



Transatlantic High-Level Roundtable Summary

“Towards a common framework for EU-U.S. Higher Education”

May 2, 2024

Washington, DC

Background and Objectives

On May 2, IIE and DAAD convened a high-level roundtable of US and European stakeholders to discuss transatlantic partnership in higher education. The Washington, DC roundtable was a continuation of the first Transatlantic high-level roundtable convened by DAAD and IIE in Brussels (October 9, 2023) in advance of the EU-U.S. Summit in Washington, DC on October 20, 2023. The 2023 joint statement released from the EU-U.S. Summit reinforced the critical importance of the transatlantic relationship through people-to-people exchanges and included a commitment by EU and U.S. leadership to increase support for academic exchanges over the next five years.

The overall goal was to map the current opportunities, discuss the critical importance of supporting and expanding current programs with a focus on creating equitable and accessible opportunities and engage academia, industry, and government in innovative collaborations for increasing research, student mobility and people-to-people exchanges. The high-level transatlantic roundtable explored why and how transatlantic cooperation in higher education matters and how to leverage its potential. Roundtable participants discussed the feasibility of a common framework for collaborative activities. They also shared examples of successful models of cross-institutional and multilateral partnerships that could be adapted to address shared priorities in higher education.

Key Takeaways by Session

Opening Remarks:

- Allan Goodman, *Chief Executive Officer, Institute of International Education*
- Kai Sicks, *Secretary General, German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD)*

Over the past decade, the general public’s trust in the EU-U.S. relationship has declined. However, public perception belies reality. The EU and U.S. share robust, longstanding economic and security relationships. Similarly, transatlantic academic exchange is robust: there are thousands of partnerships between higher education institutions in the EU and U.S., and thousands of students from the EU and U.S. participate in flagship exchanges, such as Erasmus+ and the Fulbright Program. The roundtable spoke to this gap in perception versus reality, focused on two questions:

- How might educational exchange further strengthen and promote the resilience of the transatlantic relationship?
- What platforms are needed to enhance student and scholar mobility between the EU and U.S.?



Opening Session:

Developing a Bold Agenda for Transatlantic Exchange – Vision for Uncertain Times

Speakers

- Michael Curtis, *Deputy Chief of Mission, Delegation of the European Union to the U.S.*
- Axel Dittmann, *Deputy Head of Mission, Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany*
- Marianne Craven, *Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary for Academic Programs, U.S. Department of State*

Key Questions

- Why are research and education exchange important?
- What challenges do we face in strengthening international exchange?

Key Takeaways

1. **Exchanges are indispensable to transatlantic relations, because they advance shared values.** These include democracy, rule of law, economic development, and the shared prosperity of both the EU and U.S. By working together, we can be centers for cooperation, democracy, and pluralism.
2. **Exchange builds important skill sets among EU and U.S. citizens so that they can tackle important global challenges.** Considering major structural shifts, such as the rise of Asia-Pacific, advancements in Artificial Intelligence (AI), and climate change, mobility fosters skills such as empathy, tolerance, excellence, and innovation. Through exposure to diverse facilities, teaching methods, ideas, and approaches, our people and institutions can strengthen capacity, build cultural understanding and be better equipped as leaders to tackle the major issues facing our world today.
3. **We are currently in a moment of resurgent interest in transatlantic exchange.** There has been a year-over-year increase in the number of U.S. students doing exchange to EU, as well as an increase in the number of U.S. organizations participating in Horizon projects. EU and U.S. authorities have noted ways that both sides can build on this momentum. The EU-U.S. Summit in October 2023 called for increased people-to-people exchange through funding for Fulbright commissions in member states, an increase in member-state contributions for the Erasmus+ program, and expansion of the Fulbright Schuman Program.
4. **To meet the need and demand for transatlantic exchange, we must eliminate, or at least mitigate, barriers to participation.** Some of the biggest challenges our field is facing are practical: these include financing, credentials, knowledge of what exists program-wise, and the inability of students to take time off between high school and university. Inflation and costs remain a challenge. The field should consider increasing the number of public-private sector partnerships to support exchange.



Session 1: Mapping existing initiatives and programs: Setting up a framework for deeper transatlantic collaboration.

