Strategic Engagement with Countries in Transition: *The Case of Myanmar*

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Agenda

• Welcome and Introductions
• IIE’s Myanmar Higher Education Initiative
• Why Myanmar, Why Now?: A Brief Overview of Myanmar Higher Education
• Developing Institutional Partnerships with Myanmar: A Strategic Approach
• Q&A / Discussion
IIE Myanmar Higher Education Initiative

• Launched in November 2012
• Series of Bi-national Conference Calls
• International Academic Partnership Program (IAPP) included 10 U.S. universities and 5 Advisory Board members
• Delegation to Myanmar in February 2013 to 3 cities, 9 Myanmar universities, 3 ministries
• Outcomes: report, new academic relationships, multiple trips back to Myanmar, increased interest, and a number of commitments from the participating universities and IIE
USAID-funded Higher Education Program in Myanmar Launched in 2005

Cohort 1 Graduation
International Academic Partnership Program: Advisory Board Member

- Pose Questions
- Provide Historical Context
- Identify Opportunities and Challenges
- Facilitate Connections
- Pinpoint Synergies
- Add External Validation
Historical Context in the Case of Myanmar

- Missionary Education
- Colonial Education
- Resistance and Independence
- Buddhist Monastic Traditions
- Fragmentation under Military Junta

Current State of Higher Ed
Current State of Higher Education: Challenges

- Decentralized Administration
- Emphasis on Distance Education
- Poor Learning Outcomes
- Diminished Campus Culture
- Unequal Access
Current State of Higher Education: Assets/Developments

• Institutional Saga
• Calls for Reform
  » Restoration of Rangoon University
  » National Network for Education Reform
• International Engagement
  » USAID
  » British Council
  » IIE
  » Open Society Foundations
  » American HEIs
Higher Education Reform Objectives

• Strengthen Autonomy and Leadership
• Increase Access and Inclusivity
• Revise Curriculum (Revitalize, Reintroduce, and Create)
• Improve Pedagogical Methods
• Increase Access to Resources
• Introduce Technology
Developing Institutional Partnerships with Myanmar: A Strategic Approach

- “Strategic” as much about your institution as the potential partner
- Allow institutions to understand what is feasible and explore short-term vs. long-term goals/expectations
- Common trends in the 10 IAPP institution’s strategic plans (e.g. playing up the SE Asia expertise on campus, pursuing previously outlawed areas, English language assistance)
NIU Institutional Context

• Public Mid-Tier Regional Research University
• Located 60 miles west of Chicago
• Approx. 21,000 students (16,000 UG, 5,000 GR); predominantly from northern Illinois & Chicago metro area
• Approx. 800 international students
NIU International Context

• Center for Southeast Asian Studies
• Center for Burma Studies
• Division of International Affairs
Southeast Asia Regional Strategy

• Maintain foundation of regional experts
• Expand academic spheres of engagement
• Promote partnerships in the region
• Expand capacity of higher education
• Use all of these to promote recruiting from the region and delivery of programs in the region
Myanmar Strategy

Myanmar strategy parallels regional strategy

– Build relationships across as many disciplines as possible
– Give particular attention to capacity-building

Be strategically opportunistic:

– Make use of existing contacts and relations
– Use the IIE processes to identify new contacts and opportunities
– Understand that flexibility is essential
Advancing Our Myanmar Strategy

• Burma Studies Conference
• Burmese language exchanges
• Fulbright specialist visit
• IAPP Myanmar
• Library capacity-building project
• NIU scholar visits
• NIU Delegation visits
• Funding proposals to USAID, Luce, Open Society, ...
Connecting with the World:
International Relations at Higher Education Institutions

• 20-week pilot program in Myanmar on how to establish and run an international office on campus
• 56 participants and 35 mentors
• Partners include: Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey; Northern Arizona University; Monterey Institute of International Studies; Knowledge Platform; U.S. Embassy Rangoon; AIEA; Henry Luce Foundation
Policy Documents

- Investing in the Future: Rebuilding Higher Education in Myanmar
- Policy Insights for Higher Education
  [https://ihe.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/import-content/Policy%20Insights%20for%20Higher%20Education.pdf](https://ihe.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/import-content/Policy%20Insights%20for%20Higher%20Education.pdf)
- Empowering Higher Education: A Vision for Myanmar’s Universities
- Asia Society’s Sustaining Myanmar’s Transition: Ten Critical Challenges
- Steinberg, David. Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know
- UNESCO Review on Adult Education in Myanmar
Discussion/Q&A

• What are the challenges and opportunities you and your institution have faced in engaging with a country in transition?
• What tactics are you employing and how is this different from other international engagement?
• How do you build support on your campus for such engagement?