



EDITOR'S NOTE:

This article is the first in an occasional "across cultures" feature series that highlights current higher education trends in specific foreign countries.

BUILDING



INDONESIA AND

IT'S 10,183 MILES BETWEEN WASHINGTON, D.C.

and Jakarta, but the distance between the higher education communities in the United States and Indonesia, as well as their national governments, is narrowing. With the support of U.S. President Barack Obama and Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, who launched a U.S.-Indonesia Comprehensive Partnership last fall, a growing movement is underway, particularly in the United States, to expand higher education partnerships, exchanges, and collaboration between two countries. One significant goal is to double the numbers of American and Indonesian students who study in each others' countries within five years.

While the number of Indonesian students in the United States experienced a steady growth in the 1980s and 1990s, peaking at 13,282 students in 1997–1998, it fell to a low of 6,943 in 2009–2010, according to the Institute of International Education (IIE)'s *Open Doors: Report on International Educational Exchange*. Reasons that authorities cite for the drop include a financial crisis in Asia in the late 1990s and the aftermath of September 11, 2001, when visas were restricted, although that is believed to be alleviated substantially, if not fixed totally, by now, says David Merrill, president of the U.S.-Indonesia Society (USINDO). The figures notwithstanding, Indonesia remains among the top 20 countries of origin for international students in the United States, although, as Merrill points out, more Indonesians are studying now in China than in the United States.

Open Doors also shows an average of 87 Americans a year studying in Indonesia since 2000, rising to 176 in 2008–2009, the last year for which data are available. But as the data include short visits, the number of Americans study-



PARTNERSHIPS

THE UNITED STATES



ing in Indonesia for credit for six months or more could be under 100, which is “unacceptably low,” says Merrill.

In a 2008 speech at USINDO, Yudhoyono proposed the first bilateral partnership between the two countries, expressing a wish for U.S. cooperation in building Indonesia’s “knowledge economy.” Subsequently, four U.S. nongovernmental organizations led a mission of higher education leaders to Indonesia in 2009 and issued a report calling for a “comprehensive reinvigoration” of the U.S.-Indonesia higher education relationship and the formation of an organization to make it happen.

The Joint U.S.-Indonesia Council for Higher Education Partnership was formed last summer, with binational co-chairs: Peter McPherson, president of the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU) and Fasli Jalal, Indonesian vice minister of national education. Other core member organizations are USINDO, the American Association of Community Colleges, IIE, the East-West Center, and the Exxon-Mobil Foundation, which awarded a \$100,000 grant to the Council to support its activities.

Last November, during a visit by Obama to Indonesia, where he spent part of his childhood, the two presidents formally launched the comprehensive partnership, covering many area of mutual interest, with Obama highlighting a U.S. commitment to invest \$165 million in higher education collaboration over five years.

Yudhoyono has his own personal familiarity with the United States. He earned a master’s degree in management at Webster University in 1981 and completed military training programs at Fort Benning, Georgia, and the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. A fluent English speaker, he once said in an

Two highly diverse nations are working to form greater higher education partnerships for mutual benefit.

By Alan Dessoff





“How often does it happen that we have a president of the United States who studied in Indonesia and a president of Indonesia who studied in the United States?”

interview quoted by the Al Jazeera television network, “I love the United States with all its faults. I consider it my second country.”

“[The year] 2011 is the best chance we will ever have for a major U.S.-Indonesian initiative in higher education,” says Merrill, whose career has been devoted to Asia, including service as director of USAID in Indonesia from 1987–1990. “How often does it happen,” he asks, “that we have a president of the United States who studied in Indonesia and a president of Indonesia who studied in the United States?”

Opportunities Ahead

HIGHER EDUCATION and government leaders in both countries speak enthusiastically about the opportunities the new partnership presents. As the world’s fourth largest nation, with a population of 750 million and third largest democracy; the only Southeast Asian member of the G-20; and the country with the world’s largest Muslim population (237 million), Indonesia is seen as an important strategic partner for the United States in the region and a valuable source of students and faculty for U.S. colleges and universities, as well as an important country for American scholars to visit and study.

“I don’t think anyone can ignore” Indonesia’s “undeniably very important” role in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the United States can improve its ties to the ASEAN through collaboration with Indonesia, says Jalal.

Indonesia “continues to grow in political and economic influence” and “many scholars view the country as an improbable democracy and its process of democratization rich in lessons for other fledgling democracies, such as Egypt,” declares Betsy Osborn, director of the Indonesia Program at the Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government.

