

# Report on Attending the India-U.S. Higher Education Dialogue

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*Photos courtesy of the U.S. Embassy*

It was a privilege and an honor for me to represent the Forum membership at the India-U.S. Higher Education Dialogue on June 25, 2013 in New Delhi, India as an invited guest of the U.S. Department of State. Our U.S. delegation of 21 people was led by Secretary of State John Kerry, who gave a marvelous opening address that outlined the importance of higher education cooperation between our two countries.



The Forum was invited to attend due to our expertise in building education abroad capacity in India over the past

few years through delivering three workshops for Indian universities and program providers on the *Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad*. This work has been coordinated with the [United States-India Educational Foundation](#) and the [Association of U.S. Academic Programs in India](#).

The India-U.S. Higher Education Dialogue focused on three main topics: 1) Enhancing Opportunities for Student/Scholar Mobility and Collaboration; 2) Community Colleges; 3) Technology and Enabled Learning. My principal role was to speak to the first topic.

The sessions were chaired by Tara Sonenshine, U.S. Undersecretary of State, and Ashok Thakur, Indian Secretary of Higher Education.

There are over 100,000 Indian students studying in the U.S. (the vast majority are matriculated undergraduate and graduate students) but only around 4,000 U.S. students studying abroad in India each year. Both governments want to address this imbalance by encouraging more U.S. students to study abroad in India.

One of the valuable aspects of the Dialogue was the opportunity to continue conversations that I had with Indian colleagues whom I had met at the US-India Higher Education Summit last year at Georgetown University (<http://www.georgetown.edu/webcast/us-india-higher-education-summit.html>). Discussions ranged from universities interested in joining the Forum and attending the Annual Conference to participating in the Strategic Planning Quality Improvement Program Review. The

many informal conversations over coffee breaks and meals were as important as the formal discussions during the Dialogue.

I was asked to speak at the Dialogue specifically on how the U.S. and India can increase the number of U.S. students studying abroad in India. Before departing for New Delhi I had asked two Forum colleagues, Kim Kreutzer, Associate Director of the Office of International Education at the University of Colorado Boulder, and Chris Deegan, Director of Study Abroad at the University of Illinois Chicago, for their advice and input on this question. Like me, they both led workshops in India on behalf of the Forum, and these workshops were attended mainly by colleagues from Indian universities seeking to expand their capacity to host education abroad students. Kim and Chris provided excellent input from their work in India, and for supporting data and analysis I also consulted the report issued by IIE with which the Forum assisted, *Expanding U.S. Study Abroad to India: A Guide for Institutions*. (This document is available in the Toolbox to Forum institutional members, <http://www.forumea.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Expanding-Study-Abroad-to-India.pdf>).

During the first Working Session on Enhancing Student/Scholar Mobility and Collaboration we were fortunate to have several U.S. and Indian students present on their education abroad experiences. The U.S. students were participating in internships as part of the *Passport to India Program* and they did a marvelous job of articulating the tangible outcomes of their experience. After the students' presentations, Meghann Curtis, Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Bureau Educational and Cultural Affairs, asked me to comment on the challenge of increasing U.S. education abroad to India. In the brief time that I had to make comments, I made the following points:

- I thanked the students for sharing their education abroad experiences and for providing wonderful examples of education abroad learning outcomes.
- I praised the U.S. and Indian governments for their support of education abroad *Passport to India* and *Connect India* programs (information about the *Connect India Programme*, which was officially announced at the Dialogue, will be forthcoming from the Indian government).
- I then addressed the issue of how to increase education abroad to India by discussing the following:
- The need to think about expansion of education abroad to India as not simply a matter of supply; it is also a problem of demand. We do not have enough student interest in India, and as a result there are education programs that have empty spaces. How do we generate more interest in India as a study abroad destination and increase the numbers of U.S. students well beyond the current 4,000 who study abroad in India each year? On the U.S. side, we need to address this by offering more courses that focus on India in order to help encourage student interest in studying abroad there. Students are influenced by the curriculum and their intellectual engagement with the courses that they take. Therefore, we need to encourage a greater degree of faculty engagement with India in order to generate more courses. The US-India Institutional Partnership Grants that are part of the *Obama-Singh 21st Century Knowledge Initiative* are assisting with this effort, as are the *Fulbright-Nehru Fellowships*. We need to increase

