

# Going Global

## Students Benefit From International Experiences

By Tom Schuman

Some people probably think that if they had a dime for each time they heard “21st century global economy” or one of many closely related phrases, they wouldn’t have to work so hard to compete. But the reality is that business leaders and students – tomorrow’s workforce – will continue to benefit greatly from what can generally be termed “international experiences.”

Among the biggest advocates of such efforts for today’s students is Riall Nolan, associate provost and dean of international programs at Purdue University. Nolan, a Peace Corps volunteer and Fulbright Scholar, has lived and worked in Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Senegal, New Guinea, Somalia and the former Soviet Union.

Nolan states, “It seems to most of us that to achieve success this century, a T-shaped set of qualifications is required. There must be good training in an academic discipline with a specific set of skills. That is the vertical leg of the T. Across the top has to be another set of skills, being able to apply what you know in a culturally diverse society.”

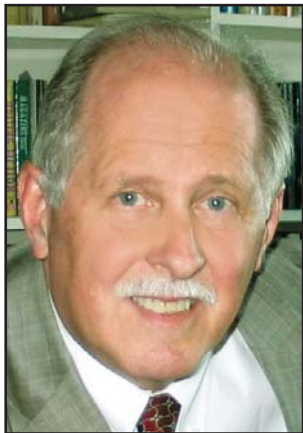
Nolan emphasizes that it’s not just the top professionals in an organization that must have the abilities to interact in an international business climate. He offers examples of the farmer trying to sell his genetically modified corn to Europeans or the automobile plant engineers and supervisors knowing what other car companies around the world are doing in order to collaborate or compete more successfully.

The students who realize the global experiences and gain those necessary skills are “miles ahead of everyone else.” Nolan notes, “You have to know and understand that people think differently than you do. You don’t have to agree with them, but you have to understand that about them.

“Most employers that we send our students to see that (the benefits resulting from international knowledge) right away. No matter what you want to go into, some period of overseas exposure is seen as a vast advantage, if not a requirement (by businesses).”



**On-campus learning is supplemented by valuable educational experiences throughout the world.**



**Riall Nolan would like to see as many as 2,500 Purdue students enjoying international study experiences each year.**

### By the numbers

Purdue is among the national leaders with 200-plus study abroad and internship programs, with more than 1,200 participants expected in the current academic year. While that is an increase of 200 students from 2005-2006, Nolan has much larger goals in mind.

“It’s hard to keep that rate of increase going, but I think we probably could and should double that. I’d like to see 2,500 students taking part.”

Interest and impact are both in place in West Lafayette.

“We have been successful in opening students’ eyes in a week or two, while others have been abroad for a year,” Nolan reports. “There is enormous interest on the part of students. In a survey, over 50% of incoming freshmen say they want to have an international experience.”

Michigan State and Minnesota are among the other similar institutions that have had longstanding successful international programs. The three Big Ten universities and others work collaboratively to learn from each other.

Nolan created a program in 2005 that takes incoming freshmen to Laval University in Quebec – a primarily French-speaking Canadian province. Few, if any, others schools have been able to replicate that early connection.

“What we find after they travel is that a transformation begins to take place,” Nolan says in a 2006 Purdue News Service story. “The students start to feel more flexible, more comfortable with such things as taking foreign language courses, learning about other cultures or becoming aware and informed about foreign policy issues.”

## Federal approach

National efforts to increase the number of students able to study abroad resulted in legislation in Congress last year. The Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Act of 2006 would include grants and fellowships to assist colleges and students. The stated goal was to increase national participation from less than 200,000 students in 2004-2005 to one million per year within 10 years.

Nolan says the work of a commission, established after the death of former Illinois Sen. Paul Simon (who championed internationalization efforts among colleges and universities), is well intentioned. He and colleagues, however, don't see the money in the federal budget to fund such an effort and also worry that what appears to be a bureaucratic approach may make the program too cumbersome to produce results.

## Coming to America

In addition to Indiana students studying abroad, much attention is paid to the number of foreign students coming to the United States. Again, with the global economy, it is important to continue to attract the best and brightest in the world to America.

Purdue is also among the national leaders in this category. The University of Southern California typically leads the way in international student enrollment, with Purdue joining Columbia, New York University and Texas as homes of diverse student populations.

Of Purdue's more than 4,800 international students this year, 1,085 are from India and more than 700 each from China and South Korea.

“Some schools saw as much as a 30% drop after 9/11,” Nolan offers. “At Purdue, our drop was only 1-2%. We have a really good track record. It's coming back (nationally). Visa regulations have been relaxed to

some extent and the perception of the U.S. is getting better.”

Nolan, who came to Purdue from the University of Cincinnati in 2003, says he has been impressed with higher education's role in Indiana. “This state has a different character to it. The universities are helping to build the future of the state. They're all moving in the same direction and trying to globalize education.”

## INFORMATION LINK

**Resource:** Riall Nolan, Purdue University, at (765) 494-9399 or [www.ippu.purdue.edu](http://www.ippu.purdue.edu)

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