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## EDITOR'S FOREWORD

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Warning flags have been raised repeatedly by those concerned about the future of foreign language and area studies in the United States. One manifestation of this concern is a new two-year effort to seek consensus on the future of federal support for international education. Known as CAF LIS, the Coalition for the Advancement of Foreign Language and International Studies probably represents the last opportunity to address international education problems for some time to come.<sup>1</sup>

The problems facing Latin American studies are similar in kind to those facing other foreign area studies, although the boom and bust swings of interest in Latin America may be greater than in other world areas. One problem is generational. Most of today's foreign area specialists entered the field in the 1960s and early 1970s. The *Latin American Research Review* and the Latin American Studies Association were also creations of the 1960s, as were other foreign area studies journals and associations. Even a casual observer at a LASA Congress will note the preponderance of participants in their forties and fifties (the "founder generation") and the relative scarcity of younger scholars (the "successor generation"). In certain fields such as economics and sociology, the ranks of the successor generation are especially thin.

Most of the founder generation in Latin American studies will have retired from the field by the turn of the century or will leave shortly thereafter.<sup>2</sup> Whether they are replaced depends on two factors: first, on whether their faculty positions are maintained rather than eliminated, and second, on whether well-trained successors are available.

Area studies are not highly valued by most academic disciplines. Past success in creating faculty positions for fields such as Latin Ameri-

can studies was due in large measure to the prestige and financial leverage created by federal support for foreign language and international studies under NDEA Title VI (now Title VI of the Higher Education Act) during a time of rapid university growth. Now that the growth of higher education has halted, retaining existing faculty lines for area studies may be difficult even with federal support. Without such support, major losses are inevitable. As Africanist Michael Lofchie has noted, "In the context of the steady state university, the replacement of area-skilled persons with persons whose primary identity is methodologically defined takes a terrible intellectual toll."<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, Title VI funding has been systematically reduced by inflation while spread over more and more activities. In seven of the last eight years, the Reagan administration recommended elimination of all Title VI funding, even though it represents less than three-tenths of 1 percent of the U.S. Department of Education budget. The future of Title VI funding seems bleak indeed, given the competition it faces from far larger programs serving constituencies with much more political muscle than the international education community. A 1983 Rand Corporation report observed that "Title VI with its emphasis on *quality* does not fit in well in an agency whose primary organizational mission is *equality*."<sup>4</sup>

The growing complexity of the international education community presents yet another challenge to area studies programs. When the original Title VI legislation was passed under the National Defense Education Act of 1958, university-based area studies programs represented the primary locus of international education efforts. Today interested groups include such disparate entities as primary-school foreign-language teachers, international citizen-exchange organizations, foreign business risk analysts, the Fulbright Alumni Association, local groups concerned with internationalizing the school curriculum, international relations programs, and international business associations. Such diversity represents a potential for both strength and conflict.

The mission of CAF LIS is to conduct a national dialogue on international education needs and to explore whether a consensus can be developed for a common "plan of action for international competence." This effort has been funded for two years by the Ford, Hewlett, McDonnell, and Rockefeller foundations. CAF LIS faces a formidable task, however. Even presidential commissions have failed to see their recommendations for international education realized. Richard Lambert has noted that following World War II, "Federal support for campus-based language and area studies disappeared, despite assurances from national officials, including a Presidential Commission in 1943, that such highly trained individuals were a valued national resource."<sup>5</sup> The more recent recommendations of presidential commissions such as the Per-

kins Commission of 1979 and the Gardner Commission of 1983 met no better fate.

The case for establishing a new federal entity to support international education is, in my view, compelling. Funding for Title VI is at historically low levels, and the survival of its programs cannot be taken for granted precisely because they do not enjoy wide support among newer elements of the international education community. Other federal programs supporting international exchanges and education are scattered throughout dozens of agencies and are equally vulnerable. In contrast, such highly visible and broadly based entities as the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts have been extraordinarily successful in fulfilling their missions, while serving as rallying points for their respective constituencies. It is easy to imagine a new national endowment for international education playing a similar role in bringing much-needed new resources to the international education effort. A successful coalition uniting the currently fragmented constituents of the international education community might succeed where presidential commissions have failed.

But from the standpoint of university-based foreign language and area studies, the arguments against a new federal entity may be persuasive. These warnings focus on the dangers inherent in opening the door to unpredictable changes. One fear is that a new federal entity might become more politicized than the Center for International Education, which administers Title VI funds within the U.S. Department of Education. Another danger is that university-based area studies programs might be overwhelmed by the political muscle of newer groups and lose, rather than gain, support. Perhaps the major fear is simply that once the Congress begins to write legislation, the process will go out of control, leading to some unpredictable and unsatisfactory outcome.

While the new dialogue promoted by CAFLIS is developing, the best alternative in the short run is to try to make the existing system work by seeking to increase Title VI funding to a level consistent with the original intent of that legislation. Were such funding to be attained, the objectives of the CAFLIS initiative would be greatly clarified. Whether the goals of CAFLIS are ultimately sought through existing or new legislation, the inauguration of a new presidential administration offers the best opportunity to make the case for international education that may be available for many years to come. Such an opportunity should not be lost.

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## NOTES

1. For a summary of CAFLIS activities to the present, see *CAFLIS UPDATE*, 30 Sept. 1988, available from CAFLIS, One Dupont Circle, Suite 710, Washington, D.C. 20036.
2. Gilbert W. Merkx, *The National Need for Latin American and Caribbean Specialists: Current Resources and Future Requirements* (New York: National Council on Foreign Language and International Studies, 1983), 27–28.
3. Michael F. Lofchie, "Africa," *Beyond Growth: The Next Stage in Language and Area Studies*, edited by Richard D. Lambert et al. (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Universities, 1984), 402.
4. Lorraine M. McDonnell et al., *Federal Support for International Studies: The Role of NDEA Title VI* (Rand Corporation: Santa Monica, Calif., 1981), 12, emphasis in original.
5. Lambert, *Beyond Growth*, 9.