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FINAL REPORT

"EVALUATION OF TRAINING SUPPORT SERVICES OF AID'S ACADEMIC PARTICIPANT TRAINING PROGRAM"

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PREFACE

This study was conducted by Development Associates, Inc. (DA) for the Office of International Training (OIT) in the Development Support Bureau of the Agency for International Development.

Development Associates wishes to express its appreciation to Mr. William T. White, Director of OIT, whose support and special interest in the study greatly facilitated the evaluation. Also, thanks should be extended to Mr. F. William Small, OIT Deputy Director, who provided special input in key areas and to other OIT staff who gave much of their time and effort in arranging for and participating in the staff interviews. Special acknowledgement should be given to Dr. Raga Elim, OIT's Project Monitor for this study, whose creative and enthusiastic support was invaluable. He provided insightful and judicious guidance as well as support throughout all phases of the study.

Also, appreciation should be extended to the Project Directors and staff from SECID, USDA and RLA, who provided full cooperation in arranging for staff interviews and review of files.

Finally, Dr. George Kettner of Development Associates made important contributions to the field efforts and contractor evaluations as did Tania Romashko and others of the study team.

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One of the functions of the AID Office of International Training (OIT) is the support of U.S.-based academic training for selected foreign nationals to participate in degree programs which are designed to meet the socioeconomic needs of the participant's country. The training is requested by the U.S. Mission staff who collaborate with host country officials in selecting participants for training in various academic fields. The academic training is supposed to be tailored to the Mission/host country development project and to the areas of technical and/or managerial expertise needed to advance the development project.

Academic participant training represents an important part of AID's development objectives and can have a significant impact on U.S. foreign assistance in developing countries. It can also fail to impact on development goals and foster negative images of U.S. culture and institutions when participants incur bad experiences in training or are not trained properly. In the past, OIT programmed all academic participants except those in agriculture. However, owing to staff reduction, OIT has entered into contracts and agreements with outside organizations to perform that service. The placement of the majority of academic participants and provision of support services are now managed by three contractor organizations:

- The Southeast Consortium for International Development (SECID)
- Roy Littlejohn Associates (RLA)
- U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)

The reorganization of OIT's academic participant training underscored the need to evaluate the three contractor organizations, to assess their working relationships with OIT and to reexamine AID policies and procedures about the support of academic training. Also, reports by the AID Office of Auditor General (1980) and the Office of Comptroller General (1980) expressed concerns about the programming and management of academic participant training, suggesting the need to critically assess current operation of the academic participant training program in light of AID development objectives.

A. Purpose of the Study

The objectives of this study are threefold: (1) to evaluate progress made towards meeting the contractual obligations of SECID, RLA and USDA and identify areas of strengths and weaknesses; (2) to advance recommendations for the improvement of academic training by analyzing contractor operations and visiting university sites to interview participants; and (3) to evaluate the working relationships of OIT with SECID, RLA and USDA respectively, through an assessment of operating procedures and management practices.

B. Methodology

In order to carry out the study objectives, a schedule of interviews was arranged with OIT and contractor staff to obtain information on management and administrative procedures, problems and issues in participant placement and support services, working relationships between OIT and the contractors, and a review of the training program and study courses. Also, various documents were reviewed including contracts, agreements, correspondence, and OIT/contractor records. In addition, visits were made to training institutions where participants were interviewed along with faculty, student advisors and others on various aspects of the academic training program. A total of 24 universities were visited and 183 participants and about 70 university staff were interviewed. Case studies were completed for each university and contractor organization.

C. The Contractor Organizations

There is no systematic process or set of procedures for how contractor organizations select training institutions and place participants. The manner in which participants are placed varies significantly. There are both similarities and differences in the criteria used by contractors to select institutions, but important differences overshadow the subtle commonalities.

There are also significant differences in the way participants are monitored and provided with support services. However, none of the contractors initiates close, active monitoring of the participants but operates essentially in a reactive fashion. Participants are generally left on their own after placement, although they are encouraged to contact contractor staff in case of problems or an emergency. Specific contractor problems and issues are discussed below.

HAC

The health insurance program for AID participants called Health Accident Coverage (HAC) has been cited by all three contractors and many participants as being severely mismanaged with very poor handling of health insurance claims.

Orientation

All three contractors provide different degrees of orientation to most of the participants. Key problems here are: (1) participants are poorly informed about the academic training program by the Missions and (2) poor timing and delays in participant arrival precludes some of them from receiving orientation.

Management/Information Systems

The nature of information systems influences the quality of management decisions possible at both the contractor and OIT levels of operation. Information systems established by the contractors to track participants range from fragmented, disorganized and manual to comprehensive, structured and automated. Inputs to OIT's computerized information system are not the same among contractors. SECID and RLA are on one reporting system while USDA is on another. Such lack of uniform reporting by contractors to OIT can lead to incomplete or unreliable data on participants.

Staffing

Programming staff vary significantly among the three contractors in terms of level of expertise, academic training, experience and specialized knowledge to deal with academic participant training. There are also problems of staff turnover and there is generally a lack of formal orientation and training for new staff.

Working Relationship with OIT

The working relationships between OIT and each of the three contractors are characterized by frequent miscommunication and lack of clear direction on respective roles and responsibilities. The most significant feature of these relationships is that there is no unanimity of purpose or clear agreement on objectives. The causes of these problems stem from both the contractors and OIT itself and the problems are exacerbated by lack of a monitoring/evaluation system which can provide management direction and compliance with OIT policy by contractors. OIT staff are aware of these problems and have been exploring ways to resolve them. They are not simple problems but are complex and hinge on a reexamination of the contracting mode and decision to contract out the academic participant training program.

The Contracting Mode

The decision to use three contractors to arrange and support academic participant training has caused problems and does not seem justified under any consideration when weighed against the purpose and objectives of the program. Participants are not being placed in a systematic fashion and it is questionable that they are being placed in the most appropriate training institutions.

The geographic split among the contractors also does not appear to satisfy any real purpose but actually serves to limit the effective placement of participants. SECID operates in 17 states, RLA has the remainder, and USDA primarily programs in agricultural fields in land grant colleges and universities. This arrangement does not add to the effectiveness or efficiency of the academic participant training program and indeed may only detract from it in some cases.

The Placement Process

A key factor in the placement process is the capability to utilize the best available resources in U.S. educational institutions. This can be best accomplished by creating or having access to a network of educational resources on a national and international scale. Such a network can provide key information and support in the appropriate placement of participants. Management capability to organize the programming, placement, monitoring and follow-up of participants in the utilization of the network resources is another critical factor. The Consortium for International Cooperation in Higher Education (CICHE) is an organization which has access to a resource network and management potential which could lend a new dimension to AID's programming in academic participant training.

The Participants

While most participants were generally pleased with the training program, they had numerous complaints and suggestions for improving it. There was also surprising agreement among the participants on problem areas and issues.

Principal problems were practical training experiences, the selection process in the host country, placement at appropriate institutions in the U.S., health insurance, short call-forward notice, orientation, and academic courses. Generally, participants are not provided with adequate direction and support. Approximately 42% of the participants felt that the training programs were only somewhat related to their PIO/P objectives and job preparation. However, it should be pointed out that the more general the degree program, the more frequent the participant view that training was only somewhat related to PIO/P objectives. Thus, one-half of bachelor level participants, near two-fifths of masters level participants and only about one-quarter of doctorate participants expressed this view.

D. Office of International Training (OIT)

The Office of International Training is aware of the major problems and issues with academic participant training and has instituted steps to address some of the problems. Some of these problems stem from the current arrangement of contracting out the training program to three separate organizations. OIT needs to develop a monitoring evaluation system to effectively manage the academic participant training program. Also, there should be more vertical lines of communication and authority which converge at the Director's level.

OIT should develop a capability to play an advocacy role in AID training and to explore innovations and alternative approaches to academic participant training and support of Mission/host country goals. In this regard, OIT staff has developed some provocative ideas about the concept and utilization of participant training, such as establishing regional training centers, providing more training in host countries and reexamining the utility of PhD programs for non-university development projects. These ideas should be pursued in concert with a more aggressive outreach effort to both the Missions and the international education community to reinforce the principal role of OIT as a service oriented office.

E. Major Recommendations

1. OIT should actively pursue the idea of computerizing the placement system so that a systematic and total approach to placement can be achieved. This would lend a completely new dimension to the academic participant training program and to the international education community. A start in this direction has already begun with a Registry of Institutional Resources created by the Board for International Food and Agricultural Development (BIFAD).

2. OIT should contract out for services with only one organization which has the potential or capability to manage the academic participant training program and which also has close contact and access to a national network of educational resources for international development. This arrangement should not only facilitate the management and monitoring of the program but could permit OIT to expand its responsibilities and initiatives in the field of training and support of Mission goals and objectives in developing countries.

   Other specific recommendations for improving OIT's internal policy and management procedures are included in Chapter II. Chapter III provides a discussion on the three contractor organizations, and Chapter IV presents recommendations made by participants for improving their training program. Chapter V concludes with recommendations covering key facets of the academic participant training program as they involve OIT, Missions, contractors, and the participants.

II. BACKGROUND

A. Overview

The Office of International Training (OIT) in the Development Support Bureau (DSB) of the Agency for International Development (AID) is responsible for the training of foreign nationals who are selected to participate in academic or non-academic training programs in support of AID development projects in developing countries. While training foreign nationals can be done in the participants' own country, in the United States, or other countries, a major OIT activity is support of U.S.-based academic training for selected host country participants.

Previously, OIT was responsible for the processing, placement, and support of participants; however, owing to reduction of staff, OIT entered into contracts and agreements with outside organizations to provide the necessary services to carry out the training program. The majority of academic participants are placed in colleges and universities and are monitored by three contractor organizations:

- The Southeast Consortium for International Development (SECID), a private non-profit organization
- Roy Littlejohn Associates (RLA) a private for-profit consulting company
- United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

Both SECID and RLA are funded under respective contracts with AID OIT to assist in arranging the programming, implementation, monitoring and administration of the agency's academic participant training program. USDA has identical responsibilities but its relationship with OIT is under a Resources Support Services Agreement (RSSA), by which specific requirements and services are spelled out between AID and USDA. It should be noted that OIT has other RSSA's with government agencies such as Department of Labor, Commerce and Health and Human Resources, but their activities primarily focus on short-term technical training. Virtually all of the academic participant training that is channeled through OIT is provided by the three contractor organizations. SECID has been operating since 1977 while RLA began operations in FY 1979. USDA substantially predates these organizations in arranging for academic participant training, having begun in the 1950's.

1. Purpose of the Study

OIT has experienced a dramatic reorganization and reduction in operations which began in 1975 when staff was reduced from 122 to 76 persons, again in 1978 when staff was reduced to 42 and it is anticipated that further reductions in FY' 82 will reduce personnel to approximately 30 full time staff. This staff reduction has resulted in (1) the need to contract out the programming aspects of academic participant training which culminated in RLA and SECID as the major contractors for placing non-agricultural trainees and (2) the reduced ability of the agency to maintain adequate records and management control of the participant training activities.

The reorganization of OIT's academic participant training activities underlined the need for a general evaluation of the contractor organizations in order to identify immediate issues and problems associated with the participant training program and the contracting arrangements with USDA, SECID and RLA. Further supporting the need for evaluation was the concern about the OIT's programming and management of academic participant training expressed in the AID Auditor General Report (May 15, 1980) and the Comptroller General Report (May 5, 1980).

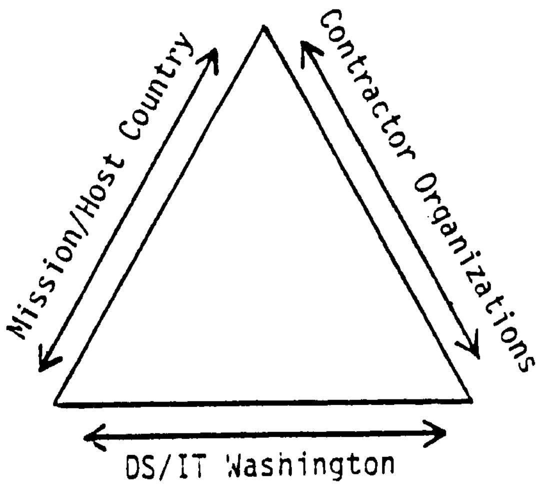
Specifically, the objectives of the evaluation study were to:

> "Evaluate progress made towards meeting AID objectives stipulated in its agreements with SECID, RLA and USDA; to identify areas of weaknesses and strengths; and to advance recommendations in the form of a proposed plan of action for the improvement of academic training for AID supported participants".

This report has been prepared to address these objectives and to focus on the entire academic participant training program which includes not only the contracting organizations and their operations but those of OIT as well. However, no discussion of the academic participant training program can be adequately addressed without considering the origin and interrelationship of the processes involved in selection, placement, monitoring, support and follow-up of the participants when they return home.

The process originates at the Mission level which sets the participant program in motion and in most cases is a key influencing factor in the disposition of a particular student trainee. This process is in reality a triangular arrangement with OIT and the contractor organizations forming the other two sides.

Characteristically, abstractions of actual events and activities tend to be simplifications of the dynamics in which those events and activities function and the extent to which they interact in their cause and effect relationships. But for purposes of understanding the academic participant training program, the issues and problems which are of concern, and the possible alternatives to achieving agency objectives, the triangle concept can be a useful descriptive tool. This is especially true when evaluating the academic training program as there are a number of agencies, organizations and persons involved in any given academic area of specialty where inherent difficulties in communication and implementation can cause serious problems. Finally, the fact that academic participant training within AID is not a centralized program but is a component of AID development projects, as concluded in the Auditor General's Report (May 15, 1980), reinforces the necessity for viewing the total program as the sum of its three essential parts. These are: (1) the Mission, (2) OIT, and (3) the contractor organizations and placement sites. Each side of the triangle is a necessary support to the other two sides. Graphically the process can be displayed as follows:



Thus, it is important to view this study as one which considers each side of the triangle and not just AID Washington or the contractor organizations, although the single most important recommendation will focus on the contractor organizations and the present AID relationship with the three contractors. It is also important to assess how problems originating in one leg of the triangle cause problems in one or both of the other legs, so that to consider solutions for those problems without addressing the source would not only fail to resolve the issue but may only lead to further problems and difficulties. For example, previous studies of the academic participant training program focused generally on AID Washington or OIT. The assumption was commonly accepted that many of the issues and problems occuring with participant training could be laid at the doorstep of OIT. Rarely was the search for causes and solutions directed elsewhere and so in some cases there was no cause and effect analysis. On the other hand, there are those with tendencies to look at the contractor organizations and the Missions as the principal barriers to proper participant placement and to treat OIT as the one caught in the middle of the process. Both viewpoints obviously err in looking at only a part of the whole process, and it must be emphasized that problems and issues have occured throughout the participant process ranging from individual selection of participants by host countries to miscommunication by OIT and contractors to lack of follow-up by Mission and project personnel.

In summary, the academic participant training program will be examined through an analysis of the total process in order to identify where improvements may be made to satisfy U.S. policy goals and objectives for participant training and to support the Missions in carrying out the training component of their development projects in host countries. Parenthetically, this study should also ellicit some provocative questions on the basic concept of academic participant training as a foreign policy objective and as a component of AID's philosophy and policy in developing countries. New strategies coupled with innovative programming, placement, and training techniques may be necessary to garner the benefits of rapidly changing U.S. educational and industrial technologies according to the needs of developing countries where the level of technology transfer may be irrelevant or inappropriate to developmental goals.

The most immediate study objective, however, is to recommend ways which will not just improve the academic participant training program but will provide the best possible alternative within the existing level of resources to train participants in a truly meaningful and effective way. It is in this context that the study has been conceived and carried out while still adhering to the basic scope of work and overall AID objectives.

2. Technical Approach

a. Scope of Work

The technical approach to carry out this study was determined in large part by the scope of work as defined in AID's Contract No. AID/500/PCC-C-0394, Work Order No. 1. This contract was executed with Development Associates, Inc. (DA) January 15, 1981. A proposed approach was submitted to the project manager and a tentative work schedule was developed to carry out the study objectives. The specific areas to be examined as defined by the scope of work are as follows:

- Discuss the agreements with the appropriate AID/W officials and review relevant unclassified contracts, agreements, correspondence, and records.
- Examine reports and records of SECID, USDA, and RLA concerning the placement of participants and their support services.
- Hold discussions with appropriate individuals at SECID, RLA and USDA.
- Visit a sample of approximately 20 institutions which provide training under SECID, RLA, and USDA arrangements for the purpose of interviewing selected university officials and participant trainees.

As further stated in the scope of work, the content of the evaluation report shall include:

- An analysis of the accomplishments of the training contracts to date with respect to their stated purposes, based upon SECID, RLA, and USDA records and reports as well as other data which the Contractor will accumulate. The analysis should cover such aspects of training as the relevance of training sites and academic fields to project needs, duration of training, success of trainees in adjusting to the U.S. academic environment, etc.

- Identification of any significant problems or issues regarding contract implementation or achievement of contract purposes.

- Recommendations by the Contractor for improving the implementation of the design of training activities. Such recommendations should include, but not be limited to, the following areas:

  -- An assessment of procedures currently employed by SECID, RLA, and USDA in monitoring training progress of participants. If such procedures are not adequate what steps should be taken by OIT to strengthen these procedures.

