

A REPORT OF THE CSIS
AMERICAS PROGRAM

U.S.-Cuba Academic and Science-Based Exchanges

PROSPECTS FOR A TWO-WAY STREET

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U.S.-CUBA ACADEMIC AND SCIENCE-BASED EXCHANGES PROSPECTS FOR A TWO-WAY STREET

Executive Summary

Since the early days of official U.S. public diplomacy at the outset of the Cold War, promoting dialogue with citizens of foreign nations has been a way to build bridges of understanding and defuse tensions. The Fulbright Exchange Program, which dates from 1946, and more recent U.S. International Visitor Programs have exposed individuals, some who later became national leaders, to American life and its democratic values. Exchanges with friendly countries are easy and help strengthen existing ties. Exchanges with hostile nations are sometimes nearly impossible but develop inroads that can lead to better relations. To the extent that the U.S. government can finance much of these activities, Americans consider it good public policy, even though such long-term investments can take decades to pay off.

Pursuing exchange opportunities with Cubans follows this logic, but with a twist. Current U.S. rules allow purposeful travel on the part of academics, students, medical professionals, and journalists. Over the past decade, as many as 2,500 American students a year have studied in Cuba. However, travel for Cubans to the United States is extremely limited. Since the revolution that replaced a petty dictator with a repressive, totalitarian government in 1959, the population has served as a captive labor force in which all able adults were expected to work for the state. In the past two years, that situation has begun to change as a result of the shift in leadership from Fidel Castro to his brother Raúl. The twist is that Cuban authorities remain deeply suspicious of any U.S. government involvement in exchanges and still worry about letting citizens travel to countries where they may be tempted to stay. More private and less U.S. government involvement in U.S.-Cuban exchanges may be a way to ease that logjam and make U.S.-Cuban exchanges more of a two-way street.

While lifting the U.S. ban on tourism to Cuba might put feet on the ground and increase chances for superficial encounters, exchanges afford some measure of control and open the door to relationships that may result in deeper understanding. While artistic and sports exchanges are probably the most familiar, they usually provide only modest exposure, whereas academic exchanges can involve intense discussions and personal interactions. Literature, social science, and economics are safe subjects that generate interesting debates. If they are designed to prevent leakage of sensitive technology, medical, scientific, and technological exchanges can be mutually beneficial and enable further cooperation in such areas as environmental protection, disaster response, and public health.

Conferences and study opportunities that take place in the United States afford the best possibility for enabling Cubans to experience American life and be exposed to democratic values. One caveat must be clearly understood: for the most part, Cuban exchange participants do not represent a broad cross-section of society. Rather, they are government employees, selected on the basis of loyalty to the state. Still, this segment of Cuban society should not be ignored.

As it turns out, the United States and Cuba have a long history of exchanges, ranging from short-term collaboration to long-standing partnerships. From the early twentieth century, the two countries have shared information in fields ranging from meteorology to dentistry. However, decades of tension followed the rise of Cuba's Soviet-style dictatorship and the break in bilateral relations. Still, a substantial number of education and science-based initiatives have been attempted since 1961, meeting with success and failure, depending on the political and social climate at the time.

It is worth noting that U.S. advocates of science exchanges have pursued initiatives with other closed societies, including Iran, North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or DPRK), Syria, and Myanmar. Most have faced significant challenges in arranging visits to partner countries. Nonetheless, these advocates have helped establish relationships between U.S. and partner-country participants that could be expanded when political relations improve. Such relationships include information sharing on topics such as health and medicine, agriculture, forestry, and technology and have contributed lessons on how to facilitate and plan scholarly exchanges in similar situations.

Also noteworthy are barriers that both the United States and Cuba impose on meetings. U.S. restrictions are grounded in legislation that tasks the Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) to regulate financial transactions and travel. A party desiring an exchange with Cubans must find a Cuban partner organization and work with the government. Visas for licensed American travelers to visit Cuba legally and exit permits for Cubans to travel to external locations are difficult but not impossible to obtain. Practical impediments include expenses that most Cubans are not able to pay. U.S. migration policies that welcome Cuban asylum seekers coupled with economic opportunities unmatched on the island have also led Cuban authorities to insist on picking participants they believe are likely to remain loyal to the regime and return to the island.

Until those situations change, best practices for conducting successful exchanges include observing equality in participant numbers and professional status. Agendas for conferences should be developed jointly to avoid sensitive subjects—a precaution that is especially important for events taking place in Cuba, where freedom of expression is restricted. A recent Latin American studies conference in San Francisco broke this guideline and featured Raúl Castro's daughter, who said she would vote to reelect President Obama, highlighting the fact that political observations by a U.S. exchange participant would not be tolerated in Cuba.¹ Finally, for study opportunities in the United States, official U.S. government sponsorship is a deal breaker, meaning that private institutions would need to cover all expenses for Cuban participants.

For the time being, prospects remain modest for meaningful exchanges as well as study opportunities for Cubans in the United States. However, properly structured, they might yield beneficial results in building friendly contacts and mutual understanding with Cuba's younger generations and perhaps future leaders. In 2002, President George W. Bush recommended a step-by-step ap-

1. Fox News Latino, "Cuban Leader's Daughter Rebuffs Press after Speech in California," EFE, May 25, 2012, <http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/politics/2012/05/25/cuban-leader-daughter-rebuffs-press-after-speech-in-california>. See also, Fox News, "Cubans Denied US Visas Have Record of Engagement," Associated Press, May 18, 2012, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2012/05/18/cubans-denied-us-visas-have-record-engagement/>.

proach to better relations with Cuba.² This is one area where the United States could take measures such as lowering U.S. visa fees, should the regime's foreign travel restrictions change. Changes in migration policies that grant automatic residency may not be practical until Cuba implements basic human rights guarantees. Although U.S. regulations are strict and Cuban travel barriers are difficult to overcome, academic exchanges that result in visits to the United States do occur on an infrequent basis and have the potential to expand if U.S. educational institutions and associations work within restrictions and guidelines, seek Cuban partners, and pay expenses. More have the potential to take place if the U.S. government is not the sponsor and if they avoid political advocacy.