Speakers

- Sarah Ilchman, *Co-President, Institute of International Education (IIE) - Moderator*
- Bruno Castro Benito, *International Cooperation with the Americas, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, European Commission (online)*
- Birgit Klüsener, *Director Scholarship Department, DAAD*
- Lily Lopez-McGee, *Executive Director, Diversity Abroad*
- Jill Blondin, *Associate Vice Provost for Global initiatives, Virginia Commonwealth University*

Key Question

- What perspectives need to be considered in setting up a framework for deeper transatlantic collaboration?

Key Takeaways

1. **If we focus on the issue of affordability, we are letting ourselves off the hook for everything else we can do.** Since 2015, several global humanitarian and economic crises with regional repercussions have constrained public budgets. An increase in government funding at all levels would be most beneficial to sustaining transatlantic exchange. However, there are many other cost-effective solutions that stakeholders at the policy, implementation, and higher education institution level can promote in conjunction with the call for funding commitments to exchange. We must challenge the scarcity mindset and think about ways that we can collaborate across agencies and institutions to increase opportunity.
2. **Although diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA) „look different“ in the EU and the U.S, relevant stakeholders should ensure that underrepresented populations have the opportunity to participate in exchange.** Student demographics have changed rapidly in the past decade, and those who work with underrepresented students in both EU and U.S. context are often not in same rooms as those running international education initiatives. EU and U.S. policy makers are also already trying to increase outreach to institutions, such as community colleges or minority-serving institutions (MSIs), that do not have much current engagement in exchange but would benefit. To broaden access to exchange, stakeholders should consider how information about exchange opportunities is accessed and what networks they should tap into to reach more people. We should invest in institutional capacity building, including investing in both faculty *and* staff who administer exchange programs.
3. **„Inter-„ is the future.** The sustainability of the field of international exchange will depend on our ability to collaborate. How might we strengthen inter-association, inter-departmental, or cross-institutional collaboration? How might we use interdisciplinary learning to spark innovation and entrepreneurship?
4. **We should incorporate existing program models into exchange initiatives that help students and scholars see how exchange can be relevant to their immediate career or professional goals and/or help them feel part of a community.** Program models for consideration include:
 - a. Microcredentialing



- b. Vocational training
- c. Co-teaching – also through Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) models
- d. Online alumni seminars or alumni programming to strengthen exchange community
- e. Funding for areas that meet national needs, such as post-doctoral funding
- f. Summer Institutes
- g. Incorporation of foreign language learning
- h. Multi-institutional collaborative models, such as consortia or three-way virtual exchanges

Session 2: Increasing engagement: The nexus between exchange, research, and industry to support the transatlantic economy.

Speakers

- Michael Hörig, *Director, DAAD Brussels Office (Moderator)*
- Daniel Hamilton, *Senior Non-Resident Fellow at the Brookings Institution and Senior Fellow at the Foreign Policy Institute of Johns Hopkins University's School of Advanced International Studies*
- Jessica Robin, *Deputy Office Head, Head of the Office of International Science and Engineering at the National Science Foundation*

Key Question

- How might transatlantic exchange support the transatlantic economy?

Key Takeaways

1. **We need to shift the narrative to help the U.S. and EU public understand that the EU and U.S. are each other's most important economic and security partner.** For decades, the relationship between the U.S. and the EU was defined by the Cold War. When the Cold War ended, the U.S.-EU relationship felt less relevant and led to a drop-off in funding. In an age of disruption, the U.S. and EU are key foundational partners. This is backed by several important data points, noted by Dr. Hamilton:
 - a. U.S. and EU security is intertwined and expanding. We are the strongest and most successful alliance in history, dating back to World War II.
 - b. The U.S.-EU trade in goods is worth \$8.7 trillion, which is equivalent to one-half of all global consumption. It is 39% higher than U.S.-China trade and 16% more than EU-China trade.
 - c. Together, the U.S. and the EU are the top services economies in the world, contributing to a significant number of jobs.
 - d. The EU-U.S. have the largest investment relationship in the world; one-half of all global capital coming into the U.S. is from Europe. Over 16 million Europeans and U.S. residents owe their jobs directly to this mutual investment.
 - e. Europeans and U.S. are each other's biggest investors in each region's energy economies.
 - f. Together, the EU and U.S. have the busiest air, sea, and digital traffic in the world.