Harvard’s Indonesia Program was launched last year with a \$10.5 million gift from the Rajawali Foundation. Among other activities, it offers grants to Harvard students to support independent research or other forms of study in Indonesia; invites high-caliber Indonesian researchers, academics, and practitioners to apply for

fellowships to pursue independent research at the Kennedy School; and develops custom executive education programs for senior Indonesian policymakers and leaders that are delivered at the school and in Indonesia.

“Indonesia has a large number of young people to educate, and the partnership will really help build its capacity to develop world-class universities. It also will help our own higher education community expand its expertise and ability to do research and build collaborative work with Indonesia. There are a lot of exciting things to do over there,” declares Alina Romanowski, deputy assistant secretary for academic affairs in the U.S. State Department’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA).

Indonesia wants to internationalize its own universities to prepare its people to be “competitive global citizens,” and “there are many things we can learn from each other,” says Jalal. Indonesia wants to learn how U.S. universities have become “top world-class institutions” and other aspects of higher education in the United States, including its relationship to national economic development and innovation, the role of public-private partnerships, and community colleges, he says.

Meanwhile, students and researchers from the United States “can learn from our rich cultures of more than 300 ethnic groups and 700 languages,” as well as the “mega biodiversity” of the world’s second largest rain forest, 17,000 islands, and 125 active volcanoes, Jalal adds.

He acknowledges that while the United States “used to be the main destination of our students who study abroad,” especially those who become lecturers in U.S. universities, that is no longer the case. “We want to see more Indonesian students study in the U.S. and reciprocally,” he says, “most importantly to strengthen friendship between the two countries, from people to people, campus to campus, through vibrant academic exchange programs.”

“The importance of Indonesia in America is for people to understand the diversity of Islam throughout the world. Indonesian culture is so rich and accepting and pluralistic, and so many people here have no concept of that,” says Katherine Bruhn, a graduate student in Southeast Asian Studies at Ohio University, who taught English in Indonesia on a Fulbright scholarship in 2008–2009.

“Indonesia is important to us in lots of ways. There’s a tremendous amount that both countries can learn, and those of us engaged in both teaching and research can learn by sharing our research and our pedagogies with each other,” adds Beth L. Goldstein, an associate professor at the University of Kentucky (UK)’s College of Education.

Initiatives Underway

“FOR REASONS THAT ARE UNCLEAR, the United States has never focused on Indonesia to the extent that it is important in terms of population and resources. We’ve never had the relationship with it as a country that we should,” declares McPherson.

With a formal relationship now established, government agencies, colleges and universities, and other education organizations in the United States are taking a closer look at the distant country and ramping up their efforts to bring more Indonesian students and faculty to American campuses as well as sending more Americans to Indonesia.

This spring, Francisco Sanchez, under secretary for commerce for international trade, is leading a higher education trade mission to Indonesia. More than 60 colleges and universities were invited to join the mission, which also will go to Vietnam, to explore opportunities for recruiting students and partnering with education institutions in those countries.

In addition to supporting the new partnership with Indonesia for its educational benefits, “increasing the international educational offerings will provide direct benefits to U.S. companies doing business with these critical emerging markets,” Sanchez declares. Education and training ranks among the top ten U.S. services exports, with tuition and living expenses from international students and their families bringing in nearly \$19 billion during the most recent academic year, according to the U.S. government’s International Trade Administration.

