



Interdisciplinary Collaboration in the Americas

By Lieutenant Colonel Federico J. Rodriguez, USAR

"A true man is not more than another, rather he does more than another." — Cervantes

The establishment of a cooperative and collaborative atmosphere between the United States and other nations, especially within the Americas, is an important tool the United States utilizes to strengthen democracy and pursue foreign policy objectives. As more countries throughout the world embrace democracy, it is an ideal time for universities to take an active role in establishing collaborative, cooperative arrangements and partnerships, and join forces with international agencies such as the USIA, USIP and others, and especially with the Department of Defense. The end of the Cold War offers unprecedented opportunities to rethink U.S. foreign policy and national priorities independent of the old Cold War assumptions.

Today, more than at any other time in history, the well-being of the United States is intertwined with that of the rest of the world. The future of the U.S. depends on building a national understanding of the intersection of foreign policy and domestic interests. The post-Cold War era also calls for the United States to reassess what constitutes its vital interests in this hemisphere and around the globe. In short, we need to come up with a new vision for the future.

Concomitantly, with federal, military and private programs, educators must now also take the lead in the arena of promoting democracy and humanitarian causes. To this end, mutual inter-

ests among educators, the military and law enforcement must be addressed, and we must encourage the sharing of expertise and the integration of resources. Educational initiatives directed at building a national understanding of the intersection of foreign and domestic issues, encouraging attention to transnational relations, and promoting international institutions crucial to managing and mediating future conflicts are now high priorities.

Currently underway at California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH), is an interdisciplinary educational initiative with El Salvador. This innovative educational program, entitled Collaborative Educational Prog-

rams for the Americas (CEPA), places universities at the focal point in dealing with the challenges of the 21st century. This international program attempts to bring together an interdisciplinary group of professionals from education, law enforcement, and the military.

The CEPA program emphasizes cultural diversity and multi-cultural curriculum; multi-lingual and international exchange interests; and the development of interdisciplinary service areas. Specific goals and objectives of the program are:

- To establish collaborative arrangements and partnerships throughout the Americas which focus on the advancement of humanitarian and democratic principles in the Americas.
- To assist in the development of elementary, secondary, and post-secondary academic educational programs.
- To assist in the elimination of juvenile anti-social behaviors; to promote vocational and occupational, as well as academic, programs; and to integrate technology to enhance the learning process.
- To bring together an interdisciplinary group of professionals from education, law enforcement, and the military, to meet future challenges and develop an educational infrastructure for personnel and material resources.

CEPA is an initiative which brings together many entities in a collaborative effort to meet the challenges of the 21st century. This interdisciplinary initiative is an attempt to involve the university, CSUDH, with a number of international agencies and organizations.



It may be of interest to the reader to know that as a U.S. Army Reserve officer, I have been a university professor for 18 years, with responsibilities that include serving as director for federal grants. In addition to extensive military experience on active duty with the National Guard and now with the Army Reserve, I have been most fortunate to have served in a number of assignments nationally and internationally, both as an educator and military officer.