  -- A review of the present working relationship with training facilities with regard to developing an individual study plan for each AID participant which will insure relevance of courses, and completion of study within the approved time framework. Again, the Auditor General's report cited problems in this area which need attention.

  -- An examination of the possibility of reporting mechanisms which will alert the contractor to potential problems associated with the training of participants.

  -- A review of the working relationships between contractors and OIT program managers as they relate to all aspects of the academic training program. Identify deficiencies that may exist, and suggest changes that should be instituted to improve operations.

  -- An assessment of the criteria used by SECID, RLA, and USDA in the selection of training institutions for each field specialty. If criteria are not adequate, develop the solutions for providing the best match between the participant's program and the training facility.

  -- A review of selected dissertations/theses of doctorate and master's degree candidates in order to ascertain the relevance of topics to the training objectives. Also, a review of the question of the validity of the Ph.D. training for participants whose objectives, as specified in the PIO/Ps, are non-teaching or research in nature. If results of review suggest inadequacies or inappropriateness, identify alternatives that are available to OIT for achieving desired objectives.

  -- A review of the extent and nature of practical experience(s) and/or on-the-job training provided to academic participants during their course of study. Suggest alternatives for improvement if such components are inadequate.

  -- A review of the performance of contractors with respect to the concerns and the general welfare of the participants.

-- A determination of the effectiveness of the present orientation and other complementary activities in the building of attitudes by participants which are positive and, at the same time, relevant to the technical assistance objectives.

DA staff worked closely with the AID project manager in developing a schedule of interviews and briefings with AID and contractor organization staff. A series of meetings were held with key staff in OIT where relevant documents, files and reports were reviewed and analyzed. Briefings were also arranged for regional bureau staff to acquaint them with the study objectives and the technical approach.

In DA's proposed approach to the evaluation of academic participant training, a mail survey to AID Missions was suggested in order to provide input to the participant training process from a field perspective. This seemed important because the training was not only conceived in the field but terminated there when the participant returned home (or did not return home in some cases). A survey of how Missions followed up on participants and the types of jobs they returned to is a critical element in the academic participant training program, and the assumption was that a survey could clarify other elements in the process.

The relatively short duration of the study and budget constraints precluded this approach as a part of the study design but the findings and conclusions are not appreciably affected as to their validity because (1) access to AID Mission documents and cables revealed significant perceptions of the training program which would have been picked up in the mail survey; (2) interviews with OIT staff and regional bureau staff provided substantial information on the Mission perspective and their relationship with OIT since many staff persons had field experience and had worked with the Missions in development projects and the training component; and (3) interviews with staff from contractor organizations revealed key issues and problems regarding Mission involvement in the training program and their role in the placement process. In summary, while a direct survey of Mission staff was not possible and the study cannot point to any statistical findings on a regional basis, there are ample data on the Mission role in participant training and the issues and problems associated with training requests and participant placement.

The one key area where data are lacking is in the follow-up on returned participants. However, since this was not a part of the study it should in no way detract from the findings and conclusions on the training and placement process and on the working relationships of OIT to the contractor organizations.

b. Field Visits

A major part of the findings is concerned with the field visits to training institutions where a sample of participants was interviewed on such topics as selection, orientation, travel, health, housing, training programs, complementary training, practical experiences and overall impressions of the training institution, the community and the academic curriculum. In addition, faculty advisors of participants, foreign student advisors and other appropriate persons were interviewed at each campus training site. The interviews were essentially open-ended and were prompted by an interview guide for both participants and university staff. Each participant and university staff interview lasted anywhere from approximately 1/2 to 1 1/2 hours. A total of 24 universities were visited and 183 participants were interviewed. Also, approximately 70 faculty advisors and other key contact persons were interviewed about the academic participant training program and the appropriateness of the study courses to the student's development objectives.

The selection of a sample of schools and students for each contractor involved the simultaneous consideration of both school and participant variables. Key school variables included type of school, location and size. Inportant academic participant variables included geographic area of home country, area of study, degree level and length of time in program. In all cases it was not possible to limit the selection to these variables, but an attempt was made to get a representative sample of the major participant characteristics and regional distribution of training institutions. The field visits were carried out over a three week period. At some training sites, participants placed by two different contractors were interviewed. Case studies of each university site were completed which described both the participants and their relationship with respective contractor organizations. The field studies were then analyzed with respect to the study questions and the results are presented in Chapter IV.

c. Study Limitations

An obvious limitation of the field data is the limited sample which was drawn although an attempt was made to gather a representative number of students who reflected the characteristics of the academic participant training program. The degree to which this was accomplished can be better gauged by the uniformity of answers to basic topical areas and the consistency of interviews from a diversified student audience placed at different universities across the nation.

The principal drawback in the interviews was the presence of both psychological and cultural biases which at times obviously influenced a participants response to questions. But interviewers were sensitive to this problem and crosschecked answers where possible.

Virtually all of the participants were open to the interviewers and in some cases sought out the interviewer. In general, most enjoyed the opportunity to express opinions on the academic participant training program, living conditions and overall impressions of the training and training environment. Their responses and insights lend an important dimension to the training program and particularly the placement process.

B. The Academic Participant Training Program

The academic participant training program is a critical element in AID's development activities and represents a major investment in human resources which can have significant long term impact on developing countries and U.S. foreign policy objectives. Conversely, this investment in human resources which focuses on both leadership skills and technology transfer in the form of professional training, can also fail to impact on development goals in host countries and at worst, create a negative reaction to U.S. policy objectives and the U.S. image.

It is important to understand the significance and potential of the program in these terms, but also in consideration of the cost involved and the numbers of participants being trained. The academic participant training program should be judged then in light of the national purpose it serves within the level of resources available and the cost effectiveness of the systems which are responsible for implementation. This involves examining the current modalities of training and the organizational framework and operating procedures in which the academic participant training program functions. However, in looking at these two elements it is also necessary to confront the key issues of academic participant training and the manner in which they are currently being addressed.

It is not within the purview of this study to make recommendations on cost effectiveness or to assume what role the academic participant training program should play in AID foreign policy goals and objectives. But this study does focus on the organizational and functional elements of the program which do incorporate policy and administrative decisions which therefore become an implicit as well as an explicit part of the study findings, conclusions and recommendations. In order to fully appreciate this connection it is crucial to discuss the major issues of the academic participant training program and the principal problems inherent in them.

1. The Placement Process

The placement process is one of the key issues which subsumes a number of critical functions in academic participant training. Before discussing this issue, it may be useful to provide a brief scenario of activities which the AID Missions, OIT and the contractor organizations perform in the process.

While there are several steps involved which may include several parties only the basic essentials will be touched on here. A fuller description and analysis of these steps are presented in Chapters III and IV.

Step 1. AID Missions in concert with the host country develop a project plan for the social and economic development of that country. The plan usually has a training component which specifies the areas of training for potential participants. For the academic training required in the plan there is a project implementation order for participants (PIO/P) which is a document describing the specific field of study and areas of emphasis desired. This is relayed to Washington OIT.

Step 2. The participant is selected for training and the academic and biographical data are sent to OIT. Note: When selection of the participant is not closely followed by the development and submission of the PIO/P, problems may result.

Step 3. OIT reviews the PIO/P and the other credentials for completeness and either assigns the PIO/P to one of the contractor organizations or requests the AID Mission to clarify information submitted or to provide missing information. This function is performed by the Senior Review Committee (SRC) which is composed of senior OIT staff.

Step 4. The contractor organization analyzes the PIO/P and other credentials to develop a Training Implementation Plan (TIP) and to identify potentially suitable training institutions. The contractor submits the TIP to OIT for review and it is forwarded to the Mission for approval.

Step 5. Upon Mission approval, the participant is placed in a university or college.

Step 6. The Mission is advised of the acceptance and the participant is requested to leave for the United States. ("Call forward" is used by OIT to describe this process.)

Step 7. The participant arrives in the United States and may be given orientation and/or language training before being sent to the selected university or college.

Step 8. The participant arrives at the training institution and enrolls in the course of study for a bachelors, masters, or doctoral degree.

Step 9. The participant completes the study program and returns home to work in association with the development project.

The above described steps are a simplified version of the process expressed in an ideal sequence. The actual flow of activities involves considerably more detailed and at times complex procedures within each step and the order of steps may vary. However, with this scenario as a background the issues can be discussed and evaluated in a proper perspective.

The placement process begins at the Mission level and proceeds through channels which culminate at the admissions office of the training institution. Several problems can arise in this process and the principal one is the PIO/P. This is briefly discussed below.

2. The PIO/P

Review of a sample PIO/P's and discussions with OIT and contractor staff reveal that this document can cause considerable problems in analyzing the specific training needs for the participant in order to meet the Mission project objectives. In many cases the PIO/P's are unclear, ambiguous, incomplete or of such a general nature that placement of the participant in a specific degree program is extremely difficult. Several PIO/P's, for example, each requested a degree in a certain field so the participant could return home to assist in the "social and economic development problems of the country." In view of the fact that academic participant training is supposed to be directed toward a specific development project, this generality of purpose only makes the placement problems more difficult. Moreover the focus should be on the Mission/host country project in terms of goal accomplishment and not on the participant or the degree. This is why OIT requests that training be specifically designed or tailored to the extent possible to the objectives of the development project which is supposed to be described in the PIO/P. While some PIO/P's are models of specificity and clarity on the participant training needs, considerable problems exist with many PIO/P's which need to be resolved before an adequate TIP can be developed and the participant can be properly placed.

Recommendation

The PIO/P should be reviewed by OIT to determine what changes should be required to make the resulting document yield more comprehensive information. The form itself may be inadequate, the form may be completed improperly or both. Although some redesign of the PIO/P may be appropriate, the major fault seems to be with the use of the form. While Handbook 10 provides a set of instructions for Mission personnel to develop the PIO/P, these appear too general; more substance, perhaps supported by illustrations, is needed.

3. Assignment of Cases to Contractors

Once the PIO/P is reviewed by the SRC, a decision is made as to which contractor organization should be assigned to place the participant. The SRC apparently makes its decisions based on experience and professional judgment as to the quality of the PIO/P and which current contractor is best suited to handle the participant's academic training program. There appears to be no formal criteria for assigning cases other than that of agricultural training which usually goes to USDA. Usually one SRC committee member makes the assignment and two other members individually review the decision. The committee does not meet as a group except when there are substantial differences in perspectives and major issues to discuss.

Recommendation

The SRC should be reexamined as to its utility in the present state of activities. There is nothing wrong with the responsibility being assumed by one person but the SRC was originally designed to function primarily as a group to select a contractor organization to handle academic participant training. Some criteria should be established on assignment of cases.

4. Selection of Institution

Once the contractor organizations receive the PIO/P's they begin the process of analyzing the training needs and requirements in order to select an appropriate training institution. The critical issue here, and probably the most important one, is that neither OIT nor any of the contractor organizations have a systematic method for choosing a university or college for the training. The selection process is for the most part based on the experience and knowledge of the contractor staff who are responsible for placing a participant. The level of professionalism in this regard differs sharply among the contractor organizations, and therefore the quality of the selection is affected accordingly.

Recommendation

AID or its contractors should develop a capacity to computerize the placement system so that a central file on the training capabilities, international experience and staff resources is available to match with a participants training needs and the specific development goals of the Missions as described in the PIO/P. Such a system is long overdue in the value and support it can provide to AID, to the university network and to the international community. The enormous potential of such a system which brings together the vast and varied resources of U.S. universities so that a systematic procedure can be applied to the placement process is beyond question. AID should explore this issue and consider alternatives to developing a computerized capability.

A similar system is already in operation by the Board for International Food and Agricultural Development (BIFAD), and is available for use by CICHE (Consortium for International Cooperation in Higher Education) in placing participants. The system, which is called Registry of International Resources (RIR) is composed of several profiles on institutions, their accomplishments, staff capabilities and subject areas of competence, which are programmed for computer access in matching resources to required academic and professional needs. Locating such information can be an invaluable tool for AID and facilitate the placement process. While human judgment must eventually prevail in the final selection and placement of the participant, the systematic process which identifies and matches specific needs to resources can lend a new dimension to program and project development.

5. Participant Monitoring and Support

Once the participant is placed and actually enrolled in the study program it is crucial that monitoring and support services are effectively carried out. This is an important part of the academic participant training program but in most cases is given the least attention.

The participant's progress and success in training, as well as the success of the development project rests on the continuing assessment and support of the participant's academic program. Monitoring should ensure that the courses are relevant and appropriate to student needs and that progress is on target so the Mission is not suddenly advised of delays or extensions when the expected completion date arrives. Also, participants should be provided the necessary support services in a timely and efficient manner.

Recommendation

Specific procedures should be spelled out for AID staff and contractor organizations on the requirements for monitoring the participants and for providing the necessary support services. These procedures should in turn be monitored by appropriate AID senior staff to ensure compliance. In addition, reporting requirements and systems should accompany the monitoring/support services procedures so that participant data are systematically collected and stored.

As indicated previously the academic participant training program is an integral part of AID foreign assistance efforts and, as an investment in human resources as opposed to brick and mortar, can have enduring effects on foreign assistance and socioeconomic development. The program as presently operated has many strengths but it also has many weaknesses, some of which are the result of AID procedures and others of which are the result of the internal AID policies, including the decision to contract out academic participant training.

The next section discusses the Office of International Training (OIT) and the major issues and problems with respect to managing the academic participant training program. It should be noted that this discussion is limited in that it touches only on key management components of the process and their relationship to each other. This was not a management study of OIT, but in order to understand the academic participant training program and how the three contractor organizations were carrying out their contracts it was necessary to examine the management structure.

Also, OIT is responsible for some participant training directly but this aspect of the participant training is not included here, and most of the issues and problems discussed previously do not apply to its own training program. Parenthetically, OIT's training procedures could serve as a model in some areas.

C. The Office of International Training

While a management system exists in OIT and functions reasonably well, there is a real need to considerably tighten up the system, create specific lines of communication and reporting, develop a monitoring and information system which can be used agency wide for policy and programming decisions and to establish an aggressive outreach effort with U.S. AID Missions, the university network and the international education community.

These sources can be used by OIT to develop a reservoir of resources both for collecting information relative to the academic participant training program and for disseminating information which can help strengthen U.S. foreign assistance efforts. This approach would reinforce OIT's fundamental purpose as a service oriented operation which can respond to Mission requests and to support the training component of their development projects. Below is a brief discussion of OIT management, information systems and resources along with recommendations for improving OIT operations.

1. Management/Administration

Although a system for managing the academic participant training program does exist, especially with regard to the contractor organizations, there are several areas of weakness which should be addressed in order to improve program operations. The presence of three contractors causes some of the problems, but others are the result of the way in which the contractor organizations are monitored. OIT staff are aware of many of the problems and in some cases are taking steps to correct them.

Basically, there are two areas which need to be improved. These are the monitoring/evaluation system and the communication system.

a. Monitoring/Evaluation of Contractors

It is necessary to establish a monitoring system which ensures that academic participant training is meeting its objectives and that contractors are effectively carrying out their responsibilities. While some monitoring does take place, there is no formalized system for holding contractors accountable for their contract obligations.

The three project managers who monitor SECID, RLA and USDA need more high level senior staff supervision, more training and a greater sharing of information through staff meetings in order to promote the critical review of contractor cables and ensure quality control through checks and balances. Furthermore, the interaction between project managers and contractors needs to be improved so that communication is open, on target and timely.

A key problem in monitoring the contractors lies in the loose way in which the contracts are written. These should be clarified with specific objectives spelled out and specific operating and reporting requirements written into the contracts. Reporting requirements which vary among the contractors should be standardized.

Recommendations

OIT should develop and administer a monitoring and evaluation system which would track contract implementation and ensure that academic participant training is meeting the needs of the Missions. Such a system would promote the role of OIT in its responsibility for participant training by sharing information with Mission personnel on a systematic basis and by assisting Missions to follow up participants' job performance once they return after training. The system could also involve closer and more frequent interchange of information with regional bureaus. A key problem with academic participant training is that there is not as much appreciation as there should be for the role it plays in Mission development projects. One of the principal thrusts of the system would be initiation of on-going communication with bureau staff to support the academic participant training program and to provide a service function to appropriate bureaus and Mission staff. The system could also provide key input to OIT policy decision making by exploring and evaluating different modes of training such as regional centers or in-county training for certain aspects of the program.

The system should be designed so that the director of OIT has access to all key facets of the operations and is periodically briefed on contractor operations, participant problems and other issues which are of concern in the placement process and the progress of participants. In order to ensure that the director is informed, the system should be organized so it is directly under the deputy director who works closely with other appropriate key staff.

A crucial objective of the monitoring and evaluation system would be to establish and maintain liaison with the international education community. This would allow identification of innovative ways of training participants, determination of the effectiveness of such techniques in different settings, and suggest mixes of training strategies that may be especially appropriate under different circumstances.

b. Communication Systems

One of the problems which needs to be addressed is the communication systems not only within OIT, contractor organizations and U.S. Missions, but among these groups as well. Part of this problem can be resolved by instituting a monitoring and evaluation system but it may also require shifting certain responsibilities to the director's office. For example, one of the most common complaints expressed by OIT staff was the lack of procedures for handling cable traffic with the Missions. There seems to be a breakdown in OIT and in contractor organizations in keeping track of cables and following up with appropriate and timely responses. The cable traffic is handled well in some offices of OIT but there are problems with it vis-a-vis the three contractors. There is presently no system for following up and informing Missions of the status of participants. This should be a high priority for OIT and a standardized set of procedures should be established to ensure that each Mission cable is closely tracked and followed up with a response as soon as possible.