these types of opportunities for faculty. The possibilities are enormous for faculty research and teaching, particularly in the STEM fields, business, environmental and health studies, history, culture and religion, and across the humanities and social sciences. Increasing faculty exchange will help to engage faculty more and will have a direct impact on what we teach in U.S. universities as faculty incorporate what they learn into their course development and design. This will help to encourage students to think about India as a study abroad destination, and better prepare them to do so.

- We know what it takes to develop, manage and sustain education abroad between our two countries and how to ensure quality. The *Passport to India* and *Connect India* programs are excellent steps in this direction. And we have many examples of successful education abroad programs in India and can look to these as models. There are well-accepted quality standards and guidelines for education abroad that cover program development, administration, student learning and support, health and safety, and all areas related to education abroad. When I started to work in education abroad nearly 25 years ago there were no such guidelines, and we had to do the best that we could by relying on our own sense of what should be done. Now we have the Forum's *Standards of Good Practice for Education Abroad*, an authoritative set of guidelines that provide a road map that will assist in expanding education abroad capacity in India. Over the past few years the Forum has conducted a series of workshops for Indian universities and education abroad programs to train them in these Standards. The Forum will continue to assist in this effort.
- A critical step in this process of increasing capacity is to ensure strong institutional support in the form of appropriate staffing and resources. As with any program, there needs to be institutional capacity to oversee and administer the hosting of education abroad students. Each institution will decide what this means within its particular context. Usually this means having at least one full-time staff member who is focused on international education and can manage the multiple tasks involved, including the support of students' needs.
- The work of increasing education abroad capacity in India need not be left to individual universities to accomplish this on their own. Over half of the U.S. students who study abroad do so through participating in a program sponsored by another university or an independent education abroad program provider. This I would recommend as an especially effective model for expanding capacity here in India. As Secretary Thakur has outlined, India is facing an enormous challenge to increase its capacity

to educate millions of additional university students. An approach to managing the growth of education abroad would be to partner with U.S. provider organizations and universities to develop and manage education abroad programs. This shared management model would draw on the expertise of each entity as they combine resources and strengths to deliver quality comprehensive programming. One example that is especially important, for example, is the issue of credit transfer. Students need to know that the courses they take will be credit bearing and count toward their degree. We do not want them to lose time toward receiving their degree because they studied abroad. A partnership model can prevent this through a School of Record arrangement, where a U.S. university or organization validates the credits, making transfer to the students' home institutions relatively seamless.

- Indian universities and education abroad programs will need to engage with the education abroad community both in order to contribute to the development and improvement of Standards and guidelines, and to promote India as an education abroad destination. Involvement with the Forum on Education Abroad, and its nearly 700 institutional members that account for over 90% of U.S. students that study abroad, offers these opportunities.
- The Forum stands ready to continue to assist its members, the U.S. Department of State, the Indian government and universities in this ongoing effort to expand U.S. education abroad to India.

At the conclusion of my comments Mr. Ashok Thakur, Secretary of Higher Education in India, responded by noting several new initiatives by the Indian universities to build capacity for education abroad. These initiatives include: 1) expanding the infrastructure at universities through the creation of international education offices; 2) building of international student hostels; 3) creating "one window" on the Indian embassy web site that will present all study abroad options in one place; 4) sponsoring workshops that focus on partnership arrangements. I was very impressed with the positive and forward-looking response by Secretary Thakur.



Attending the India-U.S. Higher Education Dialogue was a clear recognition of the Forum's expertise and authority in representing the field of U.S. education abroad. We will continue to work to expand quality education abroad programming in India and around the world in order to benefit our students.

As Undersecretary Sonenshine said in her concluding remarks, the Dialogue was part of a continuous process to increase and enhance educational exchange between India and the U.S. The ideas

discussed and the actions reported on no doubt helped to move the two countries toward this goal.