Why Academic Exchanges with Cuba?

On the one hand, cultural and academic exchanges with any closed society are fraught with dangers and opportunities. Unless precautions are taken, pitfalls range from awkward situations and propaganda coups to espionage or transfer of sensitive information or export-controlled technology. On the other hand, opportunities include the chance to gain situational and contextual awareness of the world that counterparts inhabit, the networks in which they operate, and the unique advances in selected fields of study. Moreover, they facilitate communication channels that can be expanded if diplomatic relations improve, as in the case of Myanmar. For foreign participants, exchanges in the United States offer an atmosphere to think and speak freely as well as a lens through which to see the United States in a positive light.

More than 50 years after the revolution that brought the Castro brothers to power, the regime remains a hub of anti-U.S. hostility, still supports the development of authoritarian regimes in the hemisphere, and collaborates with similar governments elsewhere, such as that of Iran in the Middle East. Closer to home, Fidel Castro's counsel encouraged Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez to gradually impose authoritarian rule and supported the rise of similar leaders in Bolivia and Ecuador. Castro's aid to Colombia's two main guerrilla groups, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN), prolonged a brutal 40-year civil war. Cuba's Communist Party is a leading member of the Foro de São Paulo, a platform for dozens of Latin American leftist parties and three terrorist groups—the FARC, the ELN, and Peru's Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement—all of which have opposed U.S. policies favoring free trade, property rights, and the rule of law. Obviously, a more democratic and market-oriented Cuba is in the geopolitical, economic, and security interest of the United States.

The problem is to how to have any sway over influential figures in the regime or even to know much about what is being considered in decisionmaking circles. Diplomats in the U.S. Interest Section are largely shut out of internal dialogues and have constraints on contact with the general public. Despite desires to reconnect bridges of understanding between ordinary Cubans and the U.S. public, the regime put up a quarantine that succeeded in blocking most outside influence. Moreover, the U.S. embargo that limited commercial trade was modified after the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis to curb U.S. tourism and, as a by-product, personal contacts.

2. On May 20, 2002, the centennial of Cuba's independence from Spain, President Bush unveiled the outline of his Initiative for a New Cuba. While it denied commercial benefits to a hostile government, it offered a gradual easing of trade and travel restrictions in response to Cuban political and economic reforms. As reforms were not imminent, it was never implemented.

Thereafter, the United States focused more on one-way communications to break through Cuba's information blockade. During the 1980s, the establishment of Radio and TV Martí were examples of U.S. international broadcasting attempts to expose Cuban audiences to outside news and opinion. Had it passed, the Bridges to the Cuban People Act of 2001, introduced by Senator Christopher J. Dodd (D-CT), Senator Lincoln D. Chafee (R-RI), Representative James A. Leach (R-IA), and Representative José E. Serrano (D-NY) would have provided scholarships to a small population of Cuban students seeking to pursue graduate study in the United States.³ And for the past 20 years, U.S. State Department programs have sought to provide humanitarian assistance to political prisoners and their families, document human rights abuses, and promote freedom of expression for dissidents.

It is not easy to know how to calibrate such efforts. By most accounts, the Castro regime has successfully jammed some radio and most TV signals. The scholarship measure, aimed at children of dissidents, failed to win support in Congress, in part, because the Cuban government could have countered it by denying exit permits. Yet in the background, exchange efforts have slowly gained traction, posing opportunities for personal interaction and discussion on relatively benign topics. Although they do not afford platforms for U.S. participants to criticize the Castro brothers, they do build trust and offer insights into the thinking of midlevel officials, as nearly all Cuban attendees work for the state and need approval of senior government authorities to participate. Thus, academic exchanges and study opportunities offer chances for interaction with a different audience—midlevel members of the *nomenklatura*—and could expose them to life and attitudes in the United States.

Past U.S.-Cuban Exchanges

Cuba and the United States share a long history of scientific and academic relations with antecedents dating back to the nineteenth century. During the first half of the twentieth century, these efforts covered a diverse range of fields, including archaeology, meteorology, botany, zoology, and medicine, facilitated through the University of Havana. During this period, many Cuban academics studied in the United States. North American scientists also established relations with Cuban colleagues while conducting field research throughout Cuba and its territorial waters.⁴ At the time, such exchanges were sustained by—and contributed to—robust economic, commercial, and political ties between the two countries.⁵

3. In the fields of public health, public policy, economics, law, or other field of social science. The act advised the president to give preference to individuals not employed by the Cuban government or actively participating in the Communist Party. The first year of funding contemplated \$1.4 million for 20 scholarships, rising to \$2.4 million by the fifth year for 35 scholarships. See U.S. Senate, *S. 1017: Bridges to the Cuban People Act of 2001*, 107th Cong., 1st sess., June 12, 2001, <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/107/s1017/text>.

4. David E. Guggenheim and Jorge L. Fernández Chamero, “Cuba-US Collaboration in Marine Science and Conservation: To Advance Joint Activities for Science and Conservation in the Gulf of Mexico and Western Caribbean” (paper presented at workshop of the Center for International Policy of the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies of Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi, Cancún, Mexico, November 1–2, 2007), 3.

5. Milagros Martínez and Rosana Resende, “Academic Exchange between Cuba and the United States: A Brief Overview,” *Latin American Perspectives* 33, no. 5 (September 2006): 30–31.

