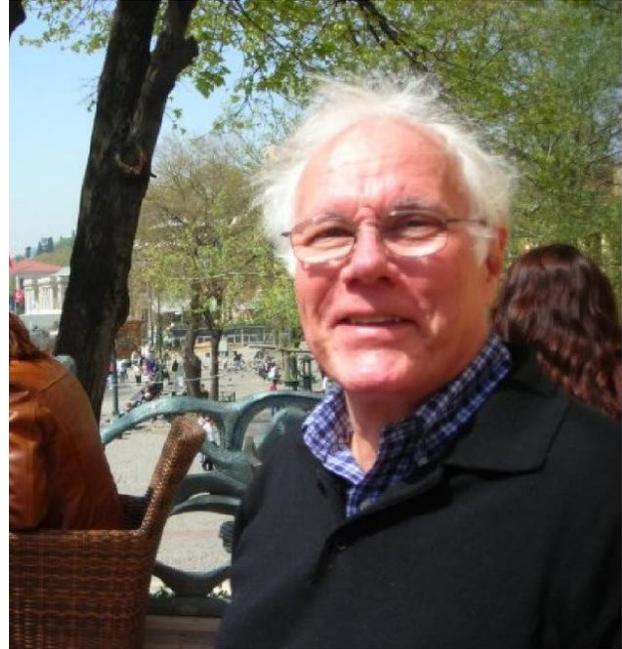


Norm Peterson: An Appreciation

In the early days of the Reagan administration, US Information Agency (USIA) Director and presidential pal Charles Z. Wick had a big idea: that the U.S. needed a global satellite TV network to connect with audiences around the world and, in time, become the centerpiece of American public diplomacy.

The problem was how to pay for it.

Wick's solution: to ask Congress to take money from USIA's exchanges budget to fund Worldnet.



At the time, Jay Gildner, a distinguished senior Foreign Service officer, was the highest-ranking career official in USIA's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). It fell to Gildner to inform the exchange and higher education communities of this funding decision, which would drastically reduce the dollars available for flagship exchanges like the Fulbright and International Visitor programs, along with many others.

Among those with whom Gildner met was Cassie Pyle, executive director of the Council for the International Exchange of Scholars (CIES) and a leading figure in the international education/ exchange communities.

Pyle was having none of it. She reported that she told Gildner that the communities would never accept this proposal, and that 'we will take this to the streets.'

This conversation occurred in 1981, at a time when 'taking it to the streets' still evoked visions of massive anti-war protests and marches for civil rights.

For our community, here's what 'the streets' looked like in the early 1980s: an extra desk in a cubicle at the DuPont Circle headquarters of CIES. The guy sitting at that desk was Norm Peterson.

Norm Peterson passed away recently. Before his retirement, he served for 20 years as senior international education officer at Montana State University, and played leading roles in groups such as NAFSA, the Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA), and the Coalition for International Education.

From his CIES cubicle, supported by contributions from nearly 20 international education organizations, Norm hired an assistant, named his operation The Liaison Group, and got to

work. Action resulted: letters with hundreds of signatures to key Members of Congress in support of exchange funding, countless phone calls and meetings, and eventually, Congressional staff delegation trips to international destinations to view the impacts of exchange programs.

His action contributed to an important outcome: Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-RI) sponsored a successful amendment that mandated, over time, the doubling of the federal exchanges budget. Charlie Wick wound up with a version of Worldnet, but not at the expense of exchange programs, which grew significantly in size, scope, and impact.

That success might be legacy enough, but Norm went further. Working with Carl Herrin, then leading the International Exchange Association, an umbrella group for citizen and youth exchange sponsors, they merged their organizations into a single entity in 1993, the Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange. The Alliance brought together for the first time the entire range of international exchange programs – from high school students to senior scholars – and grew into a significant advocacy voice for the entire community.

During the more than 12 years at the helm of these coalitions, Norm's leadership -- and the active engagement of his member organizations -- touched virtually every key public policy issue affecting international exchange: funding for USIA's exchanges and the Department of Education's Title VI programs; immigration matters affecting exchanges, notably around the Exchange Visitor Program; federal tax policy affecting international scholars and students; financial aid for study abroad; and the creation of the Defense Department's Boren scholarship and fellowship programs for advanced language study.

To these efforts, Norm brought keen perception and personal experience. Formally trained as an academic in philosophy, he had his initiation into international education through study abroad (he was a site director in the U.K. and at the International Student Exchange Program, then at Georgetown University). While he acquired his international education policy chops on the job, he brought to this calling a masterful eye for the intersection between the lofty goals that underpinned the Fulbright-Hays Act and the practical reality of building a coalition and gathering supporters. Among the many ways that he conveyed that practicality was a pamphlet he crafted early in his Liaison Group time to help practitioners be successful in advocating for these programs. It remains one of the best how-to guides to lobbying.

When Norm moved back to campus to pursue his career, he left behind the Alliance, an organization designed to fight those battles on behalf of the entire community.

As Norm's successor at the Alliance (Michael McCarry), said in remarks to a NAFSA regional conference in 2004, "Norm has probably done more than anyone in our community to make us understand how critical advocacy is to our field, and why it needs to be part of the job description of every international education or exchange professional."

The Alliance has grown in size, stature, and reach since Norm's departure. For his role in founding the Alliance and his achievements there and elsewhere, we will remember Norm as one of our field's all-time advocacy greats.

Michael McCarry
Executive Director (ret.), the Alliance for International Exchange

Carl Herrin
Chief of Staff, President's Office
Worcester State University
Former Executive Director, International Exchange Association