Recommendation

A set of internal procedures should be developed which can establish timely and appropriate communication channels within OIT and between OIT and contractors. A system should also be established which can keep track of Mission cables and responses to them.

It is suggested that the responsibility for cable communications be centralized and supervised by senior staff so that more direct supervision can be exercised in communications with the Missions. With such a system, the director could readily be advised periodically on the status of unanswered cables.

2. Information Systems to Serve AID Missions

OIT has essentially a service oriented role but has not taken advantage of the potential to fulfill that role, especially with the Missions. One of the major problems to be addressed in academic participant training is the PIO/P and the quality of the documentation that arrives with the PIO/P. As indicated earlier, much of the biographical information and other documentation is incomplete and the training objectives are only broadly stated. This not only causes delays in the placement process but confounds communication among OIT, the contractors and the Missions. Essentially this occurs for two reasons:

- Local hires who handle the training component often do not understand the U.S. educational system and the requirements of the academic participant training program.

- There is insufficient information provided to the Missions on procedures and requirements to process a participant. This results in unrealistic expectations by the Mission for placing the participant. It is essential that more guidelines and information be provided to the Mission personnel on the problems of placing participants who are not fully prepared or whose documents are incomplete. Missions should be advised of the problems and issues involved in the placement process and of the need to take all possible steps to specify the exact training program desired and to ensure that all documentation is complete before sending it to OIT.

A closer working relationship should be established with the Missions including the provision of training workshops and written guidelines and instructions for selecting and programming a participant. Also, procedures should be developed by OIT on briefing participants before they depart their home countries for training in the U.S. According to participants interviewed, the briefings provided to them by Mission staff are inadequate and misleading in far too many cases.

Recommendation

OIT should establish an outreach effort designed to assist Missions in the development of a training program. Guidelines and instructions should be developed in collaboration with the Missions so that OIT performs a service oriented role in providing Missions with the training and technical assistance for instituting the placement process. Another key area which should be addressed is information on academic participant training and an analysis of its characteristics. For example, while OIT is currently working to modernize its reporting systems, the available data need to be analyzed and formatted for special purposes.

Historical documentation of AID/host country development projects and the creation of training profiles by country could be highly useful for more effective placement. Other AID bureaus and offices could also benefit from such information. Indeed, such information could provide one important basis for OIT policy and programming decisions.

OIT should explore the feasibility of collecting training information by academic area of specialization and country so that profiles on project development can be developed and used for placement of participants. Such a data base would provide OIT with an historical summary of all training programs and academic fields of study which can be useful for analyzing OIT performance as well as that of the Missions and training sites.

3. Contractor Mode

The degree to which the academic participant training program will achieve its objectives is in part based on the level and quality of resources available including the organizational capacity to manage and administer the program. While OIT can make internal changes which involve the Missions and bureaus in the process and generally do a more effective job of monitoring and evaluation, the critical issue concerns participant placement and support which are the responsibilities of the contractors.

The placement process depends on knowledge of the educational community and experience in working with the community in academic training activities. Essentially, this means access to an educational network which can provide a variety of resources in academic training and practical experience and application of these resources to international development and educational needs throughout the world. Currently, there is no mechanism in OIT to establish this network although senior staff have explored this issue with national organizations in the educational field.

In assessing the resources necessary to produce the best training for participants it is necessary to discuss the current contracting mode by which OIT implements the academic participant training program, and which is a major part of the study objectives. The three contractors are discussed in detail in the following chapter of this report. There, the management of the contractor organizations is analyzed in detail as is their working relationship with OIT. However, there are several key issues which need to be considered when looking at the current contractor mode and its relationship to SECID, RLA and USDA.

<u>The first question</u> is whether it makes much sense to use three contractor organizations, especially considering the geographic constraints under which they operate. SECID has responsibility for 17 states and others which may be added from time to time. RLA has the remaining states but generally does not program participants in agricultural training while USDA handles all requests for agriculture and agrictural related fields. Thus, there are limits to which any of these contractors can place participants and work effectively in a national network.

<u>The second question</u> has to do with continuity and consistency in managing the academic participant training program. The use of three contractors does not provide either continuity or consistency in the placement process and has caused numerous problems because there is so much diversity in the management and administration of the training program by the individual contractors. Some of the problems are basic to the program such as inadequately trained staff, staff turnover, and lack of uniform procedures for placing participants.

<u>The third question</u> is whether the three contractors can provide the kinds of services and resources to effectively place participants in the best possible training institution. The limits placed on the contractors prevent them from utilizing the best possible resources and none of the contractors has an established network of academic institutions on a national scale which can provide the optimum resources. However, <u>the key question here is not whether each of the three contractors is doing an acceptable or unacceptable job of placing participants or whether performance has been rated as good, bad or mediocre</u>.

The right question is: <u>What is the best possible alternative within the present resources which can provide the best possible placement and training for participants</u>? The importance of the academic participant training program and the potential impact it can have on Mission objectives and U.S. foreign assistance efforts should make this an overriding concern for OIT when analyzing the present mode of operations. The practice of contracting out with three organizations does not seem in the best interest of OIT, the Missions or the participants.

In addition, the crucial question of sufficient depth of resources to support participant training should be a principal concern in managing the program. One organization, the Consortium for International Cooperation in Higher Educational (CICHE), can draw upon an extensive educational network which includes all of the American associations of state colleges, universities, land grant colleges as well as the International Council on Education for Teaching (ICET).

Recommendation

OIT should use one contractor for implementing the academic participant training program. The use of one contractor would remove many of the problems OIT now faces with the three contractors. Not only would the use of one contractor be more effective in terms of management and administration, it would probably be more cost efficient. The use of one contractor should be based on the management capability to effectively administer the program and the ability to utilize a network of educational institutions and resources to place participants. The option to subcontract under this arrangement would be an alternative if both the management capability and educational resources could not be immediately organized under one contractor. However, the idea of only one contractor responsible for participant training and reporting as one organization to OIT is an arrangement which should be seriously considered.

Detailed discussions of the management procedures and operating characteristics of each of the contractors is presented in the next chapter. Concluding that chapter is a summary and critique of the contractors pointing out their various strengths and weaknesses in implementing the academic participant training program. Chapter IV provides a discussion and analysis of the participants and the training institutions while Chapter V offers a list of recommendations for future action.

III. THE CONTRACTOR ORGANIZATIONS

Chapter III examines how each of the three contractors -- RLA, SECID, and USDA -- implemented the academic participant training program. In particular, this chapter focuses on contractor operational procedures and management approaches, including methods of selecting training institutions, participant monitoring and support functions, and contractor relationships with OIT. While the emphasis is on the contractors in this chapter, it is stressed that the academic participant training program is a multi-stage process that involves other components and organizations besides the contractors. Chapter IV presents a different view of the program, shifting attention from the contractors to the participants and staff at training institutions.

By way of further introduction to the three contractors, SECID and RLA each serve approximately 200 to 225 academic participants in nonagricultural fields while USDA serves about 500 AID academic participants in agriculture. USDA also serves nearly 200 additional non-AID participants, primarily sponsored by FAO of the United Nations. SECID places and monitors students in 17 states primarily in the South and Southeast parts of the country while RLA's geographic area is the rest of the continental United States. USDA can place students in agriculture related fields throughout the contiguous 48 states. RLA and SECID began academic participant training program operations in 1979 and 1977, respectively, while USDA has been in operation for the past three decades.

Chapter III is organized into four major sections. Sections A-C separately describe and analyze RLA, USDA, and SECID procedures and management including relationships with OIT while Section D provides both a summary and critique of these contractor dimensions. Each section includes discussion of the following topics:

- Program procedures
  - Selection of institution
  - Procedures for participant entry and exit
  - Participant monitoring and support
  - Complimentary training
  - Practical experience component

- Program management

  - Case management
  - Staff background and training
  - Information systems
  - Relationship between contractor and OIT

The statements made throughout Chapter III are based mostly on information obtained via personal interviews of contractor staff and management. All or nearly all staff at each contractor were interviewed. In addition to the following descriptive statements numerous critical comments are made by either the contractors themselves or by Development Associates (DA). The source of such comments are identified in each instance.

A. RLA Procedures and Management

1. RLA Program Procedures

a. Selection of Institution

According to the contractor, their selection of the college or university and the development of the Training Implementation Plan (TIP) generally follow the steps described here:

- Review the PIO/P and cables from the AID Mission. Often, a cable will precede the arrival of the PIO/P.
- Identify appropriate institutions from which a selection can be made. The number of institutions initially selected will vary depending upon the Program Officer (PO). If the Mission asks for a specific training institution, then the PO will follow-up on this request first. Most of the time, the contractor can fulfill such requests.
- Contact the institutions to determine the admissions requirements and what they have to offer.
- Develop the TIP and send it to the AID Mission for review. The TIP reassures the Mission that the PO understands the purpose of the PIO/P.
- Upon Mission approval of the TIP, make the final selection of the college in which the participant will be placed.

Sometimes this sequence of steps proceeds rapidly while at other times it may involve a slow iterative process. According to RLA, one possible bottleneck for the contractor is limited information. Insufficient details may be provided in the PIO/P developed by the Mission so the contractor does not have a clear understanding of training objectives. For example, a request for engineering is too vague; a request for civil engineering is more specific. Furthermore, the contractor often does not know how the participant is expected to fit into the AID/host country development project after being trained. The Mission does not give additional information about training objectives beyond that included in the PIO/P, nor does the contractor actively seek such information. Contractor knowledge of Mission objectives and manpower requirements could help to facilitate the placement process. Now however, the need for further clarification or the need to correct misunderstanding may require several cables between the contractor and Mission, all going through OIT as an intermediary.

Another bottleneck hindering rapid placement of participants is the admissions requirements of colleges which vary not only across schools but across departments within the same school. RLA described a recent tightening of requirements, although the causes for it are not clear. A few colleges have begun to require such items as original transcripts.

Identification of appropriate institutions for placement is performed mostly in an ad hoc manner. RLA staff (as well as some AID officials) tend to view the selection of institutions as a subjective art process that does not lend itself readily to formal or written procedures. Resources utilized for this are previous and existing contacts with institutions, (e.g., the university's international student office), word-of-mouth information both in-house and from AID on previous experience with particular institutions, and published guides on colleges and universities. The latter include: Peterson's Annual Guide to Graduate Study (by the different program area); and The Gourman Report: A Rating of Graduate and Professional Programs in American and International Universities. The contractor is apparently unaware of some excellent resources that would facilitate the appropriate identification of institutions. These include the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (located in D.C.) and the College Entrance Exam Board, Index of Majors (lists colleges by state, field, subfield, and level of degree).

The number of schools initially selected vary from three to six, depending on the PO. One PO, for example, selects three institutions per participant, representing a range of increasing difficulty for the participant to gain admittance. Often the participant receives the second or "medium" level of difficulty choice. The degree of reliance on specific criteria to identify appropriate institutions also varies among the POs. According to the contractor, these criteria include:

- Review of participant's records, i.e., assessing the participant's likelihood to gain college admittance;
- Experience of previous participants;
- Quality of school;
- Conditions of school location similar to the participant's country of origin;
- Recommendation and acceptance per telephone contact with faculty or department head;
- Recommendations of professional associations and specialists in certain technical fields;
- Need to place participant first in a community college for general academic preparation; and
- Timing of admissions, i.e., a participant ready for placement may be placed in a particular institution because admission acceptance could be obtained before other colleges.

The Credential Analysis Worksheet (CAW) is used by the contractor only in instances where the college requires it for its admissions process. The need for it in this kind of instance is only occasional. The CAW is not used by the PO's for selection purposes. The existing backlog on the preparation of CAW's for individual participants hampers their effective use by the contractor. Also, the CAW is never needed if the participant has an academic degree from an American college.

Per this study's review of RLA operations, the successful placement of participants at training institutions reflects the relative effectiveness of the various strategies employed by the PO's. Written criteria to be considered in placement with associated procedures can promote more consistent, positive results. The use of uniform procedures also encourages a better understanding among all concerned parties (AID Mission, contractor monitor, OIT, etc.) of what selection process is being used. A further benefit is that written procedures make it easier to train new PO's.

b. Procedures for Participant Entry and Exit

According to description by RLA staff, the entry process for the participant starts with the call-forward cable being sent to the AID Mission, which then arranges for the participant's travel and sends a return cable. The return cable generally goes to OIT's message center. Arrival information is relayed to the Washington International Center (WIC) by OIT and then to the contractor by WIC. The orientation provided by WIC varies among participants, depending on WIC's assessment of their need for orientation. According to DA's review, the means of this assessment should be formalized to clearly identify participants' orientation needs. How to best meet these needs should then be considered. Should some WIC orientation units be expanded, reduced, dropped or redirected? Should other units be added?

While much of the participants' entry is handled by WIC rather than the contractor, the arriving participant often has appointments with the RLA assigned PO and with the AID Program Manager. These appointments afford additional opportunities to orient participants by adding new information, by clarifying information provided earlier, or by correcting misconceptions. Further orientation to the college or university site is arranged for by RLA. Someone is to meet each new participant upon arrival at the training site.

A critical part of the entry process is providing the new participant with adequate insurance coverage. Unfortunately, many complaints are voiced about extensive time delays to process insurance claims. According to RLA staff, the participant is supposed to deal directly with Trust Fund Associates (TFA) which administers HAC (Health & Accident Coverage). However, RLA explains that the connection between the participant and TFA is often a poor one so the participant frequently contacts RLA for assistance in this regard. Furthermore, TFA is not fully cooperative in providing relevant information to RLA. General uncertainty over starting/ ending dates for insurance coverage and the use of separate identification numbers aside from the participant's regular PIO/P number, apparently adds to the confusion in this area. Per this study's review, problems with insurance coverage need to be fully addressed and appropriate action taken.

For the participant's exit from the United States, RLA makes the necessary travel arrangements and makes sure that the last month's expenses are taken care of. In some cases, RLA is responsible for arranging only part of the trip home while the final leg home is arranged for by the participant's home country. Problems of coordinating these arrangements, though, have resulted in unnecessary inconvenience for some travelers.

One PO described the participant's exit as the least organized of the entire program. Hence, exit procedures are not always implemented uniformly, whereby they vary depending upon the circumstances of the individual participant. Some receive an exit interview by the contractor; others do not. Some of the departing participants go through a debriefing seminar that is intended to prepare them for their return home. Per this study's review, both exit and entry procedures should be carefully thought through and criteria established for determining which mix of procedures best meets participants' needs.

RLA staff stated that there is very little problem with participants not returning home. The contractor informs the Mission when each participant has completed studies and is ready to return. The contractor's only official basis for further communication with returnees is signing them up for memberships in professional associations. The Missions provide very little, if any, feedback on returnees to the contractor. According to this study's assessment, follow-up of returnees by the RLA may help them in future placements and overall implementation of their program. A step in this direction is a newly begun "Training Institution Inventory" for RLA in-house files which is to be used to record information about participants' experience upon their return. The Mission should also participate actively in providing feedback as they are required to do according to AID Handbook 10.

c. Participant Monitoring

Participant monitoring is implemented primarily through the Academic Enrollment Term Report (AETR) which is filled out by the participant and faculty advisor for each term completed. The PO's often have to remind participants to send in their reports, which are forwarded to the AID Mission for review. If there are problems, the PO contacts the college and explores the nature of the problem.

The AETR is evidently the only mechanism used by the contractor for follow-through and monitoring of participants at some universities. In efforts to make arrangements for the field visit interviews with participants and faculty at university sites, DA field interview staff telephoned faculty advisors and other faculty who had been designated by RLA as their "program contact" for placement and monitoring purposes. The field interview staff found that in several instances the so-called "contact" person hardly knew of RLA or had had only one telephone contact with them.

The PO's deal with the personal lives and problems of the participants as the need arises. One problem, for example, is budgeting. That is, some participants find it difficult to live within their budget allowances, and complain to their PO about it. The reasons for this, legitimate or otherwise, vary among participants. The Counseling Section of OIT is informed regularly of personal problems.

d. Complementary Training

Mid-winter seminars are offered to participants' as complementary training. However, not much emphasis is given to mid-winter seminars by the contractor or by other parties involved. Volunteers often conduct the mid-winter seminars rather than paid staff, AID's, or someone else's.

e. Practical Experience Component

According to RLA, the opportunity for a practical experience component of the program is usually offered at or near the end of the participant's stay at the college or university. The participant must want a practicum in order to receive it. One PO describes most students not wanting it and anxious to return home. However, field interviews with several participants (see Chapter IV) indicate that most participants are eager to receive such experience at any point in their study here.

Several RLA staff members described the gap between western theory/learning and home country application as large and difficult to bridge. Internships were suggested as one means to attempt to bridge the gap. Other options might be suggested by the participant's faculty advisor.

