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## Letter - The Role for Universities in Creating New Connections in the Pacific Basin

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# The Role for Universities in Promoting Inter-American Cooperation in an Age of Globalization

FLACSO-Quito Forum

October 26, 2010

Buenos tardes. Dr. Adrian Bonilla, Director of FLACSO, it's a great honor to participate in this forum with such outstanding scholars and educational leaders and this distinguished audience. As you know, I am a former professor of mechanical engineering, so my expertise is outside the social science fields of the august scholars gathered here. But my experience as the director of an interdisciplinary honors program and an administrator in charge of undergraduate education at Northern Arizona University taught me two things about bringing academic disciplines together. One is the importance of approaching distinct scholarly traditions respectfully; the other is to welcome the interdisciplinary experience as a source for creativity, insightful discourse and mutual understanding. I hope that will characterize our exchange today.

Before I begin my formal remarks, I'd like to start with a personal note. As some of you may know, our trip to Ecuador was initially motivated by my son and his fiancé's decision to be married here at her home next weekend. Since one of my priorities for University of the Pacific is to expand its international reach, we decided to take advantage of this private family experience to begin to strengthen Pacific's ties to Latin America, including promoting our growing Inter-American Program. So this is very much an initial learning and orientation experience for me, my husband, Mr. Bill Jeffery, who is also with us today, and for our families and friends traveling from the US to celebrate the wedding.

## I. Pacific's approach to Inter-Americanism

This reference to our personal experience is a very appropriate introduction for my discussion today. You see, the approach that I am going to be taking to Inter-Americanism is firmly rooted in the experience of the University of the Pacific. I don't mean to imply we made some great new discovery or invention, but simply that we learned back in the 1960s that a particular approach to undergraduate education - a *personal* approach - produced a lasting spirit of and commitment to inter-American cooperation.

Some institutional history is required to fully explain this, but first I want to point out that several living examples of this spirit are here with me today. These are alumni of University of the Pacific whose educational experience was so memorable that 30 or 40 years later, they have traveled from all over Latin America to reunite and to meet with me this week. I have greatly enjoyed getting to know this distinguished group of people.

Let me clarify from the start that the notion of inter-Americanism I'll be discussing is a private and personal commitment to cooperation across the barriers - language, culture and nation - that divide people in the Americas. These are the barriers that prevent us from identifying shared values, interests and ways to work together. So this should make clear that inter-Americanism, as I am characterizing it, differs from the typical meaning of economic or political Pan Americanism. Indeed, in addressing your remarkable institution, which is the result precisely of tremendous cooperation among Latin American nations, it is important to acknowledge this difference in meaning. We at Pacific understand and respect the great achievement of cooperation upon which FLACSO is built, and we feel honored to be able to address this subject with you and to learn from you.

## **II. Origins of Pacific's Inter-Americanism: the creation of Elbert Covell College**

So how did University of the Pacific get involved in inter-Americanism in the first place? In the late 1950s, Pacific was contemplating the huge increase in enrollment that the postwar baby boom would produce in American higher education. The University decided that it wanted to develop a distinctive approach that would maintain the virtue of its small college origins while still encouraging development of specialized professional and graduate programs. The mechanism chosen to bridge that gap was the "cluster college." Inspired by Oxford and Cambridge, cluster colleges would be small individual academic units of about 250 students each, with separate faculties and residences and distinctive educational programs. Three of these cluster colleges were founded, but the most important for us today was Elbert Covell College, which opened in 1963 as a bold experiment in inter-American education.

After a nine-nation tour of Latin America in summer 1960, Pacific president Robert Burns had resolved to make Elbert Covell College a Spanish-speaking program with classes taught in Spanish. Half the students were recruited from the United States and half from Latin America. The college would also seek to attract faculty from Latin America. The curriculum would emphasize majors that would help graduates contribute to the economic, political and social development of their countries. The fact that the College was planned and launched in the early 1960s meant that it was caught up in and shaped by the enthusiasm in the U.S. and much of Latin America for President John F. Kennedy's "Alliance for Progress." Indeed, President Kennedy sent the University a congratulatory message upon Covell College's founding (he said it would surely generate "new vistas of enlightened international relationships"). Major media publications such as *Time* magazine and the *Wall Street Journal* also took note of Pacific's new cluster colleges, especially Covell College.

