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India Blog Series: Public Diplomacy: An Education ^[1]

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Good public diplomats (like good teachers and students) impart knowledge, listen, create dialogue, engage others by helping to tackle tough issues, and are open to learning from the multitude of perspectives others present. They are imbued with an inclination to advance the education of everyone, as well as their own. So what better way is there to exemplify the reach of public diplomacy than through educational exchanges?

Students can function as citizen diplomats, exchange valuable skills, share perspectives, and collectively contribute to strengthen shared values between cultures. This year, nearly 100,000 Indian students are enrolled in American colleges (a number that continues to grow), but only 3,000 American students are studying abroad in India. The U.S. and India clearly have much to gain by encouraging exchanges. Though if the two governments desire to have this exchange system reach its full potential, there are some hurdles to overcome. But first, let's take a look at the bright side.

From the educational perspective, exchanges give students the opportunity to learn about international perceptions of domestic problems. When I studied abroad in India in 2009, Indian students were curious about President Obama's stance on how to stave off recession and the international ramifications of a potentially insular economic policy. Undoubtedly, studying abroad can promote critical and creative thinking for tackling current issues. Exchanges in a



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A picture taken during

"Holi" (a religious spring festival celebrated by Hindus)

Looking beyond the educational benefits, exchanges also expose students to different cultures. They can investigate the subtleties and complexities of native cultures that need to be explored and experienced in order to be fully understood. As exciting as the prospects are for the results of these programs, they are still facing some problems.

India and the U.S. have had their share of troubles in the past over educational exchanges. The U.S. has been criticized for poor regulation of fraudulent colleges and improper treatment of international students by immigration authorities. In addition, Indian students who were duped into attending fraudulent American universities, were criticized by many for ignoring the red flags. India is also dealing with overcrowding in their top universities due to limited seats and overqualified students. Many of these students either go abroad or, if they can't afford international travel, attend local colleges that are not able to foster their talents. Fortunately, both countries are steadfast in their commitment to change these scenarios.

American authorities are working to investigate sham colleges and provide more advisory support to Indian students seeking to study in the U.S.; though it is a slow process. India is committed to investing in an Ivy League type system to attract more U.S. students and invite more U.S. universities to set up campuses in India. The new system will benefit beleaguered Indian students unable to garner a seat in the ultra-competitive Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs). It will also better the reputation of Indian higher education and encourage students abroad to study in India.

Secretary Clinton Speaks at the U.S.-India Higher Education Conference

New partnerships with universities around the world are promoting further exchanges. In mid-October 2011, the U.S. and India held an educational summit to encourage American students to study abroad in India and highlight the importance of cooperative research. The unique aspect of the India-U.S. educational relationship is that it's not just about creating an exchange or study abroad programs, but also about working together to innovate. The best and brightest are coming together to reduce the costs of lifesaving devices, making healthcare more accessible, and sharing stories and creative visions which can bridge the cultural gaps. Possibilities for future collaborations are endless.

Students contribute to the public diplomacy efforts of both nations by building stronger alliances through open dialogue. Though problems exist, if both India and the U.S. work to mitigate them, then both they and the world at large stand to greatly benefit from this form of public diplomacy.

Aparajitha Vadlamannati is a Master's of Public Diplomacy student at USC, graduating in May 2012. She is also the President of the Association of Public Diplomacy Scholars and a senior editor on the Public Diplomacy Magazine board. Aparajitha is interested in studying U.S.-India relations and Indian government public diplomacy. She hopes that participating in the India: Inside Out Project will contribute to her knowledge through primary research on both topics.
