



# An Evaluation of the FREEDOM Support Educational Partnerships Program (EPP)

## **Executive Report**

October 2004

### **PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION**

In September 2002, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the Department of State selected Aguirre International to conduct an impact evaluation of the FREEDOM Support Educational Partnerships Program (EPP), formerly the NIS Colleges and Universities Partnership Program (NISCUPP). EPP was administered by the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) from its inception in 1993 until 1999, and, since that time, by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). Funding is provided by the U.S. Congress under the FREEDOM ("Freedom for Russian and Emerging Eurasian Democracies and Open Markets") Support Act of 1992 (FSA). Through 2001, the program had funded 143 partnerships, reaching more than 130 universities in twelve Eurasian countries.

### **OVERALL ASSESSMENT**

*"We did not expect this grant to be able to make such big changes in the life of our university."*  
– Azerbaijani focus group participant

The evaluation of the Educational Partnerships Program has revealed a wide-ranging endeavor that has generally led to significant changes in academic programs and faculty expertise at Eurasian universities and institutes, as well as bringing international experience to U.S. participants. In some cases, the Eurasian partners implemented only limited modifications, such as adding a computer lab or making relatively modest course revisions. However, in others, universities and faculty extensively transformed pedagogical styles, curricula, and management practices. The majority of participants found the program worthwhile, often reporting that they gained immensely, both professionally and personally, from their partnerships. The direct effects on a partner university often extended to other educational institutions in the country, with raised standards, changes in Ministries of Education, greater research capacity, and enhanced networks. Reforms and innovations with the Eurasian universities have also had profound impacts in the wider community; the creation of legal clinics, business incubators, teacher resource centers, and non-governmental organizations as part of the outreach activities of the program have established connections and services that aid in building democracy and the market economy.

Based on an analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data, certain characteristics tend to lead to greater results and longer-term successes. Dynamic project leadership, an emphasis on vital communication, and thoughtful and pragmatic management seem to be the most critical of those factors that facilitate the partnerships. One further characteristic is also seen as important, if not critical, and that is the existence of prior relationships with the partner universities, or of prior international exchange program experience.

## **PROGRAM GOALS**

The Educational Partnerships Program operates under the mandates of the FREEDOM Support Act legislation and the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act (Fulbright-Hays Act) of 1961 and is designed to meet the following goals:

- To contribute to economic and democratic reform and development in the independent states of Eurasia; and
- To contribute to the broader Mission of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs to promote mutual understanding through exchange activity.

The evaluation was designed to determine whether EPP is meeting its short-term, intermediate, and long-term goals as listed below:

- EPP grantees will create or further sustainable institutional partnerships between American and Eurasian universities.
- EPP partners will develop and revise programs and curricula to be relevant to economic and political realities.
- EPP participants will expand their professional capabilities and capacities.
- EPP partners will find or create outlets in the community to apply their expertise.
- EPP partners will leverage private sector support for programs that meet local needs.
- EPP partners will help each other understand the cultures of their respective countries.

## **PROGRAM DESCRIPTION**

The Educational Partnerships Program is administered by the Office of Global Educational Programs in the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Grants are awarded to U.S. universities with identified foreign partners through an open-grant competition. Grants are awarded for three years, and the maximum award for most grants is \$300,000. Funds are used to support curriculum, faculty and staff development, collaborative research, and outreach activities with a multiplier effect and long-term impact.

Grants are awarded in five general thematic areas that have been deemed critical to the development of democracy and the market economy and with which Eurasian universities have traditionally had little experience: 1) business and economics; 2) education, including educational administration, civic education, and continuing education; 3) public administration and public policy; 4) law; 5) and journalism.

## **EVALUATION METHODOLOGIES**

This evaluation focuses on the partnerships in seven of the twelve countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan. The table below lists how many partnerships were undertaken in each country, whether they were still in process at the time the evaluation began, and whether or not they were included in the evaluation.

<b>EPP Grants Included in the Evaluation</b>		
	Total	Included
Armenia	11	9
Azerbaijan	8	8
Belarus	5	4
Kazakhstan	9	6
Russia	80	64
Ukraine	33	30
Uzbekistan	7	5
Note: Numbers in "Total" represent all USIA/ECA-funded partnerships in these seven countries since 1989 through 2001. Those awarded in 1993 and 1994, and from 1998 to 2001, were included in the evaluation.		

