

Vietnam Delegation Visits MSIs in Chile, Brazil

A delegation from Vietnam traveled to South America in August 2005 to visit MSIs in Brazil and Chile and to learn more about designing and implementing similar programs in their home country.

Creation of a Vietnamese MSI has been an objective of the Science Initiative Group (SIG) for several years. SIG has worked closely toward this objective with the Vietnam Education Foundation (VEF), which has been mandated by Congress to use reparations funds to advance science and technology in Vietnam, and with ministries and universities in Vietnam.

In Chile, the eight-person Vietnamese delegation, led by the Vice-minister of Science and Technology, Dr. Bui Manh Hai, spent considerable time with Claudio Wernli and María Elena Boisier of the Chilean Secretariat. They were especially interested in the processes involved in designing the MSI and organizing the competition of scientists wishing to participate. They also showed serious interest in the emphases on quality, international peer review, program autonomy and the other principal features of the MSI.

They also met with scientists and students at a MSI sites. In Chile, the delegation visited MSI programs in three cities: in Santiago, the Nucleus in Advanced Studies in Ecology and Research on Biodiversity, the Nucleus in Developmental Biology, the Nucleus in Complex Engineering Systems, and the Nucleus in Web Research (www.ciw.cl), as well as the Secretariat (<http://www.mideplan.cl/milenio/ingles/index1.htm>); in Valparaiso, the Nucleus in Condensed Matter Physics (www.nucleo-milenio.cl) and the Nucleus in Industrial Electronics and Mechatronics; and in Valdivia, the Centro de Estudios Científicos (<http://www.cecs.cl>) and Nucleus in Forest Ecosystemic Services to Aquatic Systems under Climatic Fluctuations (www.forecos.net).

In Brazil, they visited the Center for Global and Integrated Advancement of Mathematics in Brazil and the Region, the Millennium Institute for Quantum Computing (www.if.ufrj.br), the Institute of Nanoscience and the Tissue Bioengineering Millennium Institute (www.imbt.org.br). They also met with Dr. Luis Fernandes, Deputy Minister of S&T.

At these institutes and nuclei, the visitors were especially interested in financial resources, budget allocations, percentages of budget funded by MSI and by other sources and impact of the MSI on local research and education. They asked most of the principal investigators they met what they would do to change the MSI in their countries. The responses they heard, other than the desire for additional funding, was the unanimous judgment that the program worked well as it was. The PIs were especially pleased with their complete autonomy in spending their funds and structuring their research, comparing the MSI favorably with other grant programs that supported them. They also said that the MSI acted as a significant seal of approval that helped attract additional funding.

Other members of the Vietnamese delegation included Dr. Tran Ngoc Ca, Deputy Director, National Institute of S&T Policy-MOST; Mr. Le Thanh Binh, Deputy Director, Department of International Cooperation-MOST; Dr. Nguyen Thi Anh Thu, Deputy Director of Sustainable Development Research Department, National Institute of S&T Policy-MOST; Mr. Tran Dung Tien, Senior Officer, Department of International Cooperation-MOST; Ms. Nguyen Thi Le Huong, Senior Officer, Department of Higher Education and Graduate Education, Ministry of Education and Training; Dr. Nguyen Dinh Minh, Director, Department of Education and Science, Prime Minister Office; and

Mr. Dao Dinh Tan, Senior Officer, Department of Education, Science and Environment, Ministry of Planning and Investment.

Also participating in the exchange were: Lynne McNamara, Senior Program Officer of Vietnam Education Foundation (USA); Vu Minh Duc, Program Manager, Vietnam Education Foundation (VEF; USA); Claudio Wernli, Executive Director of the MSI in Chile; Jacob Palis, SIG Board Member; and Arlen Hastings, Executive Director of the Millennium Science Initiative (Institute for Advanced Study, USA).