

Issue

Midnight Surprise: Preliminary Reactions to the Federal International Education Budget Cuts

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In the wake of the Department of Education’s 2011 budget cuts—reductions that affect all levels of education and that deal particularly challenging blows to international education and foreign language studies programs authorized under [Title VI of the Higher Education Act](#)—we conducted a series of phone interviews with faculty involved in international education, including directors of area studies centers as well as presidents and executive directors of area studies associations. These interviewees were already involved with [Producing Knowledge on World Regions](#)—an SSRC project initiated in 2004 to survey the condition of area studies, which involved site visits to twenty-two area studies centers across twelve campuses—and were eager to share their reactions to the recent budget cuts. We asked them about the immediate impacts of the cuts to Title VI programs for this summer and for the coming academic year as well as the longer-term implications, with a specific focus on graduate students. We also discussed the implications of these budget cuts for the universities at large. There is remarkable consistency in the responses of these faculty, summarized as follows.

Budget Facts

Table 1 exhibits the information available at this time on the cuts that the Education Department has instituted pursuant to the final Continuing Resolution (CR) legislation for fiscal year (FY) 2011 as well as some of the international program competitions that have been cancelled entirely. While the budget for the Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE) was cut by less than 12%, funding for international studies and foreign language programs was cut by almost 40%. The line item that funds the nation’s leading area studies centers—or National Resource Centers (NRCs)—has been cut by almost 47%, from \$34 million to \$18 million (see table 2).

NRC and Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) awards are granted across multiple years. While the current grants cover the period from FY 2010 to FY 2013, decisions about continuation funding for grant years two, three, and four are made annually on a non-competing basis and are based on a number of factors, including the on-time submission of reports, evidence of progress toward grant objectives, and the congressional appropriation of funds for the program. Thus, all funded centers are just finishing the first year of their four-year award term but had prepared budgets through FY 2013 using estimated figures established at the time of the initial grant award notification.

The FLAS fellowships for this summer and for next year will be protected since the annual FLAS award letters were received by the NRCs before the budget discussions were finalized. A FLAS fellowship for a student in “language and area studies” typically covers a living stipend and partial tuition (with the university covering the remaining tuition).

However, research and study-abroad and dissertation-fieldwork awards have been particularly impacted by the budget cuts. The major shock is in the cancellation of the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad (DDRA) program, which grants approximately 150 awards each year. Faculty research abroad has also been completely cut as well as funding to the [Council of American Overseas Research Centers](#) (CAORC), which funds both student and senior-faculty research in the countries in which recipients are based as well as some comparative, cross-country research.

The consensus among our interviewees is that, with the 2011 budget cuts now a reality, the focus of lobbying should be to reinstate funding in 2012, with FY 2012 budget talks beginning this July.

National Resource Centers: Ifs and Buts

It has now been established that NRC cuts are to be applied equally across all grantees and that the NRCs will each experience a 47% cut in their budgets as of August 15, 2011. NRC directors recently received annual-award letters containing guidance for submitting revised FY 2011 budgets. Specifically, the NRCs have been instructed to maintain activities that strengthen capacity in area studies and less commonly taught language instruction, to continue to conduct outreach to minority-serving institutions and community colleges (an Invitational Priority in FY 2010 grant competition and a particular emphasis for the current administration), and to maintain evaluation activities.

If the centers spent cautiously during their first year of the current grant cycle (FY 2010–2011) and can rely on other sources of institutional support, then they may be able to struggle through the upcoming year. If the funding is reinstated in 2012, these NRCs may survive the crisis.

But, the big question is whether universities will honor the matching funding that they had originally promised in order to receive the Title VI funding. These matching funds frequently take the form of new faculty appointments, administrative staffing, program support, and the large portion of overhead costs that the Title VI program does not cover (since indirect costs for NRC awards are limited to 8%). There is doubt as to whether the universities will honor contracts already signed with new faculty hires where the position was partially (usually up to half) funded through Title VI funds.

For the public universities, there is no question that if funding is not reinstated in FY 2012, then many centers will be forced to close down. For the private elite universities, some of the bigger and long-established centers have endowments and are not threatened

with closure; however, many of their courses, programming, and students will feel the effects of budget cuts.

