Fulbright Chronicles

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Fulbright Chronicles is an independent not for profit 501 (c) (3), open access, peer reviewed, quarterly periodical with contributions by and for the global Fulbright community. The journal is overseen by a global Editorial Board.

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About and Contributing

The journal provides a welcoming space for Fulbrighters to share their work and reflections on global issues with a broad audience. It features thoughtful, accessible articles that reflect on how Fulbright experiences have contributed to knowledge and cross-cultural understanding, or that comment on contemporary issues that affect the Fulbright program or cultural and educational exchange more broadly.

The *Fulbright Chronicle*s can only succeed with the engagement of the Fulbright community. The editors strongly encourage Fulbrighters to contribute articles or commentaries on topics related to your research and practice and the critical issues of our times. Author Guidelines are available on our website (www.fulbright-chronicles.com).

The journal is an independent publication, overseen by the Editorial Board members. For further information, visit the *Fulbright Chronicles* site (www.fulbright-chronicles.com).

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The Power Of Storytelling

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The very essence of Fulbright Chronicles lies in the power of storytelling and the brilliant work Fulbrighters are undertaking in various academic disciplines. The power of storytelling can move nations, and nowhere is it put better than the TED talk given by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the Nigerian novelist. In her talk she highlighted the potential of telling stories, not from just one angle as no story is truly one-sided, but multifaceted. This echoes the experience of Fulbrighters visiting the United States from their various countries, and US Fulbrighters visiting other countries for their exchange program. Their engagements, as related on the pages of Fulbright Chronicles, reflect different cultural perspectives with regards the diverse research ecosystem and pedagogical approaches available globally. As Chimamanda succinctly stated, "stories can empower and humanise." This is the spirit we hope to inspire in our readers.

> ***"As Chimamanda succinctly put it, 'stories can empower and humanise,' and I believe this is the spirit we hope to inspire in our readers whenever they read about the projects and experience shared by Fulbrighters."***

In keeping with our vision, this issue highlights the geographical range Fulbrighters impact-from Asia and the Caribbean to Europe and the Middle East. Their work cuts across diverse fields that are important in understanding the role of culture as it relates to dietary choices, family ties and parenthood, information diplomacy, teacher education, and higher education. The rich experiences shared by these Fulbrighters promotes intercultural understanding and the hidden but important intricacies in navigating academic norms and practices. One common thread weaving the articles together is the shared goal of improving the higher education landscape and building innovative approaches.

One of the merits of the Fulbright exchange program is the formation of lasting cooperation between academics in the United States and those in other countries. This sustainable engagement was explored by the Nigerian Fulbright alumni in a ten-chapter book published to mark the 25th anniversary of the Fulbright Alumni Association of Nigeria (FAAN). The book with a myriad of topics centred on fostering and strengthening diplomatic and cultural ties between the United States and Nigeria showcased chapters such as: Building the Bridge-Institutions and Infrastructure; The Fulbright Ecosystem in Nigeria; Transforming Tertiary Education; Research, Innovation and Policy Influence; New Vistas in Nigeria-US Higher Ed Collaboration; Policy Roadmap and Recommendations. The book explores the current collaborative efforts between both countries and prospective areas for more knowledge exchange and capacity building. All ten chapters were conceived

and contributed by Nigerian Fulbright alumni based on the current trends and needs in the higher education scene in Nigeria. We congratulate the Nigerian Fulbright alumni on this milestone, and look forward to celebrating other members of the Fulbright global network.

This issue also includes three spectacular book reviews. They include: a book about a caffeinated herbal drink that cuts across countries in South America; a piece weaving together musical composition and scripture; and finally, a book about diarists and their accounts of the events of World War II in the Netherlands.

In our last issue, we officially announced that Fulbright Chronicles is now registered as a not-for-profit organization. We welcome your financial support. Do visit our website to make your kind contributions.

We would like to thank all contributors, reviewers and the entire editorial board for making Fulbright Chronicles a force not just within the Fulbright network, but in the academic community.

ARTICLES

Teacher Education in Latvia From Curiosity to Connection: A Fulbright Journey

Caryn M. Caruso

Abstract

In this article, I reflect upon my Fulbright teaching experience in Latvia as part of a teacher education program. My goal was to build a community of learners through student engagement and cultural exchange, utilizing instructional strategies such as morning meetings, literature circles, Pink Time, and a field trip. These instructional approaches provided opportunities for student-led conversations, autonomy, and hands-on learning. Additionally, they showed the importance of building relationships and strengthening cultural understanding.

Keywords: Teacher Education • Instructional Strategies • Community of Learners • Latvia

Introduction

During my doctoral studies, I was eager for another international experience. Having previously lived and worked in the United Arab Emirates and Indonesia, I approached my advisor, a two-time Fulbright Scholar, about applying for the Fulbright United States Student Program. Her response was clear: "Not now. You need to finish. But you will be a Fulbright Scholar." Seven years later, with a PhD in hand and three years of full-time university teaching experience, I applied to be a Fulbright Scholar.

I knew I wanted to teach abroad for a semester, and in my search for projects, I focused on three countries that were unfamiliar to me since I wanted to learn about a new country and culture. I reached out to universities in each, and the first to respond was a contact from Latvia. The opportunity to teach in a teacher education department at a small university abroad aligned perfectly with my professional goals of continuing my international work and offered the personal growth I had been seeking.

Initially, my knowledge of Latvia was limited, which only increased my curiosity. I began researching its history, culture, and people online and through social media. I discussed my upcoming plans with friends and colleagues, and unexpected connections to Latvia emerged. A childhood friend's husband had Latvian roots and was planning a trip there. A colleague's mother-in-law was from Latvia. A member of my Philanthropic Education Organization (PEO) group had a neighbor from Latvia who, she believed, had saved her life after a childhood accident. These serendipitous connections continued once

I arrived in the country. My landlady had recently relocated to Latvia after spending some time abroad. Another acquaintance had returned to Latvia after growing up in the US, and a friend of a friend was working there. These moments reminded me of how interconnected our world truly is, particularly when considering a relatively small country compared in size to West Virginia.

Fostering Engagement and Motivation

During my Fulbright placement at Riga Technical Institute–Liepaja, I taught within the Department of Education, Culture, and Social Welfare. While I had initially proposed two stand-alone courses, I ultimately collaborated with faculty colleagues and shared instructional responsibilities rather than serving as the instructor of record. I worked with undergraduate students who were preparing for careers as preschool teachers. I also worked with undergraduates majoring in elementary and secondary English education, as well as facilitated a master's-level course for practicing teachers. These in-service educators brought a wealth of experiences to our discussions, providing deep and rich conversations. Our discussions utilized three languages — Latvian, English, and Russian — which occasionally required breaks to process academic language but never limited the depth of our conversations.

Instructional Strategies

When designing my courses for Latvia, I relied on strategies I had successfully used in my own classes, providing a strong foundation for teaching in a new country with a new group of students. These strategies included morning meetings, literature circles, Pink Time, and a field trip.

Morning Meetings

One strategy I used is based on the Morning Meeting approach, which is designed to foster a sense of community within the classroom. Each day began with a student-generated question, which allowed students to practice their English skills through listening and speaking, while also sharing personal stories and perspectives.

My morning meeting has been adapted to utilize student-written questions for their peers. Each class, I randomly chose one student's question to read aloud; the expectation was that everyone responded, including me. This introduction to the class serves as a warm-up to help students become comfortable speaking in class and, in this case, to practice conversationally in English.

In one of the courses I taught, Latvian was initially the language of instruction; therefore, the English levels varied. Students used English in a low-stakes, conversational context. This approach allowed students to gain confidence and reduce anxiety that often comes with speaking another language. Creating a welcoming space for informal language use, morning

meetings fostered a sense of community and helped students become more comfortable expressing themselves in the English language. Morning meetings provided all students with a comfortable entry point, featuring questions such as, "What is your favorite food?" or "Where is your favorite vacation spot?" These simple prompts often led to lively discussions and deeper understanding between classmates. Moreover, this strategy can easily be implemented in their future courses, and students discussed how they could incorporate it into their own classrooms.

Students shaped the conversations and invited multiple cultural perspectives into the classroom. I observed that students became more comfortable speaking English and engaging in conversation with me. This classroom routine was a powerful tool for building trust, fostering community, and promoting intercultural learning —core values that align with the mission of the Fulbright program.

Literature Circles

Literature circles were another instructional strategy I incorporated into two of the teacher education courses. These were designed to enable student autonomy, as students could choose their role in the literature circle and actively participate in determining assigned readings, developing guiding questions, and selecting vocabulary for discussion. Literature circles supported English learners in developing their reading skills, including fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary.

Literature circles were designed for students to work collaboratively in small groups to discuss key points and takeaways. Members of the group took on different roles each week, such as discussion leader, summarizer, illustrator, and real-life connector, and share their perspectives. These perspectives elicited discussions and created purpose in reading.

Central to the course was a book study of Zaretta Hammond's *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*. Although the demographics of race and ethnicity of the United States and Latvia differ, teachers in both countries face similar classroom challenges (e.g., different cultural backgrounds, stereotypes, and language learners). Our discussions, sometimes intense, were always open and honest. I was aware of systemic challenges faced by local teachers including the Latvian language-only policy and the presence of Russian-speaking students in their classrooms, but I did not want to impose my perspective on them. Hammond's book served as a framework to facilitate these conversations, and over time, teachers began initiating discussions about their own experiences.

This approach confirmed the importance of cultural awareness and respectful dialogue, especially when addressing sensitive or controversial issues. I learned the importance of guiding rather than leading these conversations. Modeling vulnerability and sharing my own professional experiences helped create a space where participants felt safe to engage authentically. These discussions were among the most meaningful of my entire Fulbright experience.

Literature circles were also utilized in the course for students preparing to become elementary and secondary English teachers. Since this was an unexpected class that I was able to teach, I did not bring my novels with me for this particular course. Therefore, my choices were limited, and time was a significant issue compared to what I could order in the United States. I chose a well-known young adult novel, Wonder, by R.J. Palacio, that would go beyond cultural boundaries through its themes (e.g., inclusion, belonging, friendship). The students actively participated in each class, as observed in their conversations, connections, and questions. They were also highly creative in the illustrator role, as demonstrated by their artistic ability. One student created clay figures based on the characters from the novel.

Using literature circles allowed students to choose roles, lead discussions, and connect texts to their own lives. Literature circles shifted the focus from teacher-led instruction to student-driven dialogue. Additionally, students brought their own experiences and culture into the conversations in ways that, as an outsider, I could not have done. Although an American author wrote the novel, its universal themes transcended cultures and opened space for meaningful dialogue. Students drew parallels between the characters' struggles and their own realities, such as working with children with disabilities, supporting others in belonging, and the importance of friendship. They were able to find common ground while also highlighting unique cultural perspectives.

Students in the courses that participated in literature circles were able to keep their books. Their reactions were expressions of surprise and joy. They expressed their gratitude and excitement at being able to keep the books as their own. I hope that they instill the love of reading in their future students in Latvia.

