

Teaching Public Administration Abroad Through the Fulbright Specialist Program

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to promote the benefits of the Fulbright Specialist Program—which was created in 2001 as a short-term complement to the Fulbright Scholar Program—and to encourage more public administration scholars to consider teaching abroad. After providing an overview of the Fulbright Specialist Program and the collaborative teaching approach we used for the preparation and delivery of instructional materials, it presents a number of lessons learned from the perspective of the Fulbright Specialist and the host institution for maximizing the experience of teaching abroad. This article also is dedicated to the work of Fulbright, which has pursued its mission to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries for 65 years.

The University of Palermo, located in Palermo, Italy, is expanding its leadership role in helping regional and municipal governments build capacity for the development and implementation of sustainable public management practices. Part of this initiative responds to recent legislation passed by the Italian Republic that requires regional governments to develop the necessary infrastructure for performance management, including the task of moving from tracking predominantly input and output measures to the higher order measures of efficiency and effectiveness.¹ The University of Palermo—as part of working with the Sicilian regional officials on this transition—decided to explore the possibility of broadening their exposure to best practices of performance management used in the United States for additional insights and strategies.

The university contacted the Italian Fulbright for a possible funding source and decided to submit an application through the Fulbright Specialist Program for a professor of public administration in the United States to spend 6 weeks at the University of Palermo during the summer of 2010. The university requested a professor of public administration with an interest in providing traditional classroom instruction to graduate students and in providing workshops to Sicilian regional officials on topics of planning, performance, budgeting, and evaluation. William C. Rivenbark, professor of public administration in the School of Government at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and coauthor of this article, was selected as the Fulbright Specialist. Carmine Bianchi, professor of business and public management in the Department of European Studies at the University of Palermo and coauthor of this article, was the primary contact of the host institution.

The purpose of our article is twofold. First, we want to promote the benefits of the Fulbright Specialist Program, which provides an ideal avenue for teaching abroad. Second, we want to encourage more public administration scholars to consider teaching abroad for personal and professional development and for helping graduate students and public officials in other countries to contextualize such multidimensional topics as performance management. We begin with a brief overview of the Fulbright Specialist Program before describing our collaboration teaching approach. We then offer a number of lessons learned that we hope will be beneficial to public administration scholars when teaching abroad and for host universities that sponsor a Fulbright Specialist.

FULBRIGHT SPECIALIST PROGRAM

The Fulbright Program, which was established in 1946, is the flagship international educational program sponsored by the federal government *to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries*. The Fulbright Scholar is the most recognized of its numerous grant programs. The Council for International Exchange of Scholars (CIES) administers all Fulbright programs on behalf of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, which is part of the Department of State.² The Fulbright Specialist Program was created in 2001 as a short-term complement to the Fulbright Scholar Program, sending faculty members and professionals from the United States abroad to serve as expert consultants on faculty development, institutional planning, and other related subjects for a period of 2 to 6 weeks.³ The grant period for the traditional Fulbright Scholar, on the other hand, follows the academic calendar in host countries and requires a normal commitment of at least one semester.

The three goals of the Fulbright Specialist Program are straightforward. They are to increase the participation of scholars and professionals in the United States in Fulbright exchange programs, to encourage new activities that go beyond the core Fulbright activities of lecturing and research, and to promote increased

connections between academic institutions in the United States and in other countries. The goals are supported with selected projects from 20 eligible disciplines, including public administration.

The model used by the CIES to manage the Fulbright Specialist Program also is straightforward. Qualified applicants from the United States apply throughout the calendar year, with rolling deadlines, for candidacy on the Fulbright Specialist Roster.⁴ Academic institutions from other countries prepare and submit a project request for a Fulbright Specialist throughout the calendar year, which normally begins with their respective Fulbright Commission or United States embassy. The CIES manages the two processes to ensure that a qualified and interested roster candidate is matched with the appropriate project request from another country.

There is an aspect of the program that interested scholars and professionals should consider before applying for the Fulbright Specialist Roster. The program does not proactively assist roster candidates with finding a host institution. The program is very clear that the best approach to finding an interested host institution is to use your own contacts. When Professor Bianchi submitted a project request form for a Fulbright Specialist on behalf of the University of Palermo, he specifically requested Professor Rivenbark as a potential candidate from the Fulbright Specialist Roster. We have collaborated on several projects since 2005 and wanted to expand our collaboration with the help of Fulbright. A major attraction to the Fulbright Specialist Program was its short-term focus of 2 to 6 weeks, responding to our current personal and professional constraints. We were very fortunate to receive a 6-week grant from the Fulbright Specialist Program.

