

**OPENING CIEE PLENARY, NOV. 10, 2004,
BY MCKINNEY RUSSELL,
PRESIDENT, PUBLIC DIPLOMACY COUNCIL**

Steve Trooboff has asked me to give you all an updated sense of how America's public diplomacy is doing in today's world. In particular, I'll try to give you a sense of how the exchanges that are your central concern fit into the larger picture. It's still pretty early to attempt much predicting about what a second Bush administration will aim for in public diplomacy. Some of the trends in recent months seem likely to take hold and they give us some insights into likely directions.

My take is from outside the Administration, of course, but in Washington we talk a lot to each other, as you know. Later this week, Marianne Craven of the State Department will offer her insider's look. Mike McCarry, an old friend and colleague from the tense months we spent in Tiananmen China together, heads the Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange. Between his talk, Marianne's, and these remarks of mine I trust a recognizable – and fairly accurate – picture will emerge.

Our Department of State continues to be the most influential government player in America's public diplomacy. I'd like to begin this evening by giving you a sense of what's new, encouraging, and not so hopeful, and describe some unexpected successes, including a shoestring retail project called American Corners. We'll look at the state of play on the visa issuance policy. Then I'd like to describe the public diplomacy scene outside the federal government in the private sector. Finally, today's the day that IIE gives a preview of its annual Open Doors report on international education. Not much good news yet, though there are signs of hope.

It's been just 5 years since the demise of our old U.S. Information Agency. That was the independent agency that managed public diplomacy around the world and the focus of our cultural and educational exchanges everywhere. As an economy measure it was split up into several pieces in October 1999 and most were folded into the Department of State. You could hear talk back then of 2 contrasting analogies for what had happened.

The pessimists referred to it as an Anschluss, a lot like Austria's forced integration and disappearance into the Third Reich in 1938. The more hopeful ones likened USIA's incorporation to Hong Kong's reversion to China – a small element that would hasten radical changes on the mainland, the big Department. In that image, the active public diplomats, eager and trained to work openly and energetically with foreign people and societies, would have a leavening impact in Foggy Bottom and bring fresh ideas to the now-dominant hyperpower the U.S. had become.

As things turned out, the splitting up of USIA has left the U.S. a lot less able to marshal its funds and forces for public diplomacy. That Hong Kong analogy didn't hold up. The supportive USIA area home office we used to work and scheme with were dispersed among State's geographic bureaus and downgraded. And all this has also come at a time

when the need to explain American policy clearly and persuasively has seldom been so great.

In brief, the entry into State has left this picture.

All PD programs in State in the FY 2004 that just ended were budgeted at \$628 million. \$240m. of that amount was slated for overseas public diplomacy operations, through the geographic bureaus and our embassies. The system many of you know abroad of Public Affairs Officers and Cultural Affairs officers, and their lively, well-informed local staffs – it's largely unchanged, though the U.S. Information Service name has been thrown out into the dustbin of history -- now it's the PAS, Public Affairs Section.

\$76 million goes for informational programs and research. And the good news for you in the exchanges world is that over half of the \$628 m, 320m. is allocated to the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

International broadcasting, by the way, is now overseen by the Broadcasting Board of Governors, outside of State. Its funding, at some \$600m, includes greatly stepped up programming to the Middle East, as you can imagine.

I don't want to clutter your circuits with an overdose of structure and tables of organization, but there is an important advantage to ECA in just where it sits – or, better, stands – within the Department. ECA is the sole element of USIA that is now its own Bureau, headed by an Assistant Secretary of State.

And in a bureaucracy, bureaus matter!

That budget figure of \$320 m. is, by Congressional decision, designated and specifically earmarked only for ECA's exchange and cultural programs. Other State bureaus cannot poach on it. And an increase in the ECA budget up to \$345m. in this current fiscal year, as requested by the Administration, looks very hopeful. That's just 8% but more than many other elements of the Federal government can expect.

From the outside, one notes that ECA has done a good job of evaluating its efforts, of coming up with persuasive evidence that their exchange programs really made a difference and helped change minds. Doing things like careful use of attitude questionnaires before and after programs – to show they made a difference - has apparently given a real boost to the Bureau's standing with OMB and with Hill staffers.

Just one other point on organization, but an important one. With the inclusion of the shards of USIA in the Department, a new Under Secretary position, for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, came into being. The incumbent had oversight but no operational control over our friend the ECA Bureau, the office of International Information Programs and the Bureau of Public Affairs, which consists mainly of the spokesman's office.

