

# Mission of International Studies Comes To The Forefront

When George Kieh, Ph.D., assumed the role of Dean of International Studies at Grand Valley State University in August 2001, he had no idea of how much the world would change over the next few months. Kieh believes the importance of International Studies is more profound now than anytime in this generation. Born in Liberia, the former professor and Director of International Studies at Morehouse College in Atlanta oversees GVSU's international study abroad initiatives, global programs, international student services and is working to form an Intercultural Status Center as part of the academic arm of the division. Following are excerpts from a recent Q&A interview with *Colleagues*:

**Colleagues:** How has the scope of international programs been affected or altered since Sept. 11:

**Kieh:** From our point, Sept. 11 has not altered the scope. Prior to Sept. 11, GVSU had made a decision to expand the scope of international programs by adding a number of academic initiatives.

In terms of impact on our programs, clearly Sept. 11 has created -- and rightly so -- a level of anxiety among students as far as study abroad programs and faculty led global programs. We sent a memo to the resident community for students concerned about traveling right now, that we'll understand if they do not want to travel abroad. But so far, the number of students who have dropped is very small.

**Colleagues:** Do people perceive international studies differently now than when you accepted your appointment as Dean of International Studies at GVSU:

**Kieh:** The encouraging thing on our campus is that there is a greater realization that international studies has to be an integral part of the regular academic training of our students and our entire university community, so that all of us can have a much better understanding of these international issues and problems. Not that it will necessarily help these issues be quickly resolved, but it can enhance our understanding of the issues. You first have to understand the problems and then begin to solve them.

**Colleagues:** How will the war on terrorism impact International Studies and global education:

**Kieh:** I think it will impact those initiatives with study abroad and faculty led programs in terms of the anxiety level. Students may now have an apprehension traveling overseas. They believe there is an increased vulnerability of Americans. To that extent, yes. But on other side, I think it will increase interest in international affairs through a number of round-table discussions, lecture series and other talks. There seems to be a lot of increased student campus interest in international studies. It's difficult to say whether it was precipitated by Sept. 11, but I'm seeing an increase in interest by the turnout we have at these events. The fact we need to make this an integral part of our entire academic process at GVSU is even more relevant now than it was before Sept. 11. We have to do this on daily basis. It's not just about understanding different cultures, but broad factors that shape international events. Whether you do it through curriculum, study abroad, faculty led programs, lecture series or round tables, it's much, much more important.

**Colleagues:** How global have education issues become:

**Kieh:** Educators are beginning to look beyond their own boundaries to get a sense of curriculum issues, pedagogy, the question of testing, research and all those types of issues. There is an awareness even in the context of U.S. higher education, that we need to draw comparisons with other educational systems abroad. We need to examine teaching and learning from the experiences of those educational systems, and where applicable use those values. There is a clear distinction between the American educational system and others around the world, and drawing those comparisons will set a basis to make improvements in our own education system. One of the things we are striving for in International Education is basically how



we can help work with The School of Education in expanding international education activities, whether it is teaching, research or internships. We are beginning full time discussions about how we can best serve those needs in January.

**Colleagues:** How closely intertwined are the roles and missions of the School of Education and International Studies:

**Kieh:** I think The School of Education is a critical piece of International Studies. A lot of the educational issues are so global in scope that The School of Education is one of most important linkages to international divisions here. Looking at pedagogical issues across the globe, our faculty in The School of Education will be able to play a meaningful role in positions such as that while molding teachers for elementary, middle and secondary schools. It has an integral role in internationalizing the university.

**Colleagues:** What initiatives are being put in place between the two departments:

**Kieh:** What we are trying to do with international education is develop a strategic plan for the entire university through individual plans for the different departments in the schools. We will review their international activities plans for the next five years, and together we'll charter a course to see how those objectives will be achieved within the individual units and overall plan of the entire institution. We will focus on what kinds of initiatives The School of Education wants to undertake over the next five years and what kind of programs they want us to undertake as an international division.

**Colleagues:** How do you see international education for GVSU beyond the usual trips to foreign places:

**Kieh:** That's a key issue. What we're trying to do is develop an orientation that international studies is more than just traveling to foreign countries. That's just one small piece of it. It's about what you do there that matters most. Our approach is set up as a comprehensive one. Ultimately, the measure of success, of lack thereof, is the extent that we become global citizens or make our students global citizens. Study abroad is not just about seeing another culture, but it also should help a person become part of that culture and become sensitive to issues of that culture and learn about it.

**Colleagues:** What is the best way to internationalize the curriculum:

**Kieh:** I think there are many ways. It is dependent upon what the objectives are. One way to internationalize a curriculum is to create new courses that have exclusive international contents, or revise an existing course and incorporate international elements in that course.

We are currently reviewing the number of various international partnerships GVSU has. We have two major objectives for that review. One is to get a sense of what those partnerships entail and to see the extent to which progress has been made in terms of goals and objectives of those partnerships. The second is to make sure our schools and divisions and departments assume ownership over these partnerships, so it is not an individual faculty member, but a broader institutional issue. It needs to go beyond individual faculty members.