In quiet anticipation, over 100 undergraduate students filled the classroom on a hot Jakarta summer afternoon. Most of the students were Islamic, interested in hearing the presentation and asking questions of the two Americans: a professor and a university president who had traveled to strengthen relationships with institutions of higher education in Southeast Asia. After telling the students that we wanted to connect our institutions, our faculty, our students, our staff, and our cultures, we fielded their questions.

- Why were we interested in exchanges with their university, literally on the other side of the globe?
- Would we assist them in working through the challenges of obtaining a visa to the United States?
- Were American students at our University interested in visiting Jakarta and learning about their culture? What about staff? What about faculty?
- Would Muslim students be as unwelcome in our country as rumor held?

After nearly 30 minutes of questions and answers, we left the small stage and were immediately surrounded by students who wanted our business cards and more information. They promised to be in contact with us.

This was one scene out of a kaleidoscope of life-changing experiences that my wife, Professor Robin Davisson, and I encountered on a recent trip to Southeast Asia. Our journey was part of a new initiative to increase educational and research exchanges with universities in Southeast Asia, with particular emphasis on those in predominantly Islamic countries. In three weeks, we visited with faculty, staff, and students of 18 universities in Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia and Indonesia. We uncovered fertile ground for reciprocal academic and cultural exchange.

In the midst of the Year of Public Engagement, I wish to use these few minutes we have together to reemphasize the critical importance of internationalization to our institution’s relationship with the world outside our walls, now and in the future. But before I discuss our University in particular, I would like to explore the question, how are universities faring overall in their internationalization efforts?

The American Council on Education, with funding from the Ford Foundation, recently developed a series of thoughtful documents addressing that question. Specific metrics indicating how well research universities are succeeding in our internationalization missions were included in the American Council on Education Center for Institutional and International Initiatives’ report “Measuring Internationalization at Research Universities.” The report says that, on an overall scale of internationalization, the majority of research universities scored “medium” or “medium-high,” with only 2 percent scoring “high.” The Center’s report also notes that “highly active institutions were likely to have assessed their internationalization efforts in the last three years or to have
included international education as one of the top five priorities in their strategic plan or their mission statement.” Among common strategies of what this group terms “highly active research universities” is obtaining external funding for international education, as well as the commitment to internationalization in mission statements, strategic plans and similar documents. Other important strategies include investing in study abroad activities, faculty research overseas, and educational and scholarly exchanges. At the UI, we are pursuing many of these avenues.

We have long been a globally oriented institution, and this broad perspective was reinforced during the administration of President James Freedman. More recently, and prior to the Year of Public Engagement, the vision of former Associate Provost Michael McNulty, current Associate Provost Bill Reisinger, and the staff of our Office of International Programs has built up tremendous momentum. The popularity of the International Studies Bachelor’s degree is increasing, currently with nearly 400 majors. The number of University of Iowa students taking advantage of study abroad opportunities continues to climb. Despite lagging applications, our enrollments of international students are quite steady, numbering approximately 2,200 this year, representing 109 countries. These international scholars interact with American students from all 50 states and all 99 counties within Iowa. The UI is serious about creating intellectual communities around international issues for faculty and students to learn from each other. Two examples are Hillcrest Residence Hall’s International Crossroads Learning Community and the UI’s partnership with the Iowa City Foreign Relations Council. Publicly engaged international projects abound throughout the University, such as the many initiatives of the UI Center for Human Rights, the pollution prevention intern program in Mexico organized by Engineers for a Sustainable World, and International Programs’ WiderNet Project, which seeks to improve digital communication for people in developing countries. The deans enthusiastically support the international aspects of their colleges and boast a myriad of active exchanges throughout the world. And throughout our campus, we believe it is important to encourage our students to study the languages, cultures, literatures, and histories of other peoples around the world. Such study not only personally enriches students and contributes to strong critical thinking skills, but it also is important to successful careers in an increasingly globalized world. Furthermore, a populace educated in world cultures is much more likely to enjoy stronger security and better foreign relations.