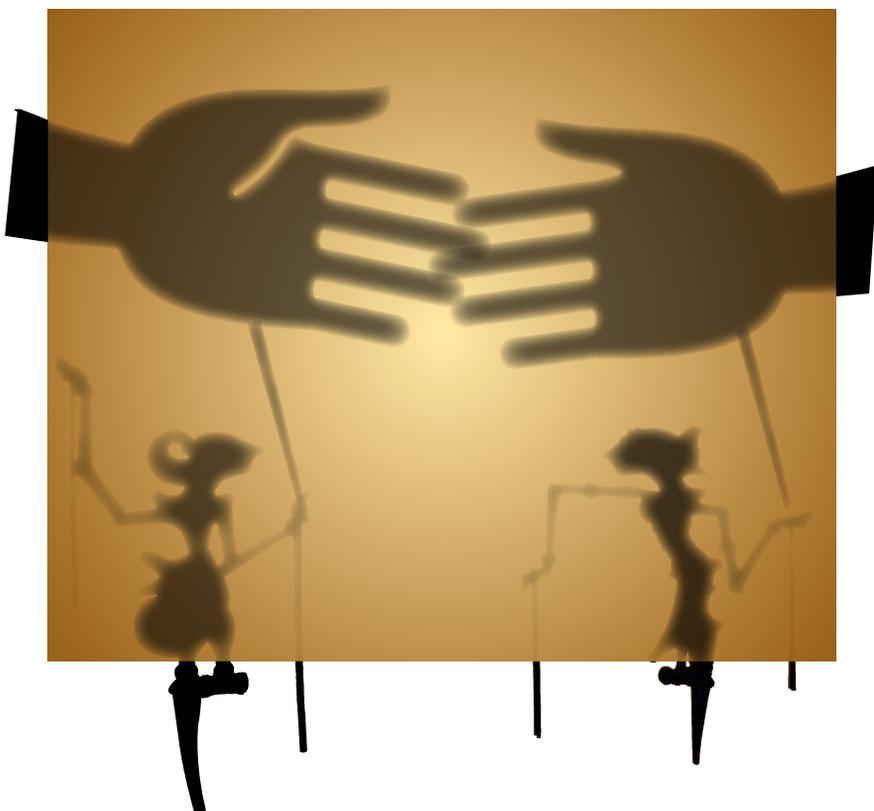
In July, the first cohort of 20 vocational and technical college faculty and administrators from ten Indonesian institutions will arrive in the United States under the Community College Faculty and Administrator Program with Indonesia, sponsored by the State Department’s ECA and administered under its Community Colleges for International Development (CCID) program. The Indonesians, who will be hosted at Highline Community College in Washington state and Kapi’olani Community College in Hawaii, are coming for a six-month program of seminars, professional development, leadership training, and opportunities to learn about the goals, organization, curricula, and administration of U.S. community colleges. The Fulbright Commission is recruiting candidates whose teaching or administrative responsibilities include the fields of business management or tourism/hospitality management, according to John Fleming, ECA public affairs officer.

Also this summer, two undergraduates each from Lehigh University and the University of Michigan, with faculty members from each school, will travel to Indonesia and meet with four students from Gadjah Mada University (GMU). They will spend three weeks together in Java, exploring religious pluralism, multiculturalism, and democracy; then they will return together to the United States to explore the same issues in an American context for three weeks. The program will culminate at the American Independence Day celebration on the Fourth of July in Washington.

Lehigh, Michigan, and GMU are among six universities from each country participating in the U.S.-Indonesia Partnership Program for Study Abroad Capacity (USIPP), an initiative sponsored by the ECA and launched by IIE’s Center for International Partnerships in Higher Education. The purpose of the program is to help advance the capacity of Indonesian higher education institutions to provide high-quality study abroad programs for U.S. undergraduates.

Among other initiatives underway or planned in the two countries:

- Four of 25 planned university partnerships have been awarded by USAID, with UCLA to strengthen research on marine biodiversity at the Universitas Udayana in Bali; with Columbia University and Universitas Indonesia to establish a center on child protection; with Texas A&M and three Indonesian universities in a tropical plant curriculum project; and with Harvard University’s



The artwork in this story is inspired by traditional Indonesian shadow puppets. Shadow puppet theater is called *Wayang kulit* in Indonesia; the word “wayang” literally means “shadow.” Shadow puppetry is an ancient form of storytelling and entertainment using opaque, often articulated figures in front of an illuminated backdrop to create the illusion of moving images. These performances are popular in many countries, including Indonesia.



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School of Public Health and several Indonesian institutions to enhance training in public health and applied research

- The first 10 American and Indonesian Fulbright students and scholars began studying in each others' countries last fall under the new Fulbright Indonesia Research, Science, and Technology (FIRST) program, a \$15 million commitment over five years to support academic exchange in critical fields that address common challenges, including climate change, food security, and public health.
- The first expanded cohort of 50 young Indonesians began studies last fall at U.S. community colleges under a new \$12.5 million, five-year Community College Initiative, in fields important to national development such as agriculture, business, engineering, information technology, and health.
- The first cohort of 17 Americans studied Indonesian in intensive institutes in Malang last summer, strengthening their language skills while deepening their understanding and respect for Indonesian society and culture.

Coming Together

THE EXPANDING higher education relationship between the two countries developed over many years. Merrill notes that Indonesians started coming to the United States for their education in the 1950s–1960s, and so many of them went to the University of California, Berkeley, that over time, they became known as “the Berkeley Mafia.”