COLLABORATIVE TEACHING APPROACH

We agreed at the beginning of our conversations about pursuing a Fulbright grant that we would work collaboratively on the preparation and delivery of teaching materials, whether in the classroom setting with graduate students or in the continuing education setting with Sicilian regional officials. This was extremely important to both of us because simply presenting best practices on performance management as taught in the United States would not have the impact desired by us or the University of Palermo. In other words, the information needed to be tailored for an Italian audience. This approach set the stage for professional development as we worked together on preparing teaching materials and exercises. It also worked well in preparing a specialized, 1-week academic program (summer school) on public sector performance through system dynamics for participants from six different countries.

Graduate Students

We used several strategies to enrich the learning experience for graduate students, avoiding the tendency to use previous lectures prepared for our respective graduate

courses. For example, Professor Rivenbark would meet with PhD students when preparing his lectures for Masters students. The purpose of the meetings was for the PhD students to help Professor Rivenbark incorporate Italian examples when describing certain concepts. One example came from an article in the local newspaper that compared the Palermo bus system to the bus systems in Rome and Milan; the article was then used to explain the concept of benchmarking in the public sector.

These meetings also gave Professor Rivenbark and the PhD students the opportunity to discuss how selected management tools are embraced in the United States versus how they are embraced in Italy. While the United States is much further along with management tools like performance measurement and benchmarking, there is more focus in Italy on how to connect management tools with annual employee evaluations. A tangible outcome from collaborating with graduate students is that Professor Rivenbark is working with a PhD student post grant on incorporating more of the American performance management literature into her dissertation on how municipalities receive services from the Sicilian Region. Another tangible outcome is that Professor Bianchi required PhD students to translate for Professor Rivenbark when teaching Masters students. This gave them translation experience and teaching experience because many critical aspects of performance management required the PhD students to provide further explanation in Italian.

Professor Bianchi also organized a 1-day workshop on local government reform as another approach to enhancing the learning experience of graduate students. A series of 30-minute presentations were given by professors and public officials to the Masters and PhD students as well as to other invited guests. Professor Rivenbark gave a presentation on financial condition analysis in local government, responding to the number of municipal officials who attended the workshop. This provided an opportunity for students and guests to ask questions on how to integrate the theory and practice of public administration, including how best practices from the United States could be used to address the critical dimensions of accountability and transparency.

Our collaborative approach to teaching graduate students went beyond the University of Palermo. A professor from Lumsa University, a small private school in Palermo, requested that Professor Rivenbark provide a lecture to his graduate students, wanting to expose them to a Fulbright Specialist from the United States. This request was immediately accommodated. One outcome from this teaching opportunity is that it gave Professor Rivenbark an opportunity to interact with graduate students from another university, many of whom were attorneys seeking public management competencies before pursuing jobs in the public sector. It also gave a PhD student from the University of Palermo additional translation and teaching experience. Another outcome is that two graduate students from Lumsa University became very interested in the summer

school on public sector performance through system dynamics, scheduled for the following month.

Regional Officials

Using a collaborative approach for providing training to the Sicilian regional officials on the topics of planning, performance, budgeting, and evaluation was not optional. It was a requirement to ensure that the public officials could actually use the information in their effort to transition from input and output measures to the higher order measures of efficiency and effectiveness. Adams (1958) also recognized the specific training needs of public officials from his work in Italy. Therefore, we decided to offer a 3-day workshop for Sicilian regional officials, building on the previous training engagements provided by Professor Bianchi. This was extremely important for continuity, ensuring that our instruction was a natural extension of the continuing education already received by the participants.

The first day of the workshop, which was attended by 18 public officials, focused on how state governments (United States) and regional governments (Italy) have implemented the legal and managerial structures of performance management. A major part of the training was a legal comparative analysis, presenting the legal framework used in some states to require performance management and budgeting (Lu & Willoughby, 2008) as compared to the legal framework passed by the Italian Republic and the Sicilian Region. The analysis included planning tools, strategic goals, management controls, and individual performance. Group exercises also were used to enhance the learning experience, building on participatory learning as described by Murray (1999) from his Fulbright experience. For example, the public officials were asked to identify and present possible outcome measures for their respective organizations.

The second day of the workshop expanded on the first day by focusing on the management tools of strategic planning and benchmarking. The state of Oregon was used as the example from the United States because its approach to benchmarking is considered best practice. A critical aspect of the second day was to move the conversation from identifying and tracking internal outcome measures to external community indicators. For example, the state of Oregon benchmarks per capita income for tracking the category of economy under the strategic goal of quality jobs. Exercises also were used to identify possible community indicators that the Sicilian region could benchmark against other Italian regions. It should be noted that additional collaborative work was needed on the training materials between day one and two, responding to the specific needs and interests of the participants.

