

← Jaspardean Kobus (212) 877-0269 (h)



THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN INSTITUTE  
833 UNITED NATIONS PLAZA NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10017  
TEL: (212) 949-5666 CABLE: AFRAM

001513

PA-AAS-364

FN 39192

August 1982

21

### AFGRAD STUDENT STATUS REPORT

By

Susan Votaw

This report will summarize the results of a survey conducted among AFGRAD Fellows attending the Society for International Development (SID) Conference, July 18-22, 1982. Fellows invited to participate were selected from the AFGRAD student body on the basis of their field of study and outstanding academic performance to date. 37 Fellows from 21 countries ultimately attended the Conference.

Two questionnaires were distributed (copies are attached). These were a synthesis of three questionnaires used by the Division of Education\* (DOE) along with some of my personal ideas. The first questionnaire, entitled Mid-Program Report, was fairly brief, requesting general information on the Fellows' academic programs and social adaptation as well as opinions of their environment and of AFGRAD services. A section called "Advice to New Students" was intended to assist DOE staff in our orientations of incoming students. The questionnaire also included a section on the SID Conference, the first time to my knowledge that almost forty AFGRAD Fellows were assembled for such an event.

\*The AFGRAD Terminal Report, the SATP Survey of Returned Students, and the DTPSA Student Survey.

Of the 37 Fellows surveyed, 33 returned the Mid-Program Report (16 anglophones and 17 francophones), representing an 89% return rate. 30% of these will complete their programs by December 1982. Tables of respondents follow by country of origin, by field of study, by geographic distribution in the United States, by sex, by degree objective, by projected termination date and by future employment. These will show that the sample, although small, is fairly representative of the AFGRAD student body as a whole.

MID-PROGRAM REPORT

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS  
BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

Cameroon	1	3%
Congo	1	3%
Ghana	1	3%
Ivory Coast	1	3%
Kenya	3	9%
Liberia	1	3%
Malagasy Republic	1	3%
Malawi	2	6%
Mali	3	9%
Mauritania	1	3%
Rwanda	2	6%
Senegal	2	6%
Sierra Leone	2	6%
Somalia	1	3%
Sudan	3	9%
Togo	2	6%
Uganda	2	6%
Upper Volta	1	3%
Zaire	1	3%
Zambia	2	6%
Total :	<u>33</u>	

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS  
BY FIELD OF STUDY

Agric. Economics	3	9%
Agric. Education	1	3%
Agric. Engr.	1	3%
Agronomy	1	3%
Business Admin.	3	9%
Civil/Env. Engr.	2	6%
Economics	2	6%
Educ. Admin.	1	3%
Electrical Engr.	1	3%
Geography	1	3%
Linguistics/TESL	2	6%
Mathematics	1	3%
Nutrition	1	3%
Physics/Mat. Sci.	2	6%
Plant Breeding	1	3%
Plant Pathology	1	3%
Poultry Nutrition	1	3%
Public Admin.	1	3%
Public Health	2	6%
Resource Management	1	3%
Rural Development	2	6%
Wood Products Engr.	1	3%
Zoology	1	3%

GEOGRAPHICAL  
DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS

Northeast	11	33%
South	6	18%
Mid-West	13	39%
Mountain	1	3%
Northwest	2	6%

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS  
BY DEGREE OBJECTIVE

Master's Level (MA, MS, MPA, MBA, MPH)	17	51%
Doctoral level (PhD, DPH)	16	59%

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS  
BY FUTURE RESPONSIBILITIES

Returning to teach	23	70%
Returning to govern- ment service	10	30%

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS  
BY SEX

Female	5	15%
Male	28	85%

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS  
BY PROJECTED TERMINATION DATE

Compl. by 12/82	10	30%
During 1983	14	43%
During 1984	3	9%
During 1985	5	15%
During 1986	1	3%

A second questionnaire, the Student Assessment Report, explored the Fellows' personal reactions to U.S. life and institutions and their re-entry expectations, and requested feedback on the questionnaires themselves. 18 were returned (8 anglophones and 10 francophones), or 55%. Breakdowns of respondents by country of origin and by sex follow.

STUDENT ASSESSMENT REPORT

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS  
BY COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

Cameroon	1
Congo	1
Ivory Coast	1
Kenya	2
Mali	1
Mauritania	1
Rwanda	2
Senegal	2
Sierra Leone	2
Somalia	1
Togo	1
Uganda	2
Zambia	1
Total :	<u>18</u>

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS  
BY SEX

Female	3	17%
Male	15	83%

It was decided to split the questionnaires in two to lessen the daunting impact of so heavy a document to be filled out during a conference. The second, more personal questionnaire was made optional as I did not want to appear overly inquisitive, although of course the students are free to answer or not answer as they please. In this regard, we must remember that they may "tend to be skeptical about what is expected of them by agencies, and as such some answers could not be particularly honest -- ie, the information provided may only be part of what they think," to quote one remark.