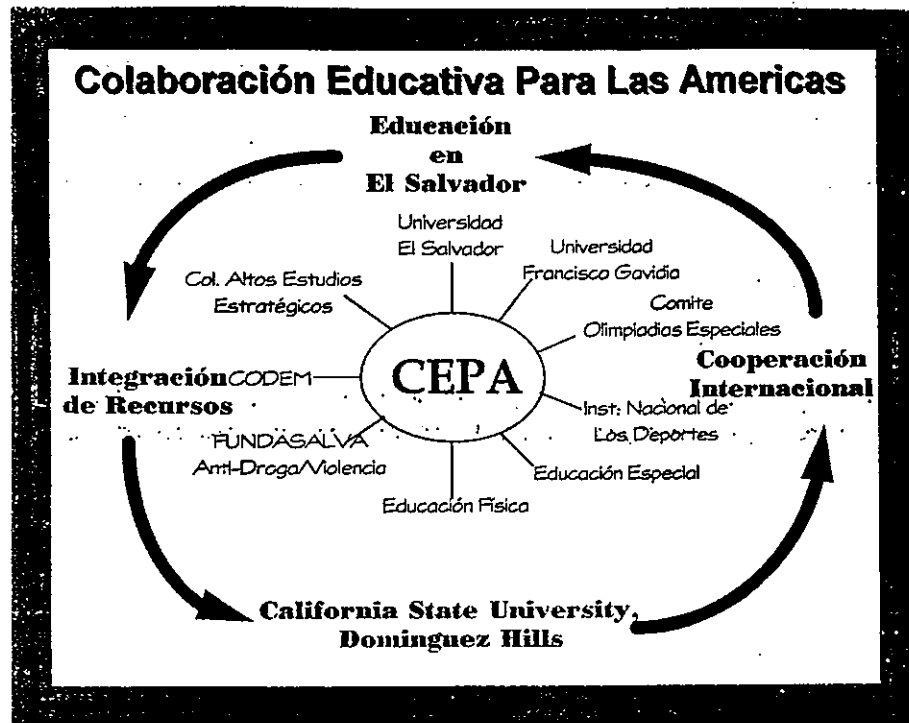
I point out these facts, not out of self-aggrandizement, but simply to demonstrate that Reserve officers, by definition, possess expertise both in the military and civilian fields that often prove mutually beneficial and synergic. These military and civilian experiences, therefore, allow me to have a vision and to design a practical program in this interdisciplinary arena.

Before assuming my position at CSUDH, I served as the dean of the Panama Canal College. Prior to that I served three years directing the Fuerzas Unidas International Program for United States Army South, having traveled extensively throughout Latin America—from Argentina to Guatemala.

The CEPA program is, therefore, a product of these experiences, teaching at the university, and the educational initiatives I pursued with my graduate students.

These graduate students, encouraged to become active in "education reform," were to involve other professionals outside of education in their visionary projects to expand their views and educational horizons. At first they were frustrated having never worked with other professionals, let alone with the police and the military. The results of the semester transcended the expectations demanded of most students.

In 1988, when I was on a tour of active duty with the National Guard Bureau, as I was coming out of a luxurious hotel in Quito, Ecuador, to take my early morning run, I saw a little girl—about 12 years of age—picking up bread crumbs and other garbage trying to find something to feed her little brother and sister. Suddenly, our petty gripes and personal frustrations appear



insignificant compared with the real problems of poverty, starvation and illiteracy. This realization should compel us all to make a difference when and where we can for a better world.

Out of the work at the university, it became evident that initiatives in CEPA could be successful if based on the kind of collaborative program which my graduate students had been involved in.

The first international CEPA conference was conducted in El Salvador in August 1995. It was important that the conference not be a one-way street, like most conferences are, where the keynote speakers lecture and everyone else just listens. Based on the successful experience at the university where the CEPA instructional activities had already been pilot-tested with our graduate students, I sought to promote the same hands-on approach involving an interdisciplinary group of professionals.

The CEPA conference in El Salvador brought the university delegation together with the El Salvadoran ministry of education, ministry of public security, ministry of defense and a number of other national and interna-

tional agencies and organizations. Representatives included regular teachers, psychologists, nurses, counselors, coaches, social workers from Fundadaiva, and the military. The participation of educators, along with the military and the police, lent true meaning to a collaborative and interdisciplinary initiative.

The emphasis of the conference dealt with educational reform initiatives in El Salvador. The El Salvadoran minister of education had announced a major plan which included the following:

- Development of a national plan that transcends the radical changes which occur following elections and change of political parties.
- Improving the instructional process and harnessing information overload through technology.
- Development of a democratic culture through education.
- Development of an administrative educational structure that is focused at the strategic level.
- Development of collaborative arrangements with all constituents of the El Salvadoran community—public and private sector—to deal with youth



violence, drugs, terrorism, environment and contamination, the economy, the homeless, human rights and health.

Two methods were used to get the participants to work together. First, the participants would place themselves in the visionary role of educational reformers of the 21st century. We worked collaboratively with our El Salvadoran colleagues, taking turns brainstorming ideas for educational reform and articulating the situation of the country. Participants worked closely with a computer specialist depicting their visions on computer-generated visual aids. By the end of the CEPA conference each would make a 15 minute report using computer-generated charts. The accompanying illustration is one of many that were produced and documented in three time-intensive days by the CEPA conference delegates.

