

# Seligson to study relationship between foreign aid and democracy

by Ann Marie Deer Owens

Political scientist Mitch Seligson will work to measure the impact of U.S. foreign assistance on democracy-building efforts in more than 100 countries around the globe, thanks to a \$296,590 grant from the Association Liaison Office for University Cooperation in Development and the U.S. Agency for International Development. He will do so in cooperation with colleagues at the University of Pittsburgh and the University of Virginia.

"If we can pinpoint where the United States has been most successful, then we can target more carefully our foreign assistance to places such as Iraq, Afghanistan and other troubled nations," said Seligson, who is the Centennial Professor of Political Science and a fellow of the Center for the Americas.

While the United States has maintained an active program of foreign assistance since the Marshall Plan in the post-World War II period, during the past decade there has been a growing emphasis on promoting democracy through foreign assistance, he said.

"At the most basic level, when countries are just beginning their transitions into democracy, assistance can focus on promoting free and fair elections," Seligson said. "Many countries that ended decades of authoritarian rule, such as those in the former Soviet Union, needed to hold competitive elections for the first time. So the United States has helped interested nations in everything from setting up voter registration systems to printing ballots."

Other areas of democracy assistance that the professors will study include the effectiveness of legislatures, the strength of the judiciary, the rule of law and whether or not there is a free press in countries that are included in the study.

"These are aspects of democratiza-

tion that go beyond selecting the personnel of government via elections that express the popular will, but yet have very much to do with the degree to which a government should be considered more democratic or less democratic," he said.

The professors will use, among other sources, data provided

by the USAID, a major arm of foreign assistance in the United States. Their research, which will cover the years between 1980 and 2002, will be available in approximately 10 months to other researchers through an online database. The research also will be presented at several workshops in Washington, D.C. ☐



Seligson

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