As some questions overlapped, findings from the two distinct questionnaires will be presented together.

### ACADEMIC PROGRAMS.

The majority are pleased with their academic programs. Reasons included having obtained the tools for economic and statistical analysis of problems in their home countries; having mastered the rudiments and principles in their major interest; that the program was in continuity with previous experience; that the program met the individual's and his country's needs, requirements and expectations; strengthened understanding of their field; relevance to professional interests; and relevance to their stated objectives. Criticisms included two Fellows (6%) whose precise fields of study were not available at their university. Nine, or roughly a quarter of the sample, expressed dissatisfaction because their studies seemed too long, too theoretical or impractical, and in the case of both public health students, inappropriate to their countries' situations and needs. Five found their program easier than expected; only two found them more difficult. Background deficiencies were mentioned in Statistics (3 students), Math (2), Botany (1) and for the GRE (1).

Of those who attended English language training, most expressed satisfaction with their command of written and spoken English by the end of their language program, although five, or almost a third of the francophones, felt their language program was inadequate (too long, too trivial), and one francophone student feels his English is still a problem. A quarter of the francophone respondents are still having trouble with heavy writing courses, with understanding American accents, with making themselves understood by Americans, and with understanding informal American English. Over half of the anglophone respondents commented that they already spoke English well before their arrival, and it was merely a question of Americanizing their English. No one reported any difficulties with gestures or other forms of non-verbal communication.

Most responses indicated satisfaction with local environments. Criticisms included poor contact between students and the local community; limited social cohesion among students; dull, closed or boring environments in university

towns; the community's indifference and/or arrogance towards Africans; and paternalism, racism, or "overt signs of discrimination at all levels" reported by three Fellows. One simply finds his environment "hard to understand" and feels that the American sense of privacy and differing notion of hospitality restrict social contact. Overall, however, responses were largely positive, especially for Fellows at universities with large proportions of African and international students. Relatedly, 100% expressed satisfaction with their International Student Advisors.

When asked to assess their departments, the great majority of responses were favorable. One only student would not recommend that other AFGRAD Fellows be placed in his department because of inadequate research facilities. All others would welcome other Fellows, if possible, if only to "provide company." One public health student, after noting a focus on the health problems of developed countries, recommends his department because of its "strong commitment to improve" itself.

Well over half the respondents expressed an interest in and the need for practical training experiences to provide an applied component to complement their theoretical background before returning home. This response was common to Fellows returning to teach as well as those returning to government service, and was expressed by master's and doctoral level students.

#### AFGRAD SERVICES.

AFGRAD orientation and counselling services were most found satisfactory; descriptions ranged from "superb," "excellent" and "outstanding" to "AFGRAD is OK." Of those expressing dissatisfaction, one student flunked us in the concern department; one Fellow feels the students are treated like children. Eight respondents, or roughly a quarter of the sample, said they had received no orientation upon arrival. Five francophones recommended that we improve our academic, social and cultural counselling. One Fellow asks us to provide

better information on the individual's specific academic program. Two felt that orientation should be provided before the Fellow comes to the United States, and another suggested that we use former returned AFGRAD Fellows for this purpose. Yet another suggested that we send the AFGRAD Program Handbook to the Fellow before he leaves his country, which would be a fine idea for anglophones and currently impractical for francophones unless the Handbook is translated.

AFGRAD's administrative support services (insurance, finance, travel) were generally found satisfactory in terms of promptness, availability and concern. Well over half the respondents expressed concern about their maintenance allowance, yet probably close to all of them are finding it hard to make ends meet financially. Several students demonstrated awareness that part of this problem is that many are reluctant to realize that "they are no longer professionals (workers) but students," to quote one observation, and that the basic expenditures and conveniences to which they were accustomed at home as professionals are financially out of reach to them here as students. And in one Fellow's words, "rent is high in republican areas."

A relatively low percentage (6%) of responses expressed dismay over the book allowance, described by one student as "so low as to be meaningless." Two complained that their maintenance checks are usually late. Four Fellows are disturbed about the amount provided for travel funds, although this may be related to AFGRAD's unusual decision to provide \$45 for travel status supplement per night for the SID Conference instead of the usual \$50, given the huge expense involved in bringing so many Fellows to Baltimore, paying their conference registration fees, and so forth.

Roughly a quarter of the respondents complained about their medical insurance, described variously as "slow" and "awful." The lack of coverage for frequently required medical care such as physical examinations, eyeglasses and dental care has been a primary problem. One respondent says HAC is so bad that he "simply gave up on them." However, no one reported any difficulties in finding satisfactory or reasonably-priced medical services in their area.