University Responses

All the interviewees said that their universities had been extremely supportive, with presidents, provosts, and deans writing letters to Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and working closely with their Federal Relations officers and state congressional representatives. Some deans have called for meetings of the various NRC programs to discuss coordinated responses. In addition to the [Consortium of Social Science Associations](#) (COSSA), the [National Humanities Alliance](#) has worked closely with universities to appeal these budget decisions.

However, all interviewees agreed that their respective universities—whether public universities, smaller private universities, or elite research universities—are not in a position to step in to make up the budgetary difference, as all of them have experienced permanent budget cuts upward of 10% across the board over the past two years. As mentioned earlier, not only can they not step in, but whether they will honor commitments already made in terms of matching funds or even contracts already signed remains uncertain. It is worth noting that, in the past, in quite a few cases when centers lost their Title VI funding for a cycle, universities would step in for a 3- or 4-year period until the funding was restored in the next grant cycle.

Ironically, despite overall budget problems, many of the interviewee's campuses had experienced recent growth in international education, with new centers of international or global studies being established, each housing six or seven different area studies centers. Since 9/11, there has also been a growth in the number of students enrolled in graduate programs, especially in Middle East Studies (MES). On some campuses, there has been as much as a tripling in the number of graduate students in PhD programs in MES. Over the past decade, important gains in the number of students enrolled in Arabic language courses have also occurred. One faculty member in MES emphasized that, for the first time, they were receiving qualified incoming graduate students with two to three years of Arabic language study, including some that had taken Arabic in high school. This respondent also commented that there was increasing diversity in the student body pursuing international education, with more students of color going into these fields

Impacts

Respondents were asked about the immediate and longer-term impacts of the cuts on their individual centers, with a specific focus on graduate students, as well as the larger implications of these cuts at their universities.

Impact on Courses (and Faculty Hiring)

All respondents said that there would be a major impact on course offerings and, by extension, on departments. Area studies centers quite routinely organize joint courses

with departments and fund course costs and faculty salaries out of Title VI funds. This is especially true for language classes and courses responding to new or renewed interest from students, whether in terms of countries or regions previously understudied or of themes of current and public interest.

Even for elite universities, Title VI funding provides flexible funds that can address specific needs and interests through classes with small numbers of students that would, as a result of their size, otherwise be seen as not viable or essential by university administrators. Courses on places like the Caucasus, Central Asia, or Afghanistan are examples, as are small classes or one-on-one tutoring in languages such as Ottoman, Kazakh, Bosnian, Hungarian, or Pashtu.

Quite large numbers of faculty, in both language and area studies, and administrators and staff are partially or fully covered by Title VI funding. Area studies centers depend on this kind of staffing, as do many of the institutes and centers for international or global studies that were set up in the past decade.

Impact on Student Research

The cancellation of the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad program on the eve of the announcement of its awardees is deemed “devastating” for students. Many candidates for this program were planning to begin their research as early as September. The elimination of this source of funding affects students in fields that require research abroad more than others (including history, anthropology, archaeology, and comparative politics), but in general it is a blow to international research. There will be that much added pressure on the few other sources of funding, including the SSRC’s [International Dissertation Research Fellowship](#) (IDRF) program, the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS), the Institute of International Education’s (IIE) Fulbright program,¹ and smaller programs, such as Wenner-Gren. It is still unclear how NSF (National Science Foundation) programs will be affected, but for social scientists the budget cuts at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), especially the dissertation fellowships, are also significant.

At the SSRC, it has always been common to have a subset of fellows funded by both an SSRC program and Fulbright—thus enabling both programs to spread their resources farther. Approximately 20% of this year’s IDRF cohort is in this situation—with their second source of funding suddenly nonexistent—and awardees are already contacting IDRF to ensure that they will still get full funding from the SSRC.

The immediate impact, therefore, is on the cohort of students looking to go to the field in the upcoming academic year. However, training will also be affected by the cuts in courses and language study described earlier. Even specialized library collections and specific works needed by students for their dissertation research were funded through Title VI funds and will now be unavailable, as will specialized classes and tutoring. Furthermore, one interviewee suggested that if the same cuts persisted in the future, then FLAS awards would need to be used to cover dissertation research rather than

coursework, which would mean that fewer students would be supported through graduate school.

Reactions

Interviewees all expressed their shock and unhappiness at the “midnight surprise”—especially in terms of the sizes of the cuts and the ways in which they disproportionately targeted international education and higher education. Following are some of their prime reactions.