PINK TIME

Pink Time is another research-based instructional strategy, based on Daniel Pink's book *Drive* (not the color), which ascertains that motivation is based on autonomy, mastery, and purpose. Pink Time provides students with time off from class to explore and learn about topics of interest, whether related to the course or not, and thus creating opportunities to increase student motivation. Students return to class and share what they learned with the whole group. After all students have shared, the instructor leads a discussion

and facilitates conversations around the importance of self-directed learning, learning outside the classroom, and the importance of effort in learning. They explore how they perceive themselves as learners and develop awareness of their learning process by discussing their learning experiences. By embedding autonomy (choosing a topic), mastery (students wanting to learn and improve) and purpose (connecting their learning to personal reasons and sharing with others), Pink Time incorporates Daniel Pink's concepts of motivation into classroom practice. Like Genius Hour and Project-Based Learning, Pink Time is student-directed. However, Pink Time includes an instructor-led conversation that explicitly discusses the importance of metacognition, and how students learn about the process of learning. Pink Time also eliminates the external reward of a grade by having students grade themselves.

I conducted Pink Time in both the master's course and the preschool course. The strategy gave students time to pursue an interest and share it with the class. Students were excited to share what they learned, as demonstrated by their eagerness. Additionally, they were attentive listeners and asked thoughtful questions. Pink Time provided an opportunity for students to discuss how they learned and what they learned about themselves. Additionally, it gave insight into what is important to each of the students.

Field Trips

Field trips allow learners to connect with their surrounding environment and provide students with experiential learning opportunities. Field trips provide students with opportunities to increase their interest and motivation. They allow them to interact with different environments through observation, inquiry, and hands-on learning. I organized a field trip for students majoring in preschool education. The local area features the Nature House, an interactive science house, complete with habitats for ants and cockroaches. There is also a learning boat that takes trips on the lake, where participants can collect water samples and use microscopes to observe lake specimens. Organizing a field trip also pushed me out of my comfort zone at the university and encouraged me to find opportunities for my students to utilize local resources. It also allowed me to work with different community members, including the women at the Nature House.

The students who attended the field trip participated by observing the habitats, using the interactive wind tunnel, asking questions, and having conversations with the tour leader. As they interacted with the exhibits, several students remarked that preschool children exhibit the same sense of curiosity they experienced, which could easily be fostered through field trips and hands-on learning. They began discussing how they might adapt similar activities for younger learners in their own classrooms, such as observing insects or experimenting with air movement.

Using local resources, like the Nature House, helps instill the importance of creating opportunities for hands-on learning outside the classroom. Additionally, drawing on local resources supports sustainability and ensures the continued ability to provide meaningful, community-based learning experiences.

Enduring Impact

As with any new semester, I initially worried about connecting with my students in Latvia. This was a new country and culture for me, and I was sharing the courses with other professors rather than serving as the instructor of record. I also did not speak the native language, though I learned simple conversational phrases that helped build rapport. Fortunately, most Latvians speak English as part of their participation in the European Union, so communication was manageable. During orientation and conversations with colleagues who had lived in the country, I learned that Latvians often consider themselves introverts—less likely to initiate conversations but willing to engage when approached.

Despite these challenges, I drew on my prior experience building a community of learners. I incorporated familiar strategies such as morning meetings, literature circles, Pink Time, and a field trip. These approaches, grounded in motivation and engagement, proved effective across cultural boundaries. They reinforced the idea that supportive, student-centered practices can foster meaningful connections and enhance learning in any setting.

In addition, these practices helped me gain a deeper understanding of both the people and the culture of Latvia. Ultimately, the experience affirmed that intentional, inclusive strategies can transcend differences in language and context, creating a classroom environment where students feel connected and learning thrives.

My Fulbright experience in Latvia has had a lasting impact on both my teaching and my academic work now that I have returned to my institution in the United States. This semester, for literature circles, all students are reading the same novel. This approach proved highly effective in Latvia, where students engaged in small-group discussions and then came together as a whole class to clarify questions and deepen their understanding of the material. Additionally, assigning the same text helps address challenges related to student absences during literature circle time, since students can move fluidly between groups without losing continuity.

Beyond the classroom, I am collaborating with colleagues to explore incorporating field trips into my courses to enrich and expand the student learning experience. This idea grew from observing the impact of experiential learning in Latvia, and it will create more meaningful connections for my students here.

Finally, I am analyzing the data I collected on Pink Time during my time abroad. Although, I am not currently in communication with former students, as I continue this research, I plan to engage in member collaboration with former Latvian students to ensure the accuracy and authenticity of the data. The students themselves expressed eagerness to read the findings, and I look forward to sharing the research with them.

My Fulbright experience has not only broadened my teaching practices but also strengthened my commitment to student-centered learning and collaborative research. The insights gained in Latvia continue to shape the way I approach pedagogy, curriculum design, and scholarly work. Teaching in Latvia deepened my teaching philosophy by underscoring the importance of building relationships and being true to myself. It reminded me that creating a caring and student-empowered environment surpasses language barriers and reaffirms my commitment to fostering culturally inclusive and motivating spaces wherever I teach. While instructional strategies are essential, it is the human connections formed through open dialogue, shared stories, and mutual understanding that truly define a meaningful international exchange, for which the Fulbright is intended.

> ***"Creating a caring and student-empowered environment surpasses language barriers."***

Conclusion

As educators, we never fully know the impact we have on our students, and often, our students shape our own teaching and learning in even greater ways. My experience in Latvia reinforced this truth, as I learned as much from my students' perspectives and cultural insights as they did from me. As I continue my teaching practice, I strive to connect in meaningful ways that foster growth for both my students and myself.

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Working with students who are studying to be pre-school teachers. We are creating our morning meeting questions to ask during each class time. This low-stakes strategy encourages language practice and provides opportunities for building a community of learners.

BIOGRAPHY

Caryn M. Caruso, PhD, is an Assistant Professor and Elementary Education Coordinator in the College of Education at Lander University in Greenwood, South Carolina. She was in Latvia at the Riga Technical Institute-Liepaja from August 2024 to January 2025, where she taught in the Department of Education, Culture, and Social Welfare. She can be contacted at ccaruso@lander.edu.

Being the First Fulbrighter in Ordu, Türkiye

Hailey A. Hesseltine

Abstract

This article reflects on my experience as the first Fulbright English Teaching Assistant assigned to Ordu, a small city on Türkiye's Black Sea coast. It explores what it means to be a yabancı (foreigner), the power of everyday encounters to create exchange, and the importance of access to international connection beyond major cities. By weaving history, community, and personal narrative, it highlights Fulbright's quiet but enduring role in fostering curiosity, belonging, and mutual understanding.

Keywords: Fulbright Program • Türkiye • International education • Cross-cultural exchange • Regional access

I remember opening my email at 4 a.m., cramped in a tiny dorm room with my best friend. It was the day before I would graduate with my master's degree, and I was living in Hawai'i, probably the farthest I could be from Türkiye. My "room" could have been mistaken for a storage container: me in a twin-sized bed, my best friend on a borrowed air mattress on the floor. A month earlier, I had been named a Fulbright ETA finalist for Türkiye, and now the only question was where exactly I would be placed.

I'm not sure why I woke up so early that morning. Perhaps nerves about graduation, perhaps a forgotten notification. But there it was: an email from Fulbright. I would be spending my grant year in Ordu. A quick Google search revealed a small coastal city on the Black Sea, its mountains dropping sharply into the sea. A few hours later, my best friend, Turkish herself, woke up, and together we called her father to ask if Ordu was a "good" place. Little did I know then that this placement would be fateful in the best possible way.

Being the first Fulbrighter assigned to Ordu meant both a responsibility and an opportunity: to shape a legacy of English education in the region and to build new bridges of exchange. But it also raised a deeper question: What does it mean to be a yabancı, a foreigner, in this context, and how can Fulbright turn that identity into connection and community across cultural lines?

Ordu, or Altınordu, a city of just over 235,000, is nestled between green mountains and the sea. Mist often hangs over the hills, waves crash against the shore, and steady rain nourishes the fertile soil, which supports the region's identity and livelihoods. Hazelnut trees dominate the landscape, defining both scenery and seasonal rhythm, as families leave the city each summer to take part in the harvest. Alongside hazelnuts, tea cultivation and fishing sustain the

local economy and culture; tea, poured endlessly into tulip-shaped glasses and fresh fish from small boats on the coast define daily life. Türkiye supplies around 70% of the world's hazelnuts, meaning that to eat them anywhere in the world is often to taste the labor of families from Ordu. And yet, despite this global significance, Ordu remains relatively untouched by foreigners. Tourists are rare, and encounters with outsiders become memorable, even newsworthy. An American teaching at the university naturally sparks curiosity, making Fulbright's presence here particularly meaningful.

Teaching in Ordu: Classrooms and Curriculum

The center of my Fulbright experience was the classroom. I taught 21 hours of speaking-focused English courses each week, split between Maritime students and English Language & Literature students, reaching about 120 students in total. These two groups of learners could not have been more different, and they challenged me to rethink what it means to teach language.

The Maritime students were mostly young men preparing for careers on ships, where English functions as the lingua franca of global navigation. For them, learning English was a practical tool for future employment, not an academic exercise. They were curious but cautious, often reluctant to speak up for fear of making mistakes. Their confidence grew gradually, and the breakthroughs were deeply rewarding, like the first time a student cracked a joke in English and the whole class laughed, or when groups practiced their poster presentations with surprising fluency.

The English Language & Literature students were more academically inclined, eager to discuss pop culture, books, and contemporary global issues. Their English was stronger, but they often relied heavily on written forms. Speaking classes gave them a chance to experiment orally, sometimes stumbling but always eager to push through. They were also the most inquisitive, asking me about politics, US culture, and even my personal life. At times, the questions bordered on being too personal, but I came to see their curiosity as a sign of trust and engagement.

Trust became the defining feature of my classroom. Students told me things they had never told another teacher, perhaps assuming that as a foreigner, I would be less judgmental or less connected to their local community networks. A few students confided in me about their sexuality, something rarely discussed openly in Türkiye. They said they felt safe in my class, that my presence created a small pocket of openness. Others stayed after class simply to talk, to share stories, worries about exams, or dreams for the future. One student even asked me to teach him how to play the ukulele after spotting me playing the instrument in a coworker's office. These small gestures turned the classroom into more than a space for language. It became a space for trust, creativity, and belonging.

Learning to Teach, Teaching to Learn

Before Fulbright, my professional background had been rooted in student advising and mentorship. I supported high school and university students one-on-one, including many first-generation and international students, as they navigated higher education. In that work, relationships were individualized and progress could be tracked over months of conversation. Teaching 120 students in Ordu was a different challenge entirely. Instead of depth with a few, I needed breadth across many.

I quickly learned that my students' progress would not come from correcting every grammar mistake but from building confidence. One Maritime student barely spoke at the beginning of the semester, responding only in single words. By spring, he was volunteering answers, even if imperfect. Another student from English Language & Literature began weaving American idioms into his presentations, proud of using expressions I had introduced casually in class. Small shifts like these reminded me that language learning is about courage.

