

File - Vietnam participants

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EAST LANSING

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS AND PUBLIC SERVICE
OFFICE OF THE DEAN

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To: Ruben V. Austin
From: James B. Hendry
Subject: Ph. D. Meeting

This memo is an attempt to summarize the results of the meeting with Ph. D. participants which took place on February 6. As a general statement, the meeting seems to have been worthwhile and both participants and faculty felt that it made some contribution toward improvement of the program and the efforts of the participants. Of the participants scheduled to come, all were present except Mr. Khanh, who was quite ill with the flu and did not attend any of the sessions. The faculty representation was sadly depleted by the time everyone assembled, however, illness, the press of other engagements, and trips out of town accounted for a majority of those invited, and only Dorsey, Smuckler, Cunningham and I were in attendance.

The general meeting in the morning opened with a series of introductory remarks by Ralph Smuckler, who discussed recent developments at the Institute in Saigon, indicated some of the reasons for optimism over the Institute's progress in the future, some of the problems which are still to be overcome, and emphasized strongly the important role which these participants will play upon their return to Vietnam.

After the introductory remarks, discussion was opened with an invitation to set forth particular problems which the participants felt would affect their own future, or suggestions on the selection of Ph. D. candidates to follow. The first thing to come up was the complaint by the participants that although, as Smuckler had indicated, they are expected to fill an important role in the NIA at some future date, they feel they have almost no contact with the NIA at the present time, and that the NIA has no real interest in them. They said that it was difficult to become very excited over the prospect of returning to the NIA and helping to build it into a better institution when they felt isolated and ignored by the faculty and the administration. They suggested that they would like to receive notification of events taking place within the NIA on a fairly regular basis, as well as materials relating to administrative and economic change in Vietnam. For example, the NIA might send them copies of Administrative Research so that they can keep in touch with what is going on in research and other Institute activities. They also suggested that they help in building the library

holdings in their area of interest and would like to feel free to send suggestions for ordering books and documents to the library, and, possibly, receive some correspondence relating to current acquisitions. They do not feel that they can initiate these increased contacts from here, but that this must come from the NIA. This is undoubtedly a very touchy area for MSU to meddle in, but it seems to me that the morale of the participants might be improved if we could somehow communicate to the NIA the need and desirability of improving the current relations between these participants and the NIA so that when they return they will feel that they are coming into a situation where they are both wanted and needed. Xuan may be able to help since he will understand the situation.

Another problem that came up in connection with their general status at the NIA was the question of American versus French degrees, and the general reputation attached to each. They complained that the typical attitude in Saigon was one of looking down on American degrees, and recognition of this does little to bolster their morale here. I asked whether they really felt that the American degree was inferior to the French degree now that they had had an opportunity to work towards one. It seemed to be the unanimous opinion of the participants that the American degree was more difficult to obtain and more thorough in its requirements with respect to the particular field than was a French degree at the doctorate level. Therefore, they do not feel that they are being short-changed academically, but rather feel that the true value of their degree will not be appreciated. We came to no firm conclusion other than that this was a form of prejudice with which they would have to learn to live, but that, hopefully, this prejudice would gradually decrease over time as the number of Vietnamese holding American degrees increases and their contributions to the progress of Vietnam are recognized.

We discussed the Ph. D. participant selection process, and a number of points were brought out as follows:

- a. There was some feeling that the opportunities to come to the U. S. for Ph. D. training should be widened to take in other than civil servants. While this has been done in the case of the Ph. D. participants now here, they all felt that the private sector was not fully canvassed in trying to find competent candidates, and that if the opportunities are concentrated among civil servants, the NIA would cut itself off from potential candidates who might be better qualified and who might bring a different outlook and ~~perspective~~ to their studies. This is essentially a problem of improving ~~perspective~~ and communications, but it is also partly a matter of emphasis in the selection process.
- b. The group as a whole felt that good academic performance in the past and enthusiasm for the teaching assignment at the NIA in the future were the important characteristics to look for, and that language proficiency was a much less important criterion.
- c. There was some feeling that the requirement that the candidate serve the government for ten years was too long, but this was not a strenuously held position. For one thing, it was pointed out that anyone choosing the academic profession would not object to the ten-year requirement since

his commitment was really a lifetime proposition. Further, anyone who looked on the program as a ten-year investment, and who might therefore be deterred by the length of time required at the Institute after his degree, would not be the type of candidate that was desired.

d. The need for a sociologist to teach at the Institute was discussed, but no suggestions for candidates were made. All agreed that a sociologist would be necessary, given the increased emphasis on social science in the revised Institute curriculum.

e. All of the group agreed that at the time of the interview the interviewing board should emphasize very strongly that the Ph. D. program was extremely difficult, and all efforts should be made to dispel the notion that an American Ph. D. was something that could be obtained easily. They also brought out the fact that it was beginning to look as though three years was not enough time to complete the course requirements, pass the oral exams, and write the dissertation. Most felt that it would take at least three and one half years to get through, and recommended that in talking to prospective candidates the three-year time limit generally used in discussions be emphasized as an estimate only, with the strong likelihood that the total program would take closer to four years. In other words, it should be made clear that the three years is not a rigid limit, but rather a target time period that would be met only under the best of all possible situations.

We raised the question of whether they thought a year at MSU would be desirable before going on to some other school for further graduate training. All of them thought this was a poor idea since it takes a certain amount of time to get used to a school, and in this context a year at MSU would be pure waste. There is the further administrative problem of possibly losing credits as a result of a transfer, a point which Than made from his personal experience in transferring from Columbia to Cornell. Incidentally, no one raised a question about staying the U. S. to complete the thesis - all apparently accept the necessity of this.