Initial Uncertainty

The lack of information and specifics until just recently meant an inability to plan and led to “paralysis.” All NRCs immediately halted spending in order to hoard their funds. One campus was planning a series of events around the tenth anniversary of 9/11 but has stopped all work on this project. Given the summer break, they feel that the window of opportunity to carry on with their original plans has closed.

There is general unhappiness with the lack of communication from the Department of Education. On June 1, NRCs received an email from the Title VI program stating: “For FY 2011, the National Resource Centers has \$18,048,762 from which to make continuation awards. Your IFLE program officer will provide the specific information about your NCC award in a later communication within the next few days.” The NRCs did not receive follow-up emails explaining how the \$18 million will be distributed among the individual grantees until approximately one week later.

Sense of Betrayal

Several respondents expressed their dismay that these cuts were occurring under the current administration, which had seemed to embody enlightened international engagement. The general feeling among respondents was that while it was the Republican-controlled House of Representatives that mandated a 10% cut in the Education Department’s budget, it was the Obama administration that disproportionately targeted international education programs. There was also specific criticism leveled at the Department of Education, which for years has collected information from NRCs but then poured it all into a database that, for all intents and purposes, cannot be used to produce the information and figures that could support arguments to counter those who question the need for Title VI funding.

Interviewees also questioned what the private foundations were doing and whether or not they were trying to exert pressure on the Hill. Given the historical role of foundations in setting up area studies in the first place, several wondered whether they would step into a similar role fifty years later.²

Ironies

All interviewees noted the irony of these cuts, which come at a time when the United States is faced with particularly deep changes and challenges abroad—not least with the Arab revolutions, which have sent foreign-policy circles into a tailspin. It is also ironic that universities have generally taken up a discourse of globalization and internationalization—which has been especially dominant in recent commencement ceremonies—but find themselves undermined in their ability to provide international education.

Next Steps

The SSRC will continue work on the [Producing Knowledge on World Regions](#) project and is preparing to conduct a short online survey to collect information on the points raised here in a more systematic manner. The Council had in fact applied to the Education Department to move its existing research into a new phase of data analysis, but the International Research and Studies Program—to which the Council submitted its proposal—has been completely defunded. This small program (of around \$6 million/year) was the only program at the Department of Education that actually funded critical evaluation and in-depth study of the state of area studies—and now this resource for reflexivity has been lost to the academic community.

Table 1**Department of Education Cuts by Program**

<i>Amounts in thousands</i>	FY 2010 Appropriation	FY 2011 Final Appropriation	Change from FY 2010 Appropriation to FY 2011 Final Appropriation	
			<i>Amount</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE)	32,496,575	21,533,610	-10,962,965	-33.7%
Office of Innovation and Improvement	1,368,365	1,856,179	487,814	35.6%
Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools (OSDFS)	403,053	288,465	-114,588	-28.4%
Office of English Language Acquisition (OELA)	750,000	733,530	-16,470	-2.2%
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS)	16,309,933	16,230,481	-79,452	-0.5%
Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE)	2,016,447	1,738,946	-277,501	-13.8%
Federal Student Aid (FSA)	32,117,751	46,148,743	14,030,992	43.7%
Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE) *	2,973,887	2,621,656	-352,231	-11.8%
Institute of Education Sciences (IES)	659,006	608,786	-50,220	-7.6%

Departmental Management	1,531,232	1,793,923	262,691	17.2%
Contributions	296	922	626	211.5%
General Funds Receipts	-29,029,763	-49,663,207	-20,633,444	71.1%
Other Mandatory Accounts	10,074	9,219	-855	-8.5%
APPROPRIATION TOTAL	61,606,856	43,901,253	-17,705,603	-28.7%

Detail: Office of Postsecondary Education

	FY 2010 Appropriation	FY 2011 Final Appropriation	Change from FY 2010 Appropriation to FY 2011 Final Appropriation	
			Amount	Percentage
Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE)	2,973,887	2,621,656	-352,231	-11.8%
Higher Education, including:	2,740,665	2,388,946	-351,719	-12.8%
Other Aid for Institutions				
International education and foreign language studies	125,881	75,729	-50,152	-39.8%
Domestic programs (HEA, VLA, and PL #)	108,360	66,712	-41,648	-38.4%

(HEA VI-A and B) #	108,300	66,712	-41,548	-38.4%
Overseas programs (MECEA section 102(b)(6)) [^]	15,576	7,465	-8,111	-52.1%
Institute for International Public Policy (HEA VI-C)	1,945	1,552	-393	-20.2%

The Fiscal Year 2011 grant competitions for the International and Foreign Language Education programs that have been cancelled are *in red*.