Overall, my impression of the Fellows' feelings about AFGRAD is that we are doing a good job and that we could improve in certain respects. There will be a section below with specific recommendations.

#### ADAPTATION TO U.S. LIFE AND INSTITUTIONS.

The Student Assessment Report contained a series of 24 questions on various aspects of their lives in which the students may have met difficulties. Again, the goal was in part to ascertain which areas are most problematic, for the immediate purpose of including explanations and/or warnings in our orientation sessions for newly arrived AFGRAD Fellows. The responses were surprisingly uninformative: I had expected a much greater range of difficulties than those expressed.

As regards official documents, only two students reported delays in obtaining their forms IAP66A from AFGRAD. Three are currently experiencing delays in receiving their updated I-94's from Immigration.

Time management, as expected, was cited as a difficulty, especially at the beginning until "one settles down," in one Fellow's words. As regards time, four respondents expressed difficulties with becoming punctual and learning to plan ahead. Two feel that the pace of life as a graduate student precludes time for fun and socializing. In this regard, several reiterated the importance of studying daily and planning assignments well ahead of time to be able to "stay on top of things."

Finding satisfactory housing has not really been a problem, although three Fellows reported difficulties with landlords, one felt he had been discriminated against, and two students' rental deposits were not returned to them. One Fellow expressed outrage at the accommodations secured for him by AFGRAD. Five students say rent is very high.

Student-faculty relationships, a key to the U.S. graduate system, are generally good according to the responses. Several Fellows expressed their

liking for the availability of their professors. One student finds his professors condescending, but otherwise helpful and friendly. One feels there is a social gap between professors and students, and one had difficulty approaching her professors to ask questions, especially at the beginning of her program. However, when asked what they liked most about studying in the U.S., the response given most frequently was the quality of student-faculty relationships.

Only one Fellow expressed difficulties with making use of the various resources available to him as a student, saying it was difficult to find reference materials because of the volume of students at his school competing for materials in short supply.

U.S. instructional methods did not appear particularly problematic: only three students voiced any criticisms, all of them finding lectures sometimes informal to the point of being unstructured or superficial.

Students have not had any real problems overall with written assignments: only one person expressed difficulties with term papers, and even those were only at the beginning. Two are finding it hard when conducting research to secure the right information quickly. Four francophone Fellows are frustrated by being slower than their American counterparts. No one reported any difficulties with study assignments, other than the problem of reading speed for some francophones.

In terms of tests and examinations, one Fellow expressed difficulties in realizing what was expected of him. Four are not accustomed to take-home exams; six dislike multiple-choice tests (although two suggested that these questionnaires should have been multiple-choice, including one who specifically expressed dislike for such a format!). Two are uncomfortable with open-book exams, and two dislike true-false tests. One Fellow pointed out that so-called objective tests are easier for the professor to grade, yet all in all do not explore a student's command of the subject matter, but rather his ability to take tests speedily and find the "tricks."

The grading system has not been too difficult overall: two students mentioned that they learned how to "beat the system" by studying old exams. Only one Fellow felt that different grading standards are used for international students. One Fellow is simply mystified by the grading system (for example, why 89/100 is a "B" while 90/100 is an "A," when the two grades are only 1% apart). Another feels that extra time should be granted to foreigners on exams.

Major U.S. institutions (such as the economy, political parties and elections, federal vs. state governments, and religious life in America) have by and large not presented too much of a stumbling block, and most respondents expressing lack of understanding concede that they have not bothered to find out. One student expressed perplexity about the variety of religions in America. Another does not understand American football and would like more information (I don't understand football either, so I can't help).

The question on male-female relationships yielded a variety of responses. No one expressed friction with women in professional or managerial roles. One Fellow disapproves of the American habit of publicly displaying affection. One student had difficulty with American female "aggressiveness." One found it hard to tell at first whether women "were just being nice or serious -- it turned out they were just being nice." Another says he was shocked at first by women who allow their husbands to do the cooking until he began cooking for himself, at which point he "understood the women's position"! Yet another reports he has learned to accept American women's demand for equal treatment. Only one student mentioned problems with dating white women. Finally, one reports he "didn't do too well -- otherwise why am I returning home a bachelor?" Curiously, many of those expressing difficulties of any type with male-female relationships are here with their wives.

When asked which ethnic and cultural groups are easiest and which the most difficult to deal with, predictably enough, most found fellow Africans the easiest. Practically all of those who answered this question expressed problems in dealing with black Americans. Very few respondents said that all

ethnic groups are equally easy or difficult to deal with. Mainstream white Americans, although often found ignorant of Africa and Africans, appeared to be the easiest for these respondents to relate to.

