

History

75 Years of the International Center at the University of Michigan

From its earliest years through today, the University of Michigan (U-M) has been one of the top schools in the United States in terms of its international student and scholar population. U-M enrolled its first students from abroad in 1847, and in fall, 2013 international students numbered 5,963 from 115 countries. U-M was also among the first institutions to establish programs for U.S. students to study abroad and an English language program for international students.

International Education at U-M before the Establishment of the International Center

- 1845 The first graduating class at U-M included a student who would later begin an international career as the first Methodist missionary in China.
- 1847 The first two international students enrolled at U-M: one from Mexico and one from Wales.
- 1872 The first student from Asia (Japan) was enrolled.
- 1908 The U-M College of Engineering established an English language program for international students and hired J. Raleigh Nelson, a faculty member from the University of Chicago, to lead it. This program eventually evolved into the English Language Institute which was established in 1941.
- 1914 Levi Barbour established the [Barbour Scholarship](#) [1] Program to support exceptional female students from Asia studying science, medicine and mathematics. This was one of the first full scholarship programs for international women in the U.S. Today Barbour scholarships also support women in social sciences and humanities, and since its inception over 600 Barbour scholarships have been awarded.
- 1921 Carlton Wells began volunteer work with U-M international students. He was treasurer of U-M's Cosmopolitan Club which coordinated Christmas hospitality programs, field trips, and cultural nights. Four years later he was appointed Secretary to the Board of Foreign Students at a salary of \$200 annually.
- 1924 The U.S. Immigration Act of 1924 was passed which regulated international students at U.S. universities.
- 1929 U-M was authorized to accept international students under the new immigration law. At that time the Registrar's Office was responsible for international students. When the University Counselor to Foreign Students was appointed, immigration functions were transferred to that office.

1933 Dr. J. Raleigh Nelson was appointed by President Ruthven and Dean Bursley of LS&A, and authorized by the Regents, to serve as the University Counselor to Foreign Students. He previously served as Chair of the Committee on Foreign Students in the College of Engineering.

1938-1960

1938 **The International Center (IC) was founded and J. Raleigh Nelson was named as its first director. The IC was created to serve the needs of the growing international student population. The first floor of the South Wing attached to the Michigan Union was officially designated by the Regents as the location of the IC. The English Language Service was instituted at the IC.**

1939 The International Center began publishing News Bulletins at 25 cents per year or 5 cents per issue.

1940 U-M began educational exchanges with other nations via the [State Department's Good Neighbor Policy](#) [2]. The nations included Turkey, Chile, Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela. U-M developed student exchange programs with institutions in Brazil, China, and Lebanon. Thus began the overseas work of the IC.

1941 The [English Language Institute \(ELI\)](#) [3] was created to meet the language needs of international students.

1942 J. Raleigh Nelson was instrumental in organizing a national conference on international students as a member of the Advisory Committee on the Adjustment of Foreign Students in the US. This committee/organization was the forerunner of the National Association of Foreign Student Advisers (NAFSA). Dr. Robert Klinger represented the IC and U-M at the conference.

1943 Dr. Esson M. Gale succeeded Dr. Nelson as director of the IC and served in that role until 1954. The J. Raleigh Nelson House became a residence hall for international students. The IC began developing relations with the US Department of State Division of Cultural Relations and the Office of Inter-American Affairs.

The Advisory Committee on the Adjustment of Foreign Students in the US held a meeting at the Michigan Union.

1946 A conference sponsored by the Institute on International Education (IIE) and the US Department of State entitled "Conference of College and University Administrators and Foreign Student Advisors" was held at the Stevens Hotel in Chicago. Drs. Gale and Klinger attended and wrote a report for President Ruthven.

1947 Esson Gale attended a pre-NAFSA steering committee meeting at IIE where the organization and by-laws of NAFSA were discussed. Also on the agenda was the inaugural NAFSA conference to be held on the U-M campus in Ann Arbor.

The Ann Arbor Conference Steering Committee met at IIE. Dr. Gale attended as a member of the committee, and James Davis attended since he was in charge of local arrangements for the U-M NAFSA conference.

President Ruthven welcomed participants to the first NAFSA conference at the opening session held in the Rackham Building. IC staff members Esson Gale, Robert Klinger, James Davis and Sarah Grollman were heavily involved in the conference.

1948 Esson Gale was elected to be a member of the NAFSA Executive Committee at the U-M conference which was titled "Conference on International Student Exchanges for May 10, 11 and 12 at the U-M."

IC Board of Governors was given a report regarding the organization of NAFSA by Esson Gale who was a "Charter Member" of NAFSA. Nelson, Gale, Davis, and Klinger were all active in the creation of NAFSA. Currently, [NAFSA](#) [4] is the largest international education association in the world with 10,000+ members from over 60 countries.

- 1950 The Trueblood home was purchased by U-M and converted for use by the IC. This building was later known as the Madelon Pound House, and became the Pound House Children's Center at the request of international students whose main concern was child care. Currently, the [Ginsberg Center for Community Service and Learning](#) [5] occupies the Pound House. U-M's [J-1 Exchange Visitor Program](#) [6] was officially designated.
- 1954 Dr. James M. Davis became director of the IC and served in that role until 1964. He also served as president of NAFSA in 1960-61.
- The IC's Study Abroad Office was created on October 1. Mr. Sigur advised 43 students about overseas study during that first fall term.
- 1955 The International Student Association (ISA) was formed to replace the Cosmopolitan Club and to provide activities for international students. It existed for ten years. There also were 14 nationality clubs. Dr. Davis noted that he had 10,000 copies of the new Form I-20 for U-M departments to use for international student admissions. Dr. Davis arranged visits for 41 Department of State visiting dignitaries from abroad.