As in so many activities on our campus, the students are important leaders in the University’s international efforts. Organizations of students from many countries are active at the UI, and we value them highly. I learned much from meeting with UI student leaders from Southeast Asia prior to our trip, and we in the UI administration continue to have very worthwhile interactions with them. These international students present a unique perspective. With one foot in each culture, they are important ambassadors for both.

*While passing through immigration in an international airport, observing security precautions applied to both returning citizens and foreign visitors, Robin and I are mindful of the change in the international environment since September 11, 2001. We*
note two stages at which international travelers face increased scrutiny: first, upon entering the airport of departure and, second, upon immigration into the country of arrival. We note the careful attention paid to luggage, to carry-on packages, and to people at every airport, especially to those whose appearance and attire suggest some specific countries of origin. Our own luggage is subjected to extraordinary scrutiny, perhaps related to our itinerary. We realize that this is a focal point of the dilemma of finding the right balance between security and openness, not only for the United States, but for any country receiving a substantial number of international visitors.

Despite our successes and support of internationalization at the UI, our country and our world are at an especially critical juncture—socially, culturally, and academically—that compels us to pay attention to educational exchange between the United States and our academic colleagues throughout the world. The U.S. National Academies this year issued the report “Policy Implications: International Graduate Students and Postdoctoral Scholars in the United States.” This document notes the critical importance of recruiting, educating and training a cross-section of U.S. students for careers in science and engineering. It also emphasizes the continuing need to attract and retain talented students from other nations. Nationwide over 500,000 students, mainly graduate students, are an important part of the fabric of American universities. At our own University, fully 50% of graduate students in the physical and mathematical sciences, and 25% of those in the life sciences are international students, the majority Asian in origin. We must not take their presence for granted, and certainly not their many contributions to our research, teaching, and cultural milieu. National competitiveness, now and in the future, depends upon a mutual interdependence between our country and technologically advancing countries abroad in the worldwide development and maintenance of expertise in science and engineering.

After many years of steady growth of the international population in American universities, the trend has reversed since September 11, 2001. International applications and enrollments from a broad spectrum of countries have decreased substantially. Earlier this year, the Council of Graduate Schools reported a 5% decrease in international student applications from 2004-2005, following immediately on the prior year’s 28% decline. The CGS concluded that “despite significant efforts by the federal government and by U.S. graduate schools, international interest in graduate study in the U.S. is not rebounding.” In the 2002-03 academic year, enrollments at U.S. universities from various Southeast Asian countries decreased by 10-14%. Declines from Middle Eastern countries reached up to 25%. Applications and enrollments from China have flattened. Our need for interchange with these specific parts of the world is most critical today.

The reasons for the drops in enrollments are well understood:

- Difficulties in obtaining visas related to understandably increased attention to American national security; and
- Widespread perception, particularly in Islamic cultures, that international students are not welcome in our nation, or at least not as welcome as they perceived themselves to be just a few years earlier.
Earlier this year, the Association of American Universities, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and 38 other leading associations in academia in general and in science and engineering specifically, urged our government to accelerate its efforts to “reform the visa process for international students, scholars, and researchers.” Suggested strategies included renegotiating visa reciprocity agreements to extend the duration of visas and permitting multiple entries on a single visa.

A dry, warm and breezy Friday afternoon on the northeast shore of Malaysia in Terengganu state. Hundreds of men on foot, on scooters, and on bicycles hurry to dozens of mosques to attend afternoon prayers. Their colorful robes billow behind them, the flowing lines punctuated by the appearance of cell phones on the riders’ hips. The road soon clears as the faithful perform the afternoon ritual. Terengganu is a sister state of Iowa. We are said to be the only American state to have a sister-state relationship in Malaysia. We are welcome here, and recognized as Iowans, from The University of Iowa, home of the International Writing Program, among other distinctions.

