

World Education NEWS & REVIEWS



A publication of WORLD EDUCATION SERVICES

SPRING 1991

Volume 4 Number 2

International Trends

U.S. & European Community Begin Conversation On Exchanges

by Charles Karelis

An announcement made in Brussels this past November 16th may prove important for higher education on this side of the Atlantic. On that day, U.S. Secretary of State James A. Baker III and European Community President Jacques Delors told the press that the U.S. and the EC have agreed to set up a joint working group on higher education and continuing training. The aim of this small group of government officials—which will draw heavily on the advice of the higher education community—will be to “define ways to develop cooperation in the field of higher education and continuing training, including in particular the exchange of academic faculty, staff, and students” (emphasis added). Baker and Delors expressed confidence that the activities of this working group would actually “stimulate the flow of academic staff and students between the U.S. and Europe.”

Behind the announcement lay several months of transatlantic discussion about educational exchange, initiated by officials of the U.S. Department of Education. These officials had been struck by a discrepancy. De-

spite the close cultural and economic ties between the U.S. and Europe, the higher education linkages—the flow of students and faculty, and the degree of institutional cooperation—are weak, at least as measured in some obvious ways. For instance, it is interesting that while about 25 percent of all the goods exported by the U.S. goes to the 12 nations of the EC (Ireland, the U.K., the newly united Germany, France, Luxembourg, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Denmark, Italy, and the Netherlands), these same nations

Charles Karelis is Director of the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education.

buy only about 10 percent of our “educational exports”—as measured by the numbers of foreign university students who come to the U.S. from the various parts of the world. Conversely, while a majority of Americans who study abroad study in Europe, the absolute numbers that go

to Europe are tiny—less than 3 percent of all American college students.

Speaking more impressionistically, European and U.S. universities seem to be on different wavelengths—with different standards, different social missions, different teaching methods, and a different view of what being a university student is about.

What effect, wondered U.S. officials, would this weakness of our educational links with Europe have on our economic and cultural relations with Europe in the long run? In particular, might not the isolation of the two education systems make it needlessly difficult for European and U.S. professionals and business people to work abroad? And would this not disadvantage consumers and providers of services on both shores—especially in the era of the multinational corporation?

But, alerted by a report by Professor John Harris of Samford University in Alabama, these same U.S. officials recognized an opportunity as well as a problem. The opportunity was that the EC had recently committed itself to a big push in the field of student and faculty exchange, or “mobility,” as they are likelier to call it in Europe. This new EC effort prompted the U.S. offi-

continued on page 23

INSIDE

- 3 COUNTRY UPDATES...More *Australian* mergers...*China* to double vocational-technical training...former *East German* education system being dismantled...will the real *Japanese* undergraduate please stand up?...*Portuguese* overwhelmed by “cheerful and sexy” *Brazilians*...
- 10 SPANISH EDUCATION TODAY...Spain striving to catch up with European Community...
- 19 STUDY ABROAD...How U.S. Administrators, Students and Parents Weathered the Gulf Crisis...
- 21 CHANGES ADOPTED BY CNA...listing of institutions now awarding own degrees...

For Professionals in International Education

cials to propose the creation of a small bilateral study group that would look at the advantages, for both sides, of somehow hooking the U.S. and its universities into these new EC efforts. It was this study group that Secretary Baker and President Delors announced in November.

The seriousness of the EC's commitment to expanding student and faculty mobility is what made the notion of U.S. participation so intriguing. In fact, the EC had announced the goal of having fully 10 percent of all EC university students do some portion of their studies in another EC country by 1995. To this end, the Brussels-based EC government had launched—that is, launched, *and* generously funded—a series of elaborate exchange “schemes,” or, in our terms, government programs.

The main one of these programs, created in 1987, is known as ERASMUS—the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students. With a budget over the next three years of about \$190 million and 27,000 student grantees (1988-89 figures), ERASMUS must be the most ambitious exchange program ever created.

ERASMUS defies easy summary, but it has a number of salient features. One essential feature is that participants receive full academic credit at their home university for their foreign study—assuming they successfully complete their work abroad. This makes it possible for students to study abroad without delaying the completion of their degrees and adding unduly to the cost of their education.

But the real trick is that this academic recognition is grounded in fact, rather than fiat or faith. That is, the EC member nations do not require their universities to give credit for study at the universities of the other member nations as a matter of law. (If this seems too intrusive to take seriously, consider that after 1992, most professional recognition bodies in the EC countries will be required to accord automatically to all EC citizens whatever professional status they have in their home nations.) Nor is the recognition of foreign study based on a simple act of faith by one university in the quality and rigor of another—not, perhaps, unheard of in the case of recognition of foreign study by U.S. colleges.

