It is always easier to see and solve someone else's problems. This explains why counselors, therapists, consultants, pundits, think-tank specialists, academic, financial, legal, and spiritual advisors, philosophers, cartoonists, bloggers and next-door neighbors will always be with us. It also is why we say ironically, “Physician, heal thyself.” Self-diagnosis isn’t easy. Getting a good perspective is hard.

This applies to nations and cultures as well as to individuals. It also applies, I recently discovered, to global policy experts.

In early June, I traveled with my wife and son through western Greece. Being a specialist in the history of the region, I visualized again in concrete terms how human beings through time settled and organized themselves in the agriculturally rich district, what challenges they faced. Inevitably, in period after period, the cultures they had created collapsed and disappeared, mainly because they failed to identify and solve their domestic and foreign problems.

In the small town of Korone, while having lunch, I talked with the owners of the taverna, mother and son. She moved and sat in obvious pain. I asked about it.

She explained that she was among the students at the National Technical University of Athens in November 1973 protesting for democratic freedoms. The U.S.-supported military dictatorship ordered tanks to disperse the students. She was wounded in her hip. If she had gone to a public hospital, she would have been arrested and imprisoned, perhaps tortured. She received what treatment she could privately from someone whom the U.S. and the Greek governments then would have called a “leftist sympathizer.” She is now disabled.

Back in Austin on June 12, I attended a daylong seminar at the LBJ Library sponsored by the American Assembly of Columbia University. Prominent business and government consultants, university specialists in international affairs and public policy, and legal and spiritual advisers, philosophers, consultants, pundits, and media strategists talked about U.S. global policy and the future of international institutions. The prevailing view was optimistic. The optimism about our educational institutions baffles me.

The optimism about our educational institutions baffles me. The joint national academies of the United States have issued well-publicized reports about our failures in the sciences, particularly in mathematics.

After 9/11, foreign students who earn doctorates in the sciences at American universities have to return home to help their countries, not ours.

Former University of Texas at Austin President Larry Faulkner was taken for granted. As 5 percent of the world’s population, we consume, extravagantly, 30 percent of its oil resources.

As for the privatizing craze, I hope everyone will read Los Angeles Times journalist T. Christian Miller’s forthcoming book on contractor corruption and its deadly consequences. It should give us all some much-needed perspective.

The situation is no better at system schools and community colleges.

Two, what goes on at top institutions of higher education does not address the knowledge of international affairs, foreign cultures and languages. It should give us all some much-needed perspective.