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Foreign Programs for Universities

Political realities argue that we must plan to furnish technical assistance to other countries for some years into the future. If this be so, we will need a continuing supply of well-qualified people for a variety of overseas assignments. If people of high quality are to be available, a basic requirement is that foreign duty constitute a meaningful part of a professional career. This is a major point of *A.I.D. and the Universities*, John Gardner's recent report to the Administrator of the Agency for International Development.

Much of Gardner's advice is directed toward A.I.D., for there are many respects in which this government agency and its relations with universities could be improved. But much of the advice, and the part emphasized here, is aimed at universities, for it does not take a very long chain of reasoning to conclude that universities must have a key role in improving our technical assistance program.

In order for Professor X to be of maximum value to his host country, he must not only have technical proficiency and a reasonable knowledge of the country, he must stay long enough to become a living part of the situation he is attempting to help. Usually this is long enough to mean considerable loss of contact with graduate students and colleagues at home; too often it has meant being passed over in favor of someone on the campus when promotions and other favorable actions were under consideration. In short, going overseas on a technical assistance mission has often posed a choice between a trip of such short duration as to be of questionable value to the host country and one long enough to impose real personal penalties. The way to avoid this difficulty, Gardner says, is to root out "the attitude that overseas activities are something quite separate from the mainstream of the university's life and being. . . . If the university treasures its integrity then it has two choices: Get out of overseas activities entirely or recognize such activity as *an integral part of university life and work.*"

A university that takes the second alternative must concentrate, perhaps on one region or on one kind of technical assistance, and will develop special competence (faculty, library, research) in its area of concentration. It will arrange for a faculty member to take graduate students on overseas assignments, both because the foreign experience is a constructive part of their training and because in their later careers they too are likely to spend some time abroad. And it will make sure that foreign duty is as well recognized through honors and advancement as is duty on the home campus. All of this requires self-discipline and agreement, from the departments to the president's office, that selected, but only selected, kinds of foreign assistance constitute an integral part of that university's area of special competence. A university that adopts this position has a strong basis for insisting to A.I.D. that it is a university, not simply a convenient contracting and recruiting agency for short-term use, and that it must therefore have those contractual arrangements that will help it to contribute most effectively over the long run to achieving the objectives of the nation's foreign assistance program.—DAEL WOLFE