Two very talented people have held that job of Under Secretary, Charlotte Beers and Margaret Tutwiler. But, as luck and the breaks would have it, neither served any extended period – they were in office a total of only 24 months of the 48 months of the first Bush administration. Someone else was, as they say in Washington, acting Under Secretary. That person is Patricia Harrison.

Pat took on acting U/S late last spring with characteristic energy. Under Congressional urging a new activist element in her office just came into being in September. It's the Office of Policy, Planning and Resources and since its bureaucratic anagram is RPPR it was bound to be called Ripper. It will do the strategic planning for public diplomacy and a point of coordination, without direct operational control.

A very talented PD officer, Betsy Whitaker, heads the office. Most people in Washington think of Ripper's birth as a clear step in the right direction. Most of the 15 or so reports on PD in the last few years have called for the creation of just such an active element. Many PD practitioners are hoping that the Under Secretary's office, and Ripper, will gain even more clout to coordinate and direct PD efforts worldwide. There is a proposal taking form to create within the Department a U.S. Agency for Public Diplomacy, roughly analogous to the semi-autonomous Agency for International Development.

For the foreseeable future, however, the place where America's public diplomacy is planned and executed will remain the Department of State. Recent years have seen several changes and new directions.

That bright exchange student you sent to Spain or Thailand a few years ago enters State today with a career choice up front. She or he has to pick a so-called cone, an area of specialization. The four traditional ones were political, economic, consular, and administrative. Now there's a fifth – public diplomacy. This day, if that's the one you pick, you may get up to 19 full weeks of specialized PD training before your first post, a big increase.

And it's interesting to note that PD is the second most popular choice, right behind the political cone in appeal.

Out in the field, there's a remarkable surge in the creation of so-called American Corners. There are now 170 of them and the target urged by Congress is to launch up to 400 of them in the next few years. It an idea born in post-Soviet Russia to create within provincial and university libraries a separate room devoted to all sorts of information about the U.S. The American side provides, usually for about \$50,000, telephone link-ups, equipment, computer, fax, a television set to watch DVDs and VCRs, and so on. There's a basic library collection, including the place where all of you are featured -- Peterson's guide to study in the U.S. In return, the host institution provides the site, pays the bills, assigns an English-speaking supervisor of the American Corner, and guarantees access for all comers. They can serve as a point of welcome contact for American students abroad, and returned exchange students and others who have been in the U.S. can sustain their American links through the Corner.

An intense PD focus on the world of Islam was, of course, bound to happen after 9/11. Funding and people in the field have surged. Two key words in the exchanges arena there are PLUS and YES, acronyms with a nice upbeat echo. PLUS is a degree-granting undergraduate program that combines study in home countries and the U.S., with the help of American grants. Some 75 Iraqi students were among those who began study under PLUS this year. The goal is to bring total number from Islamic countries up to 400 this year and reach as high as 1000 by 2007.

The YES program in the Middle East is modeled after one of the most successful student exchange efforts the U.S. has ever undertaken. That was FLEX, which brought over 2000 high school students from former Soviet republics, starting in about 1992, for an academic year in an American school and living in an American family.

Adapted for Islamic countries and renamed the YES program-- Youth for Educational Study – it brought 170 youngsters to study in the U.S. last year. They came from countries as diverse as Pakistan, Jordan, Malaysia, and Nigeria. The gender balance was notably fair, with 55% being boys and 45% girls. This is another project scheduled to grow sharply in the coming years.

A new youth-focused magazine in Arabic has gained readership fast since it was launched last July. Its breezy title is HI! – which just means HI in English. Recently an English-language version online, called HI International and identified as a webzine, has won a growing following as well, and not just in the Arab world. It ranges across the youthful landscape of careers, friends, education, technology, sports, beliefs, and, say the editors, “most important of all, the future potential of youth”.

One other new thrust is worth noting. The Department has beefed up its capacity to keep track of the alumni and alumnae of all U.S.-sponsored exchange programs. They aim at completing a centralized alumni archive of all former ECA exchange dating back to 1970. It will be available to PD posts early next year to help maintain ties to former exchangees and help them build on their U.S. experience. There may be some useful fresh ideas and connections about alumni links for your institutions in this new emphasis.

There is new action outside the federal government. Business for Diplomatic Action”, an effort launched earlier this year, spells out its mission in these terms: “To sensitize American companies and individuals to the rise of anti-Americanism in the world and to enlist the U.S. business community in specific actions to address the issue and reduce the problem.” Keith Reinhard, president of the major advertising firm DDB worldwide, has been active in the business community tracking the impact of negative attitudes on the success of U.S. business abroad.