Only two respondents are finding problems with their wives' adaptation to life in the U.S.: one says his wife is bored, and the other's is having trouble finding a job. No one reported difficulties with their children's adaptation process.

The question concerning the Fellows' understanding of American values and characteristics revealed a curious mixture of attitudes, varying from bare tolerance or total confusion to perceptive understanding. Two Fellows cannot understand Americans at all, and one of these refuses to even contemplate the differences because "it just beats" him. One student says that Americans are hard to understand but must be accepted because they can't be changed. Over a quarter of the respondents expressed concern with U.S. low world awareness. Self-interest, disrespect for tradition and ignorance were the traits of the American character most difficult to accept, yet as one woman put it, "their history explains a lot." Another noted that "foreigners expect a lot from Americans, so it is not surprising if they are easily disappointed."

When asked to summarize what they liked most about studying in the United States, four Fellows appreciated most the nature of their relationships with faculty members ("democracy is students and faculty eating in the same cafeteria") and three, the ready availability of information. Other responses included having learned to manage time more efficiently, the flexibility of their programs and the quality of their schools, democratic institutions, efficiency and pragmatism. On the other hand, features of life liked least included the lack of time to socialize, the fact that their program was too specific to the U.S., too theoretical or too long (even though another thinks there is too much material to be absorbed in too short a time), and a perceived lack of morality. Overwhelmingly, however, the aspect disliked by the most was the weather.

The students identified a variety of factors contributing to their academic success in the United States, notably discipline, financial organization, hard work, doing study assignments early, and good relationships with their academic advisors. Adjustment to the Fellow's social and community environment was attributed to being outgoing, friendly, open, frank, obedient, and polite, and to being active by participating in social functions and international meetings (one respondent mentioned picnics four times, which must be where he had some of his most memorable experiences!).

These respondents' recipe for survival would caution new students to be selective with their friends and not to be shocked by American ignorance, to be "diplomatic" and "willing to educate Americans" by explaining cultural differences observed. Several respondents stressed that one must remain tolerant of Americans and their views. Although the newcomer should certainly retain his own identity, it was felt he should remain flexible, realizing the differences in customs and trying to understand them. By contacting one's compatriots and establishing relationships with host families, some social differences may become less bewildering.

To facilitate adaptation, respondents made specific suggestions such as advising new students to use deodorant, leave tips in restaurants or write thank-you notes for invitations and favors. The need to learn punctuality and to adapt to the pace of life were reiterated. One Fellow aptly summed up the fundamental difference felt in a society which values individualism: "no one is another's brother's keeper as you would find in Africa."

#### RE-ENTRY EXPECTATIONS.

The respondents are all either returning to teach or to some form of government service. Expectations regarding the impact of their studies in the U.S. on their relationship with their employers were mainly optimistic: that a broad-minded employer would enable the Fellow to make a strong contri-

bution upon returning; that there will be improvements due to their increased qualifications or knowledge; that they will be respected; that their responsibilities will increase. One Fellow thought his long absence might strain his professional relationships. Two of the three women respondents (one returning to teach, the other to government service) feel they will have to battle sexual discrimination upon their return.

In terms of anticipated effects of their stay in the United States on their relationship with their family, those here without their wives and children expressed deep loneliness and frustration, along with a fear of "social deterioration" upon their return. One Fellow expects her family to be concerned about her cultural values until she "proves she has not changed." One fears his wish to "advocate the duty of each family member to try to be self-sufficient without altering the solidarity within the family might embarrass some family members." Another expects no change as he has suffered no "moral degradation" here. Yet another is looking forward to having more money so as to improve his family.

Expected changes in their relationships with friends varied from jealousy or communication problems to enhanced relationships because of their heightened world awareness, commitment to their country, or increased understanding and experience -- "some may be jealous, others will rejoice with me."

When asked if they are expecting a re-entry transition period, several Fellows felt two or three years insufficient to generate "reverse culture shock." Others think they will be impatient with "living inconveniences" or "office shortcomings." One will miss the privacy he enjoyed here. Some feel they will have to reach a cultural compromise, retaining the positive aspects of their experience in the U.S. and rejecting the negative: they must "try to readjust to life but at the same time strive to change it while remaining in an African framework."

Overwhelmingly, however, the section on re-entry concerns demonstrated a pronounced lack of awareness of the conflicts and impasses the Fellows are likely

to encounter. Responses primarily stated that they expect to experience no reverse culture shock, defined by one as "only one of those academic terms which apply to the untravelled." This points to the need for AFGRAD to organize some form of re-entry workshop which would address itself specifically to the possible stumbling blocks returning graduate Fellows may face.