2. RLA Program Management

a. Case Assignment

RLA's start-up of its contract is described by all concerned as having been difficult and problematical. On RLA's part the causes for this may stem from lack of relevant resources like well qualified staff and appropriate corporate experience. On the other hand, OIT could have provided greater monitoring and technical assistance during RLA's start-up period, allowing for a more gradual transfer of cases from OIT to RLA.

Two criteria cited by the contractor for case assignement to Program Officers are to:

- Distribute the workload evenly or equitably; and
- Assign cases according to the PO's interest.

Most of the participants are from Africa and the Middle East, but the PO's are not area specialists either in terms of geographical area or field of study. The broad spectrum of different fields of study in which participants are placed (as opposed to, e.g., agriculture-related areas only) may hamper the feasibility of assigning cases on the basis of field of study. The advantage of doing so, though, are the gains to be made from staff specialization, both in terms of worker roductivity and greater knowledge that produces better matches between training requirements and actual training. PO's that specialize in certain areas (e.g., engineering, education, health) will be relatively more proficient in understanding specialized training requirements, knowing the suitability of particular curriculum at different colleges, and establishing/ maintaining contacts and networks of communication with the training institutions.

Another criterion for case assignment is that the Senior Program Officer handles the more difficult or problematical cases, often cases which are new or pending. Less experienced PO staff tend to "inherit" most of their cases. An example of a problematical case is one that has been pending for a relatively long time and the Mission wants immediate placement. Such delays, according to the contractor, are often caused by the lack of transcripts and other credentials on the participant which are necessary for the admissions process. The source of the delay, in other words, is attributed to the overseas Mission.

b. Staff Background and Training

The emphasis that the contractor's management places with regard to staff background is on the broader skills, rather than on specialized skills in certain areas of study. Communication skills are stressed, and the ability to interact effectively with participants on a personal level is also considered very important. Other or related traits deemed desirable are: pays close attention to detail and exercises aggressive and passive behavior in dealing with participants as the situation demands. Former program participants are thought of as possibly good candidates for PO's, as two of the PO's are now.

According to DA's assessment, while the broader skills (e.g., communication skills) are important, other skills are important as well, and should not be neglected. In particular, knowledge and skills in specialized fields of study would facilitate the placing process and enhance the likelihood of meeting the overall objective of the study, i.e., providing the necessary training to meet the manpower requirements of the AID Missions. More generally, a higher level of professionalism and experience is required for effective placement and monitoring.

Neither formal orientation or training is provided to new PO's, nor is any training manual provided. The new PO is asked to talk informally with each of the other PO's to learn about their particular modus operandi. Such a "casual" approach to training may easily lead to gaps in knowledge and misapplication of knowledge, gained by new PO's. A more structured training system could ensure adequate and complete coverage of relevant topics.

The caseload for the new PO is adjusted according to level of experience. The contractor states that it takes approximately six months for a new PO to achieve minimal competence and one year to become a "first-rate" PO.

c. Information Systems

Formal requirements for data reporting to AID are fulfilled by the contractor completing and submitting AID Form 1380-9 on a monthly basis. RLA staff stated there is no problem in doing this although they did comment on "inconsistencies" between their data and that reported by AID's Participant Training Information System. According to AID OIT, such differences may stem from the limited data kept by RLA in contrast to the more extensive data available to OIT. Furthermore, RLA and OIT may be using different categories or criteria for organizing their respective data.

No formal procedures are used by the contractor for internal reporting, other than frequent sharing of information among the staff on an ad hoc basis. No regular meetings are held for such purposes as case assignment or placement of participants.

Individual file folders are maintained for each participant, but not necessarily in a uniform fashion among the PO's. As mentioned earlier, the contractor is starting an internal file on participant experience, based on exit interviews. Other files, such as a file on university contacts/characteristics, are not maintained.

According to DA's review, systematic recording of useful information and effective data management can reduce the ad hoc nature of RLA program operation and distribute information more readily and effectively among RLA staff. First-hand observation of RLA files and records indicates lack of systematic and uniform procedures for their information systems. Efforts to obtain factual data on participants, for instance, are unnecessarily time-consuming and inefficient.

d. Working Relationship Between Contractor and AID OIT

The RLA Project Director meets with his Program Manager (PM) from AID/OIT on a weekly basis. The working relationship is described by the contractor as "excellent." Also, expectations of the academic participant training program on the part of the PM are described as "realistic."

From the contractor's perspective the proper channels at AID are routinely used for carrying out program activities. Furthermore, officials at AID are routinely informed of participant problems and are consulted or referred to on all policy decisions. OIT officials, however, have noted some problems. In particular, they have cited lack of information on RLA procedures for selection of institutions and on RLA participants themselves. In addition, AID Missions and some universities in a number of instances have been very critical of RLA's handling of placement of their participants.

B. USDA/International Training Division (ITD) Procedures and Management

1. USDA/ITD Program Procedures

a. Selection of Institution

The contractor typically uses a relatively small network of thirty to forty institutions in order to place participants. These institutions are, for the most part, land-grant universities, although several non land-grant universities are repeatedly utilized as well. According to USDA/ITD staff, these schools offer the relevant expertise, not just for the general study of agriculture but also for certain areas of specialization (e.g., seed improvements, pest control, agricultural economics, tropical soils, wheat science). Different schools tend to emphasize particular areas of specialty, in effect limiting the set of schools relevant for a particular participant. The range of choices is limited further when other factors are taken into account, such as filled quotas or limited openings and the ability of the applicant.

Besides offering the relevant areas of study, program contacts at each school are useful for both participant placement and participant monitoring purposes. The program contact, usually associated with the university's School of Agriculture, can often give the USDA Program Specialist a preliminary reading on an applicant's admissability or at least make referral calls to the appropriate department to obtain the requested information. This helps to considerably speed up the selection and to avoid formal applications at schools where probability for admission is low. The program contact further assists in the placement process by transmitting the relevant documents to the admissions office and keeping track of the progress of the formal application. On occassion for urgent cases, the program contact person has been relied upon to obtain quick admissions via "special handling."

An unwritten policy of the USDA/ITD office is that only one school is approached at a time in attempting to place a participant. The reason cited for doing so is to maintain their good relations with the program contact office. The time required for a preliminary reading on an applicant's admissability into one school is typically short, only a few days and is much shorter than what a formal application would require. Unless otherwise directed by AID, USDA proceeds with the formal application when they have received a favorable, preliminary reading from the university. Sometimes, however, interacting with only one university at a time can lead to extensive delays in achieving participant placement (according to AID OIT).

According to USDA/ITD, the PIO/P's vary greatly in the degree of their specificity on the training request. One USDA Program Specialist commented that PIO/P descriptions have gotten more skimpy over the years.

Previous PIO/P's provided fuller descriptions on the backgrounds of the participants and the AID Mission project. Frequently, though not in a majority of cases, USDA has requested more information, clarification, and/or additional documents from the Mission. Frequently requested are TOEFL scores because these are being required by more and more colleges as part of the formal review of a foreign students application. Requests for more detailed training objectives tend to occur at the graduate levels; training at the undergraduate level tends to be more general.

USDA's understanding of a PIO/P training request is facilitated by staff knowledge of AID projects and third world countries. In many cases USDA officials have visited the country in question, have observed the AID Mission Project, or otherwise gained familiarity with the relevant project or country. ITD Program Specialists can obtain information both on AID projects and relevant training institutions within this country from expert or knowledgeable staff available either within ITD or elsewhere in the Department of Agriculture.

The selection process entails an "art form" insofar as the process in certain aspects does not lend itself to general written statements. Such aspects might include an institution's acceptability of foreign students, changing quotas within graduate departments, public relationships between the institution and USDA, and idiosyncracies of individual schools, departments, and AID Missions. Idiosyncracies might include cultural or social factors which affect the receptiveness of schools toward applicants.

Emphasis given to an applicant receiving a degree from a prestigious school appears to vary among Program Specialists and also among participants, AID Missions, and other concerned parties as well. Other criteria for selection of the institution include the appropriateness of the training content itself and how well a particular school can meet the needs of the individual participant. As reported by some Program Specialists, many colleges offer good training in agriculture but do not have the strongest reputations. At issue here, in simplistic terms, is the possible trade-off between prestige of the institution or degree and the relevance and appropriateness of the actual training content itself.

According to DA's assessment, this is obviously not a clearcut issue, but more explicit discussion on the subject might help to facilitate a greater understanding among all the involved parties. AID's overall policy in this regard could be made more explicit.

USDA Program Specialists noted that the placement of applicants with accompanying TIP within 30 days of receipt of PIO/P is an unrealistic expectation. In most instances tentative TIP's can be drawn up at this time, but formal admissions will take longer. Program Specialists complained that the requirement to submit a detailed budget in exact format with each TIP, whether the TIP is at a tentative, revised, or final stage, creates too much unnecessary paperwork. Allowances do not very that much, and while tuition does vary greatly it is a straight forward, well-known entity in the budget. Budget estimates on a less detailed basis would greatly reduce the amount of required paperwork.

b. Procedures for Particpant Entry and Exit

Most of the participants who go through Washington, D.C. enroute to their training site receive orientation at both WIC and USDA. The USDA orientation given by the assigned Program Specialist typically includes: the review of the tentative program to make sure it meets the training objectives; review of travel arrangements to the university; presentation of a videotape on campus life in the U.S.; discussion of USDA and the land grant institution system; and orientation on fiscal procedures for participants.

Other participants do not benefit from such orientation because of the late arrival of the participant in the U.S. An orderly process for arrival and sufficient orientation has been hampered in many cases by delays in securing proper credentials, completing appropriate documents, and sending the call-forward. These delays often necessitate sending the participant directly to the university, by-passing the stop in Washington, D.C. and orientation. Per DA's review, it is difficult to ascertain the cause of the shortcomings in this regard; the likely causes are multiple, reflective of the entire system (see Chapter IV for more discussion on this matter).

As for PLA and in fact SECID too, delays in beginning health insurance coverage for USDA participants are frequent. Similarly, delays in processing insurance claims are excessive.

The travel unit within the USDA IT office makes the travel arrangements for travel within the U.S. and for return to the home country. They prepare travel itineraries for both the participants and the Program Specialist. They consult the internal "University Fact Sheet" file for ground transpor- tation routes and initial lodging arrangements. Generally speaking, arrangements are made such that participants arrive on site during daylight hours and are met at the airport or campus by someone from the university. While the travel unit also prepares the itinerary for return to the home country, the home country may to some degree or other influence this effort (e.g., home country contribution for return travel with restrictions on ticket).

c. Participant Support and Monitoring

A central point for USDA support and monitoring of participants is the program contact office at each university site. Living allowance checks, correspondence, and AETR's are all routed through this office. While some contact is made with faculty advisors (who know USDA staff person- ally), most of the contact with the university and the participant goes through the program contact office. Obtaining AETR's from the partici- pant is usually not a problem for two reasons: for one, the program contact office provides monitoring support in this regard and secondly, the participant's check could be held up to ensure compliance. The program contact office, in general, serves as a frequent source of support for the participant and greatly facilitates the monitoring and support function of the academic participant training program.

The frequency of contact between the participant and USDA can vary substantially, depending on the participant, the type of program, and whether or not any special problems have occurred. Ph.D. students, for example, typically require less contact than other degree program stu- dents or non-academic participants. The student's first quarter or semester is a critical one, when most of the student's adjustment must take place and English language barriers, if any, must be overcome. In this regard the first term AETR report is important and follow-up by the Program Specialist, where necessary, is critical.

One Program Specialist at USDA commented that the success of the program depends largely on the conscientiousness, knowledge, and follow-through of the individual Program Specialist. Dealing with the personal lives of the participants is sometimes the most difficult part of the Program Specialist's job. The English language barrier is also problematical in a number of cases with regard to the participant's academic adjustment and progress.

d. Complementary Training

As per RLA, many participants attend mid-winter seminars. They are received by participants with different degrees of satisfaction. (See Chapter IV for further discussion.)

e. Practical Training Component

Generally speaking, initiatives to incorporate a practical training or non-academic component within the participant's individual program come from sources other than the USDA/ITD office or Program Specialist. In fact, some Program Specialists insist that the participant obtain the degree before any practical training is given or at least receive practical training only in-between terms. Initiatives for non-academic training originate from AID Mission requests, the university, faculty advisor, and the participants themselves. For example, participants may request, to attend certain seminars or professional society meetings. Such requests by participants are more common at the graduate rather than undergraduate level.

2. USDA/ITD Program Management

a. Case Assignment

The Deputy Director of the International Training Division at USDA initially reviews PIO/P training requests when USDA first receives them from

AID's Senior Review Committee. Depending on subject area, the PIO/P's are assigned to one of four branches:

- Agronomics and Engineering (crops irrigation, horticulture, plant protection);
- Animal Science and Natural Resources (range management, forestry, watershed, soil conversation, fisheries);
- Economics and Policy; and
- Management, Education, and Human Resource Development (agricultural communication, agricultural trainee development, vocational education).

Within each branch as well cases are assigned primarily on the basis of subject area, secondarily based on such criteria as workload distribution and country/project of the participant. The four branches are sufficiently independent of each other such that they may exercise their own assignment criteria. For example, one branch may place relatively more emphasis than another on collective decision making for both case assignment and selection of institution for participant placement. Besides specialization by subject area, there is also some specialization by country as well, whereby certain individual staff have become familiar with selected projects and systems in third world countries.

The number of participant cases which USDA has been handling for AID has been steadily increased by approximately 25 percent over the past year (attributed, in part, to increased emphasis in agriculture at the AID Mission level). USDA/ITD has been increasing its staff to handle the increased caseload (without the benefit of projections of caseload numbers from any source). For example, more staff have been hired to handle additional participants specializing in plant protection. Also, staff changes and realignments have been caused by recent retirements of long-term staff and other causes.

The branch of Management, Education, and Human Resources within USDA/ITD is a relatively new one. As described by one interviewee, this branch deals with subject areas that link the behavioral sciences to agriculture. Its primary emphasis to date has been serving non-academic participants, although a greater number of academic participants are expected to be served in the future.

Insofar as possible, switching of cases among Program Specialists is minimized. The continuity aspect is stressed in this instance. While overall monitoring is provided by one Program Specialist, the Program Specialist may be assisted by a Program Assistant and/or Secretary. Staffing arrangements vary among the four branches, illustrating that some branches are more "experimental" than others. In an ad hoc manner greater reliance on support staff for participant monitoring has occured in some instances of Program Specialist staff overload or staff change-over. Apparently, no one arrangement has been found to be an optimal one, at least by concensus. The Program Specialist also receives support from other units within ITD, including travel, fiscal, and administrative units.

According to DA's review, the overall system of case assignment and management within USDA ITD can be described as a decentralized one. Case assignments and staffing arrangements are made within each branch with variation and independence across the four branches. On the plus side, this approach allows for flexibility that can best suit the particular staff and situations involved with each branch. On the other hand, there may be some short-coming in systematic management procedures for insuring timely and appropriate handling of individual cases. Much reliance is placed on the Program Specialist. In some instances where the Program Specialist has not been readily available for participant support or monitoring, the secretaries have fulfilled a greater role than normally the case. While the latter staff have done an admirable job in these instances, more explicit management policy and control rather than ad hoc adjustments may help to insure a more effective operation. Greater reliance on utilizing support staff for participant support in routine matters may be a good arrangement; management of this, though, should be done in an explicit manner.

b. Staff Background/Training

The emphasis on staff backgrounds, particularly for Program Specialists, is on having staff who are well acquainted with agriculture-related matters and have advanced degrees (preferably Ph.D.). A number of interviewees commented that within the ITD office there has been an overemphasis on having staff with Ph.D. backgrounds. Recommended was greater flexibility in this regard, particularly when some branches have been short on staff due to increased caseload and staff turnover. What are needed are mid-career staff who will tend to be relatively stable and have a broader understanding of agriculture. A master's degree background could provide such broader understanding.

Program Specialists tend to specialize not only by subject area but also to some extent by country and Mission project (although the latter will vary among staff). Some ITD staff have visited overseas Missions and observed particular projects firsthand. A few have been training officers at USAID Missions. USDA resident staff, outside of ITD, who have provided expertise in developing countries serve as an additional source for ITD staff to consult with from time to time. The larger network of USDA staff and resources provide still other sources of information on overseas projects and problems and appropriate institutions in this country for training in certain subject areas.

Training for new professional staff in the ITD office is done mostly on an informal basis. Project Leaders of the four branches provide the appropriate guidance in this regard. New support staff tend to receive short, formal training.

c. Information Systems

The flow of information to and from USDA staff is implemented through recordkeeping, file maintenance, reporting, staff meetings, and routing procedures. More specifically, these procedures include the use of:

- File folders on each participant with sections in each folder on PIO/P and related documents, fiscal documents, correspondence, travel, etc.
- Centralized filing (on task orders, letters of agreement, billings, etc.) maintained by the Participant and Training Support Services branch of ITD.
- Written procedures on fiscal document routing.

- Manual on program procedures, "International Training Handbook," which is an operational version of AID's Handbook 10.

- University Fact Sheet file on each university which USDA has contact with, including information on program contact at the university, university calendar, expenses for international students, recommended transportation and lodging arrangements, documents required for enrollment, English language requirement, and services offered by the Foreign Student Office.

- Weekly meetings of the senior staff, plus meetings on occasion for collective decision-making within branches.

