



Interim Report

to

The American Turkish Society

from

AFS-USA, Inc.

for

Faces of America

2010

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INTRODUCTION

In a recent article entitled “International Study Shouldn’t Be Elective” Sally Blount-Lyon, Dean of the New York University Stern School of Business Undergraduate College, presents intercultural learning as a “social imperative” explaining that “given the ever-increasing interconnectedness of our complex world, students need to understand how political tensions, conflicting attitudes...and the ever-expanding reach of free markets will impact worldwide security and the future of the global marketplace.”¹

In today’s global world, which places a premium on international literacy, students who are not exposed to the world and other cultures will be left behind.

- Victor C. Johnson,
Associate Executive
Director of Public Policy,
NAFSA

To which AFS-USA would add that only through complete immersion in a foreign culture are ethnocentric assumptions challenged and minds opened to alternative points of view, counteracting the dangerous tendency for polarization and antagonism that are at the root of so many of the world’s problems. Intercultural education provides the experience young students need to become compassionate, informed global citizens who are ready, willing and able to bridge cross-cultural divides.

Countries around the world clearly understand the importance of cultural literacy, sending on average over 9% of their high school students abroad. The U.S., however, lags far behind with only 1.3%. Even less likely to participate in foreign exchange are students from underserved communities where cost presents a significant barrier to participation.

To exclude economically disadvantaged minority students, students from low-income immigrant families and others facing serious economic hardship is to reinforce the barriers they must scale. It is estimated that 20% of jobs in the U.S. are connected to world trade.² To quote the former CEO of UPS, “we need an American workforce who knows the world.” It is imperative that we provide the most promising underprivileged youth with the tools they need to navigate this increasingly complex and interdependent global environment.

¹ <http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2008/12/19/blountlyon>

² U.S. Census Bureau, Exports from manufacturing establishments, (2005), U.S. Department of Commerce www.census.gov/mcd/exports/arp05.pdf

Yet in 2008 only 4% of all students studying abroad were African American, 5.9% Hispanic.³

Also discouraging is the fact that only 50-53% of low-income minority students even graduate from high school.⁴ In the midst of these disheartening facts, there's hope. *Faces of America*, in conjunction with our community partners, has raised the sights of our students so that, upon return from their exchange, 100% declare that they plan to attend college and nearly half aspire to a post-graduate education.

But in these uncertain economic times, the opportunities for intercultural education have receded. In order to continue to support these achievement-minded but at-risk students we must redouble our efforts. Whereas in prior years these students worked to contribute to their exchange experience, today, rising unemployment and the reduction of wages makes even the smallest contribution extremely difficult. Concurrently, funding from the philanthropic community has been reduced due to the economy, impacting the funds that AFS-USA and its students are able to raise at the national and local level.

AFS-USA is grateful for the \$10,000 gift from The American Turkish Society (ATS), in addition to the \$2,000 re-allocated from the remaining balance of the 2007 Global Educators program, in support of our 2010 *Faces of America* program. Your generosity has assisted us in lessening the impact of the economic downturn on deserving students, while at the same time providing critical leverage to broaden our base of corporate, foundation and private support. Together, we are helping to close the achievement gap and make intercultural education – and its lifelong benefit – accessible to students throughout the country, and specifically in New York City.

“Due to this phenomenal experience, my confidence has heightened incredibly. I gained a new sense of independence, expanded my horizons and understood how everyone is the same, but in different ways...I developed better leadership skills, which will benefit me in school. I accepted the challenge of going to another country for community service and I now accept the challenge to give it my all senior year. I am extremely confident that I will achieve my highest pinnacle because of Costa Rica.”

- Malissa, 2009 *Faces of America* Returnee

³ Bhandari & Chow, 2008

⁴ The Urban Institute, February 25, 2004, <http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=410936>

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

AFS-USA has been proudly partnering with ATS since 2001, at which time the AFS teacher exchange from Turkey to the United States was developed. In 2007, AFS launched a national program called *Faces of America* to reach into inner cities and rural areas in the U.S. to provide scholarships for underserved, underrepresented and at-risk students to participate in AFS exchanges; a year later ATS joined AFS to help fund this important initiative. Since that time, together we have offered young people the international exposure, knowledge and leadership training they need to navigate today's increasingly interconnected world.

