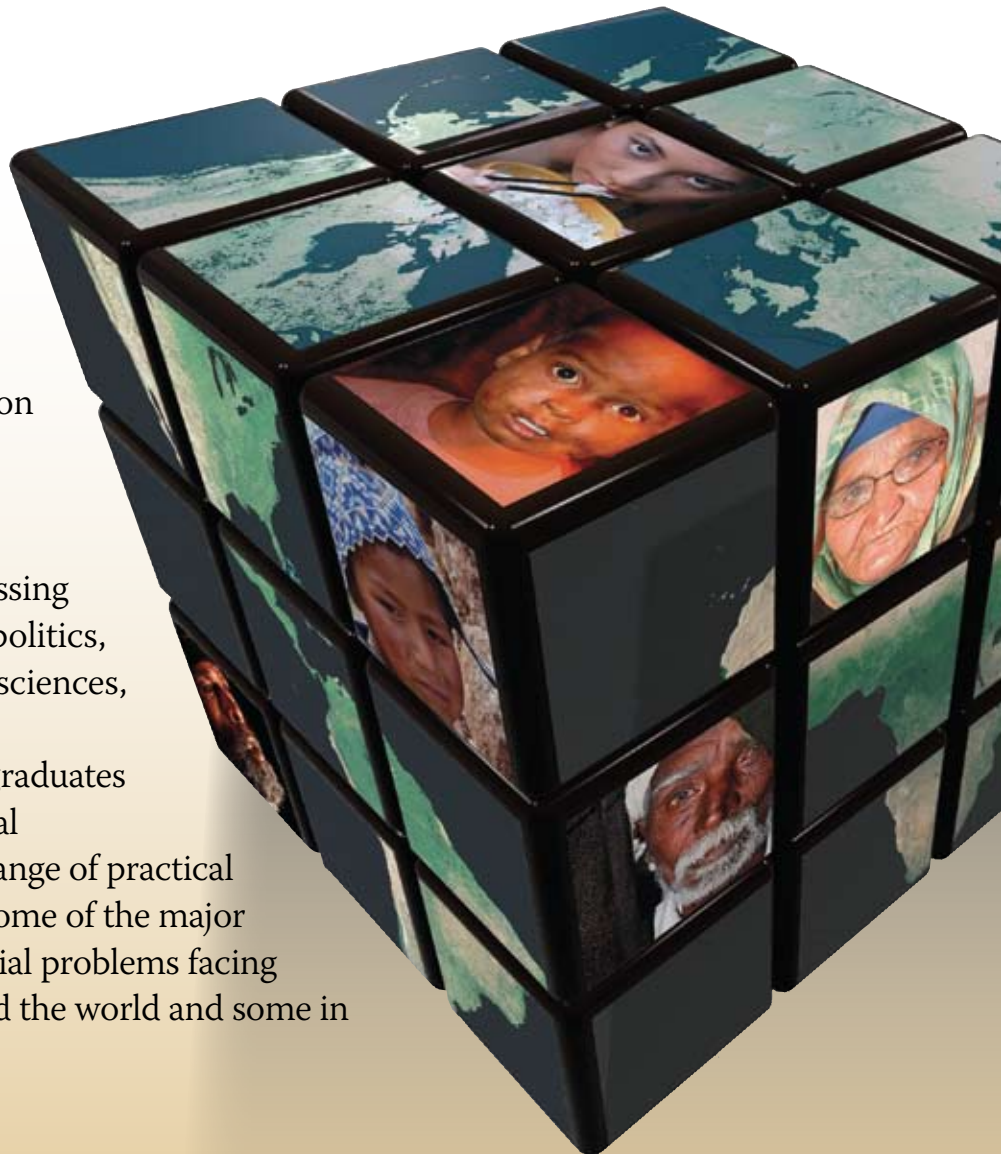


Helping improve societies around the globe is at the heart of higher education. Universities are becoming a greater force in higher education to promote

MASTERING International Development

GRADUATE PROGRAMS in international development, although not new, are taking a broader scope and assuming new significance in the global higher education community. Once largely the province of economists, they are becoming more multidisciplinary, encompassing areas like government and politics, law, ecology, and the social sciences, as well as economics.