1960-2000

- A community volunteer group called [International Neighbors](#) [7] (IN) was formed to provide programs for international women spouses. IN also held weekly tea parties in the IC for international and U.S. students.
- 1960 On October 14 at 2:00 a.m. Sen. John F. Kennedy, presidential candidate, stood on the steps of the Michigan Union and challenged 10,000 U-M students to serve this country by serving those in developing nations. As a result of U-M student activism, JFK proposed the creation of the [Peace Corps](#) [8] one week before the election. The Peace Corps came into existence through executive order in March, 1961.
- Dr. James Davis provided support for the students and the student organization (Americans Committed to World Responsibility - ACWR) that pushed for the creation of the Peace Corps. ACWR held meetings in the IC.
- Dr. Davis was also instrumental in the founding of [the National Council for International Visitors \(NCIV\)](#) [9] which works with the Department of State to host international leaders who come to the United States.
- 1961 Dr. Davis is named chair of President-elect Kennedy's task force on the International Exchange of Persons.
- 1963 ISA had 500 members. The IC hosted 306 short-term Department of State distinguished visitors.
- 1964 The Peace Corps plaque at the Michigan Union was dedicated on May 1.
- 1964 Dr. Robert B. Klinger became director of the IC. He also served as President of NAFSA in 1964-65.
- 1965 The IC underwent a thorough evaluation by various groups. The IC Program Council was formed. 312 short-term international visitors from 53 countries stayed overnight at the Pound House.
- 1968 James Montgomery was officially named the Overseas Adviser. He was sent to Bolivia, Argentina and Paraguay in 1967 to interview prospective students.
- 1970 Due to lack of space in the IC, some staff members were moved to the Pound House.
- 1972 Dr. Jon Heise became Director of the IC. An advising office for Overseas Opportunities was formally established to advise students about opportunities for studying, interning and volunteering abroad.

- The [U-M Peace Corps Office](#) [10] was established in the IC through a contract with Peace Corps. This office continues today to encourage students to join the Peace Corps and “serve the cause of peace” as JFK challenged students across the country to do in 1960. As of 2012, U-M has sent 2,458 of its graduates to the Peace Corps (4th highest of all universities in the US).
- 1982
- 1985 The IC and U-M celebrated the 25th Anniversary of the Peace Corps on the steps of the Michigan Union. Vice President George H.W. Bush spoke.
- 1994 Mr. Zahir Ahmed became director of the IC.
- 1995 IC Associate Director, Kay Clifford, served in a NAFSA national position as Chair of the Council of Advisors for Foreign Students and Scholars (CAFSS) from 1995-96. The IC establishes a satellite office on North Campus. Initially housed on the fifth floor of the Institute of Science and Technology, the office moved to Pierpont Commons in 1996.

2000-2013

- 2000 Dr. Rodolfo R. Altamirano became director of the IC.
- 2001 The IC’s Assistant Director for Education Abroad, William Nolting, served in a NAFSA national position as Chair of the Section on U.S. Students Abroad (SECUSSA) from 2001-02. As SECUSSA chair he founded the NAFSA committee on Work, Internships and Volunteering (WIVA).
- 2003 [International Career Pathways \(ICP\)](#) [11] was established by the International Center, Career Center, Ford School, School of Social Work and School of Public Health to facilitate workshops to enable students to plan for global careers. Currently ICP has 12 co-sponsoring units.
- 2006 The IC facilitated the establishment of the first two [Peace Corps graduate programs](#) [12], Coverdell Fellows programs in Public Policy and Natural Resources and the Environment.
- 2007 Dr. John E. Greisberger became director of the IC. He served as president of NAFSA in 2004.
- 2009 The Michigan International Internship and Service Program (MIISP) was established by the IC in collaboration with the Career Center and the Ginsberg Center to enable students to gain international experience through guided internship and service opportunities.
- 2010 The [50th anniversary of the Peace Corps](#) [13] was celebrated at U-M with the IC playing a key organizational role for a number of major events including a national symposium on the future of international service, and a celebration on October 14 at 2:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m. on the steps of the Michigan Union commemorating JFK’s impromptu speech and celebrating the creation of the Peace Corps.
- An [Ann Arbor Historical Street Exhibit marker](#) [14] was placed next to the sidewalk across from the Michigan Union that tells the story of JFK, the Michigan Union, and the Peace Corps. The IC facilitated the establishment of three Peace Corps Masters International graduate degree programs in Education, Social Work and Natural Resources and the Environment.
- 2013 The IC facilitated establishment of three additional Peace Corps Fellows graduate programs, in the Schools of Nursing, Social Work, and Art and Design. The IC celebrates its 75th anniversary and 75 years of being housed in the south wing of the Michigan Union.

Prepared November, 2013, by Kay T.C. Clifford, former Associate Director of the International Center. The International Center would like to thank the [Bentley Historical Library](#) [15] for its assistance and access to its collection.

Source URL: <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/about/history>

Links

- [1] <https://rackham.umich.edu/funding/funding-types/barbour-scholarship/>
- [2] <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1921-1936/good-neighbor>
- [3] <https://lsa.umich.edu/eli>
- [4] <https://www.nafsa.org/>
- [5] <https://ginsberg.umich.edu/>
- [6] <https://j1visa.state.gov/>
- [7] <https://international-neighbors.org/>
- [8] <https://www.peacecorps.gov/>
- [9] <http://www.globaltiesus.org/>
- [10] <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/abroad/peace>
- [11] <https://internationalcenter.umich.edu/abroad/swt/work/icp>
- [12] <https://www.peacecorps.gov/volunteer/university-programs/>
- [13] <http://peacecorps.umich.edu/>
- [14] <https://aadl.org/aastreet/frame14c>
- [15] <http://bentley.umich.edu/>