



Master's of International Affairs in Comparative and International Disability Policy

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One of the most important things that international educators can do is to be **inclusive** - of culture, race, disability, etc. And, we must go beyond teaching tolerance to teaching ethno-relativism and working to achieve both accessibility and parity among people.

The **United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific** notes that globally, **10% of people (or 650 million) live with a disability**. However, the largest percentage of those live in **Asia** (as many as 400 million). *The "Biwako Millennium Framework for Action towards an Inclusive, Barrier-free and Rights-based Society for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific" (BMF) was adopted as guideline for action at the high-level intergovernmental meeting held in Otsu, Shiga, Japan in October 2002. The BMF promotes a paradigm shift from a charity based to a rights-based approach to disability.*

<http://www.unescap.org/esid/psis/disability/>

This uneven proportion of people with disabilities in Asia, combined with the barriers (sociocultural and physical) that people with disabilities face there, create some extremely high hurdles to overcome to create parity and accessibility.

I've found an extraordinary new academic program, a **Master's of International Affairs in Comparative and International Disability Policy**, at the **Institute on Disability and Public Policy (IDPP)** at **American University's School of International Service**. It's a joint venture, and takes place in Southeast Asia (with the assistance of **ASEAN**), with students who are change agents in their respective countries. These students themselves have disabilities, and so have a plethora of experience from which to draw upon. It's exciting, a great move forward for creating access of all kinds for people with disabilities.



Dr. Derrick L. Cogburn, Executive Director of the IDPP, with CIDP student Mr. Khy Huy, LL.M., American University, 2010, at the inaugural IDPP residency period

We were lucky enough to sit down and catch up with **Dr. Derrick L. Cogburn** (Associate Professor, [American University School of International Service](#); Executive Director, COTELCO; Associate Professor, [Syracuse University School of Information Studies \(iSchool\)](#); Executive Director, IDPP), about this exciting new Master's Degree.

WE: Please tell us about the Institute on Disability and Public Policy (IDPP)'s new Master's of International Affairs in Comparative and International Disability Policy.

DC: The **Master's of International Affairs in Comparative and International Disability Policy (CIDP)** is the world's first virtual graduate program on **disability studies and public policy**. It is managed by the IDPP and offered by **American University's School of International Service** in collaboration with the IDPP's university and outreach partners.



IDPP Program Director Ms. Consuelo Nelson with incoming CIDP students at the residency opening dinner

WE: *What was the genesis of this degree program?*

DC: The Institute on Disability and Public Policy (IDPP) was the result of several dialogues in accordance with the **Vision 2020 of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**, adopted on the 30th Anniversary of the founding of ASEAN. Through discussions, it was acknowledged that persons with disabilities in the ASEAN region have not had access to postsecondary education – a major vehicle for the attainment of social and economic mobility. This is particularly true in the field of public policy studies. As a result, persons with disabilities have not been able to acquire the academic credentials to participate as full partners in the construction of policies that significantly influence their lives. Subsequent expert meetings and focus groups led to a partnership that would develop a proposed institute to address these concerns.

The IDPP was established in partnership with the ASEAN Secretariat and within the context of The Nippon Foundation—ASEAN Strategic Partnership Agreement for the purpose of improving the circumstances of persons with disabilities in ASEAN countries. The new global framework provided by the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\)](#), adopted in December 2006, provides a broad context for the CIDP degree.

Formally launched on April 4, 2011, the IDPP focuses on the **analysis and understanding of public policy for persons with disabilities**. The IDPP has four key objectives that it has been specifically designed to meet in cooperation with its university and outreach partners:

- **Master's Degree:** Offer an innovative Master's degree at the intersection of disability studies

and public policy studies using advanced cyberlearning techniques

- **Continuing Education and Certificate Program:** Offer certificate and non-degree programs and other capacity development activities in the areas of disability and public policy
- **Outreach and Capacity-Building:** Engage in outreach and capacity-building activities to enhance awareness of and address disability and public policy issues in the ASEAN region
- **Collaborative Research:** Facilitate research on comparative and international disability policy issues as they relate to the ASEAN region.

The CIDP program, a centerpiece objective of the IDPP, launched this year. In May, the degree program received approval from American University's Board of Trustees and Middle States Accreditation. The program introduced students to the program during a two-week residency period July 18-29 in Bangkok, Thailand, with courses beginning August 29.