USDA/ITD is developing a computerized data base of factual information on each participant assessible by local terminal. Factual information on participants contained in this data system for reporting will include: country of origin; U.S. university; field of study; arrival and estimated departure dates; and level of degree. Bureaucratic and other obstacles have hampered getting the system fully operational. The immediate purpose of the system is to fulfill both internal and external reporting requirements. A longer range goal of this information system will be to serve as a device for monitoring chronological events in a participant's program (e.g., visa and exit requirements).

While the computerized information system can go a long way in providing a relevant means for managing the USDA portion of the academic participant training program, two additional resources should be cultivated. First, the latest version of AID Handbook 10 should be available to Program Specialists. Second, additional information might be included as part of the University Fact Sheet such as relevant course offerings, opportunities for field work, departmental strengths and academic requirements.

USDA/ITD also has an ongoing evaluation system for participant training although more evaluative effort is expended on the short-term (non-academic) than on the long-term (academic) participant. Formal instruments (where both close-ended and open-ended questions are used) have been developed for exit interviews of the academic participants. A (non-random) sampling of written responses by participants in exit interviews is presented in Exhibit III-1.

EXHIBIT III-1

Selected Comments From USDA Exit Interviews of Participants

Comments on the Foreign Student Office

- "blessed to have hard working secretary who helps foreign students a lot"
- plans made by faculty advisor
- has given useful academic and personal advice
- needed to solve social problems
- only assigned 6 months before degree received

Comments on the Faculty Advisor

- "nice professor, easy to approach"
- didn't have much time to advise
- helpful, but advises too many students
- planned and scheduled training
- excellent, understanding

Comments on Suggested Improvements

- Don't require students with English as second official language to take elementary English
- Exclude general courses like humanities; focus on technical courses (e.g., range management)
- Give some OJT after graduation

Comments on Negative Features of Training

- American students and community were not helpful
- Academic material too technical; field observations too simple
- Had no choices in practical experiences; did what professor wanted
- Blacks need to work harder than white counterparts
- No option to visit other states to compare techniques

Comments on Positive Features of Training

- Important practical experience
- Opportunity to share experiences with other participants
- Chance to compare U.S. and home country methods

Comments on Program Specialists

- Overall, very favorable
- One negative comment-posting participants' checks every month didn't give specialist any information about participants, what they were doing, how they felt.

d. Relationship Between Contractor and AID OIT

USDA/ITD describes its working relationship with its Program Manager at AID OIT as good. Beyond that particular relationship, however, USDA/ITD staff and management express several complaints and frustrations. Such complaints include: lack of consistent directions and procedures from OIT; too much dispute over TIP's; cumbersome procedures for preparing TIP's and budgets; delays in cable traffic due to meticulous requirements in format and wording; too much second-guessing on the part of OIT; lack of specificity in training requests; use of USDA ITD as an extension of AID OIT staff rather than in a contractual relationship; and OIT's tendency to treat AID Mission complaints as crises. In general, ITD views OIT as not having moved yet from an operational role to a management one in their relationship with them. For example, ITD views the requirement that every cable must go through OIT as unnecessary. Lack of clarity on responsibilities and roles, frequent changes in OIT policy and procedures, and lack of overall coordinative direction for the academic participant training program were further cited as problematical issues. ITD did express the desire to have a close working relationship with OIT, but that the relationship should be a contractual one where scope of work, communication links, and evaluation criteria are clearly delineated.

According to this study's review, it should be pointed out that ITD operates rather independently and has been often casual in fulfilling OIT information requirements. There are problems of communication between OIT and ITD which originate and are perpetuated in both agencies. Unfortunately, the relationship between the contractor and AID OIT has been mostly a negative one.

C. SECID Procedures and Management

1. SECID Program Procedures

a. Selection of Institution

SECID selection of institutions for participant placement depends on several criteria. One criterion repeatedly emphasized by SECID is to select the best institution where the individual will succeed. Effective placement depends not only on the quality of the institution but also on the particular individual and the likelihood of how well he/she will do. Selection is affected by several other criteria, including:

- PIO/P training request for subject area and degree level;
- PIO/P training request for specific institution;
- Maintaining a balance between selection of SECID member and non-SECID universities (i.e., efforts are made to include both minority and non-minority institutions in the development process); and
- Geographic dispersion of participants (i.e., the objective is to avoid concentrations of students in one area or institution).

PIO/P's sometimes request not only a particular field of study and degree objective, but combinations of program areas and/or degree objectives (e.g., public health and computer science as well). These latter kinds of requests can have the effect of considerably narrowing the range of appropriate choices. Also, clarification on these kinds of requests is often necessary.

According to SECID, AID Missions lack knowledge or understanding of the university system in this country in terms of its diversity, requirements for admissions, degree requisites, and types of program offerings. These misunderstandings lead to confusion and misplaced expectations on the part of both the AID Mission and the participant. How long a program will require to complete, for example, is one area where the Missions' expectation is not a fully informed one.

All the placement is performed by the Program Officer with help from an assistant. PIO/P's are initially reviewed for: stated training objectives; level of specificity in the request; institution requested; and credentials, both present and missing. Lack of information makes the placement process more difficult. Contacts at schools may be department chairpersons, other faculty, admissions officers, and/or foreign student advisors. In a few schools, SECID works through one person for all fields, similar to USDA's approach in this regard. Initial contact with a university is made to obtain information on the type and length of the relevant program or field of study and admission requirements and to explain AID's program. Before an application form is filled out and sent in to the university, copies of credentials are sent ahead to obtain a preliminary reading on admissability, in order to save time. In cases where PIO/P requests are unusual, a preliminary evaluation may be obtained from a university contact by telephone first.

Various reference sources consulted for placement purposes include: Peterson's Annual Guide for Graduate Study; The College Handbook (for undergraduate programs); Index of Majors; MBA Programs; Graduate Management Education; Guide to Graduate Study in Urban and Regional Planning; and Architectural Institutes - Guide on Accredited Schools. Staff attendance at professional meetings in selected fields (e.g., public health) is viewed as important for keeping abreast with changes and developments in academic offerings for entire disciplines (not just one school or department). Furthermore, a communications network among universities is quickly built up for the areas or programs with which SECID deals mainly: public health; engineering; business administration; and public administration.

The Credential Analysis Worksheet (CAW) is viewed by SECID as a useful tool for selection and placement purposes. That is, the CAW is used not only by university admissions offices for evaluating a foreign applicant, but also by SECID for the initial stage of the selection process. Particularly for more common areas of study, the CAW is helpful in narrowing the range of potentially relevant schools. The CAW is also useful if a relevant goal of the AID program is to diversify the placement of participants.

According to SECID, TOEFL scores should be provided more routinely with PIO/P training requests and packages. CAW's as well as TOEFL scores, should be provided more routinely and promptly with PIO/Ps to avoid or at least minimize delays in the placement process. Failure of the AID Mission to promptly send letters of recommendation further holds up participant placement.

Attempts at placement of marginally qualified students or applicants rejected by several universities is a problematical area with misunderstandings with not only the AID Mission but also with AID OIT. SECID contends that they prefer to place students where the program suits the particular individual and the likelihood of success is good. They resist the approach of "dumping" less than outstanding applicants at certain schools for the sole reason that schools will readily waive admission requirements for full-paying foreign students. SECID recommends that greater innovation and flexibility be used to place such students (e.g., place participant at one institution until requirements for another institution are met, then transfer participant).

b. Procedures for Participant Entry and Exit

The SECID participant file is physically moved from the placement unit to an area nearby the assigned Assistant Program Officer (APO) about the time the new participant arrives in the U.S. The APO reviews such files to check whether new participants have received an orientation package prepared by the SECID placement unit and usually distributed at the Washington International Center (WIC). This package contains a variety of items including a SECID brochure, a description of education in the U.S., copies of standard forms including expense reports, insurance vouchers, and typing requests as well as copies of salient correspondence such as letter of acceptance and housing arrangement agreement.

Whenever possible, new participants travel to SECID for an on-site orientation, typically after having spent two to five days at WIC. The SECID orientation covers items included in the formal package as well as the roles of SECID, AID and the academic advisor, the AETR, maintenance allowance, travel and the general notion that should the participant need help, call the APO using the WATS line. Part of this on-site orientation is individually tailored based on each participant's PIO/P. Contents of the PIO/P are discussed in terms of time in the U.S., level of degree, nature of specialization and when available, review of the university course catalog to introduce the student to what courses he or she may be taking. According to SECID participants occasionally have different expectations than the training program outlined in the PIO/P, usually either because participants received no orientation before leaving their home country or materials were reviewed but participants were told they could change things once in the U.S. Both situations create tension and conflict between participants trying to alter the PIO/P and SECID trying to implement the PIO/P as written. In-depth review of the PIO/P training program design before the participant leaves the home country can eliminate such misunderstandings later.

As with entry, the SECID APO also administers exit interviews with participants on-site whenever feasible. Alternately, SECID mails the questionnaire to participants and asks for its completion and return to SECID. Most participants receive some formal introduction from SECID at entry, even if sometimes it is in Washington during WIC orientation or at the airport in Raleigh-Durham where participants are between planes. A smaller percentage of participants actually receive in-person exit interviews. For these individuals, their responses are reviewed and discussed with them. Complaints made about the program are usually ones over which SECID has no control (e.g., the maintenance allowance is too small, there is too much paper work).

According to DA's assessment, the concept of administering an exit interview to participants and reviewing responses with interviewees is a good one as is the mailing of the interview protocol to those participants who do not stop at SECID before returning home. While it is useful to learn that participants complain about features of the program that SECID has no control over (e.g., maintenance allowance), the form might be redesigned to elicit more concrete comments about SECID procedures themselves. SECID staff noted that suggestions to improve their operation were few and usually very general. In fact, no SECID procedures have ever been modified based on participant comments. A reservoir of potentially useful information could be tapped by more directed questions to participants.

The SECID APO may or may not be responsible for travel return to home country. However, even if AID writes the ticket, the APO usually makes the reservations using a commercial travel agent. This information is submitted to AID for review and processing. Usually such reservations stand. In the meantime, the APO gives the participant early notice of probable travel arrangements.

c. Participant Monitoring and Support

A detailed file format has been established and is utilized first by placement, then by all monitoring and support APO's to store relevant information about each participant. Each file includes a copy of the PIO/P, biographical data, transcripts, a CAW, travel invoices and itineraries, information about practical training, telephone conversation logs, program planning data, cables, correspondence, AETRs, TOEFL scores and visa information. The advantage of such a uniform filing system is that all pertinent information about a participant is filed according to a set format in a single place. This information would be usually accessed by the APO but may be accessed by other staff as necessary.

As part of the introductory SECID orientation process, the APO asks participants to use the WATS line to contact him or her for any reason. To begin, participants are asked to call the APO to identify their academic advisor where not previously known, to comment on their housing and to summarize how registration and first classes went. Students differ in how comfortable they feel about using the telephone. Thus, some rarely call the APO while others may call on a reasonably frequent, regular basis.

Generally, APOs respond to participant contacts and requests. Although APO's may call the participant's academic advisor at least annually, the primary monitoring device is the AETR. It indicates grades for past courses, planned courses and whether, according to the student and his or her academic advisor, there are any problems. Poor grades, dropped or incomplete courses or specific problems noted all represent flags to the APO requiring some follow-up. Completed AETRs without such characteristics are merely filed on the assumption that no problems or at least no major problems were being experienced by participants other than those they may have called the APO about.

Other than AETR review, APO's follow no standard procedure for checking on the progress of participants included in their caseload. According to DA's assessment, more agressive monitoring provides regular benchmarks about participant progress and can identify potential or actual problems earlier than under the current more ad hoc system.

APOs do contact both the participant and academic advisor about four or five months before the annual training order expires to check out next years plan and proposed budget. In addition, APO field visits at least annually and preferably more often to all participants serve a monitoring function as well as other purposes. Visits reinforce APO-participant relationships, provide the opportunity to remind students they are under controlled programs and give a chance to discuss both program-related and personal issues with participants. Field visits may also include discussions with the academic advisor, occasionally the foreign service officer and sometimes a stop at the admissions office to learn about changes in requirements or modifications to the courses of study.

Primary support provided to participants by APO's include arrangements for transmission of the monthly maintenance allowance, housing if the participant lives on campus and general support regarding participant problems. One type of issue is concerned with adjustment, not only to a new country usually with a different education system, but also adjustment from having been in the work force most recently in their own countries to student status in the U.S. According to SECID, such a shift often results in loss of prestige and a more survival lifestyle without many, if any, frills. Some academic participant training program regulations tend to reinforce this diminutive stance. The need to send in separate typing receipts for each occasion signed by both the typist and academic advisor in order to be paid for typing expenses is one program requirement that participants complain about.

A fairly widespread and common problem area addressed by APO's deals with HAC insurance claims. Typically students receive nasty letters from collection agencies about long-term unpaid bills that HAC should cover which places students in awkward uncomfortable situations. APO's can't directly solve such delayed payment problems but do contact HAC to determine status of certain claims and encourage prompt payment where appropriate. It appears that either the current HAC system should be revamped or a new more responsive system instituted.

d. Complementary Training

As do RLA and USDA participants, most SECID participants attend mid-winter seminars. Some view these seminars as a welcome break from regular coursework and a chance to see another part of the U.S., while others find less utility in the program.

e. Practical Experience Component

Generally, selection of practical experience activities as well as selection of particular academic courses are made jointly by the participant and his or her academic advisor. This information is recorded on a SECID generated form which describes the course of study. The APO reviews this form in light of specified training objectives and does a cost projection to see if funds are available in the existing budget. The burden of establishing an appropriate training program including practical experience thus rests fundamentally with the participant aided by his or her advisor. When the participant feels that he or she is not getting what he or she thinks is needed, the participant is asked to inform the APO who then will look into the situation.

According to this study's assessment, the plus of this system is consideration of participant knowledge of home country conditions and anticipated job activities as well as advisor knowledge of academic and to a lesser extent, practical offerings at the university and in the technical field of specialty. Several minuses or weaknesses can be noted. One, the advisor may not be used to building in a practical experience component into student training so may not do so at all or may only consider a limited range of alternatives. Second, without periodic follow up by the APO, opportunities for appropriate practical training may be missed (e.g., deadlines for conference attendance may pass, expression of interest may be too late because sessions are full).

2. SECID Program Management

a. Case Assignment

Initially, the Program Officer and his assistant handle all potentially new participants for university or college placement. Monitoring is subsequently carried out by one of the four Assistant Program Officers (APO's) assigned according to geographic area, usually by state.

According to DA's review, the separation of placement and monitoring functions seems to offer both advantages and disadvantages. Specialization in placement headed up by a senior SECID staff member with both education and international experience seems to streamline and facilitate the process. However, the APO assigned later does not have a detailed chronology of events preceding participant arrival in the U.S. other than what has been included in the participant file and transmitted verbally. Since at least two people have responsibility for the participant at different times, coordination is necessary to assure smooth transistion. This coordination may not be as comprehensive as may be appropriate.

APO's take over from placement at the time the participant arrives in the U.S. Some 30-40% of new participants receive language training prior to or in conjunction with academic training. In about 5% of the cases, potential participants cannot be placed so the file is returned to AID which in turn may pass the file onto RLA or an alternate may be named. Periodically, geographic state assignments are reviewed and adjustments made to more equally distribute the caseload among the APO's.

Also according to DA review, case assignment to APO's on the basis of geographic area may not represent the most appropriate way to allocate participants. The general concept of this system is that APO's are generalists, not subject matter specialists. While many functions performed by APO's are independent of area of specialization or level of degree, some facets of the position are topic specific. Perhaps most important is the APO review of the planned course of study designed by the student and his or her academic advisor. With more specialization by topic area, more critical review is possible and more active participation in the design of the program by the APO is both feasible and desirable.

b. Staff Background and Training

Senior staff offer backgrounds which combine important aspects involved in implementing the academic participant training program. They are able to draw both upon their knowledge of U.S. education as well as experience in international settings which provides insights into how to match foreign student skills and AID needs with basic programs offered by U.S. universities supplemented by practical training. APO's who monitor participants after placement offer varying backgrounds that may or may not include training and/or experience in the international arena. APO's do tend to offer experience which includes extensive people involvement. Counseling is one area for example shared by several APO's. No specific degree requirements are imposed. No APO's have PhDs, one has a masters degree and the others have bachelor degrees.

According to DA assessment, given the division of key functions into placement v. monitoring and support, staff backgrounds seem appropriate. Should a different configuration of activities be instituted, a review of staff qualifications would be in order.

New APO's or other staff are trained primarily on an informal basis. To begin with, new personnel review an in-house procedures manual which is updated at least annually to reflect changes instituted by AID. Then, new personnel receive orientation from various staff members in different levels of detail, depending upon the positions of new personnel. If new personnel are APO's, joint orientation by all other APO's may be conducted. Beyond these activities, additional training takes place on the job.