Even after scientific and academic exchanges were curtailed in 1961 with the breaking of diplomatic ties, many researchers maintained links through nonofficial channels, and thus a limited number of exchanges continued. Interestingly, the Cuban revolution invigorated U.S. academic interest in Latin America, which led some major U.S. universities to establish departments of Latin American and Caribbean studies.⁶ Concurrently, Cuban interest in U.S. studies grew, and in 1972 a course on U.S. history was established at the University of Havana, making way for the first formal postrevolution academic contacts between the two countries, notably in the humanities and social sciences.⁷

In 1974, the Nixon administration adopted measures to ease regulations restricting academic and scientific exchanges, measures that the Carter administration took even further.⁸ Thus, academic and scientific exchange between U.S. researchers and Cuban counterparts grew during this period:

- In 1977, the first participation of Cuban scholars in the Congress of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA), took place in Houston, Texas.
- In 1978, two Cuban intellectuals, researching literature, linguistics and law, visited Yale, Harvard, Princeton, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- In 1979, a delegation from the School for Advanced International Studies of Johns Hopkins University, funded by the Ford Foundation, visited the University of Havana; that trip initiated a regular exchange between the two institutions.
- In the 1980s and 1990s, U.S. National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration cruises entered Cuban waters to perform marine research.⁹

This period of relatively increased cooperation in the realm of scientific and academic exchanges culminated with a memorandum of understanding signed by the Cuban Academy of Sciences and the Smithsonian Institution in 1980.¹⁰ Subsequently, the United States tightened policies toward Cuba, and in October 1985, President Ronald Reagan signed legislation making visits by Cuban intellectuals to the United States more difficult, based on the fact that their employer was the Cuban government. That year, all Cuban scholars from the Centro de Estudios de América were denied visas to participate in the LASA Congress in Albuquerque, New Mexico.¹¹ Subsequent scholarly meetings of Cubans and Americans took place in Mexico, Canada, and Cuba.¹²

Exchanges remained limited until the George H. W. Bush administration allowed Cuban scientists and academics to participate in U.S.-based meetings again, exemplified by the return of a Cuban delegation to the 1989 LASA Congress in Miami and by new programs dedicated to Cuban studies at Georgetown University's Center for Latin American Studies, American University, the University of Chicago, Harvard University, the City University of New York, Yale Uni-

6. *Ibid.*, 31.

7. *Ibid.*; Guggenheim and Fernández, "Cuba-US Collaboration in Marine Science and Conservation," 3.

8. Guggenheim and Fernández, "Cuba-US Collaboration in Marine Science and Conservation," 3.

9. *Ibid.*, 5.

10. "SI and Cuba Sign Memorandum of Understanding," Smithsonian Institution Archives, record unit 371, box 3, May 1980, 1, http://siarchives.si.edu/collections/siris_sic_1827.

11. Guggenheim and Fernández, "Cuba-US Collaboration in Marine Science and Conservation," 3.

12. *Ibid.*

versity, and the University of California system.¹³ Thereafter, foundation funding for U.S. -Cuban exchanges expanded, providing support for predominantly U.S.-based events welcoming Cuban intellectuals.

However, the Cuban Democracy Act of 1992¹⁴ seemed to encourage Cuban-U.S. academic and scientific collaboration on the one hand and while it tightened economic sanctions against the Cuban government on the other, causing the regime to take a defensive stance.¹⁵ The Clinton administration later authorized a variety of educational exchanges with Cuba, including licensing for Cuban faculty to teach in the United States and vice versa and allowing U.S. college students to study at the University of Havana beginning in the fall of 2000.¹⁶ As a result, the 1990s proved to be a growth period for such intellectual efforts, including the following notable projects:

- New U.S. academic programs focusing on Cuba were offered, like those at Florida International and Tulane universities, along with an increasing number of undergraduate courses for Americans offered in Cuba.
- Collaboration began between the Havana-based Center for Marine Research and the New York Botanical Garden.
- Cuban academics participated in conferences with the International Studies Association, the American Studies Association, the American Political Science Association, the International American Studies Association, the American Sociological Association, the American Public Health Association, the American Neurological Association, the American Library Association, the American Physical Society, and the American Chemical Society.
- The David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies inaugurated its visiting-researcher program, in which over 70 Cuban academics were able to connect with U.S. counterparts.
- In February 1999, Cuba received its first visit from the cruise ship *SS Universe Explorer* of the Semester at Sea program through the University of Pittsburgh's Institute for Shipboard Education.
- In June 1999, the U.S. Department of Agriculture awarded a project titled "The Role of the Agricultural Sector in Cuba's Integration into the Global Economy and Its Future Economic Structures: Implications for Florida and U.S. Agriculture" jointly to the Center for International Economic Research of the University of Havana and the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences of the University of Florida, Gainesville.¹⁷

By the end of this period, the number of U.S. students participating in study abroad programs in Cuba had expanded substantially, from fewer than 500 during the 1998–99 academic year to more than 2,500 in 2002–03.¹⁸ However, under the George W. Bush administration, the relationship experienced a curious amalgam of setbacks and breakthroughs:

13. Martínez and Resende, "Academic Exchange between Cuba and the United States," 34.

14. U.S. House of Representatives, *H.R. 5323: Cuban Democracy Act*, 102nd Cong., 2nd sess. (June 4, 1992).

15. Guggenheim and Fernández, "Cuba-US Collaboration in Marine Science and Conservation," 3; Martínez and Resende, "Academic Exchange between Cuba and the United States," 35.