They also are producing graduates with the interests, theoretical understanding, and broad range of practical skills necessary to address some of the major economic, political, and social problems facing developing countries around the world and some in developed countries as well.



of international development graduate programs, which note positive change across borders. BY ALAN DESSOFF

It is the urgency of those problems that is sharpening the focus on graduate programs that cover a wide range of international development issues.

“The incredible reality of more than two billion people who live in abject poverty, the number of people who die needlessly every day from preventable diseases, and all the other indicators of underdevelopment and inequality make it critical that we have more people trying to understand that situation and what they can do to change it,” says Jeff Unsicker, a professor at the School for International Training (SIT).

A former dean and interim president of SIT, he teaches now in its master of arts in sustainable development program, which SIT created as a separate degree program when it restructured its curriculum in 2001. But a focus on international development has been at the core of all SIT programs since the 1960s, and its graduate degree programs in the field might be among the oldest offered anywhere.

Many long-established and traditional international affairs programs, like those offered at Columbia’s School of International and Public Affairs and Princeton’s Woodrow Wilson School, have always addressed development issues in the context of international relations or economic frameworks, says Joan Dassin, executive director of the Ford Foundation’s International Fellowships Fund, Inc.

Broader Focus

The difference now, she says, is that programs have a broader focus, encompassing social policy questions as well. “The multidisciplinary aspect is critical, because I think we all understand now that economic development is not simply an economic matter. The interconnected challenges of development in the world’s poorest countries—environment, public health, education, and how to improve the quality of life for so many people around the world—is probably the biggest issue facing all of us. All aspects of how people live are critical for the development process,” Dassin asserts.

As an example of newer graduate programs that take that approach, she cites Brandeis’s “quite innovative” master of arts in sustainable international development (SID), which is housed in

the university’s Heller School for Social Policy and Management. The Brandeis program represents “a newer trend of locating these programs in a social policy framework that increases their focus on social and environmental issues,” Dassin says.

Laurence R. Simon, associate dean for academic planning at Heller and professor and director of the SID graduate program and its related master of science in international health policy and management, says the program, which he began in 1994, grew from a recognized need at the time to understand “why so many development programs were unsustainable.”

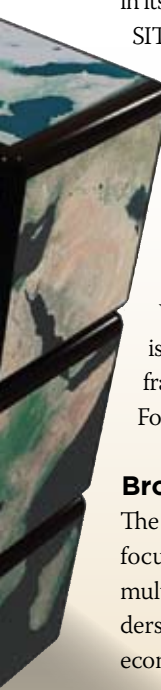
A key reason, he and others who helped launch the program concluded, was that “they lacked people who were able to see the world in some of its complexity” and were not segmented by individual disciplines, Simon says. “Development systems needed to be interdisciplinary and integrated,” he says.

Accordingly, the Brandeis program was built on “the idea that economics is critically important but it’s not enough. All inquiry takes place within a context of social and political policy. That should be so clear in development when we’re trying to think through and institute changes that are going to alleviate and hopefully eliminate poverty,” Simon declares.

Two years before Simon established the master’s in SID program in the Heller School, a program with a similar focus was started in a different type of graduate-level environment—a law school. The University of Washington’s LL.M. program in sustainable international development is believed to be the first graduate program at a U.S. law school to focus on international development.

The program’s objective, Washington Law explained in a written statement, was to “allow lawyers to combine specialized training and research in the law of international development (including the important dimension of sustainability) with training in other relevant disciplines.”

Today, in addition to a seminar on legal problems of economic development and a course on international environmental law, Washington Law students are encouraged to take advantage of the university’s course offerings in other areas including economics, political science, international studies, sociology, public health, and environmental studies.



In the world today, there is growing need, in the United States and abroad, for persons with legal skills in dealing with the host of issues affecting sustainable international development.

“In the world today, there is growing need, in the United States and abroad, for persons with legal skills in dealing with the host of issues affecting sustainable international development,” the law school states.