Ambassador Luis Gallegos, Chairman of the Committee that created the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), engage with CIDP students during his seminar on the creation and implementation of the UNCRPD

WE: *Who are your institutional partners, and how do they influence and support the degree program?*

DC: The **IDPP** is a partnership network among the *School of International Service at American University (Washington, DC); Mahidol University (Bangkok, Thailand); the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore; the National Technical Institute for the Deaf at the Rochester Institute of Technology (Rochester, New York); the University of Indonesia (Jakarta, Indonesia); the University of Malaya (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia); De La Salle Philippines; Ateneo de Manila University (Philippines); and the Royal University of Phnom Penh (Cambodia).*

The IDPP is also supported by the *Center for Research on Collaboratories and Technology Enhanced Learning Communities (COTELCO)* at *American University* and *Syracuse University*; the *Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability (APCD)* in Bangkok; and the *International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment*.

The IDPP is generously funded and guided by the **Nippon Foundation**.

Each institutional partner is represented on the IDPP's Advisory Board, and provides expertise, input, guidance, and services in unique ways. Our partners are involved in research initiatives, outreach efforts, student recruitment, capacity building, network expansion efforts, offering accessibility expertise, among other items.

WE: *Who are the members of your first cohort?*

DC: Our first global cohort of CIDP students consists of ten students from the ASEAN region – six from the Philippines; two from Vietnam; one from Cambodia; and one from Singapore. Students are blind or have visual impairments; are deaf or hard of hearing; and/or have mobility impairments. All ten students were awarded full fellowships by The Nippon Foundation, which will cover their tuition, books, and assistive technology.



CIDP students and IDPP staff meet with staff from the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific during a residency site visit

WE: *How can this impact, both short- and long-term, disability policies in Southeast Asia?*

DC: It is a mission of the IDPP that **students with disabilities are leaders in the determination of their own destinies**. By providing access to higher education, the IDPP and the CIDP program will further enable a cadre of leaders to strive toward the development of disability-

inclusive public policy across the public sphere, the private sector, academia, and civil society. The CIDP program has been designed to ensure equal opportunities for persons with disabilities to capitalize upon their own unique capabilities.

Many of our students are already actively involved in advocating for disability-inclusive policy in their local communities, including participating in local student chapters of the **World Federation of the Deaf**; coordinating a deaf advocacy program on a university campus; speaking to media; and advising advocacy groups on disability-inclusive policy. The CIDP program will provide further knowledge, expertise, skills, and tools that will enable these future leaders to create regional, national, and global change, as well as offer access to a network of renowned experts and professionals that can help facilitate the change needed in their countries and beyond.

***WE:** How are cyberlearning opportunities changing the way that people with disabilities can learn and impact their own communities?*

DC: Cyberlearning brings students from around the world together virtually. Students can participate from anywhere with an internet connection, allowing for course delivery, administration, and collaboration among a geographically-distributed network of people. Students with disabilities are not limited to the opportunities available to them in their local communities.

Cyberinfrastructure tools allow them to interact with and learn from professors and peers from across the globe. This global network cuts across geographic boundaries, and creates a truly barrier-free and accessible learning environment. As a result, the impact they can have on their communities as change-agents is exponentially strengthened.



Members of the CIDP student cohort with IDPP Executive Director Dr. Derrick L. Cogburn, IDPP Program Director Ms. Consuelo Nelson, and The Nippon Foundation representative Mr. Minoru Yoshida

WE: *What are the core courses and specializations within IDPP? What do you visualize future leaders focusing on, in their respective countries and fields?*

DC: The CIDP degree is offered by the **International Communication** program at **American University's School of International Service**. Core course topics in the CIDP curriculum include:

- Disability Policy and Organization: The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
- Practicum Seminar in International Communication
- Disability and Social Policy
- International Relations Theory and Disability Rights
- Informing and Evaluating Policy
- Assistive and Adaptive Technology
- Cross-Cultural Communication and Collaboration

Students will be required to complete a practicum project or a master's thesis. This year, concentration tracks in Disabilities Studies and Management and Leadership will be offered.

As mentioned earlier, many of our students are actively involved in local efforts to change and advocate for effective disability policy and accessibility rights. We are confident that these future leaders will significantly strengthen and continue their work in the disability policy field in the private, public, academic, and civil society sectors. Each student has tailored research interests and specific issues within disability and accessibility policy that they are passionate about. We

believe the CIDP program will provide them with expertise, skills, and a professional network to continue changing public policy and fighting for a more accessible global society.

***WE:** Is there anything else you'd like to share with us?*

DC: We are so excited about the potential of this program, and its ability to demonstrate the capacity of accessible cyberlearning approaches. The IDPP network and the program it supports can have a tremendous impact on the ASEAN region, and the lives of persons with disabilities around the world.

WE: Thanks so very much, Dr. Cogburn. I'm excited to see the difference that this program - and participants - can make in the world!

For more information, please see: <http://aseanidpp.org>

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