16. Guggenheim and Fernández, "Cuba-US Collaboration in Marine Science and Conservation," 3.

17. Martínez and Resende, "Academic Exchange between Cuba and the United States," 30–37.

18. Guggenheim and Fernández, "Cuba-US Collaboration in Marine Science and Conservation," 3.

- In 2003, 60 U.S. scientists participated in the MarCuba Conference, which served as an international forum on marine research in Cuba, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Western Caribbean. However in 2006, only three Americans were able to participate.¹⁹
- In September 2003, a delegation from the American Association of State Colleges and Universities traveled to Cuba, marking the first meeting of heads of Cuban and U.S. universities.²⁰
- The U.S. government denied all 64 visas of Cubans intending to participate in the 2004 LASA Congress in Las Vegas and all 58 visas to Cuban participants at the 2006 congress in Puerto Rico.²¹
- In 2004, restrictions began limiting the number of academic, cultural, scientific, and technical exchanges, based on recommendations that they occur over a longer duration to discourage disguised tourism.²²
- In 2007, a meeting of a group of 15 Cubans and 15 Americans in Cancún, México, successfully took place, led by the Center for International Policy and the Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies at Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi²³

Furthermore, the number of American students studying in Cuba dropped substantially after 2004 as a result of the new restrictions on academic exchanges. As noted during the 2011 meeting of the Association of International Educators, these restrictions “limited study abroad programs in Cuba to those lasting at least 10 weeks, required university-led programs to be run by full-time faculty members and restricted universities with Cuba programs from enrolling students from institutions other than their own. All told, the number of U.S. students studying in Cuba fell from 2,148 in 2003–4 to 251 in 2008–9.”²⁴

Numbers could rise again as a result of the Obama administration’s new regulations on travel to Cuba, which the U.S. Department of the Treasury released in April 2011. These regulations allow accredited universities to operate programs in Cuba under a general license, providing a blanket authorization for students, faculty, and staff at these universities to participate in credit-bearing study abroad programs or in a formal course of study at a Cuban academic institution that can be counted toward completion of an undergraduate or graduate degree. However, people-to-people exchanges facilitated by third-party entities still require a specific license.

Some academics expect this change in policy to encourage more diverse forms of people-to-people exchanges between the two nations. “Never has Cuba been more interesting,” said John H. Coatsworth, dean of Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs, while speaking in May 2011 at the 63rd annual conference of the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers (NAFSA). “The new Obama rules were long in coming,” noted Coatsworth, “but they’re now even more liberal than the rules of the Clinton era.”²⁵

19. Ibid., 5.

20. Martínez and Resende, “Academic Exchange between Cuba and the United States,” 38.

21. Guggenheim and Fernández, “Cuba-US Collaboration in Marine Science and Conservation,” 3.

22. Colin L. Powell, *Commission for Assistance to a Free Cuba: Report to the President*, U.S. Department of State, May 2004, 30, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PCAAB192.pdf.

23. Guggenheim and Fernández, “Cuba-US Collaboration in Marine Science and Conservation,” 1.

24. Elizabeth Redden, “Return to Cuba,” *Inside Higher Ed*, June 1, 2011, http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2011/06/01/international_educators_discuss_renewed_academic_exchange_with_cuba.

25. Originally called the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers, it was renamed in 1990 as NAFS. Quoted in Rebecca Tollefson, “Cuba Has Never Been More Interesting,” NAFSA blog, <http://blog.nafsa.org/2011/06/01/cuba-has-never-been-more-interesting/>.

Exchanges with Other Closed Societies

Less known outside of U.S. diplomatic and academic circles, exchanges with other closed societies take place, provide context, and offer comparative examples.

Iran

The National Academies in Washington, D.C., began developing relationships with Iran through visits beginning in 1999. Despite being detained, threatened, and interrogated by Iranian intelligence officers, one of the leaders of this effort, Dr. Glenn Schweitzer, maintains that such exchanges can be useful. According to Schweitzer, “Politically sensitive issues are largely avoided. For instance, this program never touched the nuclear program issue.” Iran became a focal point for this type of exchange because Iranian students seemed to be winning science and technology competitions around the world.²⁶

In November 2008, the Association of American Universities organized a trip for six presidents of U.S. research universities to visit Iranian universities. The trip was aimed at identifying ways to enhance scientific and educational links in response to an invitation by the president of Sharif University of Technology in Tehran.²⁷ The visit complemented other exchange visits by U.S. scientists under the sponsorship of Iran’s National Academy of Sciences and the National Academy of Engineering. Under the academies’ program, Iranian scientists and engineers also visited U.S. universities and participated in meetings structured around “carefully defined topics of mutual scientific interest.”²⁸

North Korea

In December 2009, six U.S. scientists and academics engaged in a five-day visit to North Korea as the culmination of a four-year cooperative effort by the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), the U.S. Civilian Research and Development Foundation, the Korea Society, Syracuse University, and Pyongyang’s Kim Chaek University of Technology. Reportedly, the symposium explored the challenges and opportunities of academic exchanges. Each partner organization contributed its expertise on the value of student exchanges, cooperation among scientific communities, specific areas for advancing scientific collaboration, and how science can be used as an engagement tool.²⁹

26. Interview with Dr. Glenn Schweitzer, by Sadie May Davis and Nicholas R. Lombardo, April 25, 2011. See also “2010 AAAS Science Diplomacy Award Goes to Glenn E. Schweitzer for Building International Relations through Scientific Cooperation,” press release, *EurekaAlert!*, February 16, 2011, http://www.eurekaalert.org/pub_releases/2011-02/aaft-2as012811.php.

27. Barry Toiv, “AAU Leaders Plan Visit to Iranian Universities,” press release, American Association of Universities, October 24, 2008, <http://www.aau.edu/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=7826>.

28. *Ibid.*

29. American Association for the Advancement of Science, Center for Science Diplomacy, *2008–2009 Inaugural Year in Review*, July 15, 2009, http://diplomacy.aaas.org/files/CFD_YIR_Web.pdf. See also David Kramer, “US Scientists Step Up Their Efforts at diplomacy,” *Physics Today* 63, no. 2 (February 2010): 25–26.

