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## Programs make a case for global engagement

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When the Soviet Union launched its first Sputnik satellite in 1957, it effectively defeated the United States in the first round of the space race. And while the United States responded in kind with Pioneer 1, it also transformed its Cold War engagement by launching a terrestrial initiative — one that involved UW–Madison back then and does so to this day.

After World War II, the Eisenhower administration understood that it was woefully unprepared for the country's new position of world leadership. The government needed multilingual specialists with firsthand knowledge of the history, politics and culture of strategically important regions, and it needed to develop future foreign service personnel. These goals required centers that could house experts and serve as depositories of information about world regions.

In response, Eisenhower signed the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) in 1958 to establish university centers devoted to the study of specific areas and languages: Southeast Asia, Africa and the whole of Eastern Europe, for example. Under the auspices of the Office (later the Department) of Education's Title VI program, these National Resource Centers, or NRCs, were charged with bolstering U.S. security through research support, area and language instruction, and community outreach.

Now, more than 50 years after Sputnik, 125 successors of those NDEA centers on 51 campuses have trained most of the country's high-level area studies experts in disciplines ranging from history and political science to law, as well as strategic regional languages.

### UW–Madison's NRCs

With eight centers UW–Madison houses the most NRCs in the country, the same as the University of California, Berkeley and the University of Washington–Seattle. Assembled within the International Institute, a joint venture of the Division of International Studies and the College of Letters and Science, these centers together span the globe.

For many on campus, NRCs are synonymous with the Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) graduate fellowships (originally NDEA fellowships) that have helped the university train thousands of world area specialists in the past 50 years. Indeed, more than half of the centers' federal funding supports this.

"FLAS fellowships have become an essential component of graduate support on this campus," says Gilles Bousquet, dean of the Division of International Studies. Bousquet also serves as director of the International Institute. "For decades they have drawn some of the strongest internationalist graduate students to this campus. This, in turn, has helped to attract and retain some of the world's best faculty who are eager to work with such first-rate students."

NRCs also provide intellectual communities that transcend disciplines. This was immediately apparent to faculty who remember when UW–Madison's first two NRCs, the African Studies Program and the Center for South Asia, were established.

Crawford Young, professor emeritus and a world-renowned political scientist whose particular interest is central African politics, says his work deeply benefited from the African Studies Program soon after he arrived on campus in 1961.

"I spent many more hours at those lunches and meetings [hosted by the

African Studies Program] than I did at departmental things," he says. While the Department of Political Science was his disciplinary base, African studies provided him with an interdisciplinary community of scholars that not only nurtured his work, but also made this campus a desirable place for him to build his substantial career.

Young credits then-UW Vice President Fred Harvey Harrington for advocating in Washington, D.C., that public universities had the resources and institutional commitment to receive this support, which came initially from a seminal Ford Foundation grant.

"Harrington worked hard to direct some of that funding toward 'the publics,' Young says. "It was at his insistence that the Ford Foundation agreed to extend its grants ... beyond the major private universities." Harrington also established the Office of International Studies and Programs, which has evolved into the Division of International Studies, to coordinate these and other campus international efforts.

Joe Elder, professor in the Department of Sociology and a scholar of India, who also joined the faculty in 1961, remembers the thrill of discovering scholars on campus who worked in Sanskrit and Hindi. They were brought together by the newly formed Center for South Asia.

"I thought, 'These are the people I'd love to have around to talk with,'" Elder says. "There's so much cross-fertilization, outreach and teaching that comes from these centers. A department can't do something like this. It has very limited funds."

For Henry Hart, an emeritus professor of political science whose research focused on India, this interdisciplinarity was key.

Since the middle of the last century, he says, faculty in engineering, education, economics, the social sciences and humanities came together to build curriculum that addressed the whole of India and not just content specific to one discipline.

“If you understand India in those terms you might be more precise in predicting how Indians will behave in one situation or another,” he explains.

### Scholarship as defense?

Beyond their own research interests, each of these men can also tell you how their scholarship served their government.

Young, for example, wrote reports and led government officials on study trips through the Congo in the 1960s.

Elder teaches an introductory course on Indian culture at the Foreign Services Institute five times each year to prepare officials headed to the country.