According to DA review, the relatively small size of the SECID operation for the academic participant training program mitigates against establishment of a full-blown formalized training program. However, key issues could be identified as part of a training agenda to insure that no significant items are omitted from orientation.

c. Information Systems

A variety of intermeshing devices comprise the essence of the information system used at SECID. To maintain a chronology of cases assigned by AID to SECID and their disposition, one administrative assistant (AA) in charge of logistical procedures updates a log. When new cases arrive from AID, the AA assigns a control number which is used in the placement process, enters basic information about each case into the log book and fills out a checklist of materials included with each new case. This information is forwarded to the Program Officer who requests any missing but necessary information from AID. Most often missing are academic credentials. Status of the placement process is available at a glance at the word processor generated placement chart that is updated and issued to staff periodically. AID also receives a copy. This chart uses the SECID assigned control number, participant identifiers, universities approached informally or to which formal applications have been submitted, results, call-forward date, notation of itinerary, budget and travel schedule and in a few instances, notation of case returned to AID. For continuity, the same AA develops all word processor data summaries as well as maintains the case log.

Another standard document generated quarterly using the word processor is a Status of Training orders which reflects the total obligated amount, expenditures by year and balance remaining. This document is useful to the financial officer to keep track of monies available and spent by participant as well as total monies obligated according to SECID compared to AID records. A related form used by the financial officer is a participant data word processor generated printout which includes a list of participants alphabetically by last name. This form allows the financial officer to determine when a new budget is needed for a participant. The fact that a host of information is stored on word processor discs allows different information format documents to be produced and tailored according to individual needs with minimal redesign and processing.

Furthermore, as described in Section I-c for SECID, a formalized file system has been established for the maintenance of all pertinent documents for each participant. Such files begin with the information transmitted by AID, are set up by the placement unit, then distributed to the appropriate APO for monitoring and support. Thus, files are physically located in several places. However, use of a common filing system and use of the participant data printout which includes APO assignments by participants allows other staff to access a particular APO's files when that APO is not in the office to respond to a pending issue.

Compilation of information about the academic participant training program using the word processor and organization of file information for individual participants provide SECID staff with the wherewithal to track progress of individual participants as well as the status of the program overall. The capability exists to keep on top of what is happening, to pinpoint potential problems early and to develop operating and management procedures that reflect program performance to date. However, such information could be used to a greater extent for long-range programmatic planning (according to DA assessment).

d. Relationship Between Contractor and AID OIT

SECID describes its relationship with AID OIT as a difficult one. Similar to USDA's criticism in this regard, SECID maintains that AID OIT views them as an extension of their own staff rather than as a separate corporation with a contractual relationship. Also similar to USDA's comments, directives from OIT have been contradictory, e.g., contradicting directives on procedures for preparing TIP's or verbal directions contradicting written directives. OIT lacks a systematic approach for monitoring its contractor. According to SECID, it has resisted requests from SECID to put their directions in writing. SECID desires to operate their program in a contractual manner, following consistent written procedures and being allowed to exercise their own professional judgment. Finally the level of professionalism at AID OIT has been questioned by SECID in that it was felt that more training and supervision is necessary.

Cable traffic was identified by SECID as another problematical area in its dealings with OIT. In particular, AID tends not to transmit SECID's cable messages until subsequently prompted by telephone calls from SECID.

D. Summary/Critique of Contractor Procedures and Management

Section D provides a summary description of all three contractors' procedures and management, plus numerous critical comments in selected instances. These critical comments represent assessments by DA, unless otherwise attributed to the contractors.

1. Contractor Program Procedures

a. Selection of Institution

The selection of the institution for participant training has a critical impact on the success of the program. The selection component is viewed as encompassing the PIO/P's, AID Mission understanding and expectations, information resources utilized for placement, criteria for selection, and logistical procedures for selection. While there are some common characteristics among the three contractors' approaches to selection, the differences are more prominent. More specifically, the similarities and differences are discussed below by topical area:

(1) All three contractors comment that more detail is needed in the PIO/P training requests. Also, documents necessary for participant admission such as TOEFL scores in English language proficiency, transcripts and letters of recommendations are often missing or delayed.

(2) With varying degrees of emphasis, the contractors commented on AID Missions' lack of understanding of admissions and length of training requirements of U.S. universities. According to the contractors, for example, the time required to earn a U.S. university degree is often longer than the Missions expect. In fairness to the Missions, though, the contractors do not fully anticipate extensions of training. Clearer understanding and closer monitoring of the time required to complete a program need to be set in motion at the onset of the participant's program.

(3) Separation of non-agricultural participants into different geographic areas of the United States is made a priori at the beginning of the selection process by OIT's assignment of the cases either to SECID (which covers 17 states primarily in the South and Southeast) or to RLA (which covers the rest of the contiguous 48 states). According to DA's review, this a priori separation, however, may not permit the most effective placement for the participant and the AID Mission although it does provide for approximately equal distribution of participants between RLA and SECID. PIO/P's, training goals, qualifications of the participant, and subject areas should all be carefully reviewed in-depth before or in place of contractor domains. This geographic factor, should not be of primary consideration.

(4) Information about universities used in the placement process varies widely among the contractors. USDA has a greater advantage in terms of staff experience and other departmental involvement with AID Missions, AID projects, and institutions of training. SECID maintains a good collection of reference materials on academic programs and institutions, while RLA is most reliant on information received via telephone contact with the institution. Lacking with all three contractors is a systematic filing of information on universities on academic programs, course offerings, admission requirements, etc. USDA has made a significant step in this direction with its University Fact Sheet file, but critical information on specific programs could be added as well. A complete information system on universities contacted by contractors would serve the following purposes:

- Avoid duplicative staff efforts in researching placement-related information;
- Store information for new staff;
- Provide more readily accessible information;
- Provide information based on first-hand contractor contact and experience with the university; and
- Facilitate more uniform, consistent procedures for placement.

Of course for such a system to continue to be viable, periodic updating is required.

(5) The Credential Analysis Worksheet (CAW) is used by all three contractors where the university requires or requests it for its admissions process. All three contractors cited delays in receiving the CAW. Only one contractor (SECID) noted that the CAW is instrumental in their placement process, particularly for assessing the admissability of an applicant and narrowing the range of potentially relevant schools. Divergent opinions about the usefulness of the CAW were noted by other sources as well. The foreign admissions offices at the universities tend to view it as useful for their own evaluation purposes (e.g., some institutes of training in countries outside the U.S. are relatively obscure or unknown to these offices). Perhaps the most relevant issue is not the usefulness of the CAW per se, but how certain information gaps on applicant qualifications could be best filled for both the contractor and the university.

(6) Criteria for selection of the institution vary among the contractors. By contractor, important selection criteria include:

- RLA: subject area; admissability and timing of admissions (e.g., select institution where admission is made first or contact foreign student or admissions offices which can readily secure admissions for foreign students on a conditional basis); logistical convenience of placing participants in the immediate Washington, D.C. area.
- USDA/ITD: subject area and specialty; reputation of school and department; availability of program contact; faculty contact.
- SECID: subject area; program suitability to qualifications and capabilities of the individual participant; inclusion of minority institutions in the participant training and development process.

The above list of criteria reflect both commonalities and differences. The differences can be subtle but, nonetheless, important as well. RLA, for example, may be relatively adept at placing marginally qualified or otherwise difficult-to-place applicants while SECID may provide better matches between participant skills and Mission expressed training needs. However, an important issue is whether or not AID policy is explicit about criteria for placement and expectations are common among all the involved parties (i.e., AID CIT, AID

Missions, participants, and contractors). If selection criteria are to vary among contractors this should be made explicit as well.

(7) While effective placement appropriate to the training objectives and the individual participant is the basic goal of all three contractors, placement procedures meant to achieve that end vary widely. USDA with its specialty in agricultural placement works mainly with a relatively small network of 30 to 40 institutions. Both SECID and RLA attempt to "diversify" to some extent or other. All of RLA's Program Officers place participants, while at SECID one Placement Officer (with assistance) performs all the placements. USDA approaches only one institution at a time and relies heavily on their university contacts to obtain preliminary readings of admissability before sending documents to the university. RLA and SECID may seek acceptance of the participants at several universities simultaneously. At RLA the number of institutions initially selected can vary from one to six depending on the Program Officer and other factors. RLA appears to be the least prepared with information before making contact with the university. The RLA staff used for placement, in general, are not as experienced as staff at either USDA or SECID, or are they likely to have as good information resources.

b. Procedures for Participant Entry and Exit

The three contractors provide different amounts of orientation to some or most of the participants, in addition to the orientation provided by the Washington International Center. One contractor (SECID), in particular, emphasizes the importance of providing such orientation themselves. They comment that in many instances the participants are poorly informed by AID Missions about training objectives, itineraries, living allowances, and cultural aspects of U.S. life. In addition, the orientation is important for establishing a rapport between the participant and the contractor assigned Assistant Program Officer. One problem cited by all contractors is poor timing or delay of the participant's arrival. Often in these cases the participant is forced to miss all orientation and/or is late or nearly late for registration and the start of classes (see Chapter IV for further discussion of this).

The contractors make arrangements for participant travel within the U.S. and return to the home country. USDA prints up a travel itinerary that specifies not only travel plans but also program study and objectives, contacts, and related information.

All three contractors claim that there is very little problem with participants not returning (i.e., only five per cent or less do not return when supposed to). For the few who do not return one cause is political turmoil or change in the home country. The exit process evidently has few required procedures. Some participants are interviewed by the contractor upon exit while others are not. USDA/ITD has some degree of interaction with returnees in the home country on an informal basis via USDA contacts with AID Missions, development projects staff and other country contacts.

c. Participant Monitoring and Support

Participant monitoring is implemented primarily through the Academic Enrollment Term Report (AETR) which is filled out by the participant and faculty advisor for each term completed. A primary support vehicle for the participants is that they are encouraged to use the telephone to contact their respective Program Officer (RLA), Program Specialist (USDA), or Assistant Program Officer (SECID) in the event of any problems or other reason. In addition, a central point for USDA support and monitoring of participants is the program contact office at each university site. Living allowance checks, correspondence, and AETR's are all routed through this office. Close active monitoring whereby the contractor initiates contact with the participant, though, is not emphasized by any of the contractors. The explicit philosophy of one of the contractors, indeed, is that the student and advisor are responsible for meeting the training objectives. The health insurance program for AID participants called HAC is cited by all three as suffering from severe mismanagement and poor handling of health insurance claims.

d. Complementary Training

All three contractors fulfill an active role in making arrangements for participant attendance at mid-winter seminars. The topics at these seminars (conducted usually during the Christmas holidays when universities are on a break) range from general cultural orientation to highly specialized topics relevant to developing countries.

e. Practical Experience Component

Initiatives to provide practical training such as internships, workshops, field observation tours, or attendance at professional meetings generally come from sources other than the contractor. Initiatives for practical training originate from AID Mission requests, faculty advisors, and the participants themselves. Once a request for such components has been approved the contractor arranges for the necessary financial and travel support. It is evident from discussions with both the contractors and the participants (see Chapter IV) that practical experiences are not emphasized for academic participants.

2. Contractor Program Management

a. Case Assignment

A "case" as defined here pertains to the entire program developed for an individual participant, encompassing PIO/P development, PIO/P review, selection of the training institution, orientation, the academic program and monitoring, and personal support (health insurance, travel, living allowance, housing). The contractor fulfills only some of these responsibilities for an individual case, such as the selection of institution and academic monitoring. Other responsibilities are fulfilled by other sources such as PIO/P development (AID Mission) or health insurance (Trust Fund Associates).

Case assignment approaches differ among the contractors. For USDA, assignment for both placement and monitoring is made by "Program Specialists" primarily according to subject area and specialty. At RLA, the important criterion is workload distribution among the "Program Officers" with the Senior Program Officer handling the more difficult cases. At SECID, all placements are performed by SECID's "Program Officer" (i.e., placement officer) and assistant, while support and monitoring duties are assigned among four "Assistant Program Officers" according to geographic area (i.e., states).

Case assignments to staff vary among contractors, reflecting different degrees of specialization. USDA with its larger operation specializes the most and RLA the least. At USDA the Program Specialist is assisted by a Program Assistant and/or Secretary for administrative support. SECID, though not specializing according to subject area, specializes by placement vs. monitoring and support functions.

Assignment of cases to either specialized or general staff is an important issue. Generally speaking, staff specialization offers the advantages of worker productivity gains and greater expertise for effective programming. Participant training cases differ by subject area (e.g., engineering, health, agriculture) and this lends itself to staff specialization. But within a given case different levels or mixes of professional expertise and administrative support are required, which lend case assignment to staff specialization as well. Greater staff specialization, on the other hand, requires greater administrative coordination and monitoring. If different staff (and organizations -- AID Mission, university, HAC -- for that matter) are handling a given case, for example, the efforts of the staff (and organizations) have to be coordinated. Mechanisms for doing so include the implementation of stated procedures and management review, direction, and control.

b. Staff Background/Training

Programming staff vary significantly among the three contractors in terms of level of expertise, academic training, and specialized knowledge. USDA/ ITD emphasizes recruitment of staff with advanced degrees (preferably Ph.D) in subject areas and specialties in agriculture-related fields. RLA, on the other hand, emphasizes the broader personal and communicative skills. SECID might be best described as falling somewhere in between the other two contractors in terms of staff background requirements. The senior SECID staff have academic and professional backgrounds in higher education and international training.

The wide disparity of programming staff backgrounds in relation to responsibilities is evident among the three contractors. Disparities pertain to subject area or specialty skills, academic placement expertise, administrative responsibilities, communication skills, and international/cultural backgrounds. Some of these skills may be over-emphasized within individual contractor organizations while others may be underemphasized. A larger operation offers the advantage of maintaining a staff with more specialized skills. Regardless of the size, though, certain skills combined with a high level of professionalism (e.g., academic placement expertise) are required for effective programming.

Also noted here is the general lack of formal orientation and training for new programming staff. Given the procedure-oriented dimension of the AID academic participant training program, a standard, institutionalized approach among all contractors for training new staff may facilitate consistent procedures and AID's management of its program.

c. Information Systems

As with other characteristics, information systems, utilized by the three contractors are quite different as are reporting requirements established by OIT. In particular, these variations include:

- Factual data on participants, available for both reporting and monitoring purposes, spans the gamut from a very disorganized state to a highly organized, automated system. The latter is an efficient system maintained by SECID with a word processing unit producing both participant and placement data on a monthly basis and at other times as needed. The data can be rendered readily in alternative formats for several different purposes.
- Participant monthly reports to AID OIT vary greatly from a few caseload figures from one contractor to both the form 1380-9 report and a placement chart report from another contractor. At the very

least, AID should maintain a consistent, uniform reporting format for its contractors.

- In a number of specific instances AID's participant data generated by its own information system are not identical to the contractor's data.
- Programming staff at each of the three contractors do not have AID OIT's current update of AID Handbook 10.
- Two of the three contractors have an operational manual version of AID Handbook 10, although only one (SECID) has a recently updated version.
- A centralized, systematic file of information on universities contacted is lacking with all three contractors, although one contractor (USDA) makes a significant step in this direction with its University Fact Sheet.
- One contractor (USDA) has an ongoing evaluation system for collecting response data from exiting participants.

In summary, the contractors' information systems are quite disparate from each other, rendering overall AID management and policy control very difficult.

d. Relationship Between Contractor and AID OIT

One contractor (RLA) had very little comment on its relationship with OIT, but the other two contractors had numerous and virtually identical comments on this regard. In summary, their critical comments are:

- Lack of uniform and consistent directives from AID OIT.
- Lack of a monitoring system and criteria for meeting program requirements.
- Lack of respect for the contractual agreement and professionalism of contractor staff. AID OIT staff recognize that indeed, the working relationship with contractors is not very good. Improvements are needed to make the three contractor system a more viable one.

IV. THE PARTICIPANTS AND TRAINING INSTITUTIONS

Chapter IV examines the entire process of the academic participant training program with emphasis on the perspective of the participants and key staff at training institutions. The principal data source for the contents of this chapter is the on-site survey of both participants and officials or faculty of selected training institutions using interview protocols. As indicated in Chapter II, the field interview team visited 24 institutions and spoke to 183 participants and about 70 officials or faculty. The sample was chosen so as to achieve a broad representation of participant and institutional characteristics for each of the three contractors. The number of participants interviewed at each institution varied from one to 22. University or institution staff who were interviewed for this study included deans, assistant deans, department chairpersons, interdepartmental liaison representatives, foreign student office representatives, administration support staff, admissions officers, faculty advisors, and grants and procurement officers. The interview questions were for the most part open-ended whereby the participants or staff had the opportunity to freely express themselves. These kinds of responses were supplemented by more specific, quantitative-oriented inquiries and answers.

One overall result that bolsters the validity of the findings is the large degree of consistency and uniformity among the responses. Not all the participants and staff share the same concerns and experiences, but most express at least some of the same concerns. In fact, the degree of consistency across the 24 sites visited is rather remarkable. Two areas of repeated and consistent responses, for example, pertain to the poor administration of the health insurance program and lack of in-depth practical training. Similarity of responses obviates the necessity or usefulness of providing a separate case report for each of the 24 institutions visited.

Overall consistency of the interview responses contrasts with the diversity of participants and training sites. The 183 participants interviewed represented approximately 17 percent of the total number of academic cases being served by the three main contractors at the time of field data collection. The respective sample percents for each of the three contractors are approximately: 16 percent (USDA); 21 percent (RLA); and 20 percent (SECID). One way to illustrate the diversity of participant respondents is to present the geographic distribution of the participant's home country, as shown in Exhibit IV-1. Corresponding distributions for the degree objectives and areas of study further demonstrate the diversity of respondents and are reported in Section C of this chapter.