Teaching also forced me to reflect deeply on my own language. Students would ask why we say "on the bus" but "in the car," or why "read" is spelled the same in past and present tense but pronounced differently. These were questions I had never considered as a native speaker. I found myself researching explanations, breaking down patterns I had always taken for granted. In the process, I became more conscious of the complexity and beauty of the English language. Teaching English in Türkiye taught me more about my own language than any linguistics class ever had.

Perhaps the most meaningful growth came from embracing improvisation. My carefully prepared lesson plans often dissolved when students arrived tired from late-night study sessions or distracted by campus events. I learned to pivot, to turn a student's offhand comment into a class discussion, to transform a vocabulary mistake into a teaching moment, to let go of rigidity. These skills have made me not just a better teacher, but a more adaptable professional. And because students knew I would listen, they invited me into their world: I attended a soccer match where my students proudly cheered on their classmates, and a play a student of mine acted in, where I sat in the crowded auditorium with my other students as she performed. These moments of showing up mattered. They reminded students I cared about them beyond the gradebook, and in turn, they brought more of themselves into the classroom.

Belonging, Yabanci, and Community

My identity as a *yabancı*, a foreigner, shaped my life far beyond the classroom. The word itself became a touchstone. Unlike the sometimes-loaded "foreigner" in English, *yabancı* is often descriptive, even affectionate. Peers might greet me jokingly with "Merhaba yabancı!" or a shopkeeper might

pause to remark on my accent. I even had fellow professors point at me in the cafeteria, referring to me as the *"yabancı hoca,"* foreign teacher, failing to understand that I understood a bit of Turkish myself. Instead of exclusion, it often carried curiosity.

I looked for opportunities to engage with the local community beyond the university. Joining a salsa and bachata course introduced laughter and rhythm that bridged cultural gaps in ways words sometimes could not. I also participated in an English-speaking club at a nearby café, which evolved into leading two-hour discussions on topics ranging from mental health to Hawaiian culture and colonialism. These became spaces of shared curiosity, where I learned as much as I taught.

Local curiosity about my presence extended everywhere, from neighbors bringing food to welcome me, to café owners offering free tea, and to children shouting "hello!" on the street. During Ramadan and Kurban Bayramı, I was invited into homes to share meals and traditions. Each encounter reinforced the sense that Fulbright is not confined to classrooms or research projects. It is lived in daily interactions, in the ordinary rhythms of community life.

Professional and Personal Growth

Fulbright in Ordu shaped me in lasting ways. Personally, I became more independent. Ordu is not a city with a large expat network or endless entertainment options; living there required forging my own routines, navigating bureaucracy, and building relationships from scratch. What might have felt isolating instead became empowering. I learned how to belong by contributing, by saying yes to invitations, by showing up consistently.

Professionally, I discovered how much I value building community through education. I realized that teaching is not separate from advising or mentorship, but serves as another form of guiding people toward opportunities and confidence. This realization was powerful enough that I chose to stay. After completing my Fulbright year, I accepted a position as a lecturer in the same department at Ordu University. This continuity allowed me not only to deepen my work but also to welcome the second Fulbrighter assigned to the city. Watching Ordu shift from having no Fulbrighters to having two, one current and one alumna, was deeply rewarding, a sign that the seeds planted during my year were beginning to grow.

Fulbright also clarified my career trajectory. I had always been interested in international education, but living and working in Ordu showed me that access to cultural exchange matters most. Big cities like Istanbul or Ankara will always attract attention, but smaller cities deserve equal opportunities to connect globally. My time in Ordu convinced me that I want to build a career expanding those opportunities, ensuring students everywhere, not just in privileged centers, can engage internationally.

History, Legacy, and Protecting Access

The Black Sea region has long held strategic importance. During the Cold War, Türkiye's geography made it a vital buffer between East and West. Soviet claims on Türkiye's straits in 1946 prompted US policy responses, culminating in the Truman Doctrine and Türkiye's NATO membership in 1952. One relic of that era is the NATO radar base in nearby Trabzon, established in 1958. Its presence brought cultural exchange: local residents mingled with foreign personnel, recreational clubs emerged, and Western pastimes such as bowling and volleyball became known. Encounters with "the foreigner" became part of social memory, a precursor to the kind of people-to-people diplomacy Fulbright fosters today.

In Ordu, this history still surfaces. People sometimes ask if I am a spy or why an American is teaching here, half joking, half curious. Such questions highlight how rare meaningful interaction with foreigners remains. Fulbright continues this tradition of unexpected exchange, allowing human connections to persist even when global politics shift. One of Fulbright's quiet strengths is sending grantees to places rarely on the map of international exchange. Before my grant, I had never heard of Ordu. Many students had never interacted with an American. Their perceptions of the US were fragmented, drawn from TV, TikTok, or the news. Simple classroom conversations and cafeteria chats bridged that distance in ways no media could.

Conclusion: Ripples of Exchange

Looking back at that cramped dorm room in Hawai'i, staring at the unfamiliar name "Ordu" on my laptop, I could never have imagined the life that would follow. What began as uncertainty transformed into belonging. Being the first Fulbrighter in Ordu was about showing up, laughing with students in broken Turkish, and creating a visible presence where Americans are rare. Each moment, though small, generated ripples that touched students, colleagues, and neighbors.

> ***"What began as uncertainty transformed into belonging."***

Representing Fulbright meant demonstrating that international exchange should not be reserved for privileged cities or institutions. Ordu's students deserve the same opportunities to engage globally, and Fulbright gave them that. In turn, I grew into a more independent individual, a more reflective teacher, and a more committed professional in international education.

Now, with a second Fulbrighter in Ordu, the story continues. The legacy is multiplying, embedding the city more deeply in global networks of exchange. This is Fulbright's quiet power: it outlives any single individual, sustaining curiosity, connection, and hope in communities far from the spotlight.

FURTHER READING

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Hailey with some of her students on the last day of school.

BIOGRAPHY

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Bridging Systems: Insights on Germany's Higher Education System from a US Fulbright Scholar Specializing in Career Services

Melissa Kulp

Abstract

This article reflects on a US Fulbright Scholar's participation in the International Education Administrator (IEA) program in Germany. It examines Germany's dual education system, emphasizing the integration of academic and vocational pathways. Insights gained inform recommendations for enhancing US career services through industry-academia partnerships, workforce readiness initiatives, and cross-cultural exchange. By comparing educational systems, the article highlights opportunities to strengthen student employability and global competencies, fostering impactful reforms in higher education and career development.

Keywords: Career Services • Vocational Training • Workforce Development • Higher Education Reform • Germany

Background

In an increasingly interconnected world, education systems reflect cultural values and act as blueprints for societal progress. The higher education models of Germany and the United States each offer distinct strengths and challenges in accessibility, structure, and workforce alignment. In the US, my career in post-secondary career services has focused on helping students align their values with major choices, experiential learning opportunities, and their entry into the workforce. This focus on bridging education and employment made my Fulbright International Education Administrator (IEA) Award experience particularly impactful, offering an in-depth look at Germany's higher education and apprenticeship system. The award brought together 17 higher education administrators for an intensive two-week immersion in German academic culture and practices. The IEA program aims to help US administrators learn about the German educational system, ask questions,

and engage in discussions with German experts and counterparts about the benefits and challenges of both systems. The experience was built on the idea that knowledge is power and that through collaboration, we can make change and reform.

Although the IEA Award primarily targets international education administrators, its inclusion of educators specializing in career services allowed me to explore how Germany connects education to employment. During the program, I was immersed in Germany's approach to career development through in-depth engagements with experts, university visits, and conversations with international offices. These interactions provided a firsthand look at how institutions build strong connections between education and employment, inspiring new ways to integrate similar practices into my own work in career services. This experience deepened my understanding of global educational practices and highlighted invaluable opportunities for cross-cultural learning that can inform and inspire administrative practices.

Eye-Opening Perspectives on German Education

Understanding Germany's higher education system required examining its primary and secondary education structure, learning directly from a high school principal from Potsdam. For many of the IEA cohort participants, hearing about the German educational system was an eye-opening experience when we discovered that students are "tracked" into different schools with distinct higher education outcomes as early as grade five. While this system varies slightly across Germany's 16 federal states, students generally enter one of three educational paths: *Gymnasium, Realschule, or Hauptschule.* The *Gymnasium* serves as an advanced preparatory track for university, offering rigorous academic coursework. The *Realschule* provides a combination of academic and hands-on learning, preparing students for vocational training or other forms of applied higher education. The *Hauptschule* focuses on practical skills and is well-suited for students pursuing apprenticeships or industrial occupations. Debates arose immediately with the principal, as this rigidity led our cohort to question how a student in grade five could possess the self-awareness and foresight required to make such key decisions about their future career paths. However, to better understand and appreciate the system, we visited institutions that serve graduates of each educational "track." My focus centered on how German institutions prepare students to be "career ready" for the workforce, providing insights into their alignment of education and employment.

On other days, speakers from the German Rectors Conference shed light on the efficiency, accessibility, and workforce-oriented structure of the German higher education system. The *Deutsches Studierendenwerk* (German Student Affairs) staff shared that student services such as housing or counseling are not managed by universities but by third-party providers. Public universities, which are predominantly tuition-free, allow students to

study without accruing debt, a stark contrast to the high tuition costs faced by US students driven in part by increasingly sophisticated student amenities. This model ensures that education remains accessible to a diverse population, promoting greater socioeconomic mobility. German academic programs are also highly specialized, with students concentrating on a field from their first semester, creating a focused and rigorous academic environment.

An Exemplar Career Model for Everyone

Central to the system is the dual studies apprenticeship model, a hallmark of German education that blends theoretical instruction with hands-on, practical training. This innovative approach provides students with invaluable real-world experience and ensures their skills align with workforce needs. During the IEA, I observed this first-hand at Hochschule für Wirtschaft und Recht Berlin, a university of applied science specializing in business and economics. Here, internships were a required component of the curriculum supported by university partnerships with over 700 companies offering three-year practical work experiences. The Head of Computer Science explained how students simultaneously attended classes where they learned the theories underpinning their hands-on training. I was impressed by the duration and depth of this applied learning and how effectively it bridged the gap between academia and industry. Classroom instruction was directly informed by industry needs, allowing students to immediately apply their knowledge in professional settings, benefiting the university, student, and the company alike.

As we visited more universities and spoke with education leaders, we were able to see that Germany's early tracking system plays a fundamental role in shaping students' academic and career trajectories. By categorizing students into distinct pathways such as *Gymnasium, Realschule,* or *Hauptschule* from a young age, the system tailors education to align closely with individual strengths and career goals. This structure allows for a deep focus on specialized fields of study, helping students build confidence and self-efficacy as they progress toward their goals.