Syria

In March 2009, a 10-member U.S. delegation of science, medical, and higher education experts visited Syria for four days of meetings to explore cooperation in health, agriculture, and scholarly exchanges. The delegation met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to discuss the central role of science and education in meeting national economic and social needs.³⁰ Bilateral working groups made recommendations that were adopted by the U.S. and Syrian delegations to collaborate on water, energy, and agricultural matters, where there are joint capacity and mutual interest between the two countries. Other initiatives included proposals to help Syrian hospitals gain accreditation, to consider establishing a Syrian-U.S. institute for advanced medical practices to benefit medical technicians and nurses, and to explore the potential for exchanges involving science and engineering students and faculty.³¹

Myanmar

In April 2010, the AAAS partnered with the U.S. Collection Humanitarian Corps³² to send a delegation of scientists and academics to Myanmar. The six-member delegation held high-level discussions on forestry, health, and other science-related issues with leading Burmese scientists and academics during three days of meetings. Burmese officials showed interest in “cooperatively addressing malaria and other infectious diseases and protecting forests and animal habitats” through engagement with counterparts from the United States.³³ Upon the delegation’s return to the United States, participants briefed members of Congress and U.S. State Department staff. Some members of the delegation also participated in a public event at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.³⁴

Because each closed society is different, engagement with one does not necessarily offer a template for collaboration with others. However, each experience contributes to a baseline for what time frames, conditions, laws, relevant actors, and possible outcomes could be expected.

U.S. Restrictions

As with the societies noted above, exchanges with Cuba require careful attention to statutory restrictions and allowances that apply to activities in Cuba for persons under U.S. jurisdiction and for Cuban nationals visiting the United States. The Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) regulates transactions related to travel, business, and exchange through the Code of Federal Regulations and Cuba Assets Control Regulations.³⁵ Partly because of these limits, exchanges in Cuba are slightly more complicated to arrange than those in other countries.

30. Ibid.

31. Edward Limpinen, “Syrian, U.S. Science and Health Leaders to Explore Cooperation,” *Science* 27, no. 5922 (March 2009): 1685–86.

32. The U.S. Collection Humanitarian Corps is a nonprofit organization based in the United States.

33. Peter Agre, “Life on the River of Science,” *Science* 28, no. 6016 (January 2011): 416–21.

34. CSIS Southeast Asian Program, “Humanitarian Assistance in Burma—Realities on the Ground,” event, April 30, 2010, <http://csis.org/event/humanitarian-assistance-burma-realities-ground>.

35. The U.S. Department of Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control maintains an online resource center that includes regulations, guides, forms, and advisories on travel and transactions with Cuba at <http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Pages/cuba.aspx>.

Conferences in Cuba

If an exchange event is held in Cuba, U.S. travelers must be licensed by OFAC. There are two categories of licensing, general and specific.

General licenses cover travel for U.S. government officials, journalists, support personnel, and full-time professionals conducting research; participants in conferences sponsored by international organizations headquartered outside the United States; telecommunications workers, students, and faculty of accredited U.S. universities participating in structured educational programs in Cuba; members and staff of U.S. religious organizations; and employees of a producer or distributor of certain agricultural commodities, medicine, or medical devices or of an entity representing such a producer or distributor.³⁶ Of note, U.S. students may take courses at the University of Havana, and U.S. academics may teach there, provided their stay is no less than 10 weeks.

Specific licenses are considered on a case-by-case basis for activities of private foundations and research or educational institutes not covered under OFAC general licensing, such as multiple trips to Cuba over an extended period of time or educational, people-to-people, and professional travel that does not qualify under a general license. Types of specific licenses available include those for individuals traveling for academic purposes but not under the auspices of an accredited U.S. graduate or undergraduate degree-granting institution; educational exchanges not involving academic credit pursuant to a degree; academic seminars, conferences, and workshops related to Cuba or global issues involving Cuba; professional research; and attendance at international professional meetings.³⁷

To apply for the specific license, an organization may submit an application in the form of a letter, complete with supporting documentation, or fill out an application form through OFAC's automated online process.³⁸

Conferences and Study in the United States

Past conference attendees from Cuba report that obtaining U.S. visas can be a significant hurdle. However, obtaining a U.S. visa in most foreign countries can be costly, time-consuming, and frustrating. Cuban participants may apply either online or at the U.S. Interest Section in Havana for a nonimmigrant visa to enter the United States. As of this writing, associated with the application is a \$220 fee, payable in Cuban convertible pesos. Most applicants receive answers within about 40 days, but determinations can last several months. An additional \$160 interview fee is charged when the applicant appears for an interview. Such fees may add up to the equivalent of a year's salary for a state worker. But beyond that, there are few additional requirements, except that Cuban travelers, like everyone else, must obey U.S. laws.

Cuban scholars visiting the United States are permitted by OFAC rules to engage in transactions typical to travel and maintenance within the United States, banking transactions, and any

36. Office of Foreign Assets Control, "Cuba: What You Need to Know about Sanctions against Cuba," U.S. Department of the Treasury, January 24, 2012, 4–8, <http://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/cuba.pdf>.

37. Ibid. See also "NAFSA Practice Advisory: New Regulations on Academic Travel to Cuba as Issued by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC), *NAFSA: Association of International Educators*, May 18, 2011, <http://www.nafsa.org/resource/library/default.aspx?id=24935>.

38. The application can be found at <https://cubatravel.ofac.treas.gov/>.

transactions related to the purpose for which the visa was issued. They also may receive payment of a stipend or salary to teach or engage in other scholarly activity at a sponsoring U.S. academic institution for the length of their coursework. Such earnings may be remitted to Cuba or carried back by the returning scholar as provided by U.S. law.³⁹

Cuban Restrictions

For now, most exchanges involve multiday conferences either in Cuba, third countries, or the United States and extended undergraduate and graduate studies by U.S. scholars in Cuba. Providing opportunities for foreigners to study in Cuba enhances Cuba's international image and is a source of hard currency for the government, except for medical training that is offered free. Some 31,000 foreign students study annually in Cuba, a more popular destination than either Brazil or Chile, the second- and third-most popular Latin American destinations.⁴⁰ Although the Cuban government does not specifically ban its citizens from studying abroad, opportunities are few.

