



Outcome Assessment of the Visiting Fulbright Student Program

Executive Summary

June 2005

The Office of Policy and Evaluation of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State contracted with SRI International to conduct a series of assessments of outcomes and impacts of various specialized exchange programs under the overall umbrella of the Fulbright Educational Exchange Program, the U.S. government's flagship international education program.

The objective of the Outcome Assessment of the Visiting Fulbright Student Program is to document the contribution of the "Fulbright experience" to the professional and personal lives of Program alumni and to demonstrate – in quantitative and qualitative terms – the Program's effectiveness in achieving its legislative goal of fostering mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries.

Overall Assessment

"Fulbright is the way for the future. It is a tool to promote an appreciation for diversity and respect for one another that is becoming increasingly important and relevant today. I hope this program will continue for years to come." (Nepalese Fulbright Student)

The Visiting Fulbright Student Program provides strong qualitative and quantitative evidence that the Program is meeting its legislative objectives, thereby strengthening relations between the United States and other countries throughout the world. The success of the Program is evidenced by participant satisfaction with the grant experiences, increases in cultural and professional learning, changes in behavior, professional development and enduring personal and professional relationships. The exchanges of information, ideas and perspectives created through these outcomes yield improved comprehension and understanding.

Alumni clearly articulated the value of the Program in generating cultural learning and mutual understanding. Immersion in American society helped to bridge the cultural gap – changing grantees' preconceived notions about the United States and giving them an opportunity to describe their home countries and cultures to Americans. Participants developed long-lasting personal and professional contacts that have enabled them to continue the exchange of thoughts and ideas from different viewpoints, and to become cultural translators for people in their home countries about the United States and its citizens.

Just as importantly, the Program has served as a platform for leadership. Graduate students in a wide variety of fields – law, business, public health, international relations, to name but a few – grappled with new ideas and methods, established contacts with the wider intellectual and business communities during their stay in the United States, and returned to their home countries ready and able to become leaders, both in their respective fields and in their communities at large.

Program Description

The Visiting Fulbright Student Program provides awards to non-U.S. citizens to study at the graduate level in the United States. In addition to providing grants for educational activities, the Program also offers pre-academic and enrichment activities designed to enhance the overall value of the Fulbright experience.

Eligible candidates include individuals at the non-degree graduate or master's level, doctoral candidates, young professionals, and artists in a wide range of fields. Grantees are selected through an open, merit-based competition. Eligibility criteria, application instructions, length and type of grant, disciplinary focus, and appropriate target audience vary by country.

Approximately 1,300 grants are awarded each year. Students apply for a grant in their home countries, either through bi-national Fulbright Commissions and Foundations that exist in 51 countries or through U.S. Embassies. The Program promotes opportunities for grantees to meet and interact with people of the United States in an atmosphere of openness, academic integrity, and intellectual freedom.

The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) administers the Program in the United States. Bi-national Fulbright Commissions/Foundations and/or the Public Affairs section of the overseas U.S. Embassies plan and supervise the Program in their respective countries. Three domestic non-profit partner organizations assist ECA with the administration of the Program. The largest of these is the Institute of International Education (IIE), based in New York. A second partner organization is the Academic and Professional Programs for the Americas (LASPAU, an acronym drawn from its original name of Latin American Scholarship Program of American Universities), which is affiliated with Harvard University. America-Mideast Educational and Training Services, Inc. (AMIDEAST), based in Washington, D.C., is the third partner organization.

Program Goal

The principal legislative goal of the Visiting Fulbright Student Program is to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries. The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs has operationalized this broad goal through four distinct indicators:

- **Satisfaction:** Overall satisfaction with grant conditions, and with opportunities to study, conduct research, and develop interactions with a diverse set of American colleagues and friends.
- **Educational/professional and cultural learning:** Personal and professional interactions and activities at the host institutions; participation in social, community, and enrichment activities; and learning about the U.S. culture and society.
- **Effects on behavior:** Personal and professional enhancement/attainment; professional contributions (products, resources, knowledge) to home or host institutions; and using and sharing new knowledge/skills.
- **Linkages, ties, and institutional change:** Development and maintenance of personal, professional, and institutional linkages and ties; and participatory activities designed to foster international cooperation and/or educational exchange.

Evaluation Methodology

The overall substantive approach of the assessment was organized around the legislative goal of the Program. More than 100 countries around the world are represented in the Visiting Fulbright Student Program. From these, ECA selected a sample of 14 countries as the focus of the study.