By definition, a partnership is a collaborative agreement between one (or more) U.S. and one (or more) Eurasian institutions of higher education, as well as the activities and interchanges that result. Each partnership has three main kinds of stakeholders: 1) the project directors or coordinators on both the U.S. and Eurasian sides; 2) faculty members from both institutions who take part in the partnership; and 3) institutional administrators (such as deans, presidents, and rectors), again, in both U.S. and Eurasian sites. Various data collection strategies were employed in order to take the perspectives of all principal stakeholders into account:

- face-to-face interviews of Eurasian university administrators, project directors and faculty;
- online survey of U.S. university administrators, project directors and faculty;
- focus groups of participants from the Eurasian universities, including administrators, project directors and faculty;
- teleconferences with U.S. participants, including administrators, project directors and faculty;
- site visits to U.S. and Eurasian partners, which included open-ended interviews with administrators, project directors and faculty, and in some cases, students; and
- open-ended interviews with program officers and other key informants.

Data were collected between February and October of 2003. In Eurasia, respondents were interviewed in their language of choice. In total, 122 administrators, 127 project directors, and 342 faculty from 105 partnerships (representing 83% of the partnerships included in the evaluation) responded to the survey. Interviews and electronic survey response times averaged 26, 40, and 28 minutes, for these three groups respectively. The table below summarizes the methods used by country.

<b>Summary of Data Collection Methods by Country</b>				
<b>Country</b>	<b>Tier 1 Survey (Email)</b>	<b>Tier 2 Survey (Tel/Person)</b>	<b>Site Visits</b>	<b>Focus Groups/ Teleconferences</b>
Armenia	0	51	4	1
Azerbaijan	0	24	4	2
Belarus	0	21	4	2
Kazakhstan	0	25	5	2
Russia	0	235	25	3
Ukraine	0	78	12	4
Uzbekistan	0	26	7	0
United States	131	0	12	6
Total	131	460	73	21

## PROGRAM FINDINGS

Overall, the Educational Partnership Program is largely meeting its short and mid-term goals and has made solid progress in some long-term goals. It has been most successful in those countries in which the Ministry of Education (MOE) has permitted a greater degree of university autonomy, such as in Russia and Armenia, and it has encountered greater challenges in countries in which the MOE is heavily involved in controlling and influencing university administration, such as in Belarus and Uzbekistan. Moreover, evaluation team members noted striking contrasts in responses from partnerships centered in Eurasian capitals versus those located in provincial cities or rural areas. In general, responses from more remote locations characterized the changes as deeper and broader – suggesting, perhaps, that the importance and potential success of partnerships are enhanced for those in smaller communities.

<p><i>Goal 1: EPP grantees will create or further sustainable institutional partnerships between American and Eurasian universities.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over 80 U.S. universities and 130 Eurasian universities participated in the program between 1993 and 2001.</li> <li>• In those partnerships which adopted distance education approaches, the reach of their programs was extended to two or more other universities or campuses.</li> <li>• Seventy percent of U.S. project directors and nearly 84 percent of the Eurasian project directors whose grants have officially been completed reported that they continue to cooperate with their partner university.</li> </ul>
<p><i>“Participants are ready and open for future collaboration and ready to undertake exchanges with U.S. universities.”</i> – Ukrainian focus group participant</p>	
<p><i>Goal 2: EPP partners will develop and revise programs and curricula to be relevant to economic and political realities.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All partnerships resulted in new or revised courses, curricula or programs of study.</li> <li>• Survey respondents thought that the new and revised courses, curricula and programs were relevant to the local situation (89.5%).</li> <li>• Nearly all of the survey respondents (93.2%) indicated that the new and revised curricula were “very much” or “somewhat” aligned with the demands of a democratic government.</li> <li>• Over ninety percent of Eurasian project directors and faculty (90.3%) felt that the new and/or revised curricula were better aligned with the needs of a market economy.</li> <li>• Over ninety percent of Eurasian project directors (90.4%) indicated that the new/revised curricula were better aligned with employer needs.</li> <li>• Participation in the program has enhanced the reputation of the Eurasian partner institutions, attracted a greater numbers of applicants, and caught the attention of other international donors.</li> </ul>
<p><i>“[Ours] was a very timely visit, because right at that moment the Californian standards of education on history, geography and other disciplines were in the process of approval. It was a very controversial thing for the United States, and it was very important for us to observe the process. We even participated in a television debate about their standards. We brought those standards to our country: they were the standards on achievements and knowledge assessment in history and I started using those standards in my lectures.”</i> – Belarusian interviewee</p>	