Limits on foreign travel for average Cubans pose the highest hurdles for scholars wishing to study abroad. Potential travelers must obtain a letter of invitation from a foreign institution acceptable in the eyes of the government. For now, they need to obtain an exit permit from the Immigration Department of the Ministry of the Interior.⁴¹ Decisions can take anywhere from a few days to a few weeks. Those least likely to receive permission to travel are medical professionals, workers in the security sector or other sensitive jobs, dissidents, and youth. Cuban academics say only about 100 science researchers are studying abroad at any one time. A recent UNESCO report cites 1,604 students outside the country in 2009.⁴²

Beyond official restrictions, there are practical limits, the most significant being financial. For Cubans earning a typical state salary of \$20 to \$30 per month, the process of obtaining a letter of invitation from a U.S. institution and obtaining a Cuban exit permit can double what is spent on applying for a U.S. visa. While Cuban nationals entering the United States under nonimmigrant visas are free to engage in transactions typical to travel and maintenance within the United States, the reality is that the travel costs, living expenses, and tuition fees are way beyond most Cubans' means. In fact, tuition at most state and private colleges can be prohibitive even for middle-class American students who must often rely on scholarships and loans. Also, if a Cuban exchange participant stays in the United States more than 30 days, that person must reportedly remit \$150 a month to the Cuban consulate.⁴³

39. Office of Foreign Assets Control, "What You Need to Know about Sanctions against Cuba," 7.

40. In 2009, Cuba reported 30,961 students from abroad studying as opposed to 16,317 in Brazil and 12,159 in Chile. In addition, foreign medical students from underprivileged backgrounds may study at the University of Havana for free if they promise to return to practice in underserved locations in their home country. See United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Institute for Statistics, "Global Education Digest 2011, Comparing Education Statistics across the World," table 11, 194, http://www.uis.unesco.org/Library/Documents/global_education_digest_2011_en.pdf.

41. Personal interview, Gloria Berbena (PAO-Havana) and James Aguirre (POL/ECON-Havana), U.S. Department of State, by Sadie May Davis and Nicholas R. Lombardo, May 3, 2011.

42. Cuba sent 1,604 students outbound to study in Spain (779), Italy (115), Germany (104), Chile (94), and France (87), among others. See UNESCO Institute for Statistics, "Global Education Digest 2011," table 12, 202.

43. Victoria Burnett, "New Hints at Looser Rules on Travel Stir Hope in Cuba," *New York Times*, May 20, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/20/world/americas/new-hints-at-looser-travel-rules-stir-hope-in-cuba.html?pagewanted=all>.

The absence of adequate communication channels poses another obstacle. At present, students looking for opportunities to study abroad must deal with restrictions on Internet access that limit what ordinary Cubans can see, notwithstanding that Cuba has the third-lowest Internet penetration rate in the Western Hemisphere.⁴⁴ Visiting the U.S. Interests Section in Havana to find out about them could risk government harassment. If such barriers look too onerous, potential participants may not make the effort to gather information and identify themselves to the school or work authorities who may be in a position to choose travelers.

Ideological competition raises barriers. During the Cold War, U.S. Fulbright Exchanges sought to attract foreign scholars to the United States to expose them to democratic values and counter Soviet international communications. In 1985, when the Soviet Union and Cuba were recruiting underprivileged Latin American youth to attend Patrice Lumumba University in Moscow for Communist indoctrination alongside regular coursework, the United States established the Central American Peace Scholarships (CAPS) program, offering opportunities to study at U.S. vocational, community college, and university campuses. The objective was to “instill attitudes and beliefs of self-responsibility and self-initiative,” taking aim at Communist teachings that exhorted subservience to the state.⁴⁵ Probably as a consequence, the Cuban regime has long opposed any official U.S. proposal, such as the Bridges to the Cuban People Act of 2001, that, in effect, would have offered scholarships resulting in similar exposure.

Related are certain incentives to migrate. Early on during Fidel Castro’s rule, the United States began welcoming asylum seekers with passage of the Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966. It was modified in 1995 when the Clinton administration agreed to stop admitting Cuban rafters found at sea. Today, if Cubans arrive on U.S. shores, or present themselves at a port of entry, they are allowed to stay; after a year, they may apply for expedited residency status under a policy known as “wet foot–dry foot.” In addition, the U.S. government’s Cuban Medical Professional Parole Program, enacted in 2006, provides visas to doctors who defect while serving on aid missions in foreign countries.

For now, such factors may limit the scope of any potential exchange program. Moreover, it should come as no surprise that scholars invited to study in the United States will be screened and carefully selected by the regime. According to one Cuban academic, successful candidates would most likely be researchers who have productive careers waiting for them back home and whose loyalty is assured. At that, they might be allowed to travel for short periods of a few weeks up to a semester, but not years.

Even so, there are signs that Cuba’s external travel policies may be up for review in the near future. After announcing intentions to reform the economy in 2010, President Raúl Castro hinted at other possible changes. In the early months of 2012, the president of Cuba’s congress, Ricardo Alarcón, reportedly said that the regime was considering a “radical and profound” reform that an-

44. “Latin American Internet Usage Statistics,” *Internet World Stats*, March 16, 2012, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats10.htm#spanish>; “The Caribbean,” *Internet World Stats*, June 22, 2011, <http://www.internetworldstats.com/carib.htm>.

45. CAPS was a recommendation of the National Bipartisan Commission on Central America, known as the Kissinger Commission. See “Central American Scholarship Program (CASP), Cooperative Association of States for Scholarships (CASS)” (report presented at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., December 1, 1989–March 31, 1990).

other official, Deputy Foreign Minister Dagoberto Rodríguez, characterized as advanced.⁴⁶ No one outside inner government circles knows what those modifications might be or whether Cuba will risk allowing citizens to connect with the outside world as China has. Even if bureaucratic barriers were raised, practical matters such as finances would continue to pose obstacles.

Pitfalls and Possibilities

For now, U.S.-Cuban exchanges can become derailed in many ways, but experience shows that they can also succeed, build confidence, and help bring down communication barriers.