Northern Illinois University (NIU) has hosted a Center for Southeast Asian Studies since 1963, and “Indonesia has always been a major component of our interest,” says its director, James T. Collins. NIU now receives more students every year from Indonesia than from any other country in the region, he says, and has signed memoranda of understanding for collaboration with Universitas Hasanuddin and Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta. Last October, NIU welcomed Dino Patti Djalal, the newly appointed Indonesian ambassador to the United States, who spoke to students, faculty, and others about Indonesia’s developing democracy.

“It seems that Indonesia is getting a lot of press and a lot of universities are getting excited about it, which is great, but we’ve been doing this kind of stuff with them for a long time,” says Kate Wright, academic affairs program manager at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies in the University of Michigan’s International Institute. The Center is 50 years old and “Indonesia has always been a key country. The connections have developed over

time, through a lot of faculty going back-and-forth, and graduate students doing research there,” Wright says.

What’s newer, she continues, is sending Michigan undergraduates to Indonesia, which the university does now through summer education abroad trips. Meanwhile, up to 100 Indonesian students come to Michigan annually. “We don’t orchestrate that or provide any funding. They come here on their own and either pay their own way or have sponsors,” Wright says.

The University of Kentucky (UK) has enjoyed “long, ongoing relationships” with several universities in Indonesia that go back to international outreach efforts through the U.S. government in the 1950s, says Goldstein. Before coming to UK in 1986, she held a position with the Midwest Universities Consortium for International Activities (MUCIA)’s project coordinating placement and monitoring of graduate training of hundreds of Indonesian students in U.S. universities.

Ohio University welcomed its first Indonesian students in the mid–1970s, when faculty members from across the campus began consulting with government offices, development agencies, and foundations in Southeast Asia, reports Christine Su, assistant director of Southeast Asian Studies in Ohio University’s Center for International Studies. As many as 40 new students began arriving each year, most of them master’s and PhD candidates with funding from the Indonesian government or Fulbright or Ford Foundation grants. Ohio University “gained a reputation for having a solid, Indonesia-focused faculty, and students were spread across the school, from communications to business to linguistics,” Su says.

Island and peninsular portions of Southeast Asia, such as Indonesia and Malaysia, are a current focus of research and study by Ohio University undergraduates as well as graduate students and faculty. Since 2004, the university has hosted the Consortium for the Teaching of Indonesian and Malay (COTIM), an intensive and specialized instruction program for American students in Indonesia, with a primary goal to give them in-country experience.

In 2006, The Ohio State University, Indiana University, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, with 12 Indonesian universities, created the U.S.-Indonesia Teacher Education Consortium to improve the quality of Indonesia’s teachers.

Values of Relationships

INTERNATIONAL STUDIES officers at other U.S. institutions also cite needs for and values to be gained from extended relationships with Indonesia. “Some of the global



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issues we would like to contribute to addressing, the grand challenges the world is facing, could be better done in collaboration with our counterparts in Indonesia,” states Mohammed El-Aaser, vice president for international affairs at Lehigh. “It is clear that there is a need to address some of the educational issues in Indonesia because the best way to build any society is to help in the process of providing education to a large sector of that society,” he explains. He cites energy and environmental issues, like climate change, along with health and poverty, as other key areas in which U.S. higher education institutions could play a worthwhile collaborative role in Indonesia.

Indonesian students currently in the United States speak highly of the good fortune they believe they have to be able to study here and the benefits they gain from the experience. Zhunnurraei Baharuddin, a native of Makassar, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, who is studying business administration and management at Miami Dade College on a Community College Initiative grant, has become involved in a wide range of campus organizations and volunteer community activities.

“People here have a lot of opportunity. Other students who come here from Indonesia will be so lucky to be selected,” she says. Returning to Indonesia this spring, she expects to continue her studies there for a bachelor’s degree and get a job with a nongovernmental organization. She hopes to come back to the United States for a master’s degree.

At Miami Dade, a community college that is the largest higher education institution, either 2- or 4-year, in the United States, “we have tried to reach out to all areas of the globe to increase awareness of global issues in our community in South Florida,” says Jane Ann Williams, executive director of the Office of International Education. Miami Dade is the only community college among the six initial participating institutions in the new U.S.-Indonesia Partnership Program for Study Abroad Capacity.

Hanum Tyagita, born in Jakarta, earned her bachelor’s degree in teaching English as a foreign language from Universitas Katolik Indonesia Atma Jaya in Jakarta. In 2008, she was awarded a Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant scholarship to teach Indonesian at Columbia University, and now is doing the same at Ohio University while pursuing her master’s degree there in Southeast Asian Studies, focusing on the decline and adaptation of local language in Indonesia, Singapore, and Malaysia.