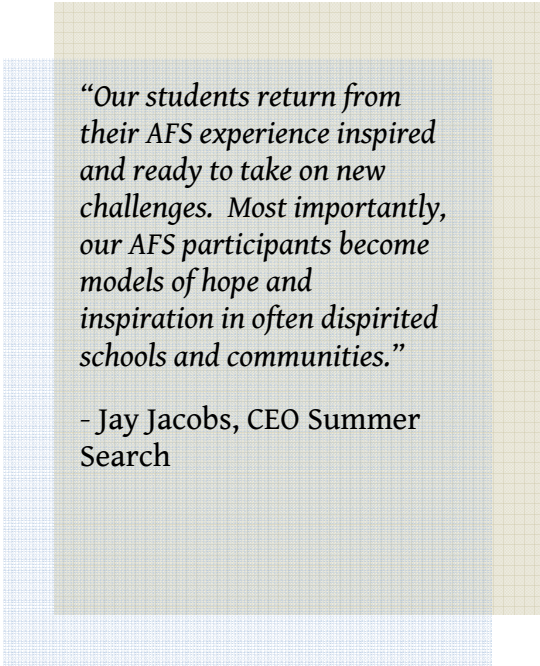
In the 2010 program year, we were pleased to again partner with local community-based organizations dedicated to identifying and mentoring high potential youth from disadvantaged communities. Our mutual aim is to deliver a holistic educational experience that focuses on getting and keeping students on a college-bound track, cultivating their academic and leadership potential and preparing them to excel in a global marketplace.

The *Faces of America* program offers year and semester exchanges in 23 countries as well as 4-6 week summer programs in over 20 countries. Most *Faces of America* students choose to travel abroad on summer programs concentrating in one of three areas:

- **Community Service:** Students work on any one of an array of projects during their exchange including teaching English, working with orphans or disabled children, environmental preservation, assisting in local hospitals;
- **Language Immersion:** Intensive instruction in languages such as Mandarin, Spanish, Arabic, Japanese, French or Russian;
- **Cultural Immersion:** Participation in activities that convey the flavor of the host country while cultivating innate leadership, team-building, community-building, artistic or athletic skills.

These students range in age from 15-18 and come from low-income minority, immigrant and other family situations where they are facing serious economic hardship. They are selected based on their community involvement, strong academic records and evidence of the open-mindedness required to thrive as ambassadors.

Faces of America includes intensive pre-program and post-program components. Our community-based partners provide initial support and guidance that helps students set goals for learning and personal growth. Once students enter the *Faces of America* track, they learn strategies for fundraising their portion of the costs (an education in itself!). As their departure approaches, they receive orientations to help them adjust to their new environments. AFS-USA destination partners provide additional welcome, interim and end-of-stay orientations. During their end-of-stay orientations, *Faces of America* scholars will attend sessions designed to help integrate their experiences and learning into their lives and future goals. Orientation leaders will ensure that students have the opportunity to discuss their experiences, explore how they can help one another readjust to life in the U.S. and develop ways to stay involved with the larger *Faces of America* alumni community. Additionally, with the ongoing support of our community partners, students will be called upon to continue to use the skills and life experience acquired in their exchange experiences through volunteerism, mentoring and/or public speaking. Over 90% of returnees participate in community service activities.



“Our students return from their AFS experience inspired and ready to take on new challenges. Most importantly, our AFS participants become models of hope and inspiration in often dispirited schools and communities.”

- Jay Jacobs, CEO Summer Search

ROLE OF COMMUNITY PARTNERS

AFS-USA has created a consortium of highly esteemed community-based organizations dedicated to delivering long-term leadership development and support programs for underprivileged youth. These partners serve their communities in lasting and profound ways and have been instrumental in introducing AFS-USA to their communities. In New York City, AFS-USA currently works with a number of groups, including SEO, Chess-in-the-Schools, Double Discovery, Minds Matter, Summer Search, Christo Rey High School, All Hollows and Liberty Leads. Students served by these organizations have varying backgrounds, but by way of example, Summer Search student demographics are as follows: 69% qualify for the free/reduced federal lunch program, 45% live below the poverty line, 92% are minorities and 93% will be first-generation college students. The

impact of the exchange experience on their core constituents is so profound that these partners invest as much as 50% in scholarship dollars towards participants' program fees.

OBJECTIVES

Faces of America endeavors to provide at-risk youth with the tools they need to communicate, collaborate and coexist peacefully in an increasingly interconnected world. Through complete immersion in a foreign culture, ethnocentric assumptions are challenged and minds open to alternative points of view. The experience and learning realized helps close the opportunity gap underserved youth face and positions them to become productive, engaged and culturally sensitive professionals and global citizens. To achieve these aims, *Faces of America*:

- Collaborates with community partners to identify the best and brightest candidates;
- Provides participants with fundraising guidance and support;
- Prepares participants for the exchange experience with pre-departure orientations;
- Supports participants during their time abroad through our extensive volunteer network;
- Delivers re-entry orientations and continued guidance to support college aspirations.