Comparing Workforce Preparation in Germany and the US

By the time German students enter universities or apprenticeship centers, they are well-prepared for specific careers, having spent years developing the skills and knowledge required for success. In contrast, US students often spend their initial two years of college exploring various disciplines before committing to a major. While this exploration furthers intellectual curiosity, it leaves less time for students to engage in internships and experiential learning opportunities directly tied to their fields of interest. Germany's dual apprenticeship system combines hands-on training with academic coursework and enhances career readiness. By providing students with practical experience

and a salary, the system alleviates financial pressures and ensures that students can focus on their studies without external financial burdens. This integrated approach serves as a model for aligning education with workforce demands, creating an effective pathway to career success.

In contrast, the US higher education system emphasizes flexibility and breadth, with students typically beginning their academic journeys through a liberal arts foundation. This approach encourages the exploration of diverse subjects through general coursework before declaring a major, fostering inquisitiveness and adaptability. Vibrant campus life and a strong emphasis on extracurricular activities contribute to creating a well-rounded educational experience. While internships are promoted as a form of experiential learning, they are often optional, short-term, and student-initiated, with no guarantee of employment. Many university-industry partnerships in the US frequently depend on employer fees to engage in recruitment, limiting access for smaller companies. These factors, alongside high tuition costs create significant financial and structural obstacles for many students navigating the US system.

Despite the many strengths the German system has, it is not without challenges. Its rigidity can be a drawback, as students have limited flexibility to move between "types" of higher education institutions. For instance, while it is possible for a student from *Hauptschule* to eventually attend a research university, the journey is complex. This stringency raised important questions within our cohort about the developmental appropriateness of expecting fifth-grade students to commit to career trajectories that may be difficult to reverse. Many of us, including myself, have dedicated our careers to helping post-secondary students who are young adults, explore their identities, find success in college, and define their professional aspirations. The stark contrast in systems underscored the complexities of balancing early specialization with the developmental needs of students, sparking intense discussions and reflections throughout our Fulbright program.

Lessons for US Career Service Offices

The US can draw valuable lessons from Germany's early selection system and dual studies apprenticeship model, which destigmatizes vocational training and offers students clear, respected pathways to essential careers. In the US, a deeply ingrained societal pressure to pursue four-year degrees overlooks students' interests and talents. Those who do not attend four-year institutions are often looked down upon and perceived as less educated. Many students enroll in college believing it is the necessary path and leave with no degree and insurmountable debt. In contrast, Germany's early selection system reduces these stigmas by valuing careers such as skilled tradespeople, professions essential to the functioning of society. Although some American high schools offer vocational training, these programs are under-enrolled and often stigmatized as the options for students who are less inclined to

attend college. If vocational programs were introduced earlier and framed as equally valuable career pathways, these programs could help students identify strengths and career interests sooner and better align education and workforce needs.

US institutions could also benefit significantly from the symbiotic relationships exemplified by Germany's dual studies apprenticeship system. While community colleges in the US incorporate aspects of this model by collaborating with local industries to design programs aligned with regional economic needs, and business schools often engage industry leaders through advisory boards to refine curricula, there remains untapped potential for deeper, more structured integration.

One of the defining strengths of Germany's model is its emphasis on developing both hard and soft skills, such as communication and problem-solving, through immersive vocational training. This dual emphasis prepares students not only for technical proficiency but also for navigating workplace environments. By adopting similar approaches, US institutions could promote greater student independence and confidence, as vocational training encourages learners to take ownership of their professional development. This approach promotes practical skill development and nurtures cross-cultural understanding, as seen in the commitment to address educational challenges and exchange of ideas during the Fulbright program.

Personal Reflections and Broader Implications of my Fulbright Experience

Through the Fulbright program, I had the privilege of engaging in exchanges with German and American educators about integrating academic and practical skill-building into educational frameworks. I was pleasantly surprised that despite what I found to be a superior hands-on experiential learning system, German administrators were interested in learning how to incorporate career services into their student resources, not just within the curricula. Many of the German administrators worked at institutions that lacked formal career service offices, and I was able to share my experience building career readiness programs among business students. At the University of Greifswald, the international services staff shared a new federal initiative called the FIT program, where support structures and career services at 89 German universities will be created for international students and graduates in hopes that they will stay and work in Germany. Speaking with the staff who had little prior work experience in career services was an incredible and unexpected opportunity for me to give back while on my Fulbright. I spent time with them, reviewing the FIT program policies and helping to construct a strategic plan for implementation. Moving forward, I hope to continue my partnership with Greifswald and other institutions involved in the FIT program.

The rich discussions we had over two weeks highlighted a shared understanding that modern education must evolve to meet the dual demands of academic rigor and workforce readiness, inspiring innovative strategies to bridge this gap. During the last two days of the program, 10 German educators joined us and shared strategies for elevating the perception of vocational training at both younger and high school ages, operating within our current US model. With them, I was able to explore ways to foster deeper industry-academia collaboration, creating a cooperative relationship between career services, faculty, and employers. These exchanges emphasized the importance of cultural shifts and systemic reforms in adapting educational models across borders.

> ***"Modern education must evolve to meet the dual demands of academic rigor and workforce readiness."***

CONCLUSION

My Fulbright journey was transformative, offering a unique lens through which to view education, culture, and policy. Beyond the professional insights, it reinforced the value of international collaboration in addressing shared challenges and fostering innovation. It revealed that students everywhere are seeking education that leads to employment, and administrators who support students share a common commitment to student success, regardless of the country. This experience personally deepened my commitment to advancing career services and providing students with resources that are inclusive, equitable, and aligned with the needs of the global workforce. It validated the importance of hands-on work experience during college, a perspective we preach in career services. It also created lifelong friendships and collaborations I could only have dreamed of a year ago.

Understanding that the IEA Fulbright primarily targets international services staff rather than career service administrators, I recognized this experience as an opportunity to explore IEA programming from a different perspective. My goal was to provide valuable insights to my home institution, while also raising awareness about career service initiatives in Germany. The German and US higher education systems have much to learn from each other, particularly in career services. For higher education administrators, the Fulbright IEA Award provides an opportunity to engage with global peers, exchange best practices, and bring back actionable ideas to their home institutions. The Fulbright experience not only furthers individual growth but also emphasizes the value of international collaboration in addressing shared educational challenges. Insights from Germany's system present an opportunity to take a deep look at US career services, ensuring students are prepared to navigate an increasingly interconnected global workforce.

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Dr. Kulp pictured with her fellow IEA Germany awardees and former German Fulbright awardees at the German Bundesrat in Berlin.

Biography

Dr. Melissa Kulp serves as the Executive Director of the Price Career Center at the Michael F. Price College of Business, University of Oklahoma. With 17 years of experience in education, Dr. Kulp specializes in integrating career readiness and employer relations into academic frameworks. She was a US Fulbright Scholar, participating in the International Education Administrator (IEA) Award to Germany in October 2024. She can be contacted at mkulp@ou.edu.

Bridging Borders Through Service Learning and Information Diplomacy: Insights from the Diplomacy Lab and Fulbright Scholars Programs

Bethany McGowan

Abstract

Through the Diplomacy Lab and the Fulbright Scholar Program, I explored innovative approaches to tackling global information challenges by integrating service-learning with information diplomacy. These programs demonstrated the power of education to foster mutual understanding, equip students as citizen diplomats, and address real-world challenges. Reflecting on my experiences in the US and Finland, this article highlights the transformative impact of service-learning on public diplomacy and proposes future pathways for global collaboration through education.

Keywords: Service-Learning • Public Diplomacy • Citizen Diplomat • Fulbright Scholar • Diplomacy Lab

Introduction: A Journey into Global Service-Learning

Global challenges such as misinformation and disinformation pose significant threats to public trust, civic engagement, and democratic values. Addressing these issues requires innovative approaches that combine education, collaboration, and diplomacy. My journey into international service-learning was rooted in a commitment to these ideals, using information as a tool to foster mutual understanding and empower communities. This commitment began during my graduate studies, where foundational experiences shaped my belief in the transformative potential of education and public diplomacy.

A fellowship with the Library of Congress Congressional Research Service (CRS) introduced me to the intricate role of research in shaping public policy and addressing societal challenges. Later, an internship with the US Department of State's Humanitarian Information Unit provided firsthand experience in using information to support humanitarian efforts and diplomacy. These early experiences emphasized the critical role of trust and information-sharing in addressing complex global challenges, inspiring me to explore how education could play a role in advancing these principles.

This foundation led me to service-learning as a method for bridging academic knowledge with real-world impact. By engaging students in projects that address misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation, service-learning provides a platform for tackling some of today's most pressing issues. It also instills in students the values of cultural humility, global citizenship, and information diplomacy—the strategic use of information to build trust, foster mutual understanding, and advance collaboration across cultural boundaries.

Through initiatives like Diplomacy Lab and the Fulbright Scholar Program, I have seen firsthand how service-learning transcends borders, connecting academic institutions, public diplomacy initiatives, and local communities. These experiences have reinforced my belief in education's potential to address global challenges while fostering cross-cultural understanding and inspiring future generations of citizen diplomats.

Laying the Groundwork with Diplomacy Lab

In 2022, I had the opportunity to bring my commitment to service-learning and public diplomacy into focus through the Diplomacy Lab, a US Department of State initiative designed to connect academic institutions with real-world policy challenges. At Purdue University, I led a course titled "Strategies for Identifying Mis/Dis/Malinformation," a project that engaged students in addressing the growing problem of misinformation. This initiative served as the perfect environment for integrating my prior experiences in public diplomacy with innovative, technology-driven solutions.

Central to the course was the use of AI tools and data analysis, which enabled students to monitor and assess trends in misinformation, particularly on social media platforms. These tools, including social listening platforms and machine learning models, allowed students to gather insights on how misinformation spreads, who it targets, and the narratives it perpetuates. For example, one project focused on identifying patterns in health-related misinformation and proposing community-specific communication strategies to counteract its impact.

This course exemplified the transformative power of service-learning. Students gained firsthand experience with interdisciplinary problem-solving, working at the intersection of technology, policy, and public diplomacy. In addition to the technical skills they developed, students explored the ethical challenges associated with combating misinformation, such as balancing free speech with public safety and understanding the cultural sensitivities required for effective communication.

> ***Combating misinformation demands a comprehensive approach integrating cultural sensitivity, ethical principles, and strategic communication."***

The Diplomacy Lab also reinforced the importance of collaboration in tackling complex global challenges. Throughout the course, students worked alongside faculty, policymakers, and public health experts, experiencing firsthand how their academic work could

contribute to broader societal goals. By the end of the semester, students had developed tools and frameworks that not only addressed specific aspects of misinformation but also contributed to the State Department's understanding of these issues.

This experience was transformative for me as well. It strengthened my skills in designing curricula that bridge academic theory with practical application and demonstrated the power of integrating public diplomacy principles into higher education. Perhaps most importantly, it served as a stepping stone for my Fulbright Scholar application, where I proposed expanding these efforts to an international context. My Fulbright Scholar proposal was successful, winning me the Fulbright Finland Foundation's Seeking Solutions for Global Challenges Award. The Diplomacy Lab laid the groundwork for a more ambitious exploration of how service-learning could foster cross-cultural understanding and address global information challenges.

