

THE BELIZE PROJECT

The Genesis of a Human Resources Program

Harold Bergsma

A call came in June 1986 from the U.S. Agency for International Development Education Training Officer in Belize City, Belize: "Could you come down and take part in the selection process for the candidates who will be coming to your campus to complete their degree programs?" After that call, eleven Belizian educators came to this campus, completed their Bachelor of Arts degrees, and all have returned to posts in the education and agriculture ministries in Belize.

All of this, so easily written in a paragraph, was brought about by a grant to New Mexico State University of \$390,000 from the United States Agency for International Development (U. S. AID) based on a proposal that had been written during the early Spring of 1986. Planning for all of this, however, occurred long before that time.

In 1984, the U.S. government instituted a National Bipartisan Commission on Central America, later called the Kissinger Commission. Its major goals were:

- To enhance Central America's economic, political, and social status through the assistance of money for "Peace Scholarships."
- To enhance U. S. national interests by improving Central America's understanding of U.S. social institutions, traditions, processes, and values.

In February of 1985, Congress authorized U.S. AID to launch a \$150 million Latin America/Caribbean Peace Scholarship Program. Soon after, the U. S. AID office in Belize contacted the Belize Ministry of Education to offer a Peace Scholarship program to provide training for faculty at the Belize College of Arts, Sciences and Technology (BELCAST). Many faculty of BELCAST held two-year tertiary degrees and needed to complete four-year degrees.

Eleven educators were selected from a nationwide search to come to the United States for training the next year. In April 1986, at the Center for International Programs at NMSU, **Paul Huntsberger** and **Harold Bergsma** were reading a Request for Proposal from U.S. AID published in the Commerce Business Daily about the Central American Peace Scholarship for Belize program. Within two weeks a proposal was drafted and copies sent to Panama, the regional U. S. AID office for Central America. In three months, NMSU heard that from among 22 other proposals, the

NMSU proposal had been selected for an award.

The 11 students arrived for study in August, 1986. They made rapid and excellent progress in their academic programs. Five students were honored as Crimson Scholars: **Roy Young, Gabino Canto, Lydia Escobar, Gilroy Middleton,** and **David Eck.** Two were honored as Distinguished Black Scholars: **Roy Young** and **Gilroy Middleton.** **Roy Young** also received the Dean's Award for having achieved the highest grade point average in the College of Agriculture and Home Economics, and the Outstanding Senior Award of Alpha Chi. Three of the students completed their degrees in 16 months, and eight in 20 months, well before the end of the 24-month approved time limit.

The genesis of the proposal, the awarding of the grant to NMSU, and the eventual graduation of the eleven Belizeans with degrees in education had taken over four years.

The objectives of the Kissinger Commission had been met and much more. Our students developed friendships and came to know about the country of the 'Mosquito Coast'. Our faculty became involved with Belizean educational concerns and made trips to Belize. New projects were planned for institutional affiliations. The NMSU Mini-World in 1986 saw its first Belizean display and listened to music from Punta Gorda.

A proposal was written in June 1988 to extend the Belize Project for an additional year. U.S. AID has agreed and the Curriculum Planning Officer from the Ministry of Education, **Gordon Knowles**, will be on our campus in the fall to complete his degree program. Faculty from the Colleges of Education and Agriculture will conduct training courses in Belize for teachers in educational research and agricultural education. A new international student teaching program will be started, bringing NMSU students to Belize to student teach.

On June 11, 1988, the Center for International Programs received a letter from **Isabel Tun** informing us that a new NMSU Alumni Association had been established and **Mr. David Eck**, a recent NMSU graduate, was nominated as its coordinator/liaison officer. We look forward to NMSU's participation in future Belize programs and the growth of the Belize Alumni Association.

International projects such as this one are frequently conceived years before the grants are awarded. Our hope is that the personal and institutional affiliations that have been developed will continue years after the project has been formally ended.



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