## **III. ECC and the spirit of inter-Americanism**

Covell College drew visits from several prominent (and intrigued) Latin American leaders. One of the early visitors was the great Colombian man of letters, German Arciniegas, who spent a lot of time getting to know the faculty and students. After his visit, he went on to London where he was interviewed by the BBC. Here's what he said about Covell College:

"The impression which a gathering of these university students gives is that of a large family of young people, who speak a common language, *who humanly are intertwined together*. It is an America united, not divided. A house well composed, not broken into pieces. Everything achieved without force, by natural means, without hiding initial disagreements, without working with the conventional atmosphere of official things. The edges continue to be polished, just as in families, just as among brothers. Friendships are affirmed through the simple circumstances of sharing the same house."

Arciniegas beautifully sums up the spirit and direction of inter-Americanism at Pacific, then and now: an America that is united - built on shared experience, friendship, and a common language. Indeed, for the graduates of Covell College, that experience was so remarkable, those friendship ties so strongly wrought, that Pacific has remained a motivating force throughout their lives.

Unfortunately, as successful as Elbert Covell College was in creating a spirit of inter-Americanism, Pacific's experiment with the cluster colleges didn't work out so well. Elbert Covell College did perhaps the best, producing about a thousand graduates over two decades who have spread out across the Americas. But for a variety of institutional reasons, in the early 1980s the University chose to merge Elbert Covell College and one of the other cluster colleges, Callison College, into a single undergraduate School of International Studies (the first in California). And our special relationship with Latin America faded away.

#### **IV. The revival of inter-Americanism at Pacific**

Happily, however, the spirit of Inter-Americanism at Pacific lived on through our wonderful alumni and the School of International Studies. But 20 years passed before we started to reintegrate Inter-Americanism into the curriculum. In the meantime in California, the Hispanic population had grown to 38% of the total population, and almost 60% of the school-age population. Yet our intake of US Hispanic students hadn't grown since the cluster college era. And students from Latin America had stopped coming altogether. Pacific was no longer producing graduates able to serve the needs of California's Spanish speaking population, and we'd lost our reputation as an Hispanic friendly environment.

It was imperative that the university respond to the needs of our own Hispanic community, and we were also interested in reviving the University's connection to Latin America. The result, in 2008, was the establishment of our current Inter-American certificate program. In many ways, Covell College provided a model. We knew that Covell succeeded by shaping its students and faculty into a close-knit community. Accordingly, we hoped to house our Inter-American students in common residences where Spanish would be the lingua franca. Moreover, we remembered that our Latin

American students' national and cultural pride had greatly contributed to Covell's spirit of inter-American cooperation. Research had shown that US Hispanic students tended not to be global-minded or to study abroad. Recruiting students from Latin America, then, was a way to broaden and enrich the program culturally and to get US Hispanics more globally involved.

#### **IV. Inter-Americanism in an era of globalization**

Twenty-first century globalization has helped shape many of the goals and circumstances of the new Inter-American Program. For instance, we know that Hispanic immigrants and their children are often at a tremendous educational disadvantage in the United States. We are committed to serving this population, and we have seen firsthand the rewards that follow.

Consider the story of one of our most distinguished alumni, the astronaut José Hernandez, Class of 1985. Born in California to a Mexican immigrant family of migrant farm workers, José spent every spring and summer on the "California Circuit," picking fruits and vegetables up and down California's Central Valley, moving in and out of schools. After a teacher implored his parents to stay put for the school year, the Hernándezes made the brave decision to give up their way of life for their children's education. José seized that chance and eventually was accepted to University of the Pacific, where he majored in engineering and dreamed of spaceflight.