She had an early introduction to the United States. Her grandfather was a diplomat who served at the Indonesian Em-

bassy in Washington in the 1950s. “My father took us to the U.S. a couple of times for holidays. We were very exposed to American culture,” Hanum says.

After teaching English in her country, she says she figured that teaching her own language in the United States “would be a nice cultural experience for me and could create more cultural understanding for both countries, getting to know each other better.” She hopes to pursue a doctorate and ultimately return to Indonesia to help the Ministry of Education there develop an adequate language curriculum and methodology in elementary schools.

American students who have studied in Indonesia report similar satisfactions. Her experience in Borneo, which is mostly a part of Indonesia, was “the most life-changing thing I have ever done,” says Anna Ruman, who graduated from Harvard last year with a bachelor’s degree in conservation and biology. On a fellowship from the Ash Center, she spent six weeks in Borneo last summer, pursuing her interest in conservation issues there and in Malaysia.

Borneo “opened my eyes to different aspects of international development; how conservation intersects with public health outcomes, with community and economic development issues. These are huge issues,” Ruman says, adding that she “really, really” wants to return to Indonesia and extend her initial studies there for a graduate degree. “It’s so incredibly interesting,” she says.

Bruhn at Ohio University relates that while teaching in a public high school in Indonesia, she lived in a small village “about nine hours from an airport, malls, or the Internet, so I was pretty isolated. But that really enhanced my experience. I had an opportunity to learn their language and be in a place where foreigners don’t normally go.” A benefit of the Fulbright program beyond teaching English, she adds, is “to have an American presence there, to bring a different face of American culture. I felt good, getting involved in the community.”

When she returned to Indonesia seven months later, she felt “entirely independent” as she taught at a language school in the same place where she was before and then accepted an opportunity to teach for the summer in a doctorate program in inter-religious studies at GMU Back at Ohio University now, with a research focus on religious education in secular schools, she expects to earn her master’s degree next year, but has applied for a fellowship to return to Indonesia before that.

She would like to see more Indonesian students come to the United States as well. “The youth in Indonesia are going to play an important role on the world stage in the future, and there are so many of them who desire and hope to come to America to study.



“It was astonishing to me as I began to study [Indonesian history] that it has been so neglected. It’s an indication of how provincial we are.”

The constant question you get, is ‘how can I get a scholarship to study in America?’ There definitely is an interest,” Bruhn concludes.

“Like everyone else,” says Laura Iandola, she was preparing to begin a dissertation on Vietnam as a doctoral student in the Southeast Asian Studies Center at NIU. She changed her mind when she took a class on the history of Indonesia. “It was astonishing to me as I began to study it that it has been so neglected. It’s an indication of how provincial we are. It took Obama going there to make people take a look at it,” Iandola says.

With two other NIU graduate students, she traveled to Indonesia last summer to study the language intensively and also learn more about the country’s history and culture, from Islam to weddings, traditional clothing, and women’s health. “It was eclectic and fascinating,” she exclaims, adding that she hopes to return and then teach and write about Indonesia, which is “wide open in terms of scholarship; there is so much work to be done on so many incredible topics.”

She adds that she has a cousin in the U.S. Foreign Service who will be posted to the U.S. embassy in Jakarta next year. “He is so excited to be going there. It is a coveted post right now,” Iandola says.

Benefits for Faculty

FACULTY MEMBERS also underscore the significance and satisfaction of expanded higher education relationships between the two countries. David Damrel, assistant professor of religion in the Center for Women’s & Gender Studies at the University of South Carolina-Upstate, who fulfilled a seven-month Fulbright teaching assignment in 2008 at the Muhammadiyah University in Indonesia, says it was “a rewarding experience in every way, dealing with students who were interested in what I had to say and were very responsive.”

With his specialized focus on Islam in the broader field of comparative religion, “it was gratifying to be part of bringing a new disciplinary subfield and teaching it in an institution where it had not been taught before,” he says. In addition to teaching, “it was a terrific experience as well to simply compare notes with my colleagues in international and Islamic studies programs there,” Damrel says.

Indonesian native Nelson Tansu, associate professor in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering at Lehigh University, came to the United States in 1995 to attend the University of Wisconsin-Madison as an undergraduate. “I always had an aspiration and passion to pursue a career in academics in science and engineering, and the U.S. is probably the premier education

system in the world in those skills,” he explains. He stayed at Wisconsin to earn a doctorate, then joined the Lehigh faculty in 2003.