Rather, the ERASMUS strategy is to encourage academic departments at vari-

Exchange *continued from page one*

ERASMUS Directory 1989-90

Subject area(s):

Engineering, Technology

Purpose of the 1989/90 grant:

Student Mobility Programme
(also grants for participating students)

- UK University of Exeter, Exeter, Devon (1)
- D Universität Stuttgart (2)
- F École Nationale Supérieure d'Électronique et de Radioélectricité de Bordeaux (3)
- F Institut Catholique d'Arts et Métiers, Lille (4)
- F École Nationale Supérieure de Chimie de Rennes (5)
- F Institut National des Sciences Appliquées de Rennes (6)
- I Politecnico di Milano (7)
- I Università degli studi di Modena (8)

Description of Programme:

This program involves a total of 20 students of chemical, civil, electronic, information, and mechanical engineering in 1-year exchanges between Exeter and Italy, and 3- to 4-month exchanges between Exeter and France, and Exeter and Germany. All work is given full credit by the home institutions. Language preparation for the French, German, British and Modena students includes a 2-week intensive course prior to departure, a 1-week intensive course on arrival and 2 hours per week during the stay abroad.

ous universities to form small, wholly voluntary groups that understand each other's standards and curricula on the basis of faculty visits and often joint curricular planning—for both of which activities ERASMUS funds are also available. The catalogue of these ERASMUS consortia runs to 897 pages! See box for an example of a virtually self-explanatory entry.

A second essential feature is that tuition is waived by the host university, though it is paid at the student's home university, just as if that student had not gone abroad. A third feature is that students are eligible for grants from the EC—averaging about \$2,000—to cover the costs of travel and the difference in cost of living between the home country and the host country. A fourth feature is that, at least ideally, there will be a rough wash between the incoming and the outgoing students in each country, this being what

makes the whole scheme economically feasible; however, it is a current problem of the ERASMUS scheme that more students want to go from the southern EC countries to the northern ones than want to go from the northern ones to the southern.

It may help make the ERASMUS scheme clear to list some advantages that might strike an American student who is contemplating a semester in Europe as he or she reviews the options. First, the student would be taking courses whose substance was not only known to the teachers back home, but had very likely been jointly planned by them. Second, there would probably be a careful evaluation of the student's actual success in these courses—which is often not available to American students who now study abroad. Third, the student might have 10 or even more European universities to choose from, rather

continued on next page

Coming in Future Issues...

INDIA'S educational system is a maze. We have the expert to guide you through it.

EUROPEAN ENGINEERING PROGRAMS will be compared.

NEW ZEALAND'S educational system is undergoing rapid reforms.

Exchanges *continued from page 23*

than the one or two with which his major department had made direct arrangements. Fourth, the European tuition would be waived, though the tuition in the home university would be paid--clearly an advantage to students in inexpensive U.S. state schools, but a disadvantage to students in more expensive private institutions.

What, then, will the new working group actually do? How will it gauge the advan-

tages of some kind of U.S. participation in ERASMUS? Besides supporting research into such issues as the

economics of student flow, the group's main activity will probably be planning, supervising, and evaluating a pilot test of U.S. participation in ERASMUS.

Since the working group has not had its first meeting as of this writing, obviously the details of such a pilot test have yet to be settled. But it will very likely be small in scale, last about two years, involve several academic subjects, begin with joint planning by academic departments for stu-

dent exchange rather than with student exchange itself, and the American colleges that participate will be selected in an open competition. This may prove to be the first step in enhancing our educational linkages with a major cultural and economic partner of the United States. □

Change, Vol. 23, No. 1, pp. 52-53, Jan./Feb. 1991. Reprinted with permission of the Helen Dwight Reid Educational Foundation. Published by Heldref Publications, 4000 Albemarle St., N.W., Washington, DC 20016. Copyright 1991. Subscription information 1-800-365-9753.



World Education Services, Inc.
P.O. Box 745 Old Chelsea Station
New York, NY 10113-0745

Nonprofit Org.

U.S. Postage
Paid
New York, NY

Subscribe today!

\$35 per year in U.S./\$50 outside of U.S.

If you're a professional in international education, this is the newsletter for you.

Name.....

Title.....

Institution.....

Address.....

State Country Zip

Please send your check (payable in U.S.\$) or your purchase order to:

World Education Services, Inc.
P.O. Box 745, Old Chelsea Station
New York, NY 10113-0745

Please send me a list of available reprints from past issues.