Expanding Impact Through the Fulbright Scholar Program

The Fulbright Scholar Program offered an unparalleled opportunity to expand my work internationally, deepening the intersection of education, public diplomacy, and information literacy. Finland, a country recognized for its innovative approaches to combating misinformation and fostering information literacy, provided an ideal environment to implement a course titled Misinformation Management for Diverse Communities." This course was designed not only to build on my Diplomacy Lab experiences but also to explore how global contexts influence the application of information diplomacy.

In Finland, students tackled real-world scenarios where misinformation influenced public health outcomes, using tools like data analysis and AI to identify patterns and develop tailored interventions. For instance, students collaborated with local health organizations to address the impact of COVID-19 misinformation on vaccine uptake in rural communities. By leveraging AI insights and cultural knowledge, they designed educational campaigns that resonated with the local population, fostering trust and reducing resistance to vaccination.

The course also highlighted the importance of cultural humility in addressing global challenges. Finnish students brought unique perspectives to discussions, often emphasizing the role of institutional trust and community resilience in combating misinformation. These perspectives not only enriched classroom dialogue but also challenged me to adapt my teaching strategies to better reflect the cultural and social contexts of my host country.

What made the Fulbright Scholar Program especially impactful was the way it allowed me to integrate global and local frameworks. Drawing on insights from the WHO Infodemic Management Training and resources from Tampere University's WHO Collaborating Centre for Health in All Policies,

I was able to connect the global fight against misinformation to local efforts in Finland. This approach underscored the value of combining international best practices with culturally specific strategies to create meaningful, lasting solutions.

The Fulbright Scholar Program also offered opportunities for professional growth beyond the classroom. An Inter-Country Travel Grant allowed me to lecture in Sweden, where I engaged with European scholars working on similar challenges. These interactions expanded my professional network and deepened my understanding of how different countries approach misinformation management. Together, these experiences reinforced the global interconnectedness of these issues and the necessity of cross-border collaboration to address them effectively.

ADDRESSING GLOBAL CHALLENGES THROUGH INFORMATION DIPLOMACY

As global challenges such as misinformation and disinformation continue to undermine public trust and civic engagement, the need for innovative solutions grounded in diplomacy has never been more urgent. Information diplomacy, defined as the strategic use of information to foster trust, mutual understanding, and collaboration across borders, was a cornerstone of my work during the Fulbright Scholar Program. This framework provided a lens through which students could explore the ethical, cultural, and strategic dimensions of combating misinformation in diverse contexts.

In the course I taught in Finland, *Misinformation Management for Diverse Communities*, students were introduced to the principles of information diplomacy and tasked with applying these concepts to real-world problems. Collaborating with local health organizations, media representatives, and academic experts, students examined how misinformation shaped public health outcomes in Finland. They analyzed case studies of vaccine hesitancy, health literacy gaps, and the role of social media in amplifying false narratives. These efforts culminated in projects that ranged from public health communication campaigns to culturally tailored educational materials aimed at dispelling common health-related myths.

A key focus of the course was the ethical use of information in building trust. Students explored questions such as: How can we ensure that information interventions respect cultural values and community norms? What role does transparency play in combating misinformation? These discussions challenged students to think critically about their role as information stewards, not just as communicators but as agents of trust-building in their respective fields.

The service-learning approach further emphasized the importance of citizen diplomacy—the idea that individuals, regardless of formal diplomatic roles, can play a significant part in fostering international collaboration. By considering the needs of Finnish communities, students gained a nuanced

understanding of the cultural and social dynamics that shape the spread of misinformation. This hands-on experience equipped them with the skills to apply information diplomacy principles in their future careers, whether in public health, education, or policy-making.

One of the most impactful aspects of the course was its ability to foster cross-cultural dialogue. Finnish students, drawing from their country's high levels of institutional trust and strong tradition of information literacy, shared insights that broadened the perspectives of their peers. At the same time, international students brought unique viewpoints on the global challenges of misinformation, enriching discussions with comparative approaches. This exchange underscored the value of diversity in tackling complex global issues and highlighted the importance of culturally adaptive strategies in information diplomacy.

Ultimately, the course demonstrated that combating misinformation requires more than technical solutions; it demands a comprehensive approach that integrates cultural sensitivity, ethical principles, and strategic communication. By positioning students as citizen diplomats, the course empowered them to see themselves as part of the solution to global information challenges. The experience reinforced the idea that diplomacy is not confined to government offices but thrives in classrooms, communities, and everyday interactions where trust and understanding are built.

Long-Term Impact: Lessons Learned and Future Directions

Reflecting on my experiences with Diplomacy Lab and the Fulbright Scholar Program, I see a clear thread connecting these initiatives: the transformative potential of service-learning to bridge academic knowledge with real-world challenges. Both programs have reinforced the importance of equipping students—and faculty—with the tools to address complex global issues like misinformation through a combination of cultural understanding, strategic communication, and information diplomacy.

One of the most significant lessons I have learned is the value of integrating public diplomacy principles into education. The Diplomacy Lab highlighted how academic institutions can collaborate with government agencies to produce actionable insights and solutions to policy challenges. Meanwhile, the Fulbright Scholar Program demonstrated how these principles can be scaled internationally, fostering cross-cultural understanding and collaboration. Together, these experiences underscored the role of higher education in preparing students to navigate a globally interconnected world where the ethical use of information is critical.

These programs have also had a profound impact on my professional trajectory. Through teaching, research, and collaboration, I have been able to explore how information diplomacy can serve as a framework for addressing misinformation and building trust across cultures. Engaging with international colleagues and communities has deepened my understanding of the

nuances involved in global problem-solving, from adapting communication strategies to respecting cultural norms. These experiences have enriched my scholarship, inspiring new research directions and collaborations focused on the intersection of information studies and diplomacy.

Looking ahead, I am committed to continuing this work, expanding on the foundations laid by Diplomacy Lab and the Fulbright Scholar Program. One of my primary goals is to develop new service-learning courses that address global challenges in innovative ways, incorporating lessons learned from my time in Finland. I also aim to foster partnerships that connect academic institutions with public policy initiatives, emphasizing the critical role of interdisciplinary collaboration in solving real-world problems.

Finally, I see a growing need to scale the principles of information diplomacy beyond the classroom, creating resources and frameworks that can be adapted by educators, policymakers, and community leaders. Whether through public health campaigns, educational initiatives, or policy advising, I believe that the strategic use of information can help build resilient, informed communities capable of addressing the challenges of misinformation and disinformation in an ever-evolving digital landscape.

As I reflect on these experiences, I am reminded of the enduring impact of the Fulbright Scholar Program. By fostering cross-cultural dialogue, promoting mutual understanding, and addressing pressing global challenges, it embodies the values that lie at the heart of public diplomacy. Through its support, I have gained not only professional growth but also a renewed sense of purpose in using education to inspire positive change. This journey has reinforced my belief in the power of service-learning and diplomacy to create a more informed, equitable, and connected world.

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Biography

Bethany McGowan is an Associate Professor in the Libraries and School of Information Studies at Purdue University, specializing in service-learning, public diplomacy, and health information literacy. As a Fulbright Scholar to Finland (2023–2024), McGowan taught and conducted research on global health and information challenges, emphasizing the roles of information diplomacy and infodemic management in fostering cross-cultural understanding. Her work integrates academic instruction with public diplomacy frameworks to address global information challenges and promote community resilience. She can be reached at bmcgowa@purdue.edu.

Teaching-Learning Centers: Why Should They Be in All Universities?

Melina Murgel

Abstract

The Fulbright Project for the Modernization of Undergraduate Education (PMG) aims to improve engineering education in Brazil. As a teaching assistant to the project, I visited Harvard, Columbia and MIT to learn about innovative teaching strategies in these universities. I found that such innovation demands institutional incentive and support, which are fostered by teaching-learning centers dedicated to assist professors to redesign their teaching practices.

Keywords: Innovation in teaching • Teaching-learning centers • Pedagogical redesign • Undergraduate education • Active learning

Teachers often want to improve the way they teach and incorporate active learning in their classes. However, as willing as they may be to do so, they frequently do not have enough time to study and plan how to do that. Therefore, it would be beneficial for them to have specialized support, or specifically, someone who helps teachers to modernize their classes – a pedagogical redesign professional.

The design of reproducible teaching methodologies is one of the objectives of the Project for the Modernization of Undergraduate Education (PMG). The program is a partnership between Fulbright and the Brazilian government with the goal of improving undergraduate education in Brazilian universities, starting with engineering courses. The University of São Paulo is participating in the PMG through the Polytechnic School (Poli) chemical engineering course. As a post-doc at the University of São Paulo, I participated in the PMG and was awarded a grant to visit universities in the United States and learn about innovative teaching methods used there, with the intent to reproduce them at Poli.

People are often surprised to find out that I am a chemical engineer holding a PhD in science education. However, for me, these two things are not as opposite as they may seem; on the contrary, they are complementary. My goal has never been to work in a factory; I've always wanted to be a scientist and a teacher. The PMG was perfect for me. Since undergraduate school, I have been interested in active learning methods, and, early in my studies on this topic, I realized that putting these teaching strategies into practice could be challenging for many reasons. Therefore, I was very excited to see the teaching-learning methods used in leading universities.

During my academic mission, I had the pleasure to visit Professor Paulo Blikstein at Columbia University and Professor Eric Mazur at Harvard University. Once I was in Boston, I did not miss the chance to also visit the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). What an opportunity!

Professor Blikstein works with pedagogical redesign teachers. The first time I read about this concept I was fascinated by the idea of professionals who help teachers incorporate active learning in their classes. Moreover, Professor Mazur is widely known in science education for creating Peer Instruction, an active learning method in which students learn by sharing their knowledge with their peers. One of the strengths of this method is that it was designed for classes with many students; a reality at Poli and a challenge for most active learning methods.

Observing Peer Instruction and other active learning methods in practice was amazing. Additionally, I learned that innovation in teaching requires substantial institutional incentive and support. Columbia, Harvard and MIT provide incentive by rewarding excellence in teaching. To support professors to redesign their classes, Harvard and MIT have their own pedagogical redesign professionals working in teaching-learning centers, which seem to be the key for innovation in teaching. In this article, I aim to answer: What is a teaching-learning center? What does it do? And why should every university have one?

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Based at the Teachers College – Columbia's Graduate School of Education – I had the opportunity to sit with Professor Paulo Blikstein, who discussed the challenges for the modernization of education. He explained that improving teaching goes beyond the strategies and methods teachers use in their classrooms, and highlighted the importance of infrastructure and faculty mindset. According to Professor Blikstein, teachers are frequently willing to improve their classes, but often too overloaded and/or insecure to do it alone. In these cases, a little help from pedagogical redesign professionals may be very handy. However, as Blikstein pointed out, institutionalization of innovation is more difficult than innovation itself.

Further, according to Blikstein, large classes can hinder innovation if assigned to a single teacher; therefore, teaching assistants (TAs) are necessary as they can share the workload. In addition to human resources, appropriate physical space, equipment, materials, and time are required. Changes in curricular arrangement are also needed because it is necessary to synthesize "old" content to make room for current technology and market's demands.