Why would The University of Iowa be a place to initiate special creative efforts to increase exchange with universities around the globe, particularly those in Islamic cultures? There are plenty of reasons, and some may be surprising.

First, the sister-state relationship I just mentioned indicates our state leadership’s commitment to international people-to-people interactions.

Second, we have a long-standing Islamic community in the area. The oldest standing mosque in the United States, and generally accepted to be the first ever built, is in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Third, the International Writing Program has brought numerous writers from the Islamic world to this University over decades. These writers have carried back the news of a welcoming and culturally sensitive environment in the University and in the greater Iowa City area.

Fourth, people-to-people cultural exchange—variously described as public diplomacy or cultural diplomacy—is another longstanding activity on this campus gaining national momentum. Professor Christopher Merrill of our English Department and Director of the International Writing Program was a principal author of an important new report authorized by the U.S. Congress concerning cultural diplomacy. This report, “Cultural Diplomacy: The Linchpin of Public Diplomacy,” expertly and succinctly makes an argument for the critical importance of cultural diplomacy in the present international situation. It also sets out bold recommendations for action, such as support for enhanced educational and cultural exchange, a responsibility of our great universities. Although the report has not been released by the State Department, we anticipate many opportunities to do our share to fulfill their recommendations.
Fifth, The University of Iowa recently joined the North American Network of Cities of Asylum. Our membership is a signal to the world that we are willing to turn our concern for writers of conscience into concrete action. This is not to say that exchanges between our institution and those in Southeast Asia or elsewhere should be limited to scholars and artists at risk. In fact, the success of these exchanges will depend on the breadth of experiences from both sides of the exchange. However, the unique attributes of our state, community and institution I have outlined may make us more attractive to people crossing a large and often dangerous cultural chasm by coming to the United States.

A dizzying dance of 15 million Jakartans at rush hour moves to the sounds of cars, motorcycles and scooters, mixed with the otherworldly and haunting voice of the muezzin calling the faithful to prayer. The island of Java, which is about the same geographical size as the State of Iowa, is home to over 100 million Indonesians, the largest Islamic country on the globe. We are drawn to understand and to help narrow the separation between our cultures. How better to begin that journey than by academic and cultural exchange?

In this Year of Public Engagement and beyond, internationalization will continue to be an ever-increasing and strengthening feature of our University’s character and commitments. How can we turn our good intentions into concrete action?

First, we are working to obtain new funding to facilitate international exchanges with universities in Southeast Asia, with particular focus on predominantly Islamic countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia. Details of this potential funding will be available in the not-too-distant future.

Second, we are working with our peer institutions in the Association of American Universities to keep the issue of internationalization high among the priorities of this prestigious academic leadership organization. Through the good offices of Derek Willard, Special Assistant to the President for Governmental Relations and Associate Vice President for Research, and with the support of the AAU leadership, we are working to make internationalization an even sharper focus of research universities across America.

Third, members of our Iowa Congressional delegation greatly support our internationalization efforts. They have agreed to work with us to improve our communication with appropriate federal offices. Our goal is an optimal balance between our country’s security needs and higher education’s critically important need for open campuses and spirit of inquiry. The former U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell used the phrase “secure borders, open doors” to describe this sought-after balance. But how do we define this optimal balance? Concerns about security will vary with the country of origin of individual students, their fields of academic interest, and the nature of recommended exchanges. However complex or challenging the problem, though, we cannot fail to find this optimal balance for the sake of academic openness, intercultural understanding, and a truly more secure world.
Finally, we must support our University’s major goal of diversity in our new strategic plan, "The Iowa Promise," including diversity based on internationalization. I admire and publicly recognize Executive Vice President and Provost Mike Hogan’s focus on making diversity one of the University’s main goals throughout the strategic planning process that he headed. I also acknowledge and thank him for his efforts to direct more resources toward improving the diversity of our campus community with particular focus on racial and ethnic diversity. One important way to accomplish this diversity is to recognize and promote the centrality of international programs to the breadth of our campus activities, education, discovery and service. Thus today we are announcing two new programs supported by the Office of the President and the Office of the Provost to enhance the visibility and effectiveness of internationalization at the UI.

