

How budget cuts could dull Washington's international edge

Federal budget cuts could threaten one of Washington's longstanding tools for maintaining its strength as a global competitor.
by

- [Bill Stafford](#)

/ April 17, 2012



Federal budget cuts could threaten one of Washington's longstanding tools for maintaining its strength as a global competitor.

The University of Washington is the crown of the metro Seattle economy, providing our community with enormous on and off-campus assets. One of its biggest gems is the Jackson School of International Studies, which has eight federally funded area or country study centers — more than any other university in the United States.

Though these centers provide real benefits for Seattle's international business and non-profit community, the current federal budget stalemate and the drive in the House for significant

budget reduction seem to foreshadow a dim future for the school's continued funding. Currently, the Jackson School's centers for geographic focus are funded under [Title VI of the Higher Education Act](#) — created to support foreign language and international education programs.

Those in the know, however, look dubiously on the future of Title VI-funded programs. Victor Johnson, an education lobbyist and Senior Advisor to the Association of International Educators has said publicly that, "The projects financed by Title VI are in a world of trouble, and some of them are going to close."

The origins of the Jackson School go all the way back to 1909. The school was the brainchild of Rev. Herbert Gowen, who announced his intention to establish a Department of Oriental Subjects in a lecture to the entire UW student body. He was to become the first chair of the new school, which debuted in 1909. The same year that the school hosted Washington's first World's Fair — the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition — on the current campus.

The exposition was designed to highlight Washington's role as the gateway to Japan, China, and Alaska; a role symbolized by the three women in the exposition's emblem — one each to represent the Asian East, the Occidental West, and the Alaskan North.

The hosting of the state's first World's Fair was a sign that even then, more than one hundred years ago, the university recognized the importance of its students and the greater Seattle community understanding the world.

Today the Jackson School houses eight National Resource Centers — one each for Canada, Global Studies, Western Europe, Eastern Asia, Russia and Central Asia, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and South Asia — designed to strengthen students' understanding of other countries' cultures, language, and economic and political organization.

Still, the breadth of the program far exceeds the focii of its eight main centers. The school also has focuses in Africa, Latin America, Japan, Korea, and other parts of the world. There is a center of Human Rights and a center for Comparative Religion, each of which brings together disciplines from throughout the university.

Each of these academic focus areas provides real benefits for our state. The school's South Asian Center recently organized a seminar on U.S. commercial relations in Washington, D.C. with the U.S. State Department and the Indian Government. The Seattle Trade Alliance assisted the Center with presenting the highlights in Seattle.

The South Asia Center's focus on India has also proved advantageous for the NW. Though China has gleaned most of the recent attention in business circles, India is beginning to look more and more like a top market competitor with its coalition-governed democracy and increasingly open economy (driven by state competition for jobs and investment). In the south and west of the nation, growth rates are exceeding 10 percent.

At Enterprise Seattle's annual Economic Forecast seminar, economist Ken Goldschmidt projected that China's growth will actually begin to slow in the next 20 years as its economy matures and its massive infrastructure buildup is completed. Meanwhile, India is just beginning its growth curve and is expected to surpass China in population sometime in the next decade.

Anand Yang, the former Director of the Jackson School, noted at the D.C. seminar that India and China appear to be returning to their former prominence as world economic superpowers. (At one time the two together represented over 50 percent of world GDP.) He predicted that by 2050 the business relationship between India and China will be the largest bilateral relationship in the world.

According to an article by Steve Wilhelm, international business expert for the *Puget Sound Business Journal*, India is also growing in importance to businesses like Boeing, Microsoft, and a number of other Washington state companies who depend on the country for a large portion of their sales; a strong business relationship that is strengthened by the more than 50,000 Indian Americans living in our region and adding their talents to Washington's economy.

These kinds of global alliances are strong signs that the Jackson School in Washington state is more important now than ever. As current Director Resat Kasaba writes on the school's website, "As we enter the second decade of the 21st century, our world is once again being pulled in opposite directions. On one side there are the forces of global integration. Today, distant parts of the globe are linked to each other through trade, investment, migration and communication on a level the world has never witnessed. From climate change, to economic crisis our world is

beset by seemingly insurmountable problems, while at the same time, relations among peoples are becoming defined with growing suspicion and outright hostility to an alarming degree all around the world.”

Despite the growing importance of international business to the northwest, our biggest asset is being threatened by proposed budget cuts in the national and state budgets. What took 100 years to build may soon be torn down at the hands of elected leaders who don't seem to recognize the importance of preparing our students to be effective global players.

Preparing our youth for competition in an increasingly high-stakes business world will become more and more critical for continuingly global northwest. The Jackson School is a jewel both for our university and our community, a fact recognized by university leadership today as well as at its inception more than 100 years ago.

As our nation and state make decisions about our future, let us not hock the community and economic jewels.