

Vietnamese students get funds to study in America; U.S. Congress promotes scholarships

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HANOI - U.S. and Vietnamese officials announced scholarships Tuesday for 71 Vietnamese students to study in the United States next year as part of a program to improve the quality of scientific education and research in Vietnam.

The students -- all pursuing doctoral degrees -- have been admitted to some of the top U.S. universities, including Stanford, Brown, Princeton, Carnegie-Mellon and MIT. Their schooling will be paid for out of the \$5 million that the United States contributes annually to the Vietnam Education Foundation.

Strengthening ties "These are 71 tremendous ambassadors to strengthen the relationship between Vietnam and the United States," said Rep. George Miller, D-Concord, who played a key role in shepherding the program through the U.S. Congress.

Miller was in Hanoi this week to meet the new scholars and confer with the Vietnamese officials and scientists about establishing "centers of excellence" to boost teaching and research.

The centers also are intended to draw the scholars back from the United States, offering them an appealing place to work. The World Bank would fund the centers, and a team of international scientists would oversee the process of setting them up.

This is the second year that foundation fellows have been selected. The first 19, selected last year, are studying in the United States.

Exchange program At a press conference to introduce next year's scholars Tuesday, U.S. Ambassador Raymond Burghardt said that the United States provides nearly \$10 million a year to fund exchange programs between the United States and Vietnam. Half the money supports the Vietnam foundation program, and half finances Fulbright scholarships in Vietnam.

"That's the largest amount of money that the United States government spends on educational exchange programs anywhere in the world," Burghardt said.

Pham Hong Phuong, 29, a chemical engineer from Quang Ngai province, will study at Stanford University. He is aware that nearby San Jose has a host of Vietnamese shops and restaurants, but he isn't sure he'll have time to enjoy them.

"I know that studying at Stanford is very hard," he said. "I will concentrate on my studies."