But José had moved so quickly from the fields to the physics classroom that initially he struggled at Pacific. He may have left engineering, but a wonderful professor - a Cuban-American initially on the Covell faculty - took José aside and tutored him, in Spanish, through his problems. The tutoring got Jose over his mental block with physics, and it opened the door to an assistant position in the physics department. This led to an internship at the famous Lawrence Livermore Laboratories, where he was hired as a research scientist and got on the path to the Space Shuttle launchpad. In August 2009, José fulfilled his lifelong dream by launching into space aboard the Space Shuttle Discovery. As our entire Pacific community watched, José traveled 5.7 million miles in space and orbited the earth 217 times. No doubt his flight inspired countless other childhood dreams all over the world.

As we're re-establishing the Inter-American Program, José's story has encouraged us to work to increase the number of faculty who can teach in Spanish. And of course, José's own commitment to inter-American educational cooperation and the advancement of science education for Hispanic children in the U.S. and in Mexico could not be greater. We are very proud to have him as a member of our Board of Regents.

The global nature of today's world has indeed shaped teaching and learning in the new Inter-American Program. Covell College taught us that both our Latin American and our US Hispanic students needed to make adjustments to living and learning with one another. Now, as greater numbers of international students come to Pacific and we send more students abroad, inter-cultural communications have become an important part of the curriculum. Our Inter-American students and all Pacific students who study abroad are required to undergo special cross cultural training. The

website we created to facilitate this training, called "What's Up with Culture?" has been adopted by the Institute of International Education, the American Field Service and other organizations in order to train tens of thousands of international exchange students every year.

By creating a real need for inter-culturally competent professionals, globalization has encouraged a foundation of international cooperation for the new Inter-American Program. This foundation consists of our alumni as well as individuals and organizations across Latin America. We've found that, as with Covell College, this cooperation has inspired a sense of idealism in everyone connected with the Inter-American Program. At the formal inauguration ceremony for the program, we invited Cesar Gaviria, the former President of Colombia and ex Secretary General of the Organization of American States, to be the keynote speaker. During his campus visit, he commented upon the wonderful idealism he saw in students and faculty and predicted the program would be a boon to inter-American relations.

## **V. Making inter-Americanism more sustainable this second time around**

To ensure that the new Inter-American Program is sustainable, we want to expand that sense of international cooperation into a series of strong institutional partnerships, especially with Latin American institutions. The first of these partnerships was formed with the Union of Universities of Latin America and the Caribbean (UDUAL), the remarkable Mexico-based federation I believe you are a part of. Indeed, it was in recognition of Pacific's goal to foster inter-American cooperation that UDUAL welcomed us as its first U.S. member. Earlier this year Pacific also reached agreements with institutions in Venezuela; now we're hoping to add Ecuadorian partners. Of course, we realize it won't be possible to undertake specific activities with every new partner. Rather, what we hope to achieve is a plurality of opportunities throughout the Americas that respond to the diverse career and study interests of our students. And while we're just getting started, we think these partnerships will gradually become a key part of our program.

## **VI. Inter-Americanism and our commitment to humanizing the forces of globalization**

I'd like to conclude by noting the remarkable parallel between the goals of Pacific's Inter-American Program and the goals of Pacific's founding fathers. Pacific is California's first university. We were founded in 1851 by a group of Methodist ministers who believed that only education could temper the unbridled materialism of Gold Rush California.

Today there's no Gold Rush, but there is rapid globalization. We know that the process of globalization can sometimes have devastating effects on people, as our Hispanic immigrants in the US know too well. Pacific's Inter-American Program is, in a sense, an effort to use education to humanize and temper the forces of globalization. Through collaborations with Latin American partners, we seek to forge *lasting personal connections* between the people of the Americas.

The night before I left for Ecuador, University of the Pacific awarded an honorary doctoral degree to Dolores Huerta, the civil rights champion who helped Cesar Chavez build the United Farm Workers

Union and who continues to fight for the rights of farm workers, immigrants and women. Dolores Huerta, a Stockton native, makes extraordinary contributions to the cause of human dignity. And ultimately that notion of humanistic contribution is what the Inter-American Program's all about: ensuring that regardless of differences in language, culture or nation, our graduates will be able to serve people with the dignity they deserve.

Muchas Gracias.