Hot Buttons

First, the most common mistake is failure to anticipate “hot-button” issues that prevent exchanges from taking place or could stop them midstream. U.S. foreign service officers who have served in Havana warn that anything “openly political” in Cuba will be immediately stopped. Moreover, U.S. official participation is not generally welcome in Cuba and, should it become apparent during an event, would immediately raise tensions. Events held in the United States, or even in a third country, are subject to scrutiny. Cuban authorities can easily misconstrue the appearance of political motives or even political side conversations among program participants. Institutions that are developing exchange programs to bring Cubans to the United States should closely monitor media reporting, as sensational publicity can negatively affect current and future endeavors.

Second, U.S. or third-country civil society groups might express concerns over the wisdom of inviting and donating airline tickets to scholars from a state governed by a hostile dictatorship. Likely areas of collaboration such as the arts, business administration, and science and technology may not be politically dangerous topics on their own, but the intent of exchanges is often in the eye of the beholder. A complicating factor is that host organizations would need to establish close relationships with regime officials, for now in the foreign affairs and possibly the interior ministries. That effort requires careful handling and knowledge of U.S. laws.

Many former exchange participants agree that medicine, science, and technology are highly beneficial discussion areas. However, technology can be touchy. On the part of the Cuban regime, discussions on the use of smart phones and social media, and even new media technology, could be interpreted as threatening. For example, senior Cuban officials might find a dialogue on the power of social media to liberate citizens in the Middle East a threat to their hold on power.

In the United States, many would have justifiable concerns over discussions or coursework construed as helping the regime bolster its military power or export it to nations that would harm Americans. Educational institutions are crossroads where considerable communication takes place, some related to research on export-controlled technology. For instance, discussions on cyber security would raise warning flags that information technology could find its way from Cuba to places like North Korea and Iran. While Cuba restricts the access of U.S. exchange participants to sensitive technology, Cuban participants in the United States would be in a much freer environment, such that precautions would need to be built into the exchange.

46. Burnett, “New Hints at Looser Rules on Travel Stir Hope in Cuba,” 6.

Such problems are not new, as Chinese students with state affiliations have been attending U.S. universities since the 1980s. In fact, China sent 76,830 graduate students to the United States in the 2010–11 school year.⁴⁷ And as many as 660,000 foreign scholars may be studying in the United States at any time.⁴⁸ On one hand, attracting talented foreigners enhances U.S. global competitiveness in science and technology. On the other, it allows some of them access to research in computer technology and critical defense systems. While some universities avoid contracts on export-controlled technology, those that seek such opportunities would be vulnerable to leakage. There, academics who have been unwilling to countenance security precautions in the past must learn to abide by new restraints to safeguard information and retain government and industry contracts. Although history suggests that émigrés working in sensitive positions pose a greater espionage risk because they are able to develop contacts over time, it also shows that foreign intelligence agents have studied at American universities and passed along sensitive information to their home country.⁴⁹

Finally, most work on potential revenue-generating activities for the regime is prohibited. For example, an American university could not organize a conference aimed directly at helping Cuban state enterprises market their products to the world. In choosing a conference topic, parties will need to know and stick to the guidelines issued by the U.S. Departments of Treasury and Commerce.

Best Practices

As in other countries, U.S. and Cuban authorities look favorably on initiatives that benefit their societies. Educational institutions should make a point of creating exchange opportunities that are not charitable but constructive and use participants from both countries equally. This approach is especially important as a starting point for new conference series. If equality is established at the beginning, it will be far easier to develop plans that lead to a successful academic exchange.

For conferences, there are three options—hosting them in Cuba, in a third-country, or in the United States. Holding seminars in Cuba or even a third country defeats the purpose of exposing Cuban scholars and academics to the United States. For now, an event in Cuba poses substantial challenges in seeking a host, arranging venues, obtaining OFAC licenses, transferring funds, and scheduling (planning should start a year in advance). Moreover, control over the event is in the hands of the Cuban government.

Holding the conference in a third country has the advantage of making travel from Cuba easier, as visa problems for both parties are reduced. Mexico, Canada, the Dominican Republic,

47. Daniel Golden, “American Universities Infected by Foreign Spies Detected by FBI,” *Bloomberg News*, April 8, 2012, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-04-08/american-universities-infected-by-foreign-spies-detected-by-fbi.html>.

48. UNESCO Institute for Statistics, “Global Education Digest 2011,” table 11, 194.

49. Although not on an exchange, Cuban émigrés Carlos and Elsa Alvarez were academics who were allegedly caught in 2005 using their employment at Florida International University to report on members of the Miami Cuban exile community and government officials. Carlos reportedly confessed to the FBI that he met several times with Mercedes Arce, a Cuban intelligence agent studying at New York’s New School for Social Research while she was assigned to Cuba’s United Nations mission. See Jay Weaver, “FIU Couple Heading to Jail in Cuban Spy Case,” *Miami Herald*, February 28, 2007, <http://www.latinamericanstudies.org/espionage/alvarez-jail.htm>; Juan O. Tamayo, “Cuban Police Arrest Top Aide to Parliament President,” *Miami Herald*, June 6, 2012, <http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/06/06/2836372/cuban-police-arrest-top-aide-to.html>.

or Spain may be options. Yet, other factors could cloud the bilateral nature of the conference and adversely affect later exchanges. For one, a high-profile conference could irritate sensitivities in the host nation. For another, it could place the event in an unfamiliar territory where it would be difficult to control intrusions by interest groups favoring or opposing either party.

A conference in the United States avoids some of these pitfalls. However, success in organizing one depends on the number of Cubans involved and their readiness to travel. Various sources claim that inviting fewer than 15 persons to the United States works well, although the latest Latin America Studies Association conference in May 2012 brought in 60, who mingled among some 4,000 other attendees. However, managing large groups is extremely ambitious and less likely to be approved because of the scrutiny such groups would face from both the Cuban and the U.S. government. Ideally, if a U.S.-Cuban exchange is the sole purpose of the event, no plans should be made until funding is guaranteed and all licenses or exit permits are approved. After that, planning may take several months.

