

By Alan Dessoiff

Higher Education and Public Diplomacy

An Interview with Patricia de Stacy Harrison, president and CEO of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and former Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs

PATRICIA DE STACY HARRISON has been president and chief executive officer of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) since 2005. CPB is the largest single source of funding for public television and radio broadcasting.

Before joining CPB, Harrison served as assistant secretary of state for educational and cultural affairs and subsequently as acting under secretary for public diplomacy and public affairs. Through international

education and exchange programs, she focused on reaching wider, more diverse publics with an emphasis on youth. She led an agency managing more than 40,000 cultural, education and professional exchanges annually with a budget of \$400 million. In that capacity, she created “Partnerships for Learning,” a global initiative providing young people with enhanced education and opportunity. Among other activities, she directed the resumption of the Fulbright Program in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Prior to her State Department service, Harrison was co-chairman of the Republican National Committee. Appointed by President George H.W. Bush in 1990 to the President’s Export Council in the Department of Commerce, she worked to strengthen export promotion programs on behalf of U.S. Business. She also served in advisory positions with the Small Business Administration and the United States Trade Representative.

A graduate of American University, Harrison has been a visiting fellow at the Institute for Public Service of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, and the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard.

IE: How do you see the role of international education in public diplomacy and international relations?

HARRISON: We have a history of international education that results in people who come to the United States to study becoming rising stars in their own countries 10 or 12 years later. You have to be pa-



Patricia de Stacy Harrison

tient. There's not an immediate return. You could make the case that if you wanted to measure and evaluate the effectiveness of international education programs, it shouldn't be based on whether they support American foreign policy but whether they go back to their countries and become good citizens and contribute to their own civil societies. All we are trying to do is create a community of people of goodwill who, because of the links they have with people in this country and vice versa, will be able to contribute to society.

IE: Members of your panel at the NAFSA conference seemed to agree that the United States has, overall, a negative image abroad. Can international education play a role in helping to improve that image?

HARRISON: It's huge. I hate to posit the idea that international education is the penicillin but in many cases it is. We can be aware, with constant polls, whether people love us or do not love us. Maybe that's the wrong question. It's not an "American Idol" contest. We shouldn't be looking for love in all the right places. What we're looking for is mutual understanding and respect.



AT NAFSA'S SIXTIETH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

this year in Washington, Harrison participated in a panel discussion on the topic "Examining Public Diplomacy and its Effects." Other panelists included Keith Reinhard, president of Business for Diplomatic Action; Shashi Tharoor, former under-secretary-general of the United Nations; and Hisham Melhem, Washington Bureau Chief for *Al-Arabiya*. The panel was moderated by Judy Woodruff senior correspondent for PBS's *The News Hour with Jim Lehrer*.

But we have to back off from instant gratification. I forgot who said it but a quote I use all the time is "when you want something, even instant gratification takes too long." We have to understand that this takes constant reinvestment and commitment and then it just gets better and better.

IE: Judy Woodruff, who moderated the public diplomacy panel, cited a speech that Defense Secretary Robert Gates gave last year in which he said "We are miserable about communicating to the rest of the world what we are about as a society and a culture, about freedom and democracy, about our politics and our goals." Can international education help us communicate that better?

HARRISON: Of course. An interesting thing happens to U.S. citizens who go abroad to study and people from other countries who come here. When I was at the East-West Center in Honolulu, which is doing an incredible job, they had a young woman from mainland China who was very anti-Hong Kong and they made her room with a woman from Hong Kong and of course they became fast friends. What happens in a situation like that is frequently, when they return home, they have a much broader perspective. That's a success story and if we can increase the numbers of people like that through international education, we will have more.

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IE: A joint State Department and Homeland Security advisory panel recently issued a report that specifically cites international education as a key component of public diplomacy. The report notes that the United States is losing competitiveness for international students primarily because we lack a proactive national strategy to attract them. Do you agree that it's important to establish such a strategy?

HARRISON: We've never been in a position before where we had to woo international students. Everyone wanted to come here. After September 11, they still might have wanted to come but it became more difficult, with visa problems, those kinds of things. And with the difficulty, we perhaps inadvertently communicated the message that "we don't need you, we don't want you, we don't like you." In the meantime, other countries looked at this huge international student market

and picked up the slack and became very competitive.

So I think we have to be a lot more aggressive, because people want to be won, they want to see us making that effort, with a whole different attitude rather than "we're going to make it as difficult as possible for you to come here." People still want to come here but not if we don't make things a little easier for them from the time they get off the plane.