First, Provost Hogan will sponsor, beginning this spring semester, an annual campus-wide symposium on selected current international issues affecting our country and our campus. Mike Hogan and his staff are developing the details of the first such Provost’s Conference on International Affairs, to be held in Spring, 2006.

Second, we are establishing a President’s Award for Excellence in International Programs to be given to a faculty member whose efforts have successfully promoted international education, intercultural understanding, cultural diplomacy, or other international activities. Because of the extraordinary activity on our campus, I look forward to receiving an extraordinary set of nominations. Details of this award and a call for nominations will be forthcoming shortly.

Internationalizing our campus and community goes beyond study-abroad activities, faculty research overseas, and educational and scholarly exchanges. It includes the important work of welcoming an increasingly diverse international population into our University and the greater community. We are proud that the University of Iowa student body includes over 2000 international students. But our faculty and staff should include a growing number of individuals of international origin as well. Let me take this opportunity to acknowledge our new Charter Committee on Diversity, who will be instrumental in these recruitment efforts. I am pleased to report that the membership of this committee has been chosen by elected staff, student and faculty leadership. The committee will be co-chaired by Professor Salome Raheim of the School of Social Work in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and Maggie Hogan, Research Assistant in the College of Pharmacy. We will be consulting intensively with this committee on a variety of diversity issues, including our internationalization efforts. I would also like to thank Professor Carolyn Colvin of the College of Education for her tireless and effective efforts on the ad hoc Diversity Committee, the precursor to our new charter committee.

Let us take a closer look at one specific example of a group from which we hope to enhance our recruitment: the Latino/Latina population. The number of our neighbors who are of Latino/Latina origin is growing rapidly, many of them new immigrants to the United States. They now constitute the largest minority group in the United States.
Similarly, in the State of Iowa, the growth has been quite robust. In reviewing the University’s population of underrepresented groups, we exceed the demographic statistics for the state in all groups except Latino/Latina. This is not to say that we can cease efforts to increase our population of other ethnic and racial groups, nor to cease efforts to increase representation of all of these groups in positions of responsibility at the University. Far from it. We are currently working with the Council on the Status of Latinos, the African American Council, and other groups to accomplish concrete successes in the area of diversity.

However, in recent conversations with the Council on the Status of Latinos, we have learned even more about the demographics in our state, community, and institution. Therefore, one additional focus of the Year of Public Engagement and our diversity efforts will be on the Latino/Latina population. In the academic realm, one important initiative supported by Provost Hogan is a future Latino/Latina Studies program, currently in development in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

One final, and ultimately perhaps most important, reason to emphasize our internationalization efforts is for the UI to better fulfill our role as a marketplace of ideas, as a protector and promoter of open speech, of respectful disagreement, of debate and discourse. Some have said that freedom of speech and even freedom of thought suffer in times of war, in times of political polarization, in this or any other country. Whether this is true in general or specifically in our time and place is itself a matter on which reasonable people may disagree. But wherever the truth may lie, our best chance to uncover it will surely be by open, frank exchange among academic scholars, students, and the general public. How better to deal with our fears, our anger, our individual prejudices and biases than to uncover them through public discourse, in order to promote understanding and healing? How better to discover our common ideals and our wonderfully diverse heritages than to cast light upon them through the power of education? Intellectual freedom is a key ingredient in international understanding. We will use the presence of dozens of national perspectives to seek a place of meeting, of connection.

The intimate dinner in Jakarta nears its end. Our hosts, from universities, non-governmental agencies, the diplomatic service, even an Iowa IWP alumnus, bid us farewell. We promise to return, to connect again, to gain invited entry into each other's lives and worlds. We intend to keep that promise. We invite you to join us.

Thank you.