<p><i>Goal 3: EPP participants will expand their professional capabilities and capacities.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All of the partnerships included a two-way exchange of project directors and faculty. Administrators traveled abroad to a lesser degree, and rarely were students exchanged through the program.</li> <li>• Most Eurasian participants visited the U.S. only once and exchanges ranged from two weeks to four months.</li> <li>• The most common complaint was that the exchange trips were too short to accomplish everything they would have liked to do.</li> <li>• Qualitative evidence shows greater use of interactive teaching methods, including seminars and group work, case studies, use of media and communication technologies, and more frequent and creative student assessment.</li> <li>• Half of the Eurasian survey respondents reported their or their partnership's involvement in collaborative research projects.</li> </ul>
<p><i>“Due to this program, we have seen improvements not only of professional areas, but also of a social nature, that is, there are changes in... lecturers’ mentalities and methodologies. The atmosphere of working and communicating with students has completely changed and become closer to international standards.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>– Armenian focus group participant</i></p>	
<p><i>Goal 4: EPP partners will find or create outlets in the community to apply their expertise.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respondents reported the creation of a total of 35 legal clinics in several countries.</li> <li>• The business partnership at Amur State University in Russia opened business incubators, and included training for Eurasian municipal leaders, business managers or entrepreneurs. At Kharkiv (Ukraine) Academy of Municipal Economy, training was offered to NGOs and government representatives.</li> <li>• Other outreach structures included community training facilities, teacher resource centers, and non-governmental organizations responding to locally-determined civil society concerns.</li> </ul>
<p><i>“In the process of our internship we came to an idea of creating Society of Cultural Links Azerbaijan – USA. [We have been] most active in establishing it. Soon we will have an opening of the Society.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>– Azerbaijani focus group participant</i></p>	
<p><i>Goal 5: EPP partners will leverage private sector support for programs that meet local needs.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many partnerships involved Eurasian NGOs or government at some level.</li> <li>• Participation of the private sector was more difficult for the Eurasian institutions. U.S. universities provided counsel for their Eurasian partners in how to approach local business leaders and solicit collaboration.</li> <li>• In one notable success, the International Management Institute very effectively involved business owners and entrepreneurs as mock boards of directors for the international game used as its MBA capstone course.</li> </ul>
<p><i>“The MBA students have now visited ten enterprises in Tashkent to learn about different types of business and these are used as case studies as well.”</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><i>– Uzbek interviewee</i></p>	

<p><i>Goal 6: EPP partners will help each other understand the cultures of their respective countries.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Over ninety percent (94.1%) agreed or strongly agreed that “Americans generally hold friendly attitudes towards the people of my country,” and none strongly disagreed.</li> <li>• Most U.S. project directors (94.6%) agreed or strongly agreed that the citizens of their partner country held friendly attitudes toward Americans.</li> <li>• Survey respondents agreed that EPP resulted in closer relations between partner countries (90.3%), improved international cooperation (93.2%), and facilitated close personal ties (92.0%).</li> <li>• A significant number of Eurasian focus group participants and interviewees felt that the U.S. partners were not sufficiently knowledgeable about their countries, educational systems, or culture.</li> </ul>
<p><i>“U.S. visitors often don’t understand the peculiarities of the Kazakh system (customs and traditions); representatives of the American side in our program have tried to apply their work methods blindly to our educational system.”</i> – Kazakh focus group participant</p>	

Overall, the FREEDOM Support Educational Partnership Program is meeting most of its goals in most countries. Through ECA funding, sustainable partnerships were both created and furthered. All partnerships contributed to the development of new or revised academic programs and curricula at the Eurasian institution, and a number of U.S. institutions also expanded academic offerings. Many of the partnerships also established outreach structures that contribute to the development of the local community. Further, the program participants reported that they better understood their partner’s culture as a result of participating in the program. The vast majority of the Eurasian participants felt they had expanded their professional capabilities and capacities. In contrast, there appeared to be less stated effect on the American participants, only some of whom, but not the majority, developed new specialties. Finally, only a few of the partnerships effectively leveraged private sector funding for partnership activities, and this is an area in which creative thinking is required for improvement in the future.

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Office of Policy and Evaluation  
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By:  
Aguirre International  
1156 15<sup>th</sup> Street NW, Suite 1000  
Washington, DC 20005

For a complete copy of the report, please contact the Office of Policy and Evaluation at (202) 632-6325 or by email ([ecaevaluation@state.gov](mailto:ecaevaluation@state.gov)).