We have talked about this over and over. We just need to get consensus and then follow through with action. We need a collective agreement, first of all, that international education is of incredible value. I don't know that the American people are really focused on this issue. There are other issues that are priorities, including, you might say, the education of their own children.

But if we frame it in a different way, change the language, and say that international education, coming and going, is really

the best form of homeland security and is really making the world a better place for our kids wherever they go off to school, then I think it will get much more respect. Sometimes the way we talk about what we do doesn't have the language that is needed to get the funding that is required for it.

IE: You said at the NAFSA conference that we need more money, more government investment in international exchange programs, and the voice to make the case for it has to come from "opinion shapers at the highest level." Who should they be?

HARRISON: Former Secretaries of State. People who are in position of power, whatever their field. You have to get their attention, engage them. I've found that half the time people don't respond because you don't ask them. Colin Powell would be willing to do that, I'm absolutely sure. I've heard him say many times it's the best investment



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You can't have a full international education partnership if it's just a one-way ticket.

this country has ever made. Or Condi Rice, after she leaves office.

IE: You also said that you thought it was important to support the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act, which would greatly increase the number of U.S. college students studying abroad in diverse places around the world. Why do you think there is a need for this program?

HARRISON: When I was acting undersecretary of state for public diplomacy, Paul Simon came to my office with a white poster and magic marker and laid it all out. In an eloquent

way, he mapped out why this was so important. Here was this unassuming senator, with his bowtie, explaining how important it is, even understanding that with all the constraints on the budget, it is a thing we must do.

I remember many of the exchanges we did that brought students to our country. All these people didn't just want to be on the receiving end. They wanted very much to host Americans. They wanted Americans to come to their countries and know something about who they were as well.

You can't have a full international education partnership if it's just a one-way ticket. I'm on the board of the American University

in Rome and part of my mission is to talk to parents in this country about the need, the absolute need, for your son or daughter to spend at least a year abroad.

IE: If you were to advise the next U.S. president on how to set the tone for international education for the next four years, what would your advice be?

HARRISON: I would say that on almost every issue you're looking at on a global level, the answer is international education. Then I would ask, how can I help you? **IE**

ALAN DESSOFF is an independent journalist in Bethesda, Maryland.

The Next President and International Education

WHETHER the next president of the United States is Democrat Barack Obama or Republican John McCain, he will be supportive of international education, according to foreign policy advisers to the candidates who spoke on a special panel at the NAFSA conference.

Denis McDonough, speaking for Obama, noted that the Illinois Senator is a cosponsor of the Senator Paul Simon Study Abroad Foundation Act and it will "certainly be" on the list of issues that he will move forward through budget and policy proposals if he is elected.

Obama also has been "aggressively pushing" throughout the campaign "for more openness, for a greater investment and creation of a \$2 billion global education fund so that we are helping to educate young people around the world rather than allowing madrasahs and other forms of extremism to educate people," McDonough said.

Obama has pledged to double U.S. foreign assistance over his first term and some of that money would be

dedicated to international education programs, McDonough said.

While the Simon Act is "one principal vehicle here," international education is a "multivariable equation" and that is why Obama has outlined a strategy for the global education fund "that will pull international resources to make education a priority," McDonough said.

"I think our shared national challenge has to be to see this as a national security priority and, as such, it cannot just be one piece of legislation but rather a whole change of the administration attitude that is going to require us to have some success," said McDonough on Obama's behalf.

Richard Fontaine, representing McCain, said the Arizona Senator believes that in the war on terror, "scholarships in the end are likely to be more important than bullets" and that "educational exchanges and those sorts of things are vitally important."

Fontaine said McCain wants to increase the number of H1B visas to "make it more attractive for people

from foreign countries to get advanced degrees here" and to work in the U.S. while they are doing it.

Visa restrictions and background checks after September 11, combined with "the image that America is not quite as welcoming to foreign students," have caused more students who would have come to the U.S. to go instead to colleges in other countries, Fontaine said. McCain believes, he said, that "we need to reopen the United States in a way to show that it is welcoming," including expedited background checks and visa processing, Fontaine said.

McCain also believes, said Fontaine, that students at the U.S. Military Academy and Naval Academy should be required to study abroad to gain expertise in regions that are strategically important to the U.S.

Democratic Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, who subsequently suspended her campaign and endorsed Obama, also is a strong international education supporter, according to advisor Mara Rudman, who represented her on the panel.