Initial interviews were conducted with Program staff in ECA and at IIE, LASPAU, and AMIDEAST, as well as with Program alumni. These different perspectives were used to develop a questionnaire for collecting data from Visiting Fulbright Student Program alumni in the 14 countries. Concurrent with these interviews, an extensive search effort was undertaken to locate e-mail or postal addresses for those alumni who received grants from 1980 to 2000 in the 14 study countries. Data were collected between June 16, 2004 and October 10, 2004. Ultimately, potentially valid e-mail or postal addresses were obtained for 2,310 of the 4,943 participants from these countries in the 1980-2000 period. By the time the survey closed, 1,609 valid completed questionnaires were received, representing 70% of the 2,310 alumni for whom valid contact information was obtained.

The findings of this assessment are based primarily on the quantitative results of the survey, but they are supplemented by qualitative information obtained in open-ended questions in the survey as well as through individual interviews and focus groups.

Visiting Student Program Outcome Assessment Study Population, Sample and Response Rate				
Country	Population (1980-2000)	Final Sample (contacted)	Responses	Response Rate
Germany	887	361	227	63%
Guatemala	150	66	54	82%
India	175	62	26	42%
Indonesia	223	126	80	63%
Japan	563	325	243	75%
Jordan	93	51	37	73%
Mexico	940	394	298	76%
Morocco	235	102	77	75%
Nepal	117	58	45	78%
Peru	307	111	84	76%
Poland	180	81	56	69%
South Africa	430	230	127	55%
Spain	591	294	220	75%
Tanzania	52	49	26	53%
Unidentified			9	
Total	4943	2310	1609	70%

Study Findings

The Visiting Fulbright Student Program is clearly meeting its objective of fostering mutual understanding. The alumni overwhelmingly expressed gratitude to the Program for the opportunity to live and study in the United States. Many identified the experience as the most important personal and professional experience of their lives. Above and beyond new world views, broadened perspectives, and enduring relationships, the alumni credit the professional experiences and credentials afforded to them by the Program as playing a critical role in their career development and their ability and desire to become leaders. The table below presents a snapshot of the statistical and anecdotal evidence.

Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • About 62% of all survey respondents would not have had the opportunity to live and study in the United States without this grant. • 92% said that they were “mostly” or “very satisfied” with the grant experience.
<p><i>[Due to the Fulbright Visiting Student Program,] I reached a level of confidence in my abilities and in myself which I could never have imagined possible.... (South African Fulbright Student)</i></p> <p><i>Having lived in America and learned many things about the American people and culture, I have corrected many misconceptions about America and Americans. The Fulbright Program definitely enhances understanding, respect, and appreciation. Any Visiting Fulbright Student would carry in his or her heart appreciation, gratitude, and respect for the American people. (Moroccan Fulbright Student)</i></p> <p><i>Being a Fulbright student has been the most important professional and personal experience of my life. I recommend it to anyone interested whenever I have the chance, and I hope that the Program goes on for a very long time. Its fostering of worldwide understanding is indeed necessary in these difficult times. (Spanish Fulbright Student)</i></p>	
Educational/ Professional and Cultural Learning	<p>On a personal level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90% visited Americans in their homes. • 80% or more attended concerts, plays, or other cultural events, and participated in American holidays or customs with Americans. • 84% or more gained new knowledge about the American economy, educational system, culture, or way of life. <p>Alumni also made a difference to the Americans with whom they interacted.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 83% reported having engendered a heightened awareness of social and cultural diversity. • 75% or more said that they had generated an increased interest in, and knowledge and understanding of their home countries. <p>Participation in the Visiting Fulbright Student Program had positive effects on alumni careers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost 95% said it gave them greater insight into their professional fields and contributed to their subsequent educational or career choices and decisions. • In open-ended responses, alumni eloquently expressed how important the Fulbright experience has been to their professional development in terms of substantive knowledge, credentials, and leadership and management skills.
<p><i>Professionally I am [now] in the cutting edge of my field, and I know that working hard I can contribute to it. In the near future it will help me to take on leader positions that finally will help my country to improve competitiveness. (Mexican Fulbright Student)</i></p> <p><i>My Fulbright experience has given me the ability to learn the importance of leadership and the empowerment and how to deal with colleagues and subordinates from different backgrounds culturally and professionally. (Jordanian Fulbright Student)</i></p> <p><i>I am indebted to the Fulbright experience for improving my professional communication, management, and leadership skills. This was achieved through [Fulbright’s] creation of situations and conditions that encouraged my constant personal involvement in the community. (Moroccan Fulbright Student)</i></p>	