One of the highlights of the conference was a presentation made by the Director of the Colegio De Altos Estudios Estrategicos, Colonel Oscar Rodolfo Campos Anaya. He reinforced our collaborative efforts and stated "After the ravages of the 12-year war, the El Salvadoran military must now meet the challenge of reintegration into society, rather than just being looked upon as an occupational force." This is powerful stuff! You should have seen the standing ovation he received.

The second tool was the use of technology to enhance the instructional process, based on a technological program I developed in the 1980s to meet various learning styles.

The success of the conference is best illustrated by the participants who, upon returning to their work sites, are implementing the CEPA concept. The Colegio De Altos Estudios Estrategicos and the Comando De Doctrina Y Educacion Militar not only contributed much to the conference activities, but also met with the U.S. delegation to follow up on ideas and plan for future conferences.

Clearly, CEPA is a program that has brought people together in a positive and constructive way. Since then, we have already attracted the attention of the campus community, our col-

leagues in other universities, congressional representatives, the secretary general of the Organization of American States, and ambassadors. Recently, I addressed the California Congressional representatives on this subject, and later this spring I will travel to El Salvador to present the program in detail to Dr. Armando Calderon Sol, the president of El Salvador.

The CEPA program, with its emphasis on the role of education in preventing conflicts and building a better future, is compatible with the goals of the Inter-American Defense College (IADC). We must realize that the times and challenges are different now. If we in the military are truly interested in promoting cooperative partnerships to deal with conflict resolution, peace-building, and civil-military relations, then educators must be part of the team.

In all of this there is a definite role for the IADC, and for the military in general. If the United States is to meet the challenges of the 21st century, then the military must be a part of the cooperative effort. The military and other responsible agencies cannot afford to carry out their own individual agendas. Otherwise, as we are currently witnessing, we will continue to fail.

Recently, in addressing the officers attending the IADC, I challenged them, as officers and leaders representing all regions of the Americas, to make a difference by implementing collaborative visionary initiatives such as Colonel Anaya promotes.

The July 1995 conference in Williamsburg, sponsored by our Secretary of Defense, William Perry, was an outstanding event. For the first time, I believe, it brought together Ministers of Defense from all of Latin America to work collaboratively with our military delegates to discuss the challenges of the 21st century. The next conference, which I understand is to be held in Argentina, can be even more effective, especially if an interdisciplinary group of professional leaders are invited—educators, law enforcement and others. If we are to deal with critical social issues—youth violence, drug trafficking and poverty—which today undermine and thwart the pro-

motion of democracy, trade, military and foreign relations among our countries, we have to collaborate on all these levels. The graduates of the IADC are in a position to make this happen.

Dr. Joseph Nye, principal assistant at the State Department, present at the IADC symposium, responded "That what we handled with the CEPA conference was indeed a broad and complex initiative." Certainly the Department of Defense, with all of its resources, could do even more by building on the CEPA experience.

During 1988-91, while directing the *Fuerzas Unidas* exercises in Latin America, I had the opportunity to assist with the design and development of a war game for low-intensive warfare entitled, "Panther." I soon realized that the military effort alone could not contribute much to higher humanitarian initiatives, the promotion of democracy and humanitarian causes. What we ended up developing was simply another tool on how to conduct wars. We were following the old adage which states "If you want peace, prepare for war." We should have been collaborating with other professionals—in an interdisciplinary arena—to design an instrument which promoted the new adage "If you want to avoid war, prepare the peace."

A major concern in our own country and throughout the Americas is the social problems described above. Today there exists all over the Americas the requirement to meet educational and public safety needs and promote greater community unity.

As our societies collectively developed, we have witnessed the failure of every entity in society, to include education, law enforcement, and, yes, the military. The unprecedented wave of immigrants to the United States, primarily from the Pacific Rim nations, Mexico and Central America, is a serious new phenomenon. For the past decade, a great number of immigrants from Central America have come to the United States, fleeing war in their homelands. Here is another good reason why we all have to work together—educators, the police and the military!



A compelling reason, mandating collaborative partnerships, is to decide what the new role, new missions of the military will be. If we do not do this, then the military will continue to be susceptible to critical reviews. Russell Baker, a New York columnist, recently wrote, "...throughout the Americas we are still spending millions of dollars on sustaining large military forces even though the military is not suited, prepared...about their role in the post-communist era...."