#### THE SOCIETY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE.

As expected, responses were overwhelmingly in favor of the opportunity presented at the SID Conference to establish contact with one another and to tax their thoughts on certain issues facing the developing world. Respondents expressed appreciation in particular for the opportunity to increase their awareness; to meet fellow scholars, African personalities, influencers of policy and professionals in their field; or to understand the challenges and strategies of development, the root causes of problems and past attempts at solutions. Appreciation was also expressed for the relevance of conference panels to the experience of developed and developing countries. One Fellow says certain conference sessions were appropriate for his thesis preparation. The Conference was acknowledged for being well organized and for recognizing that political stability is fundamental to economic development. Only two respondents (6%) expressed disappointment with the Conference because no concrete solutions were proposed. Predictably, 100% recommended that a similar opportunity be again made available if possible.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS.

The extremely high return rate of these questionnaires (89%) can be interpreted as a demonstration of the Fellows' genuine desire for communication with their sponsoring agency and of their willingness to improve not only their own programs here, but also those of future Fellows. It therefore becomes important

that these students' experiences and concerns not be reduced to mere statistics; in view of the long-term global aims of the AFGRAD Program, our function as administrators includes ensuring that the Fellows' experience in the United States be as smooth and as rewarding as possible. Although the consensus is that AFGRAD is essentially doing a good job in this respect, certain suggestions made in these questionnaire responses merit genuine consideration. Suggestions follow in the fields of orientation for incoming students, subsequent logistical facilitations, and general recommendations.

We are all highly conscious of the importance of thorough orientation upon the Fellow's arrival. Assistance and survival skills are needed the most in the beginning. Furthermore, the student's first few days are often the only personal contact we have with a Fellow throughout his entire program. Orientation sessions therefore impart required background information, and, of equal importance, establish communication between the Fellow and AAI.

We are also fully aware of the severe limitations of these brief-orientation periods. Financial considerations demand that the Fellow spend as little time as possible in New York City where hotel costs consume too much of the initial maintenance allowance. Furthermore, the student is usually exhausted, suffering from jet lag, and exposed to so much novel stimulus that his capacity to retain information is seriously diminished. Deluging a new arrival with facts and/or warnings may therefore simply leave the new arrival completely overwhelmed and discouraged, ready to catch the next plane home. Travel fatigue, the time difference, the student's unfamiliarity with the pace of life in New York and our own busy schedules severely curtail the scope and quality of the orientation we provide while speaking to a new Fellow during his first day here.

It would therefore be of great assistance to students and DOE staff alike to have thorough written materials available for distribution to each Fellow upon his arrival, to be read at his convenience. We applaud DOE's efforts in this direction as evidenced by our recent structural reorganization, and are looking forward to seeing concrete results to back up the good inten-

tions expressed on paper. Written materials should be compiled in both English and French, and must be tailored specifically for graduate students. Similar materials should be compiled and appropriately translated for our other education programs as well.

To facilitate DOE staff's task, whenever possible, attempts should be made for new Fellows to arrive together. This will enable them to feel less alone at the beginning and in addition will provide them early on with peers to contact when needed.

In addition to basic information on the AFGRAD Program (describing academic requirements; explaining financial entitlements and procedures), ideally, orientations should address educational, cultural, social and other issues the Fellow is likely to face while in the United States. Many things we take for granted are of course novel to the newcomer. Traditionally, we have counted on the orientation services provided on each campus to provide a good part of the information required. The section in the Mid-Program Report entitled "Advice to New Students" provided an opportunity for these current Fellows to contribute specific suggestions to simplify the new student's adaptation to the American educational system. In addition to explaining the credit system, the grading system and the role of the academic advisor, according to the questionnaire responses, we should recommend that incoming students take as few courses as possible in the beginning to enable them to get used to the new system gradually. They should begin preferably with familiar subject matter, emphasizing quantitative material involving light reading loads, especially for francophones. Students should be advised to take as many core courses as possible during their first semester, to pay attention to course sequencing in their departments when planning their programs, and to spread difficult courses out over time. They must also watch out for the newcomer's tendency to overload. Lastly, they should consult frequently with professors and with fellow students to determine their selection of courses and of professors.

As concerns the student's program's overall objectives, according to these respondents, new Fellows should be advised to stay within their field of study and to be mindful of their country's needs. Students should select their academic advisors with utmost care, perhaps giving priority consideration to professors who are familiar with African students, and they should again be advised to visit with them frequently. Several respondents suggested that the student take plenty of time to know his professors before selecting his graduate committee.

Whenever possible, we should conduct research into the student's individual academic program so as to prepare him better for what he will encounter. Although we often assume that the information provided in the graduate catalog is sufficient, apparently this is not always the case. Relatedly, AFGRAD could also make it a practice to contact each Fellow's department so that the eventual academic advisor is made aware of our presence and availability as well as of our requirements.

