



## ***Panel 1***

### **What Leadership, Goals, and Policies Can Ensure that Students Communicate Well in Multicultural Environments and International Commerce?**

**Deborah C. Andrews**

*University of Delaware, Moderator*

Panelists

**\*Rebecca Burnett**, *University Professor, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa*

**Daniel Chavez**, *President, Grupo Vidafel, Guadalajara, Jal, Mexico*

**\*Jonathan Monroe**, *Professor and Knight Writing Program Director, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York*

**\*Neal Lane**, *University Professor, Rice University, Houston, Texas. Formerly National Science Advisor to US President William Clinton.*

**\*Carol Geary Schneider**, *President, Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U), Washington DC*

Note: \* denotes panelists whose prepared statements are available in the conference website (<http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~wac2002/>). Also available is a statement from Elaine Maimon, Campus CEO, Arizona State University West, who had been invited to participate in the panel but was not able to attend.

The five panelists addressed this very large question from different points of view and different areas of expertise. In general, however, they endorsed, in Schneider's term, an approach to intercultural learning that supports "a vision of civic responsibility in a diverse and still deeply unequal world." This summary captures some of the issues raised in the discussion and suggestions for addressing these issues.

## **Learning That Crosses Borders**

Students need to learn to cross borders—of language, culture, and disciplines. A baseline for communicating well in multicultural environments and international commerce is communicating in more than one language. English has increasingly become the international language of commerce. But those who speak only English, especially only *American* English, lack an essential ingredient for multicultural understanding. Language study should occur at all educational levels from pre-school through university.

Students also need to acquire an ability to negotiate understanding in culturally contested situations foregrounding competing perspectives, an environment characterized increasingly by conflict, tension, and resistance (Burnett). And they need to work with people from their own as well as other disciplines. Words and ideas, even in one common language like English, don't mean the same things in different professions (Neal), and professions tend to create their own special languages as well. So students need to learn not only how to communicate within their discipline but how to translate their discipline to others. "The big context is learning how to learn from and work with others, in many settings, across different cultural, socioeconomic, class, religious, and language boundaries"(Schneider).

## **Learning to Solve Complex Problems**

Students also need to learn how to deal with muddled, complex problems, with "unsettling knowledge," knowledge that is "provisional, contingent, subject to revision...unstable" (Monroe). Their assignments should prepare them for an international workplace and an international community by helping them recognize the many dimensions of any decision beyond the mere disciplinary or technical. Good education is engaged education that encourages students and faculty alike to recognize that social policy, for example, is not something done to us but something we should shape (Burnett).

## **Taking Responsibility: Corporate Support for Education**

From his perspective as a Mexican entrepreneur, Chavez cited the role of corporations in fostering education for civic reform. For years, Mexico has exported cheap, low-skilled labor to the US and imported management talent, especially from the US. Moreover, Mexican business can thrive only in

conditions of social stability. Social policies that counteract poverty and enhance the lives of everyone can lead to greater foreign investment as well as greater national and international security. Thus Mexican executives serve themselves as well as other citizens in fostering education and international understanding.

### **Implementing Change: Some Suggestions**

The panelists cited many practices and programs (including, not unexpectedly, writing across the curriculum approaches) that can advance the central goal of intercultural learning, for example:

- educating the public that bi- or multilingualism is desirable
- supporting language instruction at all educational levels
- developing international student and faculty exchanges through the Internet and, where possible, through personal visits
- enhancing and perhaps requiring study abroad placements
- adapting curricula so that international thinking is pervasive, not merely decorative
- offering well conceived service learning opportunities that help students fulfill their civic responsibilities.

Some of these suggestions are included in a recent AAC&U report, "Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College." (In addition, Schneider notes, *US News* now collects data on how many campuses feature writing in the disciplines. The 2002 issue of *America's Best Colleges* ranks ten good examples of such programs.)

At the end of his presentation, Chavez outlined an international internship program that he proposed on behalf of his company, a major timeshare resort developer in Mexico. He offered to sponsor students from the US who would work in some of the 10 resorts his company runs. In return, as a way of enhancing Mexican education, sponsoring US schools would agree to arrange exchanges for Mexican students at US firms. Initially, he will work with students from Rice University. Eventually the program will expand to other institutions, and in doing so, provide one model of how educators and corporations can help make the world a better place.