Effects on Behavior	<p>Alumni reported having changed their professional activities in some way as a result of their grants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 83% have incorporated knowledge gained during their Fulbright experience into their subsequent professional activities. • 64% have become more internationally focused in their views of the world. • 96% have shared their Fulbright experiences with others in their home country through some form of media or community activity. The most common way of sharing these experiences was through informal conversations with others in their home countries.
<p><i>I obtained skills and knowledge that were at the cutting edge of my field and that enabled me to play a leadership role nationally from the day I arrived back in my country. I have been able to make a significant contribution to my country, literally affecting the lives of thousands of people, directly or indirectly. (South African Fulbright Student)</i></p> <p><i>In Nepal, I am primarily involved in influencing policies and institutions in favor of groups who have been discriminated against on the bases of caste, ethnicity, language, religion, gender, region, or class. My Fulbright experiences have influenced me greatly in whatever activities I am engaged. (Nepalese Fulbright Student)</i></p> <p><i>It [the Fulbright Visiting Student Program] gave me credentials both as a promising scholar and a potential leader. It makes me feel obligated to contribute to the international exchange program (especially Fulbright) both by directly volunteering to work and by becoming an accomplished scholar. (Japanese Fulbright Student)</i></p>	
Linkages, Ties, and Institutional Change	<p>Alumni report a strong record of enduring contacts following their Fulbright experiences.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 81% or more have maintained active, ongoing friendships and professional relationships that they established during their grants. <p>Most alumni have participated in international activities since completing their grants.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 62% have revisited the United States. • 58% have participated in conferences, seminars, meetings, etc. in or about the United States. • 25% have participated in organizations that work to foster international cooperation.
<p><i>We established very close relationships with other American students in my program and with other Americans living in the same city. The ties are so close that some of our American friends are godparents for our children and we still see our friends regularly. (Mexican Fulbright Student)</i></p> <p><i>What is most important is the personal interaction between individuals. America has now become my second cultural and intellectual home, and the people I know there became as close to me as my own relatives. I can disagree with American foreign policy as much as I can be critical of the policy of my own government, but since I have made that close cultural encounter with the U.S. the ties are knit and the cultural dialogue will never stop. (Indonesian Fulbright Student)</i></p>	

Conclusions

This outcome assessment of the Visiting Student Fulbright Program found strong quantitative and qualitative evidence that the Program is meeting its legislative goals. In particular, through the personal and professional activities and contacts established by grantees during their grants and augmented and maintained after their grants, the Program is meeting its objective of increasing mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries.

Grantees expressed a high level of overall satisfaction with their grant experiences, including their opportunities to study, conduct research, and develop interactions with a diverse set of American colleagues and friends. The Visiting Student alumni credit the Program with giving them opportunities to improve their self-confidence and leadership skills, which they have in turn used to become leaders in their fields and communities.

Both the educational/professional and cultural learning activities engaged in by grantees led to increased knowledge and understanding of American values, customs, and institutions, and also imparted increased knowledge about the grantees' home countries to many of the Americans around them. This learning and new knowledge gained at both the personal and professional levels, in turn, has had lasting impacts on grantees' careers, as well as on their perceptions and attitudes regarding the United States, which are frequently shared with colleagues and friends in their home countries. Finally, grantees established long-term relationships and friendships with peers and colleagues met during the Visiting Fulbright Student grants, providing an ongoing channel for continued communication and increased understanding.

As with earlier assessments of other Fulbright Program components, the Visiting Fulbright Student Program has received a high level of endorsement from its participants. They believe, as do their U.S. Scholar, Visiting Scholar, and U.S. Student counterparts, not only that they themselves have benefited from the Program, but that the Program has also increased the understanding and tolerance of many of the students, colleagues, and friends with whom they have interacted since completing their grants. Grantees provide many concrete examples of the Visiting Fulbright Student Program continuing to promote mutual understanding between the peoples of the world, thereby strengthening relations between the United States and other nations and serving the national interest.

Prepared for:
Office of Policy and Evaluation
Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs
U.S. Department of State

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