Domestic programs authorized under Title VI of the Higher Education Act (HEA) include:

- **American Overseas Research Centers**
- **Business and International Education**
- Centers for International Business Education
- Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowships
- Institute for International Public Policy
- **International Research and Studies**
- Language Resource Centers
- National Resource Centers
- Technological Innovation and Cooperation for Foreign Information Access
- **Undergraduate International Studies and Foreign Language Program**

^ Overseas programs authorized under the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act (MECEA—Fulbright-Hays Act) include:

- **Fulbright-Hays Training Grants—Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad (DDRA)**

Proposed FY11 allocation: \$5,800,000

Estimated Range of Fellowship Awards: \$15,000–\$60,000

Estimated Average Size of Fellowship Awards: \$40,000

Estimated Number of Fellowship Awards: 150

In FY10, DDRA awarded 164 fellowship awards totaling \$6,367,176.

- **Fulbright-Hays Training Grants—Faculty Research Abroad**

- Fulbright-Hays Training Grants—Group Projects Abroad
- Fulbright-Hays Seminars Abroad—Bilateral Projects

Note – FY 2011 program cancellations account for approximately \$7.5 million of the \$8.1 million in cuts to programs authorized under MECEA section 102(b)(6).

Table 2

Title VI and Fulbright-Hays Program Funding Status Estimates as of June 6, 2011

Title VI Programs	FY 2010 Funding	FY 2011 Continuing Resolution Funding [#]
NRCs 4-Year Grants	\$33.759 M	\$18.049 M
FLAS [^] 4-Year Grants	\$35.796 M	\$35.399 M
UISFL* 2-Year Grants	\$4.634 M	\$1.001 M
IRS* 2-Year Grants	\$7.152 M	\$2.423 M
LRCs 4-Year Grants	\$5.022 M	\$2.511 M
AORCs* 4-Year Grants	\$1.197 M	\$0

TICFIA 4-Year Grants	\$2.108 M	\$0
BIE* 2-Year Grants	\$4.500 M	\$883,700
CIBERs 4-Year Grants	\$12.757 M	\$5.732 M
IIPP 5-Year Grant	\$1.945 M	\$1.541 M
Fulbright-Hays Programs	FY 2010 Funding	FY 2011 Continuing Resolution Funding[#]
DDRA* 1-Year Awards	\$6.368 M	\$0
FRA* 1-Year Awards	\$1.402 M	\$0
GPA^ 1- & 4-year Awards	\$5.504 M	\$4.874 M
Seminars Abroad^ 1-Year Awards	\$1.685 M	\$1.826 M

Significant FY 2011 reductions in funding reflect the sum of cuts to continuation grant awards plus in several cases, as noted, the elimination of new competitions.

^ Education Department-obligated full awards prior to Final FY 2011 Continuing Resolution Enactment

* New FY 2011 competitions cancelled

SOURCE: Author adaptation of a table provided by Miriam A. Kazanjian, Consultant, Coalition for International Education, using data rounded from USED FY 2012 Budget Justifications, FY 2011 Spending Plan, and Announcements

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1. 1. The Fulbright Program—administered by IIE and sponsored by the US Department of State—is a flagship international-exchange program designed to increase mutual understanding between people of the United States and other countries that provides support to US citizens in possession of a BA to study, teach, and conduct research abroad. Fulbright-Hays DDRA grants are explicitly for advanced graduate students who will have achieved doctoral candidacy at the time of award and who plan on conducting doctoral dissertation research abroad, with a particular focus on non-Western foreign languages and area studies. [[↩](#)]
2. 2. Foundations have begun to respond. Just recently the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation announced a \$3.16 million grant to IIE to create the [IIE Graduate Fellowships for International Study](#). Beginning July 1, these grants will provide support for PhD dissertation research overseas to doctoral students in the humanities whose funding has been lost due to the cancellation of the Fulbright-Hays DDRA program for FY 2011. However, it is worth noting that this is a special one-time-only grant that will provide support for approximately 80 of the 130 students nominated to receive funding in 2011/2012 through the DDRA program. Thus, this grants program responds to the immediate needs of current scholars but is not intended to supplant federal investment in the longer term. [[↩](#)]