Among BDA’s initiatives is the publication of a passport-sized World Citizen’s Guide just out. It has basic persuasive language about the United States and its place in the world, and the reasons for resentment and worse of Americans and their ways. It’s a sophisticated effort written by young people for young people. The guide even offers a

basic vocabulary of the most 50 useful words in the most widely spoken languages, including Arabic and Mandarin Chinese. BDA aims at getting the guides into hands of all 200,000 U.S. students going abroad.

Meanwhile the exchanges community itself has been extremely active in keeping the issue of access to the United States for students squarely on the screens of the Congress and the Administration. The Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange in Washington has usually led the fight .You know the mantra on all sides: Open doors and secure borders. The head of all U.S. consular activity worldwide is Assistant Secretary Maura Harty. She has repeatedly urged her field officers to give students extra lead-time and speedy processing since they must meet deadlines on their campuses.

Some of you will have seen her editorial in the Chronicle of Higher Education months ago. I liked the thrust of her language: “We at the U.S. State Dept are keenly aware that fostering academic and scientific exchanges is crucial to the national security of the United States. Secretary Harty wrote that “We have turned a corner” in improving the transparency, efficiency and predictability of the visa process. Most student applicants get their visa appointment within a week. She sounds a militant note when she writes “The loss of even one qualified student to another nation is one too many”. I suspect that most of you would agree with that sentiment.

The complexity and the cost of visa fee collection have caused much heartache. It was also Ms. Harty who told the NAFSA conference in May that a pilot project to permit State to do the collecting on a pilot basis in China and India was in the planning stage. It hasn't happened yet, but the commitment is there.

On fees, one heartening trend we've noted is the readiness of some universities to reimburse the fee to its successful applicants. Harvard just recently followed the example set by the University of Texas.

Another activist on this front is Sen. Norm Coleman of Minnesota. In July he introduced his International Student and Scholar Access Act of 2004. It would set new procedures for enhancing student access, define responsibilities more clearly among federal agencies, and put Congress on record as believing that improved visa processing would enhance U.S. national security. It is apparently the basis for further efforts.

And you'll remember the strong push that former Senator Simon gave to his idea of Lincoln Fellowships, whole new study abroad programs for Americans. Its organizing mandate and half-million dollar funding were both timed to end in 21 days on Dec.1. It has taken all year for the scheduled Advisory Board of 17 to be identified. Fortunately the allocated funds for organizing, planning and launching have been approved to continue for another year until Dec. 1 of 2005. As they say, stay tuned.

Everyone has anecdotes about horror stories about visa applicants and their deep disappointments over delays or turndowns. The struggle to improve things is joined on

many levels. Mike McCarry will be offering the freshest possible perspective. He's just back from sessions with our consular officers in half a dozen eastern European countries about the best ways to sustain and speed up improvements.

The effort to strike that delicate balance between open academic doors and the demands of national security is far from won, despite earnest effort and hopeful reports of corners turned. Coincidentally IIE issued just this morning the summary highlights of its annual Open Doors report on international study in the U.S. They are not too encouraging but they could be a lot worse.

The disheartening headline is that international student enrollments dropped by 2.4% in the 2003-2004 academic years. This is the first absolute drop since 1971/72. It follows a year of minimal growth, under a percentage point, in 2002-2003, but the last five years had all been marked by steady if slow growth. For the third year running, the University of Southern California, with its 6647 foreign students, was the top receiving university. The top sending country continues to be India. Asia is by far the main sending region – no less than 57% of international students come from that continent.

Assistant Secretary Harrison noted one promising trend. The number of student-visa issuances for January through June of this year, 2004, was 11% higher than the issuances during the same 6 months of 2003. The whole issue will get some intense media attention next Monday in Washington. At the National Press Club IIE will give a briefing on the results of their research and the value of international education for the U.S.

Also coming, and beginning next Monday as well, is the fifth annual International Education Week. State and the Department of Education are the joint organizers. Secretary Powell and Secretary Paige have both hailed the importance of the meeting and of international exchange. In his message to participants Mr. Powell recalled that over 200 alumni of State exchanges have become heads of state or government.

A lot of people are saying all the right things about international education. I'd like to hope that your meeting this week here in Santa Fe, the Open Doors report, next week's focus on the world, the new Congress, and the second George Bush administration --that they will all help bridge the gap between secure borders and open doors.

And that the young people whom you send forth into the world beyond, and those you welcome, will indeed be among the next 200 who take national and world leadership roles in the decades ahead.