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Global Access Project

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Laing (CLASS) expressed concern that Georgia Southern has signed on to a speaker program organized by the U.S. State Department, called the Global Access Project. We participate with nine other colleges, and the program is run jointly with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities. Speakers are brought to each campus and beamed by satellite to all the other campuses. The first speaker’s topic was Iraq, and the International Studies Center was concerned that this would be a deeply biased program, even though they were organizing it. They requested that Vernon Egger (History Department) give a speech in advance rebutting the administration’s policy in Iraq. She noted that the concern arises from the fact that it appears we have institutionalized through a lecture series a particular perspective, which is different than simply inviting a series of speakers. She further asserted that this was proven clearly by the first speaker in the series, and that the purpose of this series is to defend administration foreign policy. She questioned what we are to benefit from becoming associated with this, particularly as the nine other colleges selected are neither on our peer nor aspiration list: Troy State, Dickinson State, University of Wisconsin-Whitewater, University of Nebraska-Omaha, South Dakota State, etc. It seemed to her and many of her constituents to be embarrassing that we have signed on to a program that is essentially propaganda.

Cyr (Moderator) offered to investigate, which Laing (CLASS) appreciated.

Update: 10/17/2003: Cyr (Moderator) noted that in addition to items reported in the SEC minutes for 11-6-03, he had secured information on the Global Access Project (GAP), recalling that Georgia Southern’s participation in the program was questioned by Laing (CLASS) at the October senate meeting.

He provided the following summary, obtained from Nancy Shumaker (Director, Center for International Studies) and Vernon Eggers (CLASS): The Global Access Project is co-sponsored the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the Department of State (DOS). The campus was informed of the program at the beginning of the year. Presidents of AASCU schools nominated their institutions for
inclusion in the GAP program and currently there are 12 schools involved. The program
details were worked out by representatives of those schools, AASCU, and the DOS.
Among the goals are to raise international awareness on campuses and to encourage
students on the AASCU campuses to consider careers in foreign affairs and
diplomacy. Because GAP schools recognized the DOS officials come with certain points
of view, differing points of view will be offered via roundtable discussions, symposia,
and presentations. The intent is to provide a well-rounded view of the topic or issue of
the month. For example, the November 18th edition will have a roundtable discussion,
and Vernon Eggers' involvement in the previous edition was not to provide a rebuttal,
but a rounded, unbiased framework for the current situation in Iraq, so that students
could form their own opinions regarding the DOS presentation from an informed
position. Eggers largely confirms this version of the setup, that he told International
Studies that he would be critical of the federal administration’s handling of Iraq, and that
this was welcomed for the alternative perspectives it would offer. He figures GAP was
likely intended by the DOS as a propaganda effort, but that it has been turned into a
fruitful venue for discussion and learning.

Cyr (Moderator) noted that Shumaker (Director, Center for International Studies) has
volunteered to come to Senate and answer questions should the Senate wish it.