

The John Morton Center:

New Directions for the Study of North America



Rector emeritus **Keijo Virtanen** of the University of Turku introduced the new John Morton Center at the American Voices seminar in Turku.

Finland and the United States share a long common history. In recognition of the influence of the United States throughout the world, it was proposed in 2011 that there should be an institute in Finland dedicated to the study of the United States. In spring 2012, with support from the University of Turku Foundation, a survey was drawn up charting teaching and research on the United States at Finnish universities. This survey revealed that although both teaching and research are fairly active on American topics, the field is fragmented.

At present, there is no single institution in Finland dedicated to carrying out teaching and research on the United States in a wide variety of fields; nor is there any institution regularly participating in public debate about the United States. In Turku, research into the United States has been actively pursued for many decades, and it would therefore seem appropriate to establish in Turku, in close association with the University, a national institute for the study of the United States.

In August 2012, the Rector of the University appointed a commission to draw up plans for the funding, organization, and profile of a "US Institute" to be established in Turku. The members of the commission were **Keijo Virtanen** (Chair), **Kristiina Helenius** (AmCham Finland), **Markku Henriksson** (Uni-

versity of Helsinki), **Risto Hiltunen** (University of Turku), **Auvo Kostiaainen** (University of Turku), **Ossi V. Lindqvist** (University of Eastern Finland), **Ismo Söderling** (Institute of Migration), **Tapani Vaahtoranta** (Uongozi Institute, Dar-es-Salaam), **Jukka Valtasaari** (The League of Finnish-American Societies) and **Jarmo Virmavirta** (Finland Society), with **Markus Kantola** and **Kimmo Elo** (University of Turku) as Executive Secretaries. We also consulted with experts on American Studies, including **Terhi Mölsä**, Executive Director of the Fulbright Center.

We presented the implementation plan and the draft for the statutes of the Institute to the Rector in May, 2013. We recommended the establishment in association with the University of Turku of an institute dedicated to research and teaching on North America, and suggested that its name should be the John Morton Center for North American Studies (John Morton -keskus). **John Morton** (1725-1777) was a Finnish-American signatory to the United States Declaration of Independence in 1776. During his lifetime, John Morton held many important public offices in colonial Pennsylvania. Morton's great grandfather was Finnish and settled the New Sweden Colony on the Delaware River in the middle of the 17th century. Morton's mother as well as his wife also had family ties to Finland.

The purpose of the John Morton Center is to carry out high-quality research and to promote a better understanding of North America both among the general public and among decision makers, within Finland and internationally. The Center will offer training for researchers, and other teaching; will participate in public debate; and will offer assistance and support to Finnish decision makers. The Center should be a forum for academic and civic debate and dialogue, functioning as a link between the academic community, civic society, and the corporate world. The task of its researchers is to explore the ways in which the United States and Canada have influenced and continue to influence developments in Finland and the rest of the world, with a particular focus on the politics, economy, culture, history, and international relations of North

American societies. How all this can be achieved remains to be seen in the years to come.

The crucial prerequisite for the establishment of the Center is a functional and adequately broad-based funding model. Funding needs to be sought for from the widest possible spread of potential sources, with the first approaches being made to local government, the corporate sector, and private foundations both within Finland and abroad. Over the next few years, the goal will be to obtain Finnish government funding for the Center's core budget. Launch-phase funding for the Center has been promised by the City of Turku, the University of Turku Foundation, and the University of Turku.

The actual starting date of the Center is January 1, 2014. The Executive Board and the Chair of the Supervisory Council were appointed by the Rector of the University of Turku in November, 2013. The other members of the Supervisory Council should be appointed over the course of the fall of 2013 and early 2014. The public application period for appointing the first Director and the Research Coordinator ends on December 20, 2013.

As Ambassador Jukka Valtasaari, who is also the first Chair of the Supervisory Council of the John Morton Center, has pointed out, the Center will carry out broad-based research, thereby enhancing understanding of American politics, economy, and ways of life in Finland as well as awareness of Finland in the United States. Active participation in public discussion by those involved with the Center will contribute to bringing North America to its rightful place in Finnish political and other discourse. This is a task of national importance for the Center.

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The article is based on Keijo Virtanen's address at Fulbright's annual American Voices Seminar on October 12, 2013 at the University of Turku.