

The Case for Support of International Education Excellence at the United States Naval Academy

During its 165-year history, the United States Naval Academy has excelled in producing graduates of the highest caliber for leadership roles in the Navy and Marine Corps. Now, geopolitical developments emphasize an increasingly vital requirement that these leaders be equipped with greater regional knowledge, improved language capacity, and a more global perspective. In response to this need, the Naval Academy has, among other things:

- Expanded study abroad opportunities; and,
- Broadened the scope and number of cultural immersion opportunities available to midshipmen and faculty.



Midshipmen visiting the EU
Parliament (2008)



China (2008)

Implementation of these initiatives has established a strong foundation for increasing midshipmen's cultural awareness and language proficiency and working toward the goal of every midshipman traveling abroad at least once during their four years at the Academy. A stronger global education curriculum is helping prepare midshipmen to better understand and effectively communicate with native populations, local and government officials and coalition partners when they become officers in the Navy and Marine Corps, a capability that will add immeasurably to the nation's readiness for future conflicts.

International Programs Office (IPO): The IPO serves as the resource center for a broad spectrum of topics associated with the study of international cultures and foreign languages. Under the leadership of CDR Tim Disher, USN (Ret.) '81, the office has developed a number of programs to support and reinforce the seven foreign languages currently taught at the Naval Academy: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Japanese, Russian and Spanish.

Cultural Immersion Programs: The IPO coordinates midshipman participation in numerous four-to-six week summer language programs in countries such as China, Morocco, Mexico, Chile, Egypt, Germany, Japan, Jordan, France, Spain and Russia. Additionally, the IPO facilitates faculty-led cultural travel during holiday and spring breaks, drawing on faculty expertise in areas from economics and engineering to history and political science. Examples include the 2008 trips to JAXA, the Japanese Space Administration Program (equivalent to our NASA), and the National Defense Academy and various think tanks in India.

Semester Study Abroad Programs: A prototype semester study abroad program was launched in 2006 with three midshipmen attending the Royal Military College of Canada for one semester. In 2008, the program had grown to 26 midshipmen studying at foreign service academies or civilian universities in Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Egypt, France, Germany, Japan, Jordan, Singapore and Spain. A semester abroad provides midshipmen with a significant cultural immersion opportunity, exposure to the training and traditions of another culture, the time to develop personal relationships with peers from other countries and increased language ability and proficiency.



Midshipmen aboard the Spanish tall ship, *Juan Sebastián Elcano*

How can the Class of 1974 help? While federally appropriated funding supports expansion of language education at the Naval Academy, private gift support is necessary to transform the global education initiative into a world-class international and regional studies program that will affect the entire Brigade of Midshipmen as a long-term objective. Areas in which '74's \$480,000 gift can tangibly contribute to the "margin of excellence" afforded midshipmen in international educational opportunities include:

- Summer Language Study Programs
- Faculty-led Cultural Immersion Travel

The Summer Language Study Programs and Faculty-led Cultural Immersion trips cost about \$5,000 per midshipman per trip. **'74's gift could send almost 100 midshipmen on such a life changing trip.**

What do midshipmen who have participated in these programs say about their experiences?

- **A 1/C who participated in a semester of study in Beijing, China** - "The highlight of the semester for me was living with a Chinese roommate. [My roommate] invited me to spend the weekends at her home in Beijing. Getting to meet her parents and see her neighborhood were wonderful experiences that I will long remember. Over the course of this semester I learned a lot of Chinese, but even more about myself. This semester will certainly serve me well in the Marine Corps in terms of maturity gained and experiences had."
- **A 2/C Arabic Major who participated in a semester of study in Amman, Jordan** - "The opportunity to study in Jordan has been one of the most beneficial experiences of my life. It has given me the opportunity to improve my Arabic; but more importantly, it has given me the opportunity to speak to people and learn from them. It is from the standpoint of a Marine who served in Iraq having virtually no knowledge of the culture and completely ignorant of the language that I am most appreciative of what I have learned."
- **A 1/C who participated in a three-week Language Study Abroad trip to Chile** - "I truly believe it was the best summer training experience I have ever had at the Naval Academy. I developed an understanding of a foreign culture and was able to evaluate the cultural differences, both good and bad, between the United States and Chile. I also greatly improved my confidence and understanding of conversational Spanish."
- **A 1/C who participated in a 3-week Tri-Service Academy Cultural Immersion trip to Vietnam, Cambodia and Singapore** - "The program was a great experience for me both personally and professionally. I had the experience to develop myself personally by interacting with many different types of peoples and cultures over the trip. I developed many lasting relationships with the acquaintances I made throughout the trip. Professionally, it showed me the lasting effects that war leaves on a country. I witnessed the devastation that war can have on the persona of a nation and how the people of a nation control its overall outlook for the future. I saw hope in the eyes of many people who have experienced only war and have had next to nothing. Yet, the hope and hard work of the population of the majority of the struggling nations in SE Asia are helping to improve the overall atmosphere of the region. I also witnessed the vast differences in the living conditions of societal classes."