The third day of the workshop was conducted primarily by Professor Bianchi, focusing on selected details contained in the Italian and Sicilian legislation on performance management. However, many of the specifics were discussed within the context of how best practices used in the United States could help with

implementation. The utility of this approach was focusing on what would and would not work given the political, legal, and managerial differences between the two countries. Overall, the 3-day workshop was a very rewarding experience for us and for the participants based on their feedback.

Summer School

The first summer school on public sector performance through system dynamics was sponsored by the University of Palermo and held in July 2009 on the island of Ustica. It was attended by 21 students from seven different countries. Professor Bianchi planned the majority of the summer school, and Professor Rivenbark was one of several guest lecturers. Because of the summer school's success, Professor Bianchi decided to hold a second summer school in July 2010. However, Professor Rivenbark became more involved in the planning stage because of the Fulbright grant.

Our collaborative teaching approach also was used during the second summer school. During the first summer school, we presented independent lectures. During the second summer school, which was attended by 24 students from six different countries, we presented independent lectures that set the stage for a comprehensive case study on using system dynamics to analyze a major capital investment for the city of Palermo. The purpose of the capital investment was to expand the tourism capacity of the city within the context of job creation and economic sustainability. Several students, who participated in both summer schools, responded that the presentations were more connected in the second summer school, providing for a richer learning experience for the group.

Professor Bianchi is working on the possibility of hosting a third summer school in 2011, focusing on the balanced scorecard approach to performance management and system dynamics. One reason for pursuing another summer school is the feedback from the students, where they are shown how to use the system dynamics methodology to address public sector problems. Another reason is to continue our collaborative approach to teaching, developing additional case studies that can be used in the summer school and in our respective graduate courses.

LESSONS LEARNED

We were extremely fortunate to have a very positive experience—even though Professor Rivenbark's luggage did not arrive until the fourth day in country. Our positive experience also was important given the resource commitments from both parties beyond that of the Fulbright grant, including our respective universities. While we present the lessons learned from the perspective of the Fulbright Specialist and from the host institution, they are not mutually exclusive because of the collaborative approach we used from the beginning of the process. We also hope that these lessons learned support the twofold purpose of our

article—to promote the Fulbright Specialist Program and to encourage more public administration scholars to teach abroad.

Fulbright Specialist

The first lesson learned from the perspective of the Fulbright Specialist is that Fulbright does not proactively assist roster candidates with finding a host institution, as previously described. While assistant professors should wait until tenure is granted before making application because the Fulbright Specialist Program does not fund personal research, making contacts with possible host institutions is strongly encouraged as soon as possible. One avenue is through academic conferences that encourage international participation. Another avenue is working through colleagues who have relationships with universities in other countries, which was the avenue Professor Rivenbark used.

Another lesson learned is to invest time when making application to the Fulbright Specialist Roster. Fulbright's website contains sample activities of a Fulbright Specialist, including lectures at the undergraduate and graduate level. Public administration scholars should be clear, however, in documenting other ways they can add value to the program. We promote the ability to work outside of the classroom in this article, providing training opportunities to public officials; therefore, this ability was clearly documented and explained. The goal is to increase your attractiveness to Fulbright and host universities.

A lesson learned from an individual perspective is to adequately prepare for being in another country for an extended period of time. Conducting research on the country and the community provides for a richer experience, allowing you to explore more of the nuances of your surroundings. Building basic language skills also is encouraged, which increases your ability to build rapport with individuals inside and outside of the university (Gunter, 1984). It also makes life much easier when you are in an area where English is limited. For example, being able to ask for additional towels when your spouse and children join you for part of the trip is very important (*Io ho bisogno di asciugamani extra, per favore*). Another aspect of adequate preparation is to plan for tourist activities as time permits.

A lesson learned from a teaching perspective is the necessity for collaboration, as noted earlier. However, there are other dimensions of collaboration. Working together on preparing a mutually agreed upon work plan is critical, along with being flexible in taking advantage of unforeseen opportunities. While personal research is not funded as part of the Fulbright Specialist Program, participants are able to look for ways to engage in collaborative research projects post grant. We are working on two comparative performance management manuscripts, expanding on our research conducted in preparation for the 3-day workshop for the Sicilian regional officials. One manuscript will be tailored for an American public administration journal, the other for an Italian public administration journal. Our work post grant builds on Fulbright's goal of developing ongoing

relationships. Working in a collaborative manner with students also is encouraged, and ranges from you helping them with their research projects to them helping you with navigating the classroom and community.

