

INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE: MAKING A POSITIVE IMPACT IN CALIFORNIA AND ACROSS AMERICA

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Fulbright-Hays Act, which authorized the Exchange Visitor Program (EVP), an important public diplomacy tool that has helped connect America and Americans to the world. As the person charged with coordinating, strengthening and promoting the international programs at the University of California, Davis, I can tell you that the spirit and effect of international exchange is alive and well – still fulfilling its public diplomacy mission after 50 years.

This is particularly true at UC-Davis, which, like most universities today, is becoming an important gateway to the dynamic world community. We know that our students and faculty must continue to develop a deeper awareness of our profound international interconnectedness in order to succeed in a world with fewer and fewer boundaries.

The EVP helps us build international bridges at UC-Davis and equip our students with greater cultural learning and understanding. Successfully administered by the U.S. State Department, the EVP provides opportunities for international participants to experience America and get to know Americans in a diverse range of ways.

At UC-Davis, and throughout the University of California system, the EVP allows international bachelor's, master's and doctoral candidates; professors; short-term researchers and scholars; and specialists to study, teach and research side-by-side with Americans and others from around the world. Though they represent a tiny fraction of the student body and faculty, they are core to the academic and research interests of our university. In fact, we could not maintain the quality and excellence of the academics and research of the university, nor our exceptional diversity, without these international visitors. In addition, these exchanges are important to the University of California as a whole, which hosts more than 10,000 international scholars every year.

In California and across the United States, the EVP helps advance America's interests throughout the world. The program engages not just university students and scholars, but participants of all ages and in many disciplines from a broad array of places in activities such as high school exchange, internships, professional training, short-term summer work, and au pairing. The EVP vastly increases the number of international citizens who have a substantive experience in the United States, including from such high priority countries as Brazil, China, India, Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, and many more. Just as on our campus, EVP participants live and work side-by-side with Americans, gaining a deepened understanding of American values and culture. Not surprisingly, the majority of participants report having a more positive opinion of America and American people following their programs. For all these reasons, U.S. embassies consider the program critical to U.S. international outreach and public diplomacy.

What's more, because a majority of these exchange programs are privately funded, they expend no U.S. government funds and cost taxpayers little to nothing.

Some have argued that international exchange programs are being abused and used for cheap sources of labor. A recent isolated incident in Pennsylvania involving a small number of students participating in just one of the many exchange visitor programs has fueled these arguments to disproportionate levels. I do not know the details of that case. What I do know is that the EVP, with its 50-year record of successfully forging greater international bonds and understanding, should not be impugned or unnecessarily scrutinized due to one isolated incident.

International educational and cultural exchange connects America to the world in positive and impactful ways – and we see those effects daily at UC-Davis. Curtailing the Exchange Visitor Program would hurt our university in a number of ways, including its academic quality and integrity, not to mention its international diversity. Exchange programs are vital to UC-Davis, the University of California, our state and our nation, and they should be supported and expanded for the benefit of all Americans.

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