While offering institutional support to teachers is crucial, it is not enough. They also need incentives to change their mindset about teaching and their teaching strategies. And that, Blikstein told me, is the tricky part. Universities praise their faculty for doing research. Productive researchers receive more

funding and get promoted. It seems like teaching is in their way. Rather than being something that professors are rewarded for doing well, teaching good classes is time-consuming and leads to little or no recognition. This is perhaps the most urgent structural change needed.

But how to do that? Teachers College started to seriously value teaching in the evaluation of faculty career progress. Faculty members are assessed by the students (as in many universities), but they also attend each other's classes twice a semester and fill out an assessment form. With these results, innovative teaching methods can be identified and acknowledged. The recognition can take the form of career progress, prizes, bonuses, funding (e.g. for classes infrastructure, or attending congresses on education), visibility of initiatives, etc.

After my conversation with Blikstein about the relevance of infrastructure and faculty mindset, I understood that I should not focus on teaching-learning methods alone, but mainly the institutional support and incentive that enable them. This helped me to 'resignify' and drive my efforts in my academic mission.

Harvard University

At Harvard, I was pleased to observe several classes of Applied Physics 50 (AP50), conducted by Professor Eric Mazur. AP50 is different from any other class I have ever attended – I felt as if I were experiencing the so called "21st century education". The course is project-based and has no lectures nor exams. The students are divided in cohorts that rotate between three sections: the check-in sections, the skills section, and the maker space sections. In the check-in sections, students acquire theoretical concepts needed for the project. They discuss, in small groups, solutions to tutorials and challenges that they have previously solved at home – this dynamic is based on Peer Instruction. When they decide they are ready, they ask a TA to check-in their solution. In the skills sections, they put these concepts into practice by performing experiments and writing a report answering guiding questions, which are also checked-in by an instructor. In the maker space they build their projects. While I was there, students were working on the construction of Rube Goldberg machines to learn about kinematics.

By observing AP50 taught by Professor Mazur, I concluded that the 21st century teacher might not be just a lecturer, but also a manager. Just like peer instruction, the strategies used in AP50 evolved across the years and have continually improved. It is notable that AP50 as currently taught demands an enormous infrastructure, and this is not feasible in every university – that is why the Mazur group does not provide a "recipe" for their success. However, they do publish many works on the theoretical basis of how and why it works – and research has shown that students learn more with peer instruction than with traditional teaching.

The success of AP50 demonstrates the potential of active learning. However, planning and conducting classes in which students are more active is not a simple task. Guided by my conversation with Professor Blikstein, I was not after teaching methods alone, but what makes them possible. That was how I found the Learning Incubator (LInc), a teaching-learning center that has a team of pedagogical redesign professionals to support faculty to redesign their courses, implement changes, and assess outcomes. When a professor is committed to redesign their course, they are exempted from teaching it, and an instructor is hired, so the professor can dedicate time to planning. Graduate students can also participate in the redesign, which contributes to their training as future teachers.

At the Learning Incubator, I met Salma Abu Ayyash, who is a Preceptor in Education Innovation. She told me that the creation of the teaching-learning center was a top-down decision, showing institutional incentive and support for innovation in teaching. It was important because, as it is hard to change the way one teaches, their biggest challenge is cultural. Salma's advice was to find a few professors who are willing to improve and start with small changes. They will spread the ideas, and bring more people on board.

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Due to their proximity, Harvard and MIT scholars frequently collaborate. Professor Peter Dourmashkin, from the MIT, also redesigned his Physics course to make it more active learning oriented, and exchanged ideas with Professor Mazur. Dourmashkin took part in the creation of Technology-Enabled Active Learning (TEAL), which was also designed for large classes, and uses Mazur's Peer Instruction.

The in-person classes are part of learning sequences, and teachers count on six to nine TAs per section, who are an essential part of the course, like in AP50. Before classes, students access video-lessons and working problems in an online environment, MITx. In the classroom, they discuss the course content in further detail and work on problems in groups. After classes, students solve practice problems with checkable answers, and if they struggle with homework, they can go to office hours.

The TEAL classroom was created to foster active learning (Figure 1). It has 13 round tables with nine seats each and electrical outlets for group – accommodating around 100 students. All the walls have whiteboards with cameras pointed at them. Screens around the room project presentation slides and broadcast what the teacher is writing, allowing all students to see from their seats.

In my conversation with Dourmashkin, the importance of cultural change for innovation in teaching came up once again. He highlighted that TEAL is supported by three pillars: student culture, faculty culture, and administrative culture. At MIT I also met Professor Lori Breslow, who accompanied TEAL's first steps and implementation. She expounded on how TEAL has a big digital component, but most importantly, a political component. When TEAL classes first began, some students and faculty members were against it.

According to Breslow, Professors Judy Dori and John Belcher played a significant role in this context. In a study, they showed that, compared to the traditional teaching previously used in the course, TEAL increased conceptual understanding and decreased course failure. In addition, students reported being positively impacted by the introduction of technology. Although complaints were heard, research results gave TEAL institutional support to keep going.

Although active learning cannot cover as much content as lectures, it can provide more depth and understanding. That is why many other active learning initiatives were born at MIT after TEAL. However, even at MIT, keeping students engaged remained a challenge. In order to help faculty members who want to modernize their classes, MIT also has a teaching-learning center, the Teaching + Learning Lab (TLL). Just like the Learning Incubator, TLL is a service center that makes innovation in teaching scalable. They are also responsible for TA training – preparing the next generation.

At the TLL, I met Lourdes Alemán, who is an Associate Director for Teaching and Learning. Once again, I was alerted that implementation of change is the hardest part. She pointed out that, for implementing change at an institutional level, it is important to address professors' concerns and offer what they need. Alemán explained some strategies that have worked in TLL.

Small groups with regular meetings guided by facilitators allow building a community of individuals who cooperate and help each other. These groups have senior and new hires. Alemán mentioned that it is important to select senior professors who are in consonance to the culture and practices that the institution wants to perpetuate. In the groups' meetings, they share their success cases and exchange ideas. Faculties need to feel that the meetings are useful, and be rewarded for the time spent there. TLL also incentivizes professors to visit each other's classes, creating a feedback loop in which they learn with each other. Disseminating positive results is important because, according to Alemán, examples of people from the same institution are more convincing than data coming from different contexts. Therefore, her main advice was to arm ourselves with data – that is what scientists listen to.

Lessons learned

When I boarded to the US, I knew that this academic mission would be a life-changing adventure. I brought back home many valuable lessons. On a personal level, this whole experience taught me that support is one of the most important factors for career success. As a STEM (Science, Technology,

Engineering and Mathematics) educator, I learnt the name of something that I had been draw to since my graduate studies: pedagogical redesign. And, as a PMG assistant, I found out that the key for the modernization of undergraduate education is institutional support and incentives.

Innovation in teaching is not something that teachers should be expected to do alone. Institutions must provide support – which can be done through the teaching-learning centers – and incentives – by rewarding professors for good classes in their career progress. The teaching-learning centers allow scaling up innovation in teaching, so rather than being teacher-related, it becomes part of the institution's culture.

> ***"Innovation in teaching is not something that teachers should be expected to do alone."***

The institutionalization of an innovative teaching culture starts with small changes and the creation of a community. It requires bringing together people who are ready and willing to change how they teach, and assisting them to redesign their classes. It is also important to collect data, measure outcomes, recognize their efforts, and reward their results. Moreover, it is necessary to provide appropriate infrastructure; mainly through the investment in teaching assistants, as it not only helps current faculty with their classes, but also contributes to the training of the next generation of professors.

To make it all happen, the teaching-learning centers at Harvard and MIT count on education experts who have knowledge about the content – in this case, the engineering domain. After all, it seems like my background in engineering and my PhD in science education are not unrelated! Now, I embrace the mission to bring the teaching-learning centers as an innovative solution to Brazilian universities.

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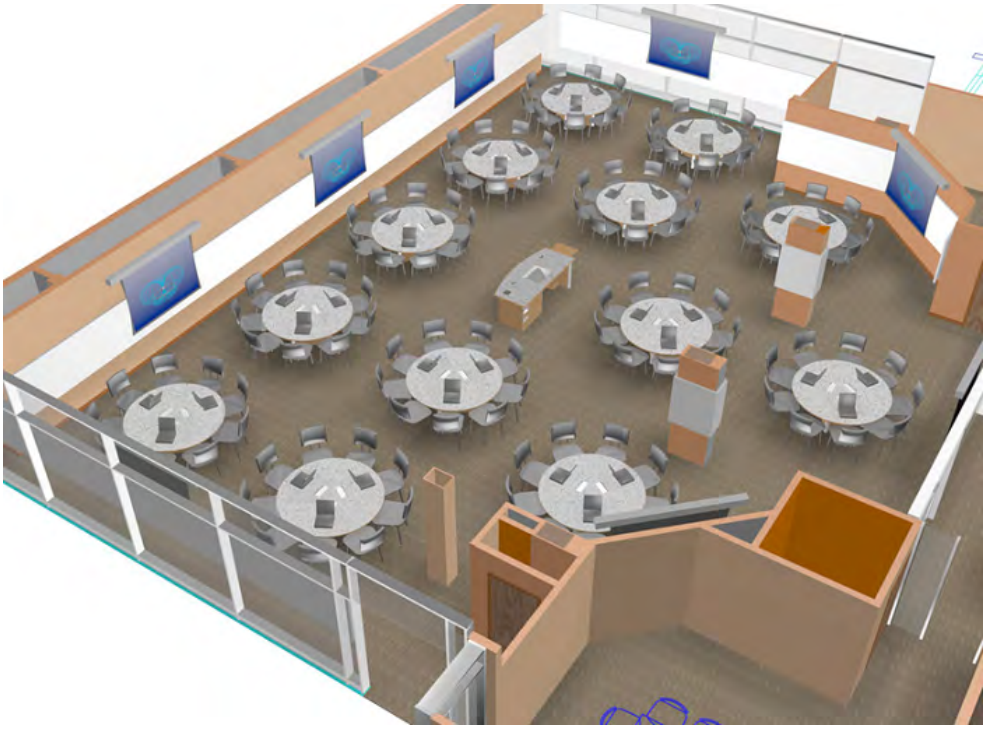

TEAL classroom (source: https://web.mit.edu/ed-tech/casestudies/teal.html).

Biography

Melina Murgel is a postdoctoral researcher in Science Education at University of São Paulo, Brazil. She was awarded a CAPES-Fulbright grant to visit the US in 2024 as part of the Project for the Modernization of Undergraduate Education (PMG). During this period, she was hosted by P. Blikstein and E. Mazur and had the opportunity to engage in enlightening conversations with L. Breslow, P. Dourmashkin, L. Alemán, and S.A. Ayyash. She is deeply grateful to her supervisors, C. Fernandez and A. Tonso, and to everyone who contributed to making this experience possible. You can contact her at melmurgel@usp.br.