Invited by Indonesia’s Ministry of Education, he returns to the country a couple of times a year, with other Indonesian scientists from abroad, to lecture to undergraduates “to stimulate their interest to pursue advanced education” in the United States or Europe, Tansu says. “Most people idolize the U.S. as a partner. Many Indonesian students would love to further their education in the U.S.,” he states. He also is involved with an organization of other Indonesian scholars and scientists founded by the Ministry of Education to attract international talent “to contribute to our higher education system and support research and professional training” in Indonesia, Tansu says.

In 2006 the University of Kentucky shared in a two-year, \$1.2 million grant from USAID that supported strategic partnerships with three Indonesian universities designed to upgrade their academic programs in agriculture, business, education, engineering, and public administration. In addition to helping strengthen U.S. ties with important institutions in Indonesia, an objective was to increase the number of talented graduates entering the Indonesian work force and revitalizing the educations of the next generation of the country’s leaders.

Through the partnership, provided under President George W. Bush’s six-year, \$157 million education initiative that ended last year to improve the quality of education in Indonesia, UK hosted faculty from the three Indonesian universities for short courses, curriculum development, and scientific collaboration, and UK faculty traveled to Indonesia to provide technical assistance and conduct short courses.

Goldstein highlights agriculture as an area “where there are a lot of mutual concerns around the environment, best pedagogic methods, second-language learning, and other things that can be problem-solved together. The problems on both sides are related,” and “it’s not just that we’re the experts bringing information to them, they have expertise to share with us as well.”

Among current activities, UK sends agriculture educators and extension agents to partner institutions in Indonesia—“a part of the world that they think is very different from their own”—to help the Kentuckians “learn about the sources of some of the products like coffee, cocoa, and palm oil that come here, and about community-based agriculture in Indonesia.” They return to Kentucky “not just with knowledge about production but how it is integrated in local economies, marketing, world trade,” Goldstein says.

Funding, Visas, Marketing

TO MAKE RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN the higher education sectors and governments in the two countries work effectively, educators and others in the U.S.-Indonesia arena point to issues to be addressed and obstacles to be overcome. “The continuity of funding is a big one. Funding streams in both directions are highly politicized. As faculty and as universities, we are ready to engage in long-term relationships, but while technology enables us to do a lot at a distance, some of it really needs to be done face-to-face, and that requires funding,” says Goldstein at Kentucky.

Osborne at Harvard’s Kennedy School says many scholars from the U.S. experience “logistical challenges” in performing research in Indonesia. “There would be much benefit in gaining support from the Indonesian government in facilitating the process of scholar exchange visas, and other necessary permissions,” she says. Jalal in Indonesia agrees. While obtaining a visa from the United States is “considered by many as the most difficult, we do not yet have a student visa category. We need to improve that, too, to facilitate students’ mobility,” he says.

Meanwhile, the United States and its universities must step-up their marketing to compete with institutions from other countries for Indonesian students, says the State Department’s Romanowski. Indonesians have multiple options to pursue their studies “in the neighborhood,” in places like Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore, and “we need to get back in the business of encouraging them

to study here,” she says. Other countries “are very aggressively marketing their universities in Indonesia, with various incentives that are very attractive to our students, while not many U.S. universities are doing that,” Jalal says. In Indonesia, “you see signs all over the place for Australian universities. They have recruiting agents there,” adds Merrill of USINDO.

Another factor is that the cost of education in the United States often is higher than in some other countries, adds Merrill. Sending Indonesian students to the United States is “relatively more expensive than to other countries,” says Jalal. “Yet, Indonesians continue to be keenly interested in a U.S. education. We need to do some innovative ‘financial engineering’ to make it more affordable” for them, and that will be among the top priorities of the Joint U.S.-Indonesia Council for Higher Education Partnership, Merrill says.

“I have found people there to be extremely willing to help us learn. It’s an open society and they are open to conversation, which provides opportunities for serious discussion and exchange of ideas,” says Goldstein. Concludes Osborne: “There is great value in the exchange of knowledge between academic institutions and among Indonesian and American scholars. Such relationships can enhance our broader understanding of how democracy can flourish.” **IE**

ALAN DESSOFF is a freelance journalist in Bethesda, Maryland. His last article for *IE* was “Supporting International Students From Countries Dealing with Trauma” in the March/April 2011 issue.



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