Others, too, have noted the absence of an institutionalized system for collaborative initiatives to deal with the contemporary challenges throughout the Americas; that includes critical social issues, economic recovery, improving education and working toward a common goal. Everyone seems to be carrying out his own agenda, and we are failing.

The president of El Salvador stated, during a recent visit to Los Angeles, that law enforcement and other governmental entities in his country are in need of professional development and collaborative initiatives. This is a need throughout the Americas, not just El Salvador; a need that requires multidisciplinary assistance. We realize also that collaborative international initiatives in today's world demand sensitivity to a diverse and multicultural environment.

Therefore, educators, law enforcement and the military are in need of staff development to be more responsive and sensitive to cultural differences of diverse populations. We must all prepare collaboratively to function effectively in a pluralistic society.

From a global perspective, I refer you to an article written by Benjamin Schwarz in the May 1995 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*, "The Diversity Myth." He highlights this very issue—and the grave implication of multi-cultural education, especially for the military and global international organizations in a collaborative arena—because as he states, "Failing to understand other cultures, we fail to understand the brutal realities of nation-building, and offer naive advice to states torn by civil strife."

Last summer, I had the opportunity to listen to General Ellerson when he addressed the foreign affairs officers in Monterey, California. He advocated that international organizations, educators and others must now be at the point of the spear. The active and Reserve components, and the officer corps throughout the Americas, must also be at the point of the spear. We are facing very different times than those which confronted us in the past.

Countries throughout the Americas are poised on the threshold of a new era of development and advancement. This is a region in transition. In most of the region, debt is being cleared, inflation is being wrestled under control, and capital is returning for reinvestment in the home country. All of these factors are combining to create tremendous opportunities for economic growth and development to complement and to reinforce democratic progress.

We still have threats, even if these threats are different today. They are no longer the traditional threats historically associated with this region. The competition between armed political parties, or the invasion from the historic enemy across the border...these are the least likely threats. Today's challenges to democratic governments are the failure to meet the expectations of the people who equate democracy with immediate economic improvement and the more sinister threat of narco-trafficking.

Narco-trafficking is a threat to national sovereignty, destroying the ideals and values of a free, democratic society. Alone, the military or law enforcement has not been successful in suppressing the drug trade...the attack on the supply side. I believe that all of us together, however, in an active partnership—law enforcement, the military and academia—can make a major difference in this endeavor.

The other threat is that of unmet expectations and the frustrations of the disenfranchised when they perceive that government leaders are not taking care of their needs. Education can be a major factor in helping people reach their objectives in the tech-

nical areas which provide the services in business and trade necessary to the modern society. Education and foreign assistance programs promote the institution of democracy and activate modern economies in a competitive world.

The Reserve components make a significant contribution in providing medical and humanitarian assistance and to nation building efforts throughout Latin America. Clearly, however, much of U.S. military effort is done in a vacuum. There is a window of opportunity for the military, educators, law enforcement and political leaders to collaborate more effectively to provide an over-arching vision. This vision must bridge cultural differences and take advantage of the geographical location, cultural diversity and historical economical role of the Americas. Much progress has already been made in recent years toward laying the foundation for a strong democracy with solid long-term economic prospects in our hemisphere. But that process can be strengthened and accelerated by individuals dedicated to promoting collaborative arrangements and sharing ideas to survive in a multipolar world. —NSR

Lt. Col. Frederico J. Rodriguez, USAR, has had considerable experience in the international arena on active duty and in the Reserve components. He was assigned to a three-year tour with United States Army South (USARSO) in Panama, where he interacted extensively with military and civilian officials of Latin American states. After his tour in Panama, he served as Dean of the Panama Canal College administering a Defense College-level educational program in a foreign country.

Returning from Panama, Dr. Rodriguez assumed his present position as Professor of Graduate Education at California State University, Dominguez Hills, where he directs research programs in international education. His program entitled, "Collaborative Educational Programs for the Americas" (CEPA), that brings together professionals from education, law enforcement and the military, serves as a model for education and social reform within our hemisphere for the 21st century.

Lieutenant Colonel Rodriguez is a Vietnam veteran and graduate of the Command and General Staff College. He received his PhD from the University of Utah.