Regarding finances, our orientation should strongly recommend that the new Fellow save as much of his initial maintenance allowance as possible. As stated in the questionnaire responses, we must stress the need to "learn the basics of individual financial management and budgeting," which means providing realistically for one's needs (not wants!), being very careful ("avoid restaurants;" comparative shopping; used textbooks), planning ahead, and, unfortunately, eschewing luxuries -- as one response states succinctly, "outline a budget and stick to it. That is it." We should also mention, for instance, that students should ascertain whether their monthly rent covers winter heating costs, to enable them to prepare fully inclusive monthly budgets.

As the next step, we should also consider exploring the possibility of eventually making such written materials available to Fellows while still in their home country. Spacing orientation out over a period of time would obviously assist the Fellow (and DOE staff!) with the initial adaptation period. Although I am aware of the budgetary limitations which come into play, we could investigate the possibility of providing written materials to former

returned AFGRAD Fellows, who would conduct pre-departure training on a voluntary basis. Although I of course cannot speak on behalf of returned Fellows, my experience of these students' willingness to help each other out leads me to believe that we could locate returned Fellows who would be pleased to provide this service at no charge. In addition to being cost-effective, in one respondent's words, "Africans are generally more willing to listen and understand what another African is saying than an American, especially at the beginning."

In the interim, however, we should consider making written information and the AFGRAD Program Handbook, in English and in French, available to the Fellow before he leaves home. Given the excessive time lapse between mailing an award letter, receiving confirmation of acceptance and then mailing out such information, we should perhaps include such material as part of the award letter package. Time permitting, we should also xerox relevant pages of the graduate catalog to include at that time.

Although the new Fellow often leaves for the U.S. on very short notice, and as such his last few weeks in his country are usually a flurry of pre-departure formalities and last-minute good-byes to family and friends, and although part of what he will learn in the U.S. is that he is "on his own" while he is here, it seems to me to be our responsibility and privilege to ensure that the transition goes as smoothly as possible. In other words, although we cannot realistically hope to alter an arriving student's high or unreasonable expectations of the United States, we can at least forewarn him to some degree.

In addition to standardizing and improving our orientation procedures, these questionnaires have also pointed to the need for AFGRAD to become more involved in the logistics of a new Fellow's settling in. AFGRAD could play a far greater role in, for example, securing adequate housing for the new Fellow. AFGRAD could also assist the new Fellow in setting up a support network for himself, by, say, actively seeking the assistance of the International Student

Office on the Fellow's campus to locate a host family to provide the new Fellow with the opportunity for contact with Americans beyond academic relationships.

AFGRAD's participation in this support network could also easily extend to the practice of providing lists of AFGRAD Fellows by country (specifying names, addresses and fields of study; no telephone numbers) to newly arrived student as well as to those already here. Such lists could be made available on a yearly or semi-annual basis, and could conceivably be computerized to facilitate DOE staff's workload. Relatedly, it should be standard practice to provide a list of names and addresses of current Fellows at each new student's university. Relatedly, AFGRAD could also conceivably ask current Fellows on a new student's campus to act as welcoming committee to the new arrival to make sure that the newcomer's first few weeks go as well as possible.

Regarding English language training, several Fellows have complained that their language training program was inappropriately trivial, leaving them ill prepared for the calibre of reading required at the graduate level. All attempts should be made to place students in language training centers whose programs, in addition to providing good on-site orientation, have demonstrated the appropriateness of their language training.

Another thorny issue is that of Fellows' families. I am aware that the last time this problem was raised with USAID, we were told that financial considerations unfortunately prohibited AFGRAD supporting a Fellow's family. However, students here without their families face deep loneliness and feelings of estrangement and distance, and may end up disenchanting, concluding that AFGRAD is not concerned with their total welfare. I am also aware that financial considerations make it difficult to bring one's family here if one has no outside income, and I support the standardization of dependent regulations recently imposed by USAID. The problem remains very complex; it is my hope that AFGRAD could in some way investigate solutions beyond suggesting how and where individual students can obtain the necessary funds to bring their dependents.

The maintenance amounts are, as we well know, a source of pervasive agitation. The same applies to the book allowance, especially for graduate students. Although we are all clear on USAID's position, it is my hope that AFGRAD can somehow voice to USAID the difficulties imposed on students (and staff!) by the low rates. We all know that a goodly part of the problem is that the standard of living the students expect does not correspond to their financial reality, yet objectively speaking, the maintenance amounts are indeed minimal. Any improvements would be appreciated.