When Harvard’s Kennedy School of Government launched its newest degree program—the master in public administration in international development (MPA/ID)—in 1999, its origins grew from “a need in the world,” says Program Director Carol Finney.

“The Kennedy School is full. We had plenty going on here and didn’t need a new program to fill chairs. In fact, we had to reduce the size of other programs to add this one. We did it because our faculty felt there was a shortage of people with the necessary skills out in the world,” Finney says.

Faculty members who helped create the new program had been trained primarily as economists and were working in the development field with governments of developing countries, says Finney.

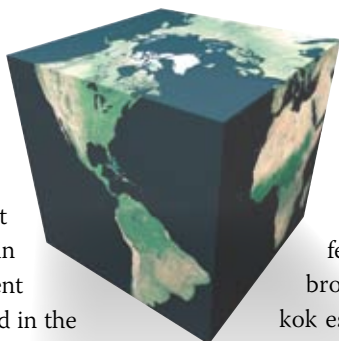
“They saw a need for people with a combination of training that would include economics at its core but be broader than that. They felt that economics was necessary but not sufficient by itself to be successful in this field. That was the program’s starting premise,” Finney says.

“The problems of international development are difficult. If they were easy, we would have solved them by now,” she continues. The economists who sparked the MPA/ID saw that “people needed to have a strong background in economics and quantitative method along with a broader set of things that economists don’t usually have—law, management, politics, some understanding of how things actually work in the world. They felt that as economists they had a lot of economics training but were lacking the big picture.”

Similarly, a multidisciplinary approach is key at Columbia, which initiated a doctoral program in international development and globalization four years ago with funding from the National Science Foundation through its Integrative Graduate Education and Research Traineeship Program (IGERT).

“Most graduate education is in silos. You do economics, or political science, or whatever, but you don’t focus on problems. We’re focusing on the problems of development and globalization and we have increasingly recognized that those problems cannot be put into the silos in which the disciplines have put them,” explains Professor Joseph Stiglitz, executive director of the Initiative for Policy Dialogue, who directs Columbia’s IGERT-IDG program.

“There is a real need to approach these problems from the interdisciplinary perspective. It has been extraordinarily valuable for



our graduate students in economics to see how political scientists approach a problem and for the political scientists to see how the economists do it. That’s the way issues in the development community have to be approached,” Stiglitz says.

International development graduate programs offered by institutions in other countries take a similar broad approach. Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok established its one-year master of arts program in international development studies (MAIDS) in 2003 as an interdepartmental and interdisciplinary program based in the university’s Faculty of Political Science. It is the first program of its kind at Chulalongkorn, the oldest university in Thailand (founded in 1917), and “quite unique” in the Greater Mekong subregion, says Brennen Jenkins, MAIDS program officer.

The university states in its literature that it seeks individuals for the MAIDS program “with sensitivity to and involvement in issues such as the promotion of social change, human rights, local community development, media freedom, and humanitarian aid.”

With a particular research focus on countries of the Greater Mekong subregion, including Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and China’s Yunnan province, the MAIDS program seeks to become a central forum for interaction on development and globalization in Southeast Asia, Jenkins explains. This fall, in partnership with the Faculty of Political Science, the program will host an international development studies conference, “Mainstreaming Human Security: The Asian Contribution.”

Doctorate programs and a master of arts in development studies at the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague are broad and interdisciplinary so that students “see the bigger picture of what is happening in their countries and can relate the situations in their countries to the world out there,” says Wieke Blaauw, deputy academic registrar.

ISS students “are critical people who see a lack of equal access to power,” he says. Poverty, gender, and inequity are among the key words in ISS programs as students seek to understand “phenomena of underdevelopment, development, and change, with special reference to low-income countries,” according to ISS literature.

Gender issues come up frequently in discussions of international development. “Gender roles are absolutely critical,” says Dassin, “because men and women tend to play different roles in communities, including households, and development strategies need to understand that and take it into account.” More recent graduate programs like the one at Brandeis that take “a more explicit focus” on social policy questions are incorporating “a gender perspective,” she says.

