

## **A VISION FOR THE NEXT TWENTY YEARS OF COMEXUS: ENHANCING U.S. – MEXICO EDUCATIONAL COOPERATION**

### **- COMEXUS**

The U.S. – Mexico Commission for Educational and Cultural Exchanges, COMEXUS, which is responsible for the administration of the Fulbright-García Robles scholarship programs, celebrated its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in November 2010. It offers a total of 25 programs for Mexican and American students, scholars, teachers and professionals. In 2009 COMEXUS awarded 165 new annual grants, renewed 57 annual grants, and gave 121 summer grants for teachers. Since its creation in 1990, the Commission has awarded a total of over 4,500 Fulbright-García Robles grants. Scholarship recipients represent the highest in academic excellence and leadership while also reflecting the broad cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of both countries.

In order to define a clear vision for the next 20 years of COMEXUS, both U.S. and Mexican governments will have to face difficult challenges and offer ambitious proposals. This new vision should utilize the Commission's great potential as a bi-national organization to become a central agent for facilitating dialogue and cooperation between both governments and between the people of both countries in the realm of higher education. Furthermore, this new vision will help bring educational issues back to the forefront of the bi-national agenda.

### **- A new Vision for COMEXUS in the context of the bi-national relation**

The United States and Mexico are inextricably linked. Both countries are tied together, not only geographically by a 2000 mile border, but as a result of the fact that Mexico is the United States' second trading partner, and the United States is Mexico's leading trading partner. Millions of jobs in both countries are connected to trade between the two countries. Over a tenth of all Americans, nearly 30 million people, trace their heritage to Mexico; 12 million of them were born in Mexico. Over ninety million people live in the Border States, including 14.5 million who live within three hundred miles of the border. México is the destination of choice for the largest number of American citizens living abroad (over one million). Recently, with the rise in the threat posed by international organized crime, the two countries have embarked on a bold partnership to strengthen the rule of law, to strengthen communities, and to reduce the consumption of narcotics and the associated violence that damages both societies, particularly communities, on both sides of the border. This partnership recognizes the central role of education for the future of both countries and their bi-lateral relationship.

Despite the many challenges that need to be addressed, cooperation has always characterized the relationship in higher education between the two countries and has long been a central element in the bi-national agenda. Since the signing of NAFTA, however, the growth in the bi-lateral relationship in higher education has not kept pace with the growing economic relationship. There has been relatively less investment in the programs in higher education that build long term mutual understanding, that will develop the next generation of leaders, and that can sustain and manage the broad and dense networks that make up this complex relationship. Countries like South Korea and Taiwan, with considerably smaller populations than Mexico, are sending higher numbers of students to American

Universities (in 2009, for instance, Mexico had 14,850, whereas South Korea had 75,065 and Taiwan 28,065). Meanwhile, the institutions of choice for American scholars and researchers continue to be in western Europe and increasingly, China (according to the 2009 “Open Doors” report, Mexico ranked seventh as an international destination for U.S. students after the United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, France, China and Australia.)

Aware that the successful management of a complex relationship full of challenges and opportunities requires a new generation of leaders that is diverse in its origins and composition, and, at the same time, sensitive to the specific needs of each country, both the US and Mexico will benefit from raising the profile of educational exchange and making it part of their strategic agenda. The U.S. has a long-term interest in promoting greater understanding of each country by the other through scholarship and research in all academic disciplines. In addition, the U.S. has a particular interest in developing professionals with the cultural and language skills to work closely with the growing U.S. population of Mexican descent. At the same time, Mexico has a strong interest in promoting graduate education in key strategic areas for Mexican students who can return home to contribute to their country's development.

#### - **A Program for Action**

As a result, ***the two governments propose to double educational opportunities between the United States and Mexico over the next five years by promoting a series of public and private partnerships that can encourage educational exchange and bi-national understanding.*** This would allow COMEXUS to offer the exchange programs that will prepare new, young leaders and give them the opportunity to know the other country's culture and society, as well as the importance of the bi-national relationship for both countries.

As part of this new vision, over three years, COMEXUS will seek to double the number of grants in existing programs and create new programs and initiatives.

Existing programs:

- Open Competition for Graduate Studies in the USA in priority fields for Mexican development, such as science and technology, education, environmental studies, teaching of English as a second language and engineering.
- Regional Competition for Masters (any field), which opens opportunities to leaders from Mexican states that have traditionally had less access to graduate education in the USA.
- English Teaching Assistantships, which bring young American students to Mexican public higher education institutions to support, as native speakers, the teaching of English.
- Graduate Studies grant for Mexican Indigenous Students.
- Summer Workshops in the USA for Mexican teachers from public schools and universities.
- Carlos Rico Grant for North American Studies, for American scholars.

New programs and initiatives:

- ***The Fulbright-García Robles Virtual Campus***, which includes Web-based, live seminars, conferences and colloquia on key strategic issues in US-Mexico bilateral relations. Mexican and American universities will be invited to participate.
- Creating a “**Virtual Library**” on US-Mexico Relations offering for free full text books and journals of interest for the bi-national relation.
- **The Fulbright García Robles Young Professionals in Government Program.** An internship and exchange program for young government professionals of both countries.
- **Workshops for Under-served Populations.** COMEXUS will offer, on a regular basis, workshops to expand the access of traditionally under-served Mexican groups to graduate education in the USA. Initial target groups are: indigenous students, graduates from Escuelas Normales and Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, and students from public universities.
- **Gender Studies.** This grant will provide opportunities to American and Mexican women to develop leadership skills and roles working with organizations and institutions of the other country.