This completes the survey of major topics covered in the round-table discussion. Some additional points that came up during the visit of the participants included the announcement, made privately (but not to me) at the reception given by the Smucklers, that Mrs. Bach Lan expects to be married some time around Easter. Her fiance is a Vietnamese commercial artist who has been in this country for ten years, and who is now working part-time and attending school part-time in New York.

The other point that came out was also made in private conversation with me, and this was in the nature of warm and enthusiastic praise for the job that Elsie Cunningham has been doing with the participants. One of them expressed this in terms that Elsie personifies the MSU Project, and the NIA for that matter, to them, for she is the one to whom they invariably turn when they need assistance, and she is always quick to do what she can to help. For a quick run-down on the progress made by individual participants, the following came out in the course of private discussions in the afternoon:

1. Cao Toan - he expects to complete his course requirements by June of this year, and wants to take the summer, and perhaps two months in the fall, to prepare for his oral examinations, tentatively set for November. He has already certified his proficiency in economic history, and has passed one language exam. He expects to certify in statistics some time during the current term, and expects to meet the second language requirement by substituting a math exam, also during this current term. He does not anticipate any trouble with the math exam. He says that his overall average at the present time is a B-, This is low, and may give him trouble in the matter of getting ready for the orals since it is likely that his advisor, Professor A. G. Hart, may delay the orals until he feels he is ready. It is also possible that the oral exam will be stiffer than normal, even if he can pull his average up a bit. Cao Toan raised the point that he would like to get away from New York a month or so this summer to prepare for his orals, and dropped the suggestion that he would like to spend it in Chicago. Apparently, he also told others that I had said he could go to Europe, although this obviously is not true. I made no flat commitment on this, but did say that I could not see any reason why this could not be permitted. Actually, it may be a good thing for him to get away from Columbia for a short while. I also promised to write to a friend of mine at the National Bureau of Economic Research to ask if he would be willing to discuss his work in consumer expectations with Cao Toan, since Cao Toan is now involved in writing a paper in this area and would like to discuss it with someone before he completes it. In general, Cao Toan seems secure and assured that he will be able to complete his degree despite the marginal grades he has received thus far. He seems content at Columbia and raised no further problems.

2. Tran Qui Than - Than also expects to complete his course work by June and to take his comprehensive examinations early in the fall. His grades are running B to B plus, and he does not anticipate having any problems in completing his work on schedule. We discussed possible dissertation topics, and I think that he will be able to work something out that will be based on American experience, but which will be transferable, in terms of problem content and analytical approach, to managerial problems in Vietnam. He indicated that he did not think he could finish his thesis between the time he completes his comprehensives and the expiration of this three-year stay in the U. S., since this will leave only about nine months for doing the research and writing. Therefore, he anticipates requiring an extension of six months in order to complete his dissertation. He raised a question with respect to the procedures to be followed in buying books. He said that it was somewhat awkward and troublesome to get the signature of professors on book orders, and wondered if we could not handle them as ICA handles book purchases by other types of participants. According to him, ICA gives students the allowance in cash and then permits them to buy what they will without further approval. Another suggestion of his was to bill the Project here directly by submitting receipts for books purchased. This is not a major problem, but a minor irritant over a period of time. He reported no other problems.

The following comments were supplied by John Dorsey, who interviewed Mrs. Bach Lan and Phat, and by Ralph Smuckler, who interviewed Ky.

1. Mrs. Bach Lan - Prognosis for completion is fair to good. She now claims to enjoy her public administration program, and is doing fairly well in her course work. She hopes to take her prelims in either the late fall or sometime during the spring, and to complete her course work by the end of this summer. She discussed her approaching marriage and said that her fiance expects to return to Vietnam with her when both have completed their work. However, she didn't expect her marriage to delay her return, or to affect her career at the Institute. It should have some effect in easing her financial situation while she is at Columbia. My reaction to this news is that it might be a good idea if MSUG in Saigon explores the various ramifications of the marriage, and prepares some sort of general policy guide for her information in the event her present plans go through.
2. Tran Ngoc Phat - Phat was a distinct, and pleasant, surprise to all, and the present estimate is an optimistic one in his case. The possibility exists that he was playing a role while here, and that this was an attempt to create an image of a stable personality. He said that he recognized that he has had adjustment problems, that he was too concerned with what was happening in Vietnam and less concerned with his studies. He regrets the "foolish" things he has done in the past year, including the fuss made over the transfer to Harvard. He now agrees that he should stay at Harvard, does not think he should come back to MSU, and feels that the worst of the adjustment process at Harvard is now over. His grades seem to be fairly good, and he expects to take his preliminary examinations in December. In summary, Dorsey says that he was much encouraged by his frame of mind, and expects that things will turn out satisfactorily.
3. Luong Nhi Ky - Ralph Smuckler's interview with Ky was a fairly short one, but since Ky is at Michigan, and therefore available for frequent conferences, this is not a serious drawback. Ky seems to be doing quite well, and is now trying to get some Comparative Government work in his program. His program is in international relations, and at present he has had no public administration in his course work. There seem to be no pressing problems. He hopes to take his qualifying exams in this current term and his preliminary exams next year.

To sum up, it all seems to have been worthwhile, and, these conferences might well be a useful procedure to continue in the future on a basis of at least once a year.

JBH/ap

cc: Musolf

PS On rereading this, my remarks on the reported statement by Cao Toan regarding the European trip seems somewhat ambiguous. To clarify, he did not raise the question with me and I certainly did not give him my permission to go to Europe. I did say that I could see no reason off hand why he must remain at Columbia all during the period he is preparing for his orals.