- g. U.S. companies spent \$37 billion on research and development in Europe, 54% of their total worldwide spending; Europe spent \$54 billion on research and development in the U.S.
2. **Programs run by EU and U.S. government agencies have traditionally faced funding gaps. To meet economic and international education priorities for both the EU and U.S., consider investment in the following areas:**
 - a. Clean and renewable energy
 - b. CHIPS act – chip manufacturing
 - c. Artificial Intelligence
 - d. Policy world – modernization in cybersecurity, AI, social media; contract management, data science
 - e. Training and skill development programs. Make going abroad relevant to current students through streamlined accreditation, rotation programs, and ability to get internships or certifications that will help them in their future careers.
 3. **Look at where there can be flexibility in eligibility for existing programs to increase exchange or bring in new funding private sector partners.** We need to be open to the idea that the purpose of programs can change; the needs they met for previous generations of participants may be different from the needs of the current generation, and programs should adapt accordingly. For example, programs might prioritize or elevate different fields of study than before or target a wider demographic of potential applicants. Such adaptations can help programs maintain relevance and engage new allies in their work.
 4. **We need an understanding of who the decisionmakers at each level and get their buy-in for study/work/intern abroad opportunities.** While those who work on the ground in international education understand the value of exchange, they are not always in conversation with decisionmakers who must maintain a bird's-eye view of a given institution, organization, or government and make difficult trade-offs. How might we invite those stakeholders to the table? By sharing perspectives and priorities, we can increase understanding of the importance of exchange and unlock new opportunities.
 5. **International research collaborations can help build a globally confident workforce. Here are the 5 program models, based on current programs funded by the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) that can be explored:**
 - a. [Non-Academic Research Internships for Graduate Students \(INTERN\)](#) is a supplemental funding opportunity that provides graduate students supported by NSF grants with internship and training opportunities at non-academic institutions to help students gain knowledge, skills, and experience in preparation for successful long-term careers. The internship program began with an engineering doctorate and is now open to all STEM students. The students acquire core professional competencies and offer professional development with different companies in the US and abroad. The program encourages the participation of graduate students from underrepresented groups.
 - b. [Advanced Technological Education \(ATE\)](#) is a community college-focused program that supports the education of engineering technicians for high-tech fields through partnerships between academic institutions, industries, and international development agencies. The program provides supplemental funding for researchers with grants to bring cohorts of students to specific countries in Europe. This gives students the opportunity to learn new skills, engage in cultural activities, and contribute to collaboration between faculty at institutions in the U.S. and Europe.



- c. [International Research Experiences for Students \(IRES\)](#) addresses the challenge of STEM students often not having the time and/or opportunity to go abroad for full year due to curricular requirements in U.S This program helps a U.S. researcher support a cohort of students to spend a summer in a research lab in another country (anywhere in the world) at both the undergraduate and graduate level.
- d. [Global Centers \(GC\)](#), launched in 2023, supports innovative and collaborative international centers that use interdisciplinary research to address global challenges identified by the scientific community. Each year has a different theme focused on a global challenge. The 2024 grants are in partnership with funding agencies in Canada, Japan, Republic of Korea, Finland to address global bioeconomy challenges.
- e. [International Multilateral Partnerships for the Resilient Education and Science System in Ukraine \(IMPRESS-U\)](#) is a multilateral initiative with Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia and Ukraine that offers grants to teams of researchers. The mandate is for researchers and students to work on multilateral, international collaborative research projects to promote the integration of Ukrainian scientists into the international research community. NSF partnered with National Academy of Sciences who built relationships with Office of Naval Research and Philanthropic foundations to cover costs for Ukrainian participants.

Next Steps

1. **Map skills gaps with transatlantic lens.** There is an abundance of existing relevant data by country or by region. However, an information gap remains concerning what the needs are in terms of the transatlantic relationship. How might we make this information more readily available for policymakers, implementers, and academics in the EU and U.S. to foster collaboration and a commitment to the transatlantic relationship?
2. **Establish a digital platform to share what opportunities already exist.** The roundtable emphasized the number of opportunities for students, scholars, and institutions to collaborate or participate in exchange across countries and fields of study. However, demand is still much higher (and growing), but there are many opportunities that already exist that aren't taken advantage of because they are less well-known. By creating a digital platform, we can make it easier for interested parties to identify relevant opportunities and align interests.
3. **Disseminate information about transatlantic exchange and cooperation with the wider public.** We hope to publish the first edition of the report "State of Transatlantic Cooperation in Higher Education and Research" in Spring 2025.
4. **Continue transatlantic roundtables to foster cross-sectoral and cross-country knowledge-sharing and good will.** We hope to hold the next edition of the Transatlantic Dialogue in Europe in Spring 2025.