A final lesson learned, and arguably the most important, is that you experience a tremendous amount of personal and professional development within a relatively short period of time—which is a fundamental outcome of the Fulbright Specialist Program. Part of this development affects your teaching skills, strengthening your ability to present and discuss subjects within a global context. It also enhances your ability to teach and advise foreign students, helping you become more attuned to cultural differences. Another part of this development affects your research skills. You are able to comprehend more of the detail when using research published by professors from other countries. This outcome has been particularly beneficial to Professor Rivenbark, given the amount of information published in other countries on performance and financial management. For example, a public administration journal recently published two articles written by Italian professors on the topics of governmental accounting and local public utilities.⁵

Host Institution

The first lesson learned from the perspective of the host institution is that the primary contact from the host institution should clearly document the goals of the grant when applying for a Fulbright Specialist, including detailed activities that will be accomplished in support of the goals. The reason for clarity is gaining support for the grant request. The first step is to secure approval from the university, which also must provide financial support in the form of lodging for the Fulbright Specialist. The second step is to gain approval from the respective country's Fulbright Commission or United States Embassy.⁶ Some countries have a competitive process because of the demand for Fulbright Specialists. The final step is to secure approval from the CIES. This process is more navigable with a grant proposal that is based on clear outcomes.

The grant proposal allows the host institution to request a specific candidate from the roster. Before a specific request is made, the second lesson learned is to contact the candidate to discuss his or her goals for pursuing this opportunity, to discuss time frames, and to ensure that the skill sets of the candidate match the needs of the host institution. This step is especially important from the viewpoint of the primary contact from the host institution, given the amount of the time the primary contact and the Fulbright Specialist will spend together. Mutual professional interests promote a collaborative work environment and increase the likelihood that these relationships will continue after the grant is completed.

A final lesson from the perspective of the host institution is to contact other surrounding universities and governments, identifying teaching and training opportunities for the Fulbright Specialist outside of the host institution. This strategy encourages other organizations to view the host institution as being

proactive when one of the university's goals involves globalism. It also allows the host institution to expand its relationships with public officials in the way of continuing education, which align with the University of Palermo's goal to expand its leadership role in helping regional and municipal governments build capacity for the development and implementation of sustainable public management practices. We also were fortunate that one of the local media outlets published a brief story on our Fulbright grant.

CONCLUSION

The CIES funds approximately 300 grants per year for Fulbright Specialists, and approximately 2 percent of these grants go to individuals from the public administration discipline. While the CIES does an excellent job of making sure a balance is maintained between the 20 disciplines that it supports, there is room for more grants being awarded to public administration scholars. For this to happen, more public administration scholars must apply to the Fulbright Specialist Roster, and more host institutions must submit project requests for individuals who specialize in public administration. But this can occur only if public administrators take the initiative to join the roster and make contacts with scholars from foreign universities.

We hope that the collaborative teaching approach and the lessons learned presented in this article will encourage public administrators to consider the Fulbright Specialist Program. Our experience was simply outstanding, and we strongly believe that our collaborative approach to teaching and training was the reason for this outcome. We would not be writing about our collaborative experience and lessons learned otherwise. We also hope that this article encourages other Fulbright Specialists to write about their experiences and lessons learned, building on the limited literature that addresses Fulbright experiences (Infeld & Wenzhao, 2009).

The timing also could not be better for public administration scholars to pursue Fulbright grants. Public administrators around the world—both inside and outside of universities—are grappling with such concepts of accountability and transparency in governmental organizations. Public administration scholars from the United States have the ability to add value in contextualizing these concepts in other countries through teaching and training opportunities. We also strongly encourage the strategy of moving beyond the classroom and providing training opportunities to public officials, which also enhances professional development for the Fulbright Specialist. It gives the Fulbright Specialist an opportunity to interact with the individuals who are actually responsible for implementing strategies to advance the notions of accountability and transparency.

FOOTNOTES

- 1 See legislative decree 27 October 2009, No. 150—implementation of the law of 4 March 2009, No. 15, optimization of public productivity.
- 2 The CIES provides comprehensive descriptions of all Fulbright programs on its website, including the Fulbright Specialist Program. See www.cies.org/Fulbright/ for more information.
- 3 It should be noted that the Fulbright Specialist Program does not fund personal research.
- 4 The CIES uses a peer review process to evaluate applications on academic, scholarly, and professional criteria.
- 5 For more information, see *International Journal on Public Administration*, 33(11), 2010.
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