Exhibit IV-1

Geographic Distribution of Participant's Home Country

Geographic Area	Percent of Participant Respondents
Mideast/North Africa	26%
West Africa	21
East Africa	22
South Africa	20
Asia	9
Latin America	2
Total	100%

Training institutions visited also varied widely in terms of size, geographic location, emphases in academic programs, prestige, and other factors. Exhibit IV-2 lists the training institutions by contractor.

The rest of Chapter III presents more detailed information about participants and their training institutions. The information is organized into six major sections which are:

- Selection and anticipated use of training;
- Arrival and orientation;
- Academic training;
- Complementary and practical or non-academic training;
- Support systems and community setting; and
- Summary.

The recommendations and critical comments made by participants and staff at the training institutions are presented at the end of each major section.

Exhibit IV-2

Training Sites Visited by Interview Team

INSTITUTION	CONTRACTOR PARTICIPANTS
1. George Washington University	RLA
2. University of Michigan	RLA
3. Boston University	RLA
4. Northeastern University	RLA
5. Simmons College	RLA
6. Tufts University	RLA
7. Arthur D. Little Management Education Institute	RLA
8. University of Wisconsin	USDA, RLA
9. Iowa State University	USDA, RLA
10. University of Arizona	USDA, RLA
11. California Statue University, Chico	USDA, RLA
12. UC Davis	USDA
13. Texas Tech	USDA
14. Western Illinois Univeristy	USDA
15. NCA and T State University	USDA, SECID
16. University of Pennsylvania	SECID
17. Pennsylvania State University	SECID
18. Tulane University	SECID
19. Southern University	SECID
20. Georgia State University	SECID
21. Mid. Tennessee State University	SECID
22. G. Peabody University	SECID
23. Tennessee State Unversity	SECID
24. University of Tennessee	SECID

A. Selection and Anticipated Use of Training

Most of the participants were selected for training in the U.S. by either their home government ministry or the university in which they held a position. The selections were made in conjunction with the AID Missions, based usually on review of applications, personal interviews, and achievement tests. Government departments typically involved in participant selection were those in which the participant was working. These included (among others): Ministry of Agriculture; Agricultural Research Council; Ministry of Planning; Ministry of Rural Development; Ministry of Health; and Ministry of Finance. Most of the participants will return to the same department or university in similar or higher positions upon completion of training. Most participants though are not certain of what their specific job title or position will be. This is not so unusual in that a specific job cannot be guaranteed for the length of participant training which often takes at least one year and may take four years or more.

A specific AID project is linked by participants to the selection process and anticipated use of training in only a few cases. In general, participants appeared uncertain as to how their training would relate to Mission goals. Note also that the length of training in the U.S. may exceed the time frames of specific AID projects. Most participants spoke only briefly, if at all, with the AID Mission about their training goals.

In most instances academic participants play no active role in the selection process beyond the initial application stage. They may respond initially to notices in their Ministry about training in the U.S., word-of-mouth descriptions of training opportunities or announcements of AID scholarships. Participants may also be recommended by their job supervisor for AID-supported training. After filling out the application form and meeting the other application requirements, participants simply wait until the actual selection and placement has been made. Most AID Missions provide little orientation to participants about the nature of the training to be received or its relationship to Mission goals. This is sometimes because Mission staff have limited information about the specific proposed training program in the U.S. and sometimes because Mission staff do not know about training in the U.S. in general.

Participant and Training Institution Recommendations

Both participants and university officials believe that the selection process could be improved by means of better information communication and modified program procedures. More specifically, participants felt that:

- The time period between the initial application to AID for training and acceptance at a training situation is too long (i.e., one to two years). Procedures could be streamlined to shorten the time interval.
- It appears to participants that AID and the contractor do not try very hard to place participants in universities of their choice or even universities which offer their particular specialty. Additional care should be taken to assure that appropriate training institutions and programs are chosen to meet the training requirements. Furthermore, selection of the university should be based on knowledge of the nature of academic programs at different schools, not just titles of programs or courses. This would imply knowledge of, for example, the theoretical vs. applied mix of instruction.
- Participants should have more knowledge of the training program and training institution before they leave their home country. Also, more information on U.S. colleges and their programs need to be available to Missions in order to better develop PIO/P's and training programs.

From the training institution perspective, concerns and recommendations on the placement process include:

- Application documents sent to universities are often incomplete and/or nearly illegible.
- In a number of instances more information is needed on educational systems in developing countries in order to assure that participants are placed at appropriate training levels. For example, references and other information sources on agricultural training institutions in developing countries are very limited.
- One program contact (and one participant) believed that in a number of cases the participant training is too specialized or too sophisticated to fit the environment to which the participant returns. In other words, the value of the training is limited if it does not complement the home country's environment.

B. Arrival and Orientation

The percent of participant respondents reporting some level of orientation to American culture and the American education system by source are as follows:

AID Mission: 39%
Washington International Center (WIC): 78%
Contractor 52%

Orientation was provided least often by the AID Missions and even when orientation was given it tended to be minimal. WIC orientation was provided most often, but length of orientation and hence content varied from less than a day to one week. Approximately half of the participants received orientation from the contractor ranging in duration from approximately 30 minutes to a few days.

The arrival and orientation phase of the program was an orderly process for many participants, but it was a very disorderly and confusing one for several other participants. The success of this phase of the program depended for the most part on the call-forward notice and the timing of the arrival in relation to the start of academic classes. Too short a notice for departure from the home country led to a very hectic and confusing departure and arrival. In some cases the call-forward notice for departure gave the participant only a few days to prepare. Poor timing of the arrival, that is, too near or after the start of classes, also put a strain on participants, causing them to miss orientation and, in some cases, even classes. In such cases participants feel out of control. As one consequence, housing is difficult to secure, especially near or after the start of classes. Other arrangements for the participant's assimilation into the academic and social communities are generally rushed as well.

In a few cases participants arrived at a training institution without having been formally admitted and without the proper documents. This makes it difficult for the admissions office to accurately evaluate the participant's qualifications and to make suitable recommendations to the relevant academic department on class standing, transfer of credits, English preparation, and prerequisite courses. Delays in registration and misplacement in courses often occur under these circumstances.

What is evidently important for the participant's adjustment upon arrival is the participant receiving personal attention at the training site. Many arrive shy and disoriented, and left on their own, would take much longer to reach a comfortable level of adjustment. The Foreign Student Office provides much of the needed personal attention and orientation. Other sources for this may include the program contact office, the language training institute and faculty advisors and friends. One participant who was doing very poorly (and had been transferred to one school from another because of it) did a complete turnaround in his academic performance, once his personal problems were drawn out by his faculty advisor and his USDA sponsor. Underlining this perceived need, many participants expressed the desire for orientation at the training site.

English language training was required at the outset of the program for 43 percent of all the participant respondents. This training requirement was met in most cases at ALIGU (American Language Insitute of Georgetown University), but several other participants took the required training at their respective training institutions. These latter organizations were noted, at least in some instances, as being also effective in providing personal attention to the participants and facilitating adjustment.

Participant and Training Institution Recommendations

Critical comments and recommendations made by participants and staff included:

- As indicated previously, several participants and staff as well complained about the very short notices for departures and late arrivals at the training institution.
- Many participants expressed the desire for orientation at the training site.
- A few participants felt that the WIC orientation was too elementary or somewhat condescending.
- Many participants expressed the desire to have been provided more information in their home country, particularly on the training program, living conditions, and living allowances. Most of the participants are professionals in their own country and are older than the American students (i.e., 30 years of age or older). Living in dormitories and other American student living standards comes as a shock to many of the new participants.
- For those students required to take English language training at ALIGU, many felt that they would have been better off taking the training at the institution where their academic program is. Readjustment to a new site would not have been required of them.

C. Academic Training

Almost half of the participants interviewed were agricultural students served by USDA, while the other half served by RLA and SECID were studying mostly in engineering, business, health-related or development-related* fields. Major areas of study for the agricultural students (which correspond to USDA four branches of topical interest) were represented, percentage-wise, as follows:

Area of Study	Percent of All Agriculture Students
Agronomics and engineering	54%
Animal science	20
Economics and policy	20
Management, education, and human resource development	6
TOTAL (90 participants)	100%

For non-agricultural participants who were interviewed, the relevant distribution was as follows:

Area of Study	Percent of All Non-Agriculture Students
Engineering	37%
Business	10
Education	3
Health-related	21
Development-related	21
Other	8
TOTAL (93 participants)	100%

The distribution of these students by degree objective demonstrates another dimension of diversity among the participant respondents, as indicated by the following:

*Development-related fields were defined to include: community development, urban planning, economic development, public administration, population planning, and agricultural development.

Degree Objective	Percent of All Students Interviewed
Bachelor's	33%
Master's	45
Ph.D.	22
TOTAL (183 participants)	100%

That 33 percent of all participants interviewed were seeking Bachelor's degrees is somewhat of an overrepresentation for this category compared to the total number of cases served by the three contractors combined. The actual percent of all cases with a Bachelor's degree objective falls within the range of only 20 to 25 percent. USDA participants, in particular, are overrepresented in this regard due to sampling. It can also be noted that almost all of the Ph.D. students will return to university positions in their respective countries, while Bachelor's and Master's students for the most part will return to government positions and/or AID projects. The average expected duration of training for all participants interviewed was 2.6 years, while the average stay to date was 1.4 years.

The subject of the purpose and value of the training was discussed in the participant and staff interviews at each training site. Nearly all participants indicated that the academic training will be relevant or at least somewhat relevant to the jobs they expect to hold when they return to their home countries. However, the degree of enthusiasm and satisfaction varied according to such factors as the availability (and expectation) of practical training experiences, requirements for taking non-related courses, and the nature of and contact with program staff and faculty advisors. The level of specificity in the training also impacted upon the student's perception of the value of the academic program. Students working for a more advanced degree, for example, tended to specialize more, had more contact with faculty advisors, and generally were more satisfied with their program.

From a broader perspective a number of participants and staff commented on the applicability of the training to developing countries. Some respondents expressed doubt about any extensive degree of applicability due to differing technological and cultural conditions. Others (e.g., a Public Administration student participating in a government internship) felt that such differences provide a useful comparison base which strengthens the learning process and the applicability potential. Still other respondents, particularly staff, who questioned the usefulness of sophisticated academic training to developing countries felt that the formal academic route was overemphasized. Alternative routes to human resource development include participation in non-degreed programs and development of local knowledge capacity in the home country.

Some of the participants emphasize more the value of the degree and its title more than the training itself. Part of this focus is perhaps attributable to the home country's priorities with regard to the prestige of the degree and the institution where it is obtained. One participant at the University of Wisconsin, for example, is dissatisfied that his degree title will be Master's of Public and Policy Adminstration although his program allows enough flexibility for him to completely fulfill PIO/P training objectives. His desired degree title is Master's of Economics which, the participant claims, would be more highly recognized in his home country. A more compelling case, perhaps, is a student with an irrigation specialty who is placed in a School of Agriculture that emphasizes applications-oriented curriculum and hands-on experience. Although only at the Bachelor's level, this student prefers to be placed at a more prestigious school which emphasizes the theoretical approach more than the practical one.

As is shown in Exhibit IV-3, in a majority of all cases (60 percent) the training is described as "closely related" to the objectives stated in the participant's PIO/P. However, in a significant number of cases (38 percent) the training is only rated as "somewhat related." In only three cases (all masters degree candidates) training was rated as "not related at all." The "somewhat related" cases occur most often (50 percent) for baccalaureate students, next most often for masters students (37 percent) and least frequently (24 percent) for Ph.D. students. This relationship reflects degree of specialization relative to likelihood that training is specifically tailored to meet PIO/P objectives. Thus, the greater the specialization by degree level, the greater the likelihood training is closely related to PIO/P objectives. Conversely, the more general the training by degree level, the greater the likelihood training is only somewhat related to PIO/P objectives. In addition, cases where the participants have been conditionally admitted and required to take "compensatory" courses (English language training and prerequisites for certain majors) may tend to rate as only "somewhat related."

Exhibit IV-3

Extent to Which Training Relates to PIO/P Objectives

	Degree Objective							
	All Participants		Bachelor		Master		PhD	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Closely Related	108	60%	30	50%	49	60%	29	76%
Somewhat Related	69	38	30	50	30	37	9	24
Not Related	3	2	-	-	3	4	-	-
Total	180*	100%	60	100%	82	100%	38	100%

The availability of practical training components, the extent of requirements for non-related courses, and misplacement (in engineering degrees) are factors affecting the amount of training relatedness. Still another factor affecting relatedness is not merely the academic program itself, but also the student's own sense of direction for the program in which he or she should be in and the courses to be elected. Orientation on the program to be entered and follow-through obviously will impact upon this factor.

In contrast to the significant number of only "somewhat related" participant cases, there were numerous instances of outstanding programs and high levels of student satisfaction and enthusiasm. Important factors contributing to these instances include:

- Effective program support and follow-through provided <u>on-site</u> (by e.g., center-based programs);
- Excellence of training institution in terms of course offerings, quality of instruction, and university resources; and
- Close relationship with faculty advisor.

Effective program contact and follow-through by instructional staff is characterized, for one, by an effective, on-going working relationship between the

*No ratings for three Ph.D. candidates.

program contact and the participant's respective contractor. A representative for Tulane University's School of Public Health, for example, works closely with SECID on admitting participants and tailoring the participant's program to meet PIO/P objectives. Enough flexibility in degree and departmental requirements is allowed to provide tailoring for specialized training objectives. For example, interdepartmental strengths are drawn upon to produce a combined program of public health and tropical medicine. Another characteristic of effective program contact on-site is where personal and administrative support and academic follow-through are provided for the participants. Examples of such programs are:

- M.P.H. program in Health Planning and Economic Development (partially supported by AID funds) at the University of Michigan.
- Arthur D. Little Management Education Institute.
- University of Wisconsin's Center for Development.

In addition, the contents of these center-based programs have an international focus. For example, the Arthur D. Little Institute provides the opportunity for specialization in International Business and Economics and Industrial Development. Program contact offices for USDA participants also provide effective personal and administrative support for the participants, although the support for academic tailoring and follow-through is not as strong as at these center-based programs.

Outstanding programs cited by participants can also be attributed in part to the excellence of the training institution. Examples of outstanding institutions cited by participants are UC Davis for agriculture-related majors and the University of Pennsylvania for demography (or population planning), regional planning, and architecture. An example of an institution where the quality was seriously questioned was Southern University (according to the AID participants). The nature of the participant's contact with a faculty advisor also impacts upon the participant's program. In exceptional, though not rare, cases the participant met his faculty advisor in his home country (e.g., at an AID project or the participant's university). One participant, for example, was an assistant to his faculty advisor in his home country (Pakistan) prior to his placement at a U.S. institution. His advisor has a world-renown reputation in the area of the participant's specialty (oilseed crops production). Overall, 58 percent of the participants felt that their faculty advisors were "well acquainted" with their programs, 32 percent "somewhat acquainted," and 10 percent "not acquainted." George Washington University is an example of an institution where for AID participants the coursework was relevant but contact with faculty advisors was minimal.

In those cases where applicable Master's and Ph.D's theses were found relevant to the participant's area of study and training objectives, the subject of the thesis pertained to the participant's home country. Many participants, though, were unable to select their topics as such due to lack of opportunity and support to return to the home country for data.

Participant and Training Staff Recommendations

Recommendations made by participants and staff at the training institutions with regard to academic training included the following:

- Faculty advisors should be better informed about the nature of the AID-OIT program and specific training objectives of the students.
- Participants should be allowed to conduct their thesis research in their home countries.
- There needs to be greater flexibility in course requirements for international students in undergraduate programs based on their special needs, including a waiver of certain university requirements (e.g., Tennessee history).
- Participants expressed the desire for greater relevance to developing countries in their coursework.
- Participants should be allowed to gain more than one degree, if the additional training is clearly and closely related to home country and mission goals.
- In a related vein, participants felt that there needs to be greater flexibility in the length of training, particularly where prerequisite and other degree requirements lengthen the required training. While extensions are often given, they are granted very late, increasing the anxiety level of the students and causing problems for AID, OIT, the Missions, and host country. Length of training should be assessed at an early stage, preferably in the first semester or quarter.

D. Complementary and Practical Training

Complementary training as part of the academic participant training program refers to mid-winter seminars while practical training can include field trips, observation tours, professional society meetings, professional conferences, summer seminars, and other related events. Exhibit IV-4 provides a list of the 1980 AID-sponsored mid-winter community seminars as a sample of the types of themes likely to be offered in these seminars. Of all the participants interviewed 69 percent reported attending or expecting to attend mid-winter seminars. The mid-winter seminars were generally popular with the participants although some felt that they were too "tourist-oriented" or not relevant enough.

One of the most emphasized and repeated concerns of the participants (and several staff respondents as well) was the lack of practical training as an integral part of the program. Sixty-eight percent of participants did have or expect to have the opportunity to attend some kind of practical training event. These events, such as field trips and professional society meetings, however, do not provide the in-depth kind of training seemingly desired by most participants. The contractors do not emphasize this part of the program, nor do the academic institutions unless they receive financial support for doing so. These statements apply equally well to both agricultural and non-agricultural students.