As stated previously, the questionnaire responses on re-entry expectations dictate the crucial need for AFGRAD to provide better training for participants concluding their programs; forewarned is forearmed! Again, I applaud DOE's efforts in this direction as demonstrated by the recent workshop organized for returning DTPSA grantees, and hope that a similar program can be made available to all returning AFGRAD Fellows. Such workshops must be specifically tailored to issues returning graduate students are likely to come up against, these issues being somewhat different from those facing undergraduates, and moreover the method of presentation may need to be revised as well. As the Fellows do not generally leave the U.S. in large groups, perhaps such workshops could be made available on a regional basis during late summer in the final year of each Fellow's program.

When the high return rate of these questionnaires is perceived as the Fellows' willingness to be in communication with AFGRAD to air their grievances and as an opportunity for feedback, the importance of our yearly university visits is highlighted. My experience both during university visits and at the SID Conference is that the Fellows are delighted by the opportunity to meet staff members in person and discuss their concerns. Campus visits serve to enhance personal contact between AAI and university officials, thereby increasing cooperation or perhaps securing additional tuition waivers, yet the importance of personal contact with the students is not to be underestimated, both for students and staff.

AFGRAD might also consider taking a stronger role whenever possible in promoting practical training opportunities for participants completing their master's degree. Traditionally, the responsibility for coming up with such positions lies with the student and his academic advisor. AFGRAD could perhaps supplement their information with lists of opportunities for practical training, to be supplied to any Fellow requesting such information.

Other suggestions made by the Fellows which merit consideration include our establishing some sort of honors system for students whose outstanding academic performance deserves commendation. A letter of congratulations upon receipt of the yearly progress reports is one possibility, or perhaps we could invest in some certificates, to be sent to students whose academic average is well above the norm.

When asked for their response to the questionnaires as a whole, most Fellows expressed appreciation for the opportunity to provide feedback and viewed the questionnaire exercise as a demonstration of AFGRAD's concern for their welfare (although one respondent wondered if we initiated this procedure simply to make the students feel as if we were interested!). Several suggested that similar surveys be done on a yearly basis; others recommended that we survey the students just prior to their return, and others, that we do so right after their arrival. Despite some criticisms of the format of the questionnaires and the fact that they were to be filled out during a conference, overall, the high response rate and the comments provided point to the desirability of surveying the students more often. This could become a standardized forum for communication that I believe would be useful and generally appreciated, especially for students who are not visited regularly by AAI staff members.

Other students suggested that we arrange annual meetings of all AFGRAD Fellows (one recommended that all the Fellows come to AAI on a yearly basis; I shudder at the logistical nightmare that would be!). These would of course be a valuable opportunity for them to get acquainted and to "network," not just for the individual Fellow's enjoyment, but also in view of the broader,

long-range goals of the AFGRAD Program. I am fully aware that the financial limitations under which we operate would necessarily preclude as major an expense as the gathering of 300-plus students in New York. However, I strongly urge that we take advantage of any opportunity like the SID Conference at which Fellows could be brought together, and I am certain the Fellows would agree. The proposed re-entry workshops would respond in part to this suggestion.

In conclusion, for the most part, the Fellows took the questionnaire and the opportunity it presented very seriously. I would hope that the findings in this Report be taken just as seriously, both as a description of how the Fellows are faring and as suggestions for improving our services. Our involvement in the AFGRAD Program and our relationship with these individuals are both an honor and a privilege, and it behooves us as administrators to be as thorough and supportive as we can.

#### AUTHOR'S PERSONAL NOTE.

Designing these questionnaires, lobbying for their return, poring through the responses, synthesizing my findings -- this whole project has been painstaking and long (I feel like I am in graduate school!), yet above all, this exercise has been an extremely informative, exciting and exhilarating experience.

I would like to convey my thanks, on behalf of the Fellows as well, to the African-American Institute for making it possible for all of us to attend the SID Conference. The week in Baltimore undeniably had its disappointments, but these were few. Overridingly, we recognize that opportunity as unique and highly beneficial on many levels, and for that we are all grateful.

I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to the AFGRAD Fellows who took time out from the Conference to fill out these two questionnaires.

I was moved by their willingness to communicate, by their motivation and potential, by the scope of their responses, and by their willingness to assist me in this project, and I am deeply appreciative.

Let us hope that the dialogue begun will prove fruitful to staff and students alike in the future.

att.

THE AFRICAN GRADUATE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

MID-PROGRAM REPORT

CONFIDENTIAL

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ COUNTRY \_\_\_\_\_  
UNIVERSITY \_\_\_\_\_  
FIELD OF STUDY \_\_\_\_\_  
DEGREE \_\_\_\_\_ COMPLETION DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
CURRENT MAILING ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
PHONE NUMBER(S) \_\_\_\_\_

YOUR ACADEMIC PROGRAM.

Please evaluate your program of study in the United States. Has the content of your course been in line with your expectations? Please explain your answer.

Has your academic program been more or less difficult than you expected, or about the same? Please comment.