Another key factor is finding an appropriate, credible in-country partner that can help win approval within the Cuban regime's bureaucracy. In most cases, academic exchanges may be facilitated through the international relations directorate of the desired institution, such as the University of Havana or the Academy of Sciences. Once selected, experienced exchange organizers generally agree that it may be best to let the in-country partner identify individual participants for the exchange. For now, American attempts to recruit participants may subject candidates to government monitoring, targeting, and possible harassment. To reduce the risk of getting stuck with ciphers, however, event organizers can require participants to make substantive presentations during their exchange.

New and useful subject areas could include sustainable food production, how to conduct environmental impact assessments, disaster response, and demographic challenges. Upon conclusion, a successful outcome is helped by the agreement of both sides to publish a summary of activities to build awareness that the work accomplished benefits both countries and does not further any hostile intent.

Foreign Study Opportunities

Since the late 1990s, it has been easier for American scholars to study and teach in Cuba than vice versa. In January 2011, the Obama administration eased Bush-era limits on U.S. scholars studying in Cuba, and university programs offering semesters in Cuba are rising, along with arts and history tours that border on tourism. U.S. students of modest means may study medicine in Cuba for free, on the premise that they will return to serve underprivileged communities in the United States. Most U.S. colleges with Cuba study programs partner with the University of Havana and offer Spanish immersion, as well as courses in the arts, social sciences, and humanities, although Cuba has nearly two dozen other institutions of higher learning at various locations on the island. Tuition, travel, and other associated fees for U.S. students may cost as much as \$20,000 a semester. While some programs appear to expose students to an idealized Cuba, a casual survey of press interviews with some returning scholars suggests that they see what they want to see. Some harbor utopian illusions, while others clearly do not.

While few Cuban nationals may take undergraduate or graduate courses in the United States now, opening digital educational opportunities, ride-aboard exchanges on marine research vessels,

long-distance mentoring, and study opportunities in third countries where U.S. institutions have foreign campuses may be ways to build confidence that will lead the Cuban government to permit more scholarly visits to the United States. Cuban officials willing to speak on the subject maintain that the U.S. government should refrain from sponsorship, that expenses need to be covered for Cuban students, and that postgraduate researchers and later graduate students are the most likely subjects to receive travel permits. More extensive partner agreements with U.S. colleges and universities with Cuba's university system offer possibilities for a time when relations improve between the two governments. Examples already exist between the University of Havana and many higher educational institutions in South America.

Conclusions

For now, prospects for meaningful exchanges and study opportunities between Cuba and the United States remain limited because of political and financial factors. Brief encounters like conferences do take place in both countries and third nations. However, regular extended study opportunities are really practical only for Americans who visit Cuba. And while private citizens make up almost all U.S. exchange and student populations, only trusted state workers may participate on Cuba's side. In that sense, exchanges are still a one-way street.

Over the long term, making exchanges less one-sided and more productive is worth the effort. For both nations, exchanges help participants gain situational and contextual awareness of the environment that their counterparts inhabit and establish communication links that can be strengthened when diplomatic relations improve. For foreign participants, they offer a lens through which to view the United States in a positive light. Moreover, they afford a basis for extending cooperation in mutually beneficial areas when and if political relations between the two countries begin to improve. Although the United States has an abiding interest in the well-being and freedom of Cubans as neighbors, particularly the courageous dissidents for whom it has been a steadfast advocate, it should be willing to open channels for discussion with members of the regime as well. As the Castro brothers face fewer days in leadership, such channels become even more salient. Because education, medicine, and science are important sectors in the Cuban state and have been traditional areas of mutual interest, a concerted effort on these subjects makes sense. Experienced organizers suggest that the best ways to get the most out of exchange opportunities are the following:

- Plan early for conferences: the bureaucratic hurdles can take months to overcome.
- Ensure that exchange events incorporate balanced inputs from both sides and respect counterparts' pride of accomplishment.
- Ensure that exchanges are mutually beneficial and avoid political "hot buttons" as well as controversial figures.
- Allow a partner institution in Cuba to navigate the bureaucratic maze on the other side of the Florida Straits.
- For now, refrain from attempting to recruit participants in Cuba or give too much prominence to particular attendees: doing so could have unfavorable consequences for them.
- Regarding study opportunities in the United States, government sponsorship seems to be a deal breaker. Furthermore, sponsoring institutions should be prepared to assume all costs.

- Ways to develop confidence leading to greater openness with students may include developing long-distance education opportunities, ride-aboard agreements on research vessels, and study opportunities in third countries where U.S. institutions have foreign campuses.

Certain policy changes on each side could benefit these exchanges:

- The United States could streamline the nonimmigrant visa application process and lower fees.
- Cuba could eliminate the need for exit permits so that all citizens—state employees, students, and independent entrepreneurs alike—could travel abroad more freely.
- By respecting civil liberties such as freedom of expression and association along with greater economic liberalization, the Cuban government could make life on the island more tolerable to curb emigration.

Until the last recommendation becomes a reality, the U.S. Congress will have little appetite for rescinding the Cuban Adjustment Act. Still, given the trend in modest economic and even minor political reforms, the time could be ripe for U.S.-Cuban people-to-people exchanges to begin to make a difference. The Obama administration thinks so and has eased some limits on contacts and travel. For now, academic exchanges will not assist the cause of Cuba's human rights activists, aid Cuba's independent journalists, or nurture independent Cuban nongovernmental organizations for which separate programs exist. What they will do is sustain lines of communication in anticipation of the day when political conditions improve. Meanwhile, meaningful reform on Cuba's part should be met by a meaningful U.S. response. In 2002, President George W. Bush said, "The goal of the United States policy toward Cuba is not a permanent embargo on Cuba's economy. The goal is freedom for Cuba's people"—even those, like most of the population, who are compelled to work for the state.⁵⁰

50. The White House, "President Bush Announces Initiative for a New Cuba," May 20, 2002, http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/05/images/20020520-1_p17378-05-th-515h.html.



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