A Fulbright Journey Of Global Healing In Barbados

Lauren D. Pitts-Bounds

Abstract

As a Fulbright Student Scholar to Barbados, my goal was to explore the influence of paternal presence or absence in shaping emotional resilience and personal agency in adolescent daughters. Through inquiry, cultural immersion, and community collaboration via the D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program and parent education workshops, I engaged with administrators, educators, counselors, high school girls, and parents to examine the perceived impact of the father-daughter relationship on decision-making and educational outcomes.

Keywords: Barbados • Fatherlessness • Trauma • Global Healing • Educational Outcomes

Introduction

The moment my feet touched the soil of Barbados, something deep within me awakened. I could not explain it at the time, but I knew I was standing on sacred ground – the kind of knowing that bypasses logic and speaks directly to the soul. Until that moment, I had carried almost no depth of knowledge about my Caribbean heritage. Yet, the second my feet met the warm earth, I felt more at home than I ever had in the United States. It was more than familiarity, it was belonging.

What began as a Fulbright research grant became something far greater than academic inquiry. It became a pilgrimage – a spiritual reckoning that merged personal healing with global purpose. I arrived in Barbados to examine adolescent girls' experiences of identity, resilience, and empowerment, but the journey soon evolved into something deeper. As the work unfolded, I realized that the questions I was asking of these young women mirrored questions I had spent a lifetime asking myself: *Where do I truly belong? Who am I beyond my trauma? And how do we reclaim power in the spaces where history, identity, and healing intersect?*

Where the Journey Began

My Fulbright Statement of Grant Purpose aimed to explore the cultural, social, and emotional factors influencing adolescent girls' development and resilience in Barbados. Initially, I planned to examine adolescent reproductive health, but the Ministry of Education expressed concern, prompting me to refocus on identity, empowerment, and educational outcomes.

What began as a shift in direction became a gift. By centering broader themes of resilience and belonging, I engaged with the girls' narratives more holistically. This transition aligned seamlessly with my dissertation, *"DADS & DAUGHTERS: Understanding the African American Fathers' Perceived Influences on Their Daughters' Academic Experiences and Educational Outcomes."* While my dissertation examined US populations, the parallels in Barbados were striking; fatherlessness disrupted family systems and limited educational access mirrored realities back home.

Through workshops, one-on-one interviews, and community conversations, I began to see a much larger tapestry emerging. Barbados illuminated that healing, identity, and empowerment are not bound by geography. Whether in Salem, New Jersey, or Bridgetown, Barbados, the challenges of identity formation amid adversity are deeply human – and so is the potential for transformation.

Discoveries Along the Way

As I spent more time in Bajan communities, it became clear that identity is both deeply personal and profoundly collective. The adolescent girls' voices carried quiet strength, but also an unspoken longing to envision futures beyond their current circumstances.

"Fatherlessness is not a singular wound," I wrote in my dissertation, "it's a ripple touching identity, belonging, and self-worth in ways both visible and invisible." That truth echoed here. Many of the young women I met carried stories of missing fathers, fractured families, and generational pain. Others described financial barriers or systemic inequities that limited their educational opportunities.

Yet I witnessed remarkable resilience. Within classrooms and community centers, these young women drew strength from cultural pride, faith, and kinship networks. Education repeatedly emerged as the most powerful catalyst for transformation academically, emotionally, and spiritually.

From this work, three central findings emerged: Identity Formation is a Global Struggle – Whether in Salem, New Jersey, or Bridgetown, Barbados, adolescent girls are navigating layered questions of identity, belonging, and self-worth. Factors like fatherlessness, trauma, and social inequities consistently emerged as drivers shaping their internal narratives. Education is Liberation – Girls consistently expressed that education represented freedom – the chance to rewrite their stories. Yet disparities in access, resources, and representation reinforced feelings of marginalization, underscoring the need for more equitable systems globally. Healing Requires Community – While personal resilience was evident, collective healing – through family, schools, and broader cultural systems was necessary to break cycles of intergenerational trauma. This aligned closely with the framework of my dissertation, which highlighted the power of shared narratives in restoring identity and belonging.

This fusion of personal and scholarly exploration became the heartbeat of my Fulbright journey. Barbados was not just the site of research; it was the mirror through which I better understood the universality of pain and the possibility of transformation.

Becoming a Part of Barbados

The moment my feet touched the warm soil of Barbados, something within me shifted. It was as though the island whispered a welcome my soul had been waiting to hear my entire life. Until that moment, I had known little about my Caribbean roots. Yet standing there surrounded by salty air, vibrant colors, and voices layered with history, I felt an inexplicable sense of homecoming.

This connection to the land shaped everything that followed. I was not just an outsider conducting research; I became part of the rhythm of Barbados – its people, its traditions, its unspoken stories. I immersed myself in Bajan culture, attending community gatherings, walking through bustling markets, sharing meals, and listening deeply to the stories of women and girls whose lives mirrored struggles I knew intimately.

But this transformation was not without its challenges. Midway through my grant period, I experienced a robbery that forced me to confront my deepest fears and traumas. In that moment, I had a choice: retreat into fear or lean fully into faith and purpose. I chose the latter. This pivotal event became a crucible for my spiritual and emotional growth. I came to understand, in a visceral way, that healing is never linear; it demands courage, surrender, and the willingness to rewrite your own narrative.

Barbados became more than a research site; it became a mirror, reflecting back truths I had carried my entire life without naming them: the generational cycles of trauma, the silent longing for belonging, and the power of reclaiming one's identity.

As I navigated these personal awakenings, I found myself deeply connected to the adolescent girls I was working with. Their stories of pain, resilience, and hope wove seamlessly into my own. Through guided workshops and conversations, I began to see how their dreams for the future and their struggles to break free from inherited patterns mirrored the very themes explored in my dissertation.

It became clear that my Fulbright journey was not just about gathering data; it was about **becoming**. I arrived seeking to contribute to global conversations about identity, fatherlessness, and healing. I left transformed, carrying with me the voices of Barbados, interwoven with my own, into a broader narrative of what it means to heal generational wounds.

LESSONS WITHOUT BORDERS

In countless conversations, the girls spoke of longing for belonging, of reconciling fractured relationships, and of navigating societal pressures without clear models of support. Their voices echoed the themes central to my dissertation: the critical role of healthy identity development and relational bonds in shaping educational and emotional outcomes. These insights reaffirmed what my research revealed: when young people feel unseen, unheard, and unsupported, the consequences ripple across every dimension of their lives.

This realization reshaped my perspective on trauma-informed approaches in education and counseling. If we are to break generational cycles, interventions cannot exist in isolation. They must be culturally responsive, community-driven, and deeply rooted in the lived realities of those we serve. My work through Legacy Counseling & Life Coaching, LLC builds on these insights, creating spaces where healing, empowerment, and personal transformation intersect.

The lessons learned in Barbados extend far beyond its shores, deepening my understanding that healing begins when we are willing to listen deeply to the stories of those we serve. Identity reclamation is a powerful act of resistance against cycles of generational trauma and sustainable change requires co-creating solutions with, not for, the communities impacted.

In this way, my Fulbright experience became both research and revelation – a living, breathing extension of the work I've dedicated my life to: helping individuals and communities reclaim their wholeness and rewrite their narratives.

RESEARCH & REALITY

My Fulbright experience in Barbados became the living laboratory where my scholarly work and personal healing converged. The foundation of my dissertation explored the intersection of fatherlessness, identity development, educational outcomes, and relational health within marginalized communities. What began as a theoretical framework evolved into something far more personal and deeply embodied when I arrived on the island.

I witnessed firsthand the profound ways in which intergenerational trauma and systemic inequities shape the lives of young women navigating questions of identity and belonging. My research focused on understanding how cultural heritage, familial structures, and socio-economic realities influence adolescent self-perception and educational achievement. As my dissertation argues, identity development is not a singular; process, it is a layered negotiation of lived experiences, cultural expectations, and systemic barriers.

These truths became clear in Barbados. In conversations with teachers, community leaders, and young women themselves, I recognized patterns consistent with my dissertation findings including the lingering effects of historical disenfranchisement and disrupted family structures. Absent

fathers have a profound influence on self-esteem, academic motivation, and relational choices. Furthermore, the resilience of adolescent girls who, despite systemic constraints, continue to seek empowerment through education and community.

During my focus groups, several young women reported feeling disconnected from their histories and cultures. This mirrored the very estrangement I had experienced growing up – a longing for belonging without fully understanding the roots of my heritage. Standing on Bajan soil, I began to understand how this disconnection reverberates not just personally, but generationally.

Empowerment, Identity, and The Queen Within

Barbados became the catalyst for a deeper awakening of my identity and purpose. While my Fulbright research focused on cultural identity, fatherlessness, and relational wellness, living the experience unearthed parts of my story I had long buried. Standing on that island, I felt an unspoken connection to my Caribbean heritage – a sense of "home" that transcended borders, time, and history. That connection became the heartbeat of my transformation.

During my time in Barbados, I was also completing the manuscript that would become *The Queen Within: Becoming the Woman God Intended*. This memoir began in 2003 as an act of survival and a way to confront trauma, abandonment, and generational wounds, but in Barbados, the writing became something more: a reclamation of identity and my voice.

The lived experiences of the young women I interviewed – their silent battles with shame, cultural expectations, and fractured family narratives resonated deeply with my own journey. Their stories of resilience amplified my commitment to amplifying voices that have too often been silenced. Through their courage, I found the strength to confront my own wounds, and in doing so, began to embody the very healing my scholarship advocated.

The Queen Within is not just a personal narrative; it is an extension of the work I began during my Fulbright year – a movement to empower others to transform pain into purpose, adversity into agency, and trauma into triumph. Barbados gave me the clarity to integrate my academic research, personal healing, and professional mission into one unified narrative that continues to guide my work today.

Legacy, Leadership, And The Collective Call To Heal

My time in Barbados was not the end of my journey it was the beginning of a greater calling. The experience clarified what had been stirring in my spirit for years: healing is never just personal; it is collective. The themes I researched – identity, family dynamics, and relational wellness extended far beyond the young women I worked with. They became the foundation for Legacy Counseling & Life Coaching, LLC, the organization I would later build to serve individuals, families, and communities worldwide.

Legacy was born from a simple yet profound belief: when we heal, we create ripple effects that transform generations. The stories I heard in Barbados mirrored those I had encountered in the US and across international borders – narratives of fractured families, silenced trauma, and the urgent need for spaces where people could reclaim their voices and agency.

> ***"When we heal, we create ripple effects that transform generations."***

My scholarship gave me the language to analyze these challenges, but my lived experiences gave me the compassion and vision to lead others through them. Through Legacy, I have fused evidence-based clinical practice, cultural responsiveness, and purpose-driven leadership to dismantle barriers to wellness, equity, and belonging.

Barbados was my classroom, my sanctuary, and my catalyst. It ignited a passion to bridge personal healing with systemic change to create opportunities for people to step fully into their own "queen within," embracing identities unburdened by shame and empowered by resilience.