Do you believe you were adequately prepared for study in the United States, or would you have been better off with more or better background in certain areas? Specify any discrepancies.

If you attended an intensive English language training program before beginning your academic program, do you feel your language training period was long enough? Do you believe you were adequately prepared to begin graduate work in an American university? Were you provided with appropriate vocabulary for your field of study? Was your background in informal English sufficient to prepare you for academic life? Please comment.

Additional Comments :

ADVICE TO NEW STUDENTS.

What advice would you give to new students just beginning their studies in the United States concerning their choice of courses?

What advice would you give them concerning handling their finances?

What advice would you give them concerning adaptation to life in the United States? (for example, what customs would you mention? what should they do and not do here?)

What advice would you give them concerning ways to facilitate their adjustment to their school and community environment in the United States? (for example, with regard to their living arrangements, relationships with their academic advisors, professors, other students, and dealing with the usual frustrations?)

Please identify some factors (other than financial aid) which contributed to your success as a graduate student in the United States.

Please list the one most important thing you would recommend we include in our orientation program for newly arrived AFGRAD Fellows. What is the one thing you wish we had told you upon your arrival?

25

THE AFRICAN GRADUATE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

STUDENT ASSESSMENT REPORT

CONFIDENTIAL

NAME \_\_\_\_\_ COUNTRY \_\_\_\_\_  
UNIVERSITY \_\_\_\_\_  
FIELD OF STUDY \_\_\_\_\_  
DEGREE \_\_\_\_\_ COMPLETION DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
CURRENT MAILING ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
PHONE NUMBER(S) \_\_\_\_\_

LIFE AND INSTITUTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES.

Have you had difficulties in obtaining official documents (such as IAP66A, I-94, passports)? If so, where have these difficulties originated (for example, U.S. Consular officials in your home country; U.S. immigration officials in the U.S.; A.A.I.; your Embassy)?

Have you had difficulties managing your money while in the United States? If so, what kinds of difficulties (for example, maintenance payments arriving late; stretching your maintenance to meet all your financial needs; understanding U.S. banking procedures; learning how to make and follow a monthly budget, etc.)?

Have you had difficulties managing your time while in the United States? If so, what kinds of difficulties? (for example, completing academic assignments on time; finding time to socialize with friends; getting used to your school's academic calendar; adjusting to the pace of life here in the United States; getting used to the U.S. emphasis on punctuality, etc.).

Have you had any difficulties with U.S. instructional methods? If so, what kinds? (for example, learning from tapes, films, or other audiovisual materials; class participation; learning from fellow students' oral reports or seminars; library research; accepting public criticism from professors and students; emphasis placed on research and synthesis of materials, etc.).

Have you had any difficulties with written assignments? If so, what kinds? (for example, writing reports, term papers, etc.; writing research papers; writing reaction papers or opinion papers; getting used to the prohibition against citing long passages from books, articles and other documents; etc.). There will be a question below on examinations.

Have you had any difficulties with study assignments? If so, what kinds? (for example, finding the proper documents; carrying out field projects; carrying out assignments based on "experiential learning;" knowing when and when not to complete optional readings or assignments; knowing all the assignments given by all your instructors, etc.).-

Have you had any difficulties with tests or examinations? If so, what kinds? (for example, getting used to many tests of relatively minor importance; getting used to "objective" tests, true-false tests, multiple choice tests; getting used to open-book or take-home examinations; performing well on essay tests; dealing with limited time allotments; adjusting to strict rules about not copying from books or from the test papers of fellow students; etc.).

Have you had any difficulties with the U.S. grading system? If so, what kinds? (for example, getting used to being graded for "class participation;" getting used to the practice of grading on a curve;" feeling that a different standard is being used for foreign students; getting used to having many factors count towards the determination of your final grade; grade inflation;" etc.).

Have you had any difficulties in your use of American English? If so, what kinds? (for example, becoming acquainted with technical terms in your field of study; becoming fluent in American slang, colloquialisms and idioms; becoming accustomed to the pronunciation in your region; making yourself understood by native speakers of American English; understanding and learning to use non-verbal behaviors such as facial expressions, postures, gestures, etc., that native speakers of American English use while talking; etc.).

How would you describe your relationship with your International Student Advisor and her/his office? Please explain.

How would you describe your relationship with the academic community at your university? Please explain.

How would you describe your relationship with the non-academic community at your university? Please explain.

What have you liked the most about studying in the United States? Please explain.

What have you liked the least? Please explain.

Upon your return, are you expecting to go through a period of transition, or "reverse culture shock"? If so, what specifically are you expecting?

Additional Comments :

THIS QUESTIONNAIRE.

Please comment on this questionnaire (for example, format; contents; what you think its purpose must have been; suggested uses; etc.). Please feel free to be specific.

Additional Comments :

THANK YOU!