Teaching Theory and Practice

Wherever they are located, most graduate programs in international development function in similar ways, combining theoretical coursework on the home campus with requirements that students gain hands-on practical experience someplace in the world.

The two-year master's in SID program at Brandeis, one of the largest in the country with about 90 students, includes a year in residence and a second year professional internship or advanced study. A one-year accelerated M.A. is available for students who come with significant project management experience.

But most students do the second year practicum, working with development organizations in countries including Mongolia, Vietnam, Ecuador, El Salvador, and the Ivory Coast, reports Kelley Ready, associate director of academics in the Heller School program. Some students seek internships or other positions in the U.S. but "it's difficult because of the cost of living here," Ready says.

It is important, Simon emphasizes, that students learn practical skills and how to apply them to development problems but also "be able to understand theory as an explanation for a problem, and how to test whether that theory is correct." Otherwise, he explains, "what we're doing is blindly developing policies and programs that

are based on assumptions. So much of development is just that. We make huge assumptions all around the world about what a problem is and in fact it may be something else. Or maybe we have identified the problem correctly but we are not dealing with its underlying causes."

Graduates of his program return to their careers "with a far broader sense of all this," Simon claims.

At Harvard, a class of about 65 students enrolls each academic year in the two-year MPA/ID program that is geared to future practitioners rather than scholars or teachers and is taught, as the Kennedy School puts it, "with intense rigor and quality."

Although economics-centered, it is a multidisciplinary program that combines training in analytical and quantitative methods with an emphasis on policy and practice. Students take microeconomics, macroeconomics, and econometrics sequences that are taught at the same level as first-year courses in top Ph.D. programs in economics, but with an emphasis on policy applications to development over pure theory.

In addition, they take a demanding set of core courses in legal and political institutions, governance, management, and the theory and policy of economic development. They also gain professional



PHOTO COURTESY OF CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY

Students from Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand, visit Cambodia in late 2006 as part of their international development graduate program.

expertise through case workshops, a required summer internship, a substantial second-year policy analysis, and elective coursework in specific fields of development. Elective options include environmental policy, natural resource management and infrastructure; poverty, health, education and community development; global governance, conflict and human rights; science and technology; and private sector development and its regulation.

Students pursuing SIT's sustainable development degree analyze competing theories and alternative approaches to development while building competencies in areas such as program planning, proposal writing, policy advocacy, and training. The program emphasizes the importance of civil society, including nongovernmental organizations, community groups, women's organizations, social movements, coalitions, advocacy groups, and charitable and faith-based organizations.

Following successful completion of coursework, students undertake a "reflective practice phase," engaging in at least six months of field practice, which they document in a portfolio that includes a major capstone paper. Recent practice positions that students have held include field researcher in sustainable agriculture and natural resource management in Ecuador; environmental researcher in Bangladesh, food security program manager in the Republic of Congo, and maternal and child health consultant in Nepal. At the completion of their field practice, students return to the SIT campus and formally present what they have learned from their experience in a capstone seminar.

Unsicker says a distinction of SIT's program is its concentration on policy analysis and advocacy. The objective, he explains, is "to prepare a whole generation of persons who are looking at the large institutional causes of poverty and environmental injustices and everything else, rather than developing programs later that respond to those problems." Accordingly, SIT teaches students "how to organize campaigns to change government and corporate policies that affect development," Unsicker says.

At Columbia, although the IGERT-IDG program is grounded intellectually in a critique and reformulation of standard economic theory, it mobilizes many of the university's other resources, including the Initiative for Policy Dialogue, the Columbia Earth Institute, the School of International and Public Affairs, the Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy, and the schools of architecture, business, law, and public health.

Students must take four of five core courses, two of which focus on development in East Asia and Africa. The degree requirements also include a three-month international research internship.