Participant and Training Institution Recommendations

Recommendations made by participants and staff with regard to practical or non-academic training included the following:

- Mid-winter conferences should be made more development-related or relevant to training.
- More emphasis should be given to the practical side of training.
- Practical training should be built into the regular program and institutionalized. Practical training offered or arranged by universities could be "sold" to the home country (as one staff member commented).
- Ph.D. candidate participants emphasized their desire to participate in university research and/or teaching assistantships and that the program to be flexible enough to allow for this.

Exhibit IV-4

1980 AID-Sponsored Mid-Winter Comunity Seminars

Themes	Location
A Cooperative Effort in Atlanta	Atlanta, Georgia
International Security: A New England Perspective on North/South Tension	Boston, Massachusetts
Queen City of the Midwest: Past, Present, Future	Cincinnati, Ohio
Adventure in World in Understanding Michigan State University	East Lansing, Michigan
Multi-Cultural Living on an International Border	El Paso, Texas
American Potpourri	Milwaukee, Wisonscin
Community Life and Citizen Activism in Urban and Rural Minnesota	Minneapolis, Minnesota
Health Care Needs and Solutions	Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
The Southwest: Past, Present, Future	Phoenix, Arizona
City of San Diego Metro II	San Diego, California
Spokane Experience II	Spokane, Washington
Utilization of Community Resources to Improve Quality of Life	St. Louis, Missouri
Dealing with Differences: Meet Syracuses American Indians and Refugees	Syracuse, New York
This is Florida	Winter Park, Florida

E. Support Systems and Community Setting

Support systems for the participant encompass living allowances, housing, family support, health insurance, participant contact with the contractor, administrative and personal support provided on-site by a program contact office, and other related areas. Support systems were described as the weakest link in the academic participant training program by several participants; they were rarely described as the strongest link. This result can be attributed to several problems or factors, including:

- Finding suitable housing was often difficult and time-consuming. In instances where participants were housed in university dormitories, this was problematical from the standpoint of noise level, younger and less mature residents, limited privacy, and other factors.
- Delays in health insurance payments were very common. Also, many participants seemed unaware of just what the HAC program covers.
- Many participants who had been professionals in their own country found it difficult to adjust to the lifestyle and living standards as permitted by the living allowance.
- The lack of AID policy and support made it difficult and frustrating for participants who did not want to be separated from their families for extended periods of time (i.e., a year or more).
- Delays in living allowance and other checks put hardships on participants living on very limited budgets.
- Regular monitoring and follow-through of participants while in the U.S. was the exception rather than the rule.

Support systems can be further described by the quantitative information obtained from the participants. Of all the participants interviewed 74 percent of them stated that they had to secure their housing largely on their own. Thirty-five percent of participants found it "very difficult" to live within their program budgets, 50 percent found it "somewhat difficult" and only 15 percent "not difficult." Approximately half of the participants had their HAC health insurance card (though some received theirs near the end of their stay or with wrong names or in some cases the card had expired). Of those participants who attempted to use the HAC system 69 percent experienced serious delay or difficulty in obtaining payment for their medical expenses. About 60 percent of the participants had some level of contact with their respective contractor at least once every three months on average, but 40 percent had less contact than this. Furthermore, contact was initiated in most instances by the participants themselves with some problem or request to make. All three contractors encourage their participants to call them whenever the need or occasion arises, but evidently active follow-up on the part of the three contractors is limited. Also, the responses of the participants indicate that PLA is generally the slowest in returning participant calls or responding to requests.

Most of the participants stated that they were generally comfortable with their community surroundings and social integration. The university's Foreign Student Office or Office of International Programs is a resource typically used by participants to bridge any gaps in this regard (and could be used more than is currently the situation). The most negative remarks about community setting were made by a few participants placed at schools in the South.

Participant and Training Institution Recommendations

Recommendations, particularly those made by the participants, were most numerous and consistent in the area of support systems. They include:

- There needs to be alternatives to the present health insurance program, such as allowing the participants to choose their own.
- Living allowances should keep up with cost-of-living increases.
- Book allowance payments should be made at the beginning of the quarter or semester when the need for book purchases is the greatest, rather than making the payments on a monthly basis.
- Some provision should be made for such health expenses as eyeglasses and emergency dental work.
- Check stubs or vouchers should substantiate payments sent to participants. Presently, it is difficult for both participants and program contact offices to keep track of what the payments are for (e.g., thesis fees, payment for attending a conference).
- Participants should be allowed to return to their home countries at least once every two years for personal and professional reasons.
- Additional support and encouragement should be provided to participants with spouses and children.
- Programs should be developed to improve social integration into the community.

- Participants should receive more positive feedback and other non-crisis communication from their contractor representative.
- It would be helpful to have at least two participants from the same country at each training site.

One major recommendation was made by staff members interviewed. Staff at universities who provide substantial adminstrative support through USDA program contact offices believe that they should receive some compensation from AID insofar as the support exceeds that given to other students. One SECID program contact felt the same way.

F. Summary

Chapter IV presents an examination of the academic participant training program based on information obtained on-site via interviews with participants and supporting staff. Twenty-four institutions were visited and 183 participants interviewed. With regard to the selection and placement of participants, most of the participants were selected by either their respective government or university in which they were working. Many of the respondents felt that the the selection process could be improved upon by means of more information on U.S. universities being made available to AID Missions and better communication channels between the Mission and the contractor.

A critical factor affecting the participant's orderly departure and arrival in the U.S. was sufficient notice of the call-forward and sufficient time allowed before the start of classes. Participants, in general, required more orientation in their home country before leaving.

Three-fifths of the participant's training programs were described as closely related to PIO/P training objectives, but a significant portion of them (38 percent) were described as only somewhat related. Three factors, in particular, which are likely to impact on the success of an academic training program are:

- The availability of a center-based program or contact office on-site to provide individual academic tailoring and follow-through and personal and administrative support;

- The quality of the institution in terms of curriculum, instruction, and facilities; and
- The nature of the participant's relationship with a faculty advisor.

One of the key weaknesses of almost any program is the lack of in-depth practical training. Several weaknesses were found in the support systems, as well, such as poor management of the health insurance program, problems in securing appropriate housing, payment systems, and routine monitoring and follow-up. Overall the participants and staff at the training institutions point to several instances of outstanding programs, poor programs, and certain weaknesses in the whole system.

V. STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommendations in Chapter V represent a careful assessment of the results obtained throughout the course of the study in all areas. They should be viewed as part of an evolving process for achieving overall improvement of the academic participant training program. Chapters I and II presented several study recommendations on a more conceptual and broader level for policy and program analysis. Chapter III contained recommendations made by the three contractors and Chapter IV, recommendations by participants and staff at the training institutions. DA has commented on and supplemented recommendations made throughout the preceding chapters.

The study recommendations presented in this chapter are both condensed and selective. For a closer and more detailed examination of the issues and the perspectives of the contractors and participants, it will be useful to refer to Chapters III and IV. Some participants' recommendations are excluded here, not because they are not recognized as valid, but because they are outside of the study's purview to cast judgment (e.g., increase participant living allowances, allow families to come with participants). They should be reviewed by AID in their own right, not as part of the study's final recommendations.

The recommendations are organized by the following topical areas:

A. Information systems to serve AID Missions

B. Contractor organizations

   1. AID OIT monitoring/evaluation of contractors
   2. Internal contractor management
   3. Innovative approaches to AID contracting

C. Selection of training institutions

   1. Selection criteria
   2. Logistical procedures
   3. Information systems

D. Arrival and orientation

E. Support systems

F. Practical experience training

Concluding comments are presented in the final section of this chapter.

A. Information Systems to Serve AID Missions

A concerted outreach effort should be made to provide information and technical assistance to AID Missions for facilitating their role in the selection of participants and development of training requests. Suggestions for information mechanisms to establish closer working relationships with Missions are:

- Periodic exchange of information through formal memos, instructions, handbooks, etc.
- Regular dissemination of materials on U.S. universities.
- Provision of more specific information on particular universities in which participants are placed; and
- Feedback to Missions of careful assessments of PIO/P's and training programs at the end of the participant's first semester or quarter. Overall direction, length of training, and need for adjustment should be reviewed in depth at this time and the AID Mission appropriately informed.

The kinds of university-related information that AID Missions should receive include admission requirements, selection processes, course offerings, degree titles and their meanings, grading systems, nature of examinations, time required to complete studies, transferability of credits from non-U.S. institutions, and so on. Better informed Missions would help to reduce misunderstandings and guide them in their initial training requests for participants. Such information would also be helpful to the participants, providing them a better opportunity to know what to expect at a U.S. university.

To further serve the overall information system for Missions, a clear tracking of cable traffic by OIT to ensure timely response is essential. As suggested in Chapter II, responsibility for cable communications at OIT should be moved to the Director's office where direct contact and supervision can be exercised.

B. Contractor Organizations

1. AID OIT Monitoring/Evaluation of Contractors

For monitoring and evaluation purposes, AID OIT should focus more on the overall direction and performance of the academic participant training program, rather than on the day-to-day operations of the contractors. If day-to-day administrative procedures are of importance in some areas, then written policies should be set forth explicitly in this regard. Verbal directives from OIT staff to contractors on a day-to-day basis for program administration tend to be confusing and inefficient.

The flow of factual reporting and monitoring data from the contractors to OIT and the careful review of such data are essential not only for effective monitoring of the contractors but also for overall policy direction of the program. Various mechanisms for achieving these ends include:

- Consistent, regular reporting of data from all three contractors using the same format;
- Review of monitoring data (e.g., data on late arrivals, health insurance problems, placement difficulties, etc.);
- Analysis of statistical report data (e.g., degree fields, distribution of countries being served, characteristics of participants);
- On-site interviews of participants and training staff on a periodic basis; and
- Ongoing annual evaluation including follow-up on returnees.

Planning and evaluation for long-range purposes should be emphasized. For example, overall flows of participants into the program in terms of area of specialty, country of origin, training objective, and other factors should receive policy review on a regular basis. Emphasis should be placed also on performance and results of the program, relative to merely monitoring the day-to-day mechanics of the program. Performance can be gauged in terms of Mission/participant satisfaction, follow-up on returnees, academic success of participant, improvements in support systems (e.g., health insurance), or other factors. The relative weight given to various measures of program performance (e.g., participant satisfaction) would vary according to policy importance.

2. Contractor Internal Management

Observations of internal management approaches were made as well during the course of the study. Some suggestions are:

- Not only cases, but especially parts of cases, should be assigned on the basis of the level and nature of expertise required, rather than assigning cases by caseload or geographic area. Varying kinds of expertise pertain to the placement function, administrative support, and subject field or specialty of the training. Various kinds of resources should be called upon to handle any one case. This kind of specialization and division of labor should have a favorable impact on productivity and appropriate matching of functions and skills.

- Management review, direction, and control should be exercised effectively over the handling of individual cases, as opposed to ad hoc approaches or too decentralized an approach.

- The placement function is a critical one, and as such the staff for this should be both highly professional and experienced.

- New staff should undergo formal orientation and training.

- Operational manuals, as well as AID's Handbook 10, should be readily available to all staff and kept up-to-date on a monthly basis.

- Information systems for statistical reporting and monitoring should be automated. In this day of word processors and micro-computers, it should be a requirement. Information links between OIT and the contractors should become automated at some point in the not too distant future.

3. Innovative Approaches to AID Contracting

Two significant innovative approaches to AID contracting are recommended here for future action. One approach, as described in Chapter II, is the one contractor mode of operation. One contractor could tie into other resources and organizations as appropriate, but could maintain central administrative control over such a network of resources. This approach would facilitate consistent procedures, performance, reporting, and monitoring.

Another innovative approach of major proportions is to involve training institutions more directly in the placement process and the academic participant training program. Combining this approach with the one contractor mode of operation could lead to the development and update of an information data base on international development and resources. The potential uses of such a data base are many including the exploration of innovative training alternatives such as utilizing university resources overseas to establish regional training centers. Other alternatives could be explored in this regard by bringing the university network and international education community into a working partnership with OIT. Their responsibilities, explicitly laid out in contractual arrangements, could include the Missions and AID in general.

C. Selection of Institution

1. Selection Criteria

One obvious criterion for selection of the institution is to place participants in programs deemed successful academically and otherwise. In this study, programs where the training was closely related to PIO/P objectives and the level of participant satisfaction was very high were often characterized by one or more of the following traits:

- Participant was placed in a program center which provided an international focus and student support systems.
- The institution and its facilities have a good or outstanding reputation.
- The faculty advisor works closely with the participant, has an interest in developing countries, has visited developing countries, and/or has a specialty closely aligned to the participant's own interests.

In past (and current) instances AID has provided financial support to international center-based programs and staff on-site at institutions who support academic participants. The success of these endeavors warrant further exploration.

Other recommendations on selection of the training institution include:

- Selection criteria should be uniform and consistently implemented among and within contractor organizations.

- AID policy on how to handle marginally qualified or difficult to place cases should be made explicit among all concerned, including the AID Missions.
- Diversification goal for placing students should be dropped as a selection criterion. There simply is not much point to it. The result of it is that some participants get placed in mediocre institutions, information and communication channels are thinly spread, and it is more difficult for the contractor to effectively monitor all the participants.
- Geographic location should be a secondary, not primary, criterion for selection.

Of paramount concern in the whole placement process is that the participant should be placed where the training objectives can be fulfilled and support can be effective. Everything else should be of secondary concern.

2. Logistical Procedures for Placement

Suggestions for logistical procedures in the selection process are:

- Contractor or placement staff should have access to files, references, and other sources of information pertaining to the training institutions previously attended by the participant and prospective institutions in the U.S. before contact with the university is made for admittance purposes.
- The program contact at a university should be utilized not only for gaining admittance, but also for developing and tailoring the program to meet PIO/P objectives in conjunction with gaining admittance.
- Preliminary readings before formal applications are made are always advisable. Institutions can be approached one-at-a-time if such readings can be obtained readily. Then the placement specialist should always aim first for the most appropriate institution for placement.

3. Information Systems for Placement

Contractors should develop and maintain information filing systems on universities, particularly those where contacts are made. Information about universities should include contact points, academic programs, curriculum, admission requirements, and participant experiences. Centralized information filing would be drawn from:

- Research on U.S. universities and training institutions attended previously by participants;
- Contacts made for placement purposes;
- Contractor monitoring of participants; and
- Evaluation including follow-up survey data on participants from various sources.

Such filing of information should be done on a systematic and regular basis.

As part of current information systems for placement, the Credential Analysis Worksheet (CAW) has been utilized by the contractors and by the training institutions more on occasion than on a consistent basis. The CAW is an expensive resource that should be made available more selectively in instances where the need for it is likely to be greater. Agricultural training institutes in developing countries, for example, are relatively less known in the U.S. and as such more reference information is needed on them. The CAW could be reformatted to allow more for the provision of specific kinds of information on foreign training institutions rather than general assessments of applicant qualifications. Also, CAW resources could be diverted to acquiring and disseminating relevant reference material. Final assessment and evaluation of qualifications then would be left up to the placement specialist and the prospective training institution.

D. Arrival and Orientation

As indicated throughout this report short notices on the call-forward and late arrivals have been problematical in numerous instances. It gives the participant a very negative outlook on the whole program. If nothing else can be achieved for a better performance in this regard, the participant's arrival should be delayed so that he or she will start the following quarter or semester. Other suggestions are:

- Participant orientation in the home country would help greatly with respect to expectations. Areas of information needed in particular are living allowances, program area of study, and university requirements for grades, courses, etc.

- Consideration might be given to replacing WIC orientation with orientation provided at the training site where feasible. This approach is likely to result in orientation more relevant and direct to the participant, and less adjustment or moving from one place to another would be required.

- Also, less adjustment and travel would be required if English language training could be provided at the training site rather than at ALIGU.

E. Support Systems

Numerous recommendations can be made with regard to support systems, including:

- The contractor should maintain active ongoing contact with support systems at the training site, including foreign student offices, faculty advisors, administrative support staff, and program centers.

- Non-crisis communication and monitoring on a regular basis between contractor and participant would facilitate effective follow-through and give reassurance to the participant. Case follow-up the first semester or quarter is especially advisable.

- Housing is difficult to secure for the participant before arrival since the participant should decide on this for himself or herself. However, arrival on-site at an early date and assistance arranged for on-site would be of great help.

- A consistently critical problem is the health insurance program (HAC). One alternative is simply to have the participant covered by the university health insurance policy. This could be arranged for as part of the placement process.

F. Complementary and Practical Experience

While mid-winter seminars are generally popular with participants, they are also thought of as too tourist-oriented and not relevant enough. One alternative to them is to use those funds set aside for complementary training to support university efforts to provide or arrange for in-depth practical training experiences.

AID policy on the practical training aspect of the program needs to be made explicit one way or another so that expectations can be clearly defined. For example, policy to institutionalize this aspect of the program should take into consideration the resources required for doing so, overall length of training, and possible time conflicts with academic studies.

G. Concluding Comments

It is hoped the above recommendations will provide OIT staff with some ideas for continuing their efforts to improve the academic participant training program which, in our opinion, is one of the most important aspects of U.S. foreign assistance efforts. Moreover, the potential for expanding OIT's role to one of advocacy and innovation in training concepts and program should be capitalized on as OIT staff are already exploring new options and alternatives in those directions.