For Hart, it was the connections he facilitated, introducing the editor of the *Delhi Times* to local editor William Theodore Evjue, for example. “And I always felt my own responsibility for offering maximum exposure to U.S. people who came to see India,” he adds.

But whether they consider these contributions acts of defense is another matter.

Elder recalls feeling some discomfort about that wording, particularly when beneficiaries of the NDEA were required to sign a “loyalty pledge” during the McCarthy Era. But Young dismisses the term as pure rhetoric. “Defense’ was put in [the name of the Act] to legitimize the program,” he says. “But it was always part of the Department of Education’s budget.”

What is certain is that the centers are equipped to assist the government on any number of complex crises. That’s not to say that scholarship and foreign relations are always in harmony.

“When the Vietnam War broke out there were major objections from the Centers for Southeast Asian Studies,” Elder remembers. “The best-trained universities had the strongest manifestations against that war.”

More recently, says Elder, there has been major criticism from some of the Centers for South Asia about the U.S. occupation in

Afghanistan. “Iran has tried it, the Soviet Union tried it. Some who know that terrain and the infrastructure of the country have serious reservations about that policy.”

Young acknowledges that unlike most academics, security agents and government officials have a strong and sometimes classified understanding about an area’s immediate circumstances. “What they have much less of a fix on,” he says, “is a sense of the historical context.”

As an example he cites the Rwandan genocide during the Clinton presidency which, he says, the United States handled without a “deep background” understanding of that society.

“This was largely interpreted as an ethnic conflict and therefore too risky for, and remote from, international concerns,” Young says. In fact, this was far from the reality. “The genocide was by no means a reflection of unanimous communal hatreds. [It] was being forced upon the country by a power hungry elite in an insecure climate stemming from the civil war.”

Still, when asked whether the understanding that NRCs can provide would have altered the outcome, Young demurs. “It might lead to a prudent, if not necessarily more successful, policy,” he says.

### The next 50 years

Today, post 9/11, scholars associated with the Center for Middle East Studies will tell you they serve as media contacts more than ever before. And it’s no coincidence that enrollment in Arabic instruction has gone up an astonishing 900 percent in the past 10 years, from 28 students in 1998 to 254 last year.

Collectively, all the centers have responded to increased interest with “Inside Islam,” an initiative with Wisconsin Public Radio that produces radio shows and internet venues to challenge misconceptions and stereotypical perceptions of Islam and Muslims worldwide.

As always, the demand for language and area studies instruction mirrors political and economic trends. Interest in learning Chinese, for example, remains steadily high, with about 300 students enrolling each semester.

To Bousquet, it’s no surprise that NRCs have kept up with changing foreign policy and global affairs. “The [International] Institute is at the intersection of the humanities, the social sciences, the professional schools and increasingly the sciences,” Bousquet says. “It is this active, interdisciplinary scholarship that is so essential, whether we’re tackling global health, sustainability, or trying to understand emerging powers like China, India and Brazil. In a knowledge economy that is intrinsically global, the role of NRCs is vital for the university, the state, the Midwest and the nation.”



### UW–Madison programs grow

The university’s acquisition of NRCs grew through the years, often with Title VI granting new support to pre-existing regional studies programs. The African Studies Program and the Center for South Asia first received Ford Foundation funding in 1960 and 1961, respectively. NDEA grants were first received in 1965.

The Center for East Asian Studies was established in 1962. In 1973, the Latin American, Caribbean and Iberian Studies Program (LACIS) came into being. In 1981 the Center for Southeast Asian Studies was established. The Center for Russia, East Europe and Central Asia (CREECA) came 12 years later. In 2000, the Center for European Studies received funding. In 2003, Global Studies first received Title VI funding and the Center for Middle East Studies, a “baby” NRC with limited support, is hoping for full funding in this year’s grant application.



*The author recognizes two sources for this article: Joan A. Raducha, “I’ll Remember This Trip: Fifty years of study abroad at UW–Madison,” UW System Board of Regents, 2008, and Crawford A. Young’s presentation, “Title VI and Research on African Politics at Wisconsin,” at the Title VI 50th Anniversary Conference in Washington, D.C., last March.*