STATISTICAL SUMMARY

Thanks to the generosity of The American Turkish Society, 8 *Faces of America* students have been awarded scholarships to study in Turkey for our 2010 program cycle. By leveraging your gift with additional funding from fellow corporate and foundation partners, we were able to expand the number of scholars supported with ATS funds from two to eight students – and to cover at least 80% of each participant's tuition cost. True to our objectives, they are culturally diverse, have demonstrated financial need and meet our mutual criteria for excellence in scholarship, leadership and enterprise. Seven of those selected live and/or attend high school in New York City; the eighth is an outstanding scholar from Houston, TX.

Please see the attached document for details and contact information regarding the 2010 *Faces of America* American Turkish Society participants.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Recruitment: AFS-USA launched the 2010 *Faces of America* recruitment process in September of 2009. In October, November and December, our *Faces of America* program staff visited several of our community partners to discuss participation and recruitment strategy for our 2010 participants. Throughout the fall, AFS-USA staff, schools and our community-based partners held workshops in underserved urban and economically depressed communities across the country and specifically throughout the five boroughs of New York City to inform students, families and schools of the cross-cultural educational opportunities available through *Faces of America* with the support of ATS.

Our community-based partners then held follow-up information sessions covering the logistical details of applications, fundraising, and financial aid. Since our partners are rooted in their communities, they drove the search to identify the most promising candidates based on academic performance, leadership skills and the ability to adapt and flourish abroad. The AFS-USA Student Services Staff facilitated this exhaustive process. In February of 2010, *Faces of America* participants participated in in-person interviews with AFS-USA program staff. One such interview event in New York was highlighted by the attendance of several of our *Faces of America* alumni, who provided valuable feedback after interviewing over 35 potential 2010 program scholars.

Again this year, recruitment efforts were hobbled by the economic downturn. According to a December 2009 Fiscal Policy Institute report, New York City's unemployment rate is at its highest in recorded history. The impact on the families of our prospective participants has been devastating. Students' efforts to fundraise (to meet their share of program fees) within their economically distressed communities have been disheartening. At the same time, many funders from the philanthropic community have reduced or eliminated their support of non-stateside programming.

In December, AFS-USA began granting scholarships, matching awards to students who demonstrated the greatest financial need. Through the winter and into spring, volunteers in destination countries recruited, screened and prepared host families for the arrival of their *Faces of America* scholars.

Due to the commitment and dedication of our partners, staff, volunteers and funders, we are pleased to report that we have 93 aspiring *Faces of America* scholars who have eagerly begun their experience abroad. Together we will be providing our participants with unparalleled opportunities to advance their world knowledge and create lasting bonds of friendship and respect.

Program Preparation: As their departures approach, students receive their Handbooks and participate in country conference calls as well as in-person pre-departure orientations (delivered by AFS-USA volunteers and staff) to help them assimilate into their new cultures with minimal anxiety. Topics include:

“The AFS experience is important because people get the chance to discover who they are, out of their comfort zone, and helps them learn to adapt to today’s world...AFS helps students to grow and learn in a level most teenagers don’t...gives you a live picture (instead of a textbook) of your country, exposes you to new ideas and people.”

- Shaday, 2009 *Faces of America* Returnee

- History, customs and traditions of their destination country;
- Cultural sensitivity skills training;
- Advice to facilitate adjustment and bonding with host families and communities including conflict resolution;
- Tools that test and challenge cultural assumptions;
- The AFS-USA communications and support infrastructure.

Participants also participate in Culture Trek, our online course that prepares them for, and supports them during, their exchange. Culture Trek is organized chronologically, reflecting the needs of students step by step: *Getting Ready*, *While You’re Abroad* and *Coming Home*.

AFS-USA staff and volunteers have spent the last several months providing support to students in preparing and securing requisite travel documents and finalizing travel plans. As the students embark on their travels, we strongly encourage journaling and blogging to help us stay current with their insights and experiences. Additionally, we look forward to surveying the students when they return so that we can continue to evaluate the impact of the program on student learning and their understanding of new cultures and perspectives.

We look forward to preparing our final report this fall to apprise you fully of the transformational effects of your generous support of AFS-USA’s *Faces of America* program. Through your generosity, young people will learn foreign language skills, develop international friendships and gain intercultural perspectives that will help them realize their potential as tomorrow's leaders, workers, thinkers, innovators and citizens.