Diverse Student Backgrounds

Wherever the host institutions are located, their graduate international development programs attract students with diverse backgrounds from many other countries as well as their own. About half the students in SIT's sustainable development program come from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, many with financial support



Jill Morehead, a School for International Training (SIT) graduate student, pitches in to build a playground for and with Sri Lankan villagers. SIT offered a 12-month service learning M.A. in sustainable development degree entirely based in Sri Lanka in 2006 to contribute to the recovery efforts of local communities following the devastating 2004 tsunami.

from the Ford Foundation International Fellowships Program and other donors, says Unsicker. The rest of the students come from elsewhere, including the United States. Many worked in the Peace Corps or in various domestic community development programs.

Unsicker emphasizes that SIT's sustainable development degree program focuses not just on development issues in other countries. "We look at development programs in marginalized communities in the United States as well, and some students come from those communities and go back to them with their degrees," he says. A number of current students are interested in New Orleans and its development in the long wake of Hurricane Katrina, Unsicker says.

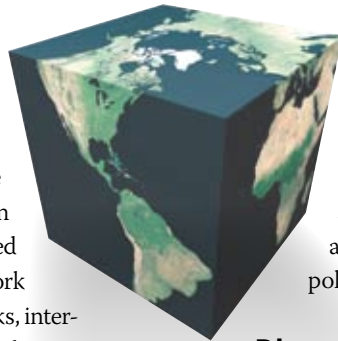
About 70 percent of students in Brandeis's program come from outside the U.S., mostly from developing countries in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and Eastern Europe. "We make an effort to reach out and get students from all over the world and from different strata. They are not the elites who are going to be diplomats. They are people who are going to work on the ground and in organizations like the World Bank," says Ready. Most students in the program have at least five years of work experience. Their average age this year is 29.

Students at Chulalongkorn have come from Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, Taiwan, Costa Rica, Finland, Germany, Japan, Moldova, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Vietnam. With the support of a new scholarship fund for students from Southeast Asia, more students from that region are expected to join the program in the academic year beginning in October.

Applicants for the MAIDS program should have an undergraduate degree, or what Chulalongkorn accepts as an "equivalent qualification," in the social sciences, as well as work or volunteer experience in a field relating to international development. The program is taught in English, and candidates with a different first language must demonstrate an acceptable level of English proficiency.

With their degrees, many graduates of international development programs begin or resume careers as diverse as the backgrounds they brought with them in the first place.

About two-thirds of students in Harvard's MPA/ID program come from developing or "transitional economy" countries, another 25 percent are U.S. students, and the rest represent other industrialized nations, reports Finney. Although the program occasionally accepts applicants directly from undergraduate colleges and universities, most admitted candidates have between three and five years of work experience in government, central and regional banks, international development institutions, NGOs, or private business.



Further, students are enriched by the diverse backgrounds of faculty who teach international development graduate programs. At Harvard's Kennedy School, MPA/ID faculty come from countries including Argentina, Chile, India, Pakistan, South Africa, Spain, Turkey, the United Kingdom, and Venezuela and are experts in disciplines such as political science, history, and law as well as economics.

Diverse Careers

With their degrees, many graduates of international development programs begin or resume careers as diverse as the backgrounds they brought with them in the first place. About two-thirds of Harvard's MPA/ID graduates go into the public sector, many to the World Bank or United Nations—"our two largest employers," says Finney. The rest go into the private sector or advance into doctoral programs or other pursuits.

Some demonstrate "success stories" at the highest levels. Finney cites Vuk Jeremic, an MPA/ID graduate who now is the Foreign Minister of Serbia at the age of 32. Finney relates: "He was in a Ph.D. program in math in the United Kingdom when I met him. He had

Authorities at many universities say the diversity of students in their graduate international development programs enriches what all of them get out of it. "You have a person from Latin America saying a policy has this impact in that region. Then someone in Asia says, 'yeah, but in our country it works like this.' And someone from Africa adds their experience."

"I think that's one of the benefits of international education in whatever field. Students see that the world is bigger than their own country and culture. They learn from each other and it broadens their perspective of the world and of the processes that take place," says Blaauw.

Finney agrees that "an overlooked benefit" of many programs is the exposure they provide to people from "lots of different places." At Harvard, "we have students from India and Pakistan, the Palestinian territories and Israel, Serbia and Kosovo—the whole range of places. There is an opportunity for them to get to know people outside the constraints they often face within their own countries," Finney says.



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The incredible reality of more than two billion people who live in abject poverty, the number of people who die needlessly every day from preventable diseases, and all the other indicators of underdevelopment and inequality make it critical that we have more people trying to understand that situation and what they can do to change it.

seen our program on the Web and he said to me 'I have to get out of this abstract math thing and do something that will prepare me to go back and make a contribution to my country. I want to come into your program.' And he did. He shifted from theoretical mathematics to international development and went back to his country after graduation. He represents a set of values and moderation that are needed in that region."

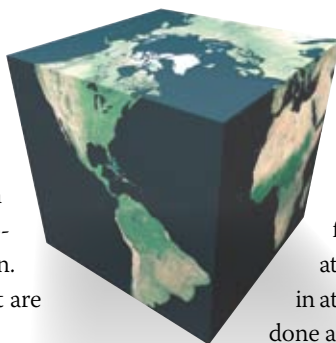
Unsicker points to Ka Hsaw Wa, a political exile in his native Burma who already had written a dramatic success story before coming to SIT, where he graduated last year from the sustainable development program. Earlier, he was a co-founder of EarthRights International, a development organization that has challenged, in U.S. courts, the activities of various multinational corporations that have aided and abetted foreign dictatorships. He now is executive director of EarthRights and has won a number of global environmental and human rights awards.

Some international development graduates remain in the academic sector. Columbia's first IGERT-IDG graduate—Ngonidzashe Munemo, whose early education was at the University of Zimbabwe and then Bard College—has been hired by Williams College, where he begins teaching this year as an assistant professor of political science. "They wanted somebody with exactly the kind of broad perspective that he brings in both economics and political science," says Stiglitz.

Promising Future

The future for international development graduate programs looks good because the need for them is still there. "These programs are important because people often become practitioners without much preparation. They do what they do very well, but they don't have a broader picture. Taking the time to study a range of topics gives people time to reflect on what they are doing," says Ready at Brandeis.

"It's important to train people from developing countries so they can guide the destiny of their own countries," declares Finney at Harvard. "When you don't have trained people from your own country, you are at the mercy of outsiders. Although we also are training the 'outsiders,' we're trying to give people from within those developing countries the capacity to build economic prosperity and political stability and general progress."



"When we started this program, we really didn't know how much of a market there would be for it," she continues. "You launch a program, you put it out there, and you see what happens. Now we see that there obviously is a market out there. This is a field in which there is a great deal of interest by graduate school-bound students, and we have been fortunate in attracting terrific, really bright students who could have done any number of other things."

"This program meets a real need in the world. The problems of developing countries are not going away anytime soon, and there is a real interest in trying to solve them. These are students who could have gone to law school, business school, medical school, whatever; but they are really interested in doing this because they find the problems compelling, and our faculty who are teaching in the program feel the same way."

Jenkins at Chulalongkorn says that while leading academic institutions in the West and Japan have established international development graduate programs, institutions in Southeast Asia have perhaps a greater responsibility to do the same because "the ill effects of globalization and underdevelopment are felt more acutely and closer to home. The region must not depend on European or American institutions for the knowledge, skills, and capacity to address the challenges of sustainable development they face at home."

Dassin says it would be "very healthy" if more U.S. students are drawn into international development studies at the graduate level, and eventually as undergraduates as well. It is important, she says, that U.S. students understand that "development is not just an issue that pertains to developing countries. There is a relationship between the consumption of resources in developed countries and the impact it has on developing countries."

There is a growing focus on development issues in higher education, she says, although "typically in this country we don't have programs that we bill as development studies. But as we begin to understand how important these interconnected concepts are, I think we will see more of these programs. The courses and the faculty expertise are there. It's a question of creating some incentive to see the interconnection."

IE

ALAN DESSOFF is an independent journalist in Bethesda, Maryland. His last article for *IE* was "Branching Out," which appeared in the March/April 2007 issue.