Full Circle

Standing on the shores of Barbados, I began to understand that my Fulbright journey was never just about academic research, it was about reclaiming my identity, rewriting generational narratives, and finding my purpose on a global stage. That moment when my feet first touched Bajan soil awakened something deep within me – an ancestral knowing that transcended geography, time, and circumstance.

Through my research, I sought to amplify voices too often silenced by stigma, shame, and systemic inequities. Through my healing, I learned that our traumas do not define us, they refine us. And through **Legacy Counseling & Life Coaching, LLC**, I have committed my work to help individuals, families, and communities rewrite their own stories of identity, wellness, and possibility.

Barbados was the catalyst, but the mission is global. My Fulbright experience, my dissertation, and my memoir *The Queen Within* are all threads in a tapestry of transformation – proof that when we lean into our pain, confront generational wounds, and reclaim our power, we create legacies that extend far beyond ourselves.

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Lauren with a group of parents, administrators, educators, clergy and students at Codrington College in St. John, Barbados.

Biography

Lauren D. Pitts-Bounds is a Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist and the CEO of Legacy Counseling & Life Coaching LLC in Dallas, TX. She received a Fulbright Student Scholar research award (2014-2015) to Barbados. She earned her master's and doctoral degrees from Drexel University. Dr. Lauren can be contacted at DrLauren@Legacyclc.org.

How A Taiwan Fulbright Broadened A China Scholar's Horizon

Hilary A. Smith

Abstract

For decades I had conducted research abroad primarily in the People's Republic of China, until a 2024 Fulbright award to Taiwan reoriented my perspective. Living and doing research in Taiwan gave me a new understanding of Chinese history and identity that both shaped my latest book and helped me escape the conflict-centered discourse that dominates conversations about China in the US. This article explains how.

Keywords: China • Taiwan • New Cold War • History • Geopolitics

Introduction

Before I arrived in Taipei in January of 2024 as a Fulbright scholar, I would not have identified with the frog in the well. In a Chinese story from the ancient text, a frog looks up from the bottom of a well and, seeing a huge turtle peering down at him from above, begins to boast about how terrific his home is and how he enjoys being master of its mud and water. "Why not come down and join me, turtle?" He asks. But the turtle is much too large to enter the small well. Instead, he tells the frog about his own home, the Eastern Sea, so big that consecutive years of flood or drought don't perceptibly change the amount of water it holds. The little frog, speechless with amazement, has become a symbol in Chinese cultures of naïve complacency and ignorance of the wider world.

"That is not me," I'd have said before 2024. I had traveled widely, lived in different parts of the United States and the globe, and developed expertise in Chinese and medical history. But living in Taipei as a visiting scholar at Academia Sinica's Institute of History and Philology (IHP) reminded me that even a world that feels expansive is just one narrow sliver of existence.

China in American Eyes: From Land of Opportunity to Incipient Enemy

Like many of my colleagues who go to Taiwan, I identify primarily as a China scholar. On an impulse thirty years ago, I signed up for Mandarin 101 in my first semester of college, and by the time the professor had finished demonstrating the four tones, I was hooked. I spent one summer in an immersive language program in Beijing and the next teaching English in Suzhou. I graduated determined to find work that would keep connecting me

with China. After returning to the People's Republic of China (PRC) as a full-time English teacher, I was lucky enough to find my way to graduate school and eventually to a career as a historian. In short, I fell in love with China as a young adult and never looked back.

You may have noticed that everything in that autobiographical sketch was about China, not Taiwan. In the mid-1990s when I started studying Mandarin, Taiwan was an afterthought. Americans were bullish about the PRC despite the shock of the Tiananmen crackdown half a decade earlier. They saw mainland China as dynamic and rising, so that's where they chose to go for study, research and work. The Chinese citizens I met were optimistic too: their lives and prospects were improving as the economy burgeoned.

Consequently, just about every part of my early education in Chinese language and culture tilted toward the PRC. The university's brilliant, hard-working language teachers were from the mainland; my Chinese was peppered with the distinctive "arr" sound that Beijingers attach to many word endings. After the first year of study, in which we read and wrote the traditional form of Chinese characters (coincidentally, the form used in Taiwan and much of the Chinese diaspora), our teachers allowed us to choose whether to continue learning traditional or switch to the simplified characters used on the mainland. Most of us switched, not from any conscious affinity for the PRC but because it meant memorizing fewer strokes of the pen.

Since then, times have changed. Over the past five years or so, as China curtailed residents' and visitors' movement in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, and as tensions between the PRC and the US have risen, it has become harder for Americans to envision a China-centered future for themselves. The number of Americans studying in China has dropped dramatically, from around fifteen thousand in the early 2010s to fewer than one thousand in 2024. The number of Chinese students in the US has also declined by many tens of thousands since its peak in 2019, though nearly three hundred thousand still attend American colleges. And Chinese-language enrollments across US universities have been going down too. At the same time, the US has halted both Peace Corps and Fulbright programs on the mainland. Princeton-in-Asia, the one-hundred-and-twenty-year-old organization that facilitated my early teaching experiences in Suzhou and Dalian, stopped sending fellows to the PRC after the pandemic began.

For people like me who make a living learning and teaching about China, it's hard to maintain morale in the face of all this. But Taiwan reignited my love of Chinese culture, history and language and reinforced my commitment to sharing that passion with students. At the same time, the experience expanded and complicated my understanding of what Chinese identity means and what Chinese history ought to look like.

Loving and Relearning China in Taiwan

Living in Taiwan was a joyful and reinvigorating experience, to an extent that I had not anticipated as I prepared to go. In the lead-up to our departure, a cloud of anxiety appeared virtually every time I talked with colleagues, students and family about the journey my high schooler and I were about to make. Taiwan? They asked. Did I think it was safe? Wasn't China threatening to invade? Once I arrived, however, I found myself able to be excited about Chinese culture and history again without US-centered geopolitics pervading every conversation. In the time I spent on the island, precisely zero of the many Taiwanese people I chatted with expressed anxiety about a Chinese invasion. It's not that they were unaware of the ominous changes in mainland political culture since Xi Jinping came to power in 2012—but Taiwan to them was more than just a potential flashpoint in a new Cold War between the US and China. It was home, where they were living full, rich lives.

It was also inspiring to be in a place where a heritage of Chinese knowledge, custom and language thrives in an ever-more-democratic and inclusive society. I loved hearing Taiwanese and Hakka spoken alongside Mandarin not only on the streets but in official subway announcements and TV shows. In January, just before Taiwan's presidential election, my teenager and I were thrilled to see tens of thousands of enthusiastic citizens gathered for a political rally in front of Taipei's presidential palace—in a street that used to be named "Long Live Chiang Kai-shek Road" after the dictator who held Taiwan under martial law for decades. Now the street is called Ketagalan Boulevard in honor of an indigenous group. In May, the streets around the legislature filled with protesters trying to stop a bill from passing. It passed, to their disappointment, but the fractious, vibrant political process went on. A taxi driver I spoke with about the protest said, "They just need to get out and vote in the next election."

To be sure, there are limits to what one can conclude from incidental interactions, and I do not mean to suggest that politics are more harmonious or society is more unified in Taiwan than in, say, the United States. Legislators sometimes throw punches at one another on the floor of the parliament. Resentments sometimes surface between communities who arrived on the island from different places at different times.

Nor do I intend, by celebrating Taiwan's distinctiveness and diversity, to reinforce a dichotomy between "good Taiwan" and "bad China," or to suggest that my time in Taiwan reinforced a negative view of the mainland. While Taiwanese colleagues, friends and strangers sometimes expressed consternation about surveillance and the suppression of free speech when I asked about the PRC, just as often the reaction was quite positive. Only rarely did I hear the kind of anxiety about China that I'd grown used to in the US. The people I talked with asked me where I had been on the mainland and told me about their own travels there. Some had businesses and family in the PRC and visited often. They marveled at how rapidly Chinese infrastructure had advanced. In short, just as Taiwanese people viewed Taiwan as more than a pawn in a

geopolitical game, most of them spoke of China as more than a big, scary neighbor. Depending on their own background and experiences, people in Taiwan saw mainland China as heritage, threat, inspiration, oppression, family, opportunity—any combination of these, or all of them at once.

The next time someone suggests that it is intrinsically Chinese to be authoritarian or that Confucian cultures are naturally antidemocratic—claims I sometimes encounter in my classes and when I give talks in the community—I can complicate this simplistic notion with a fresh set of counterexamples.

Fulbright's Enduring Outcomes

The Fulbright experience changed not only the book I went to Taiwan to complete but also the content of what I teach, reorienting my thinking and building connections that will foster more collaboration in the future. The book, a history of how nutrition science has assessed Chinese bodies and foodways, broadened and gained complexity in Taiwan. From fellow Fulbrighter Miranda Brown, with whom I co-presented a workshop on Chinese dairy history, I learned more about how many premodern Chinese doctors had recommended milk as a health booster, for example. That in turn reshaped the way I wrote about the modern perception that lactose intolerance is a problem for Chinese eaters.

Similarly, the project had originally focused only on China, but in Taiwan, Japan entered the picture too. After I gave a talk on early twentieth-century Chinese nutrition books, Chen Hsiu-fen from National Chengchi University urged me to learn more about the Japanese precedents that the writers had been drawing on. Japanese impact on Chinese science is not something histories published in the PRC tend to emphasize. But Taiwan's colonial heritage has conferred an understanding of Japan both more intimate and more nuanced than what prevails on the mainland, and there it became more apparent to me how profoundly Japanese voices had influenced Chinese dietetics.

Taiwan itself shows up in the book thanks to the deeper engagement with experts on food and medical history that the grant facilitated. I had not considered Taiwan in my initial conception of the project, probably because I assumed that the story there would differ little from the story in other Chinese communities. But during the Fulbright experience, talking with and reading scholars such as Chen Yu-jen, Pi Kuo-li, and Michelle King, who have all written about Taiwan's distinctive cultures of food and medicine, made me begin to suspect that Taiwan was necessary to complete the story I had begun to tell. That suspicion became conviction when I stumbled across archival documents about Taiwan's modern foodways in the library of Academia Sinica's Institute of Modern History. The documents chronicled how Taiwan had begun to import large amounts of discounted American wheat and dairy after World War II, and how that influx had changed eating patterns. I knew I needed to revise my chapters.

Taiwan's diverse heritage impacted smaller things about the project too, such as the spelling of names in the book. Originally I wrote all the Chinese names in the manuscript in Hanyu Pinyin, the system for rendering Chinese characters invented in the PRC in the 1950s. But while Pinyin is universal on the mainland, in Taiwan it competes with many different alternative spellings. I initially saw this as a historian's nightmare—if there is no unified standard, how do you tell whether a name mentioned in one source is the same as a name in another? But gradually Taiwan helped me realize that systems can accommodate a bit of idiosyncrasy without falling apart. I began to accord my historical actors the same respect I accorded living people when it came to choosing their own spelling. Just as I would not correct the residents of 淡水, a Taipei district they spell "Tamsui" but that would be "Danshui" in Pinyin, I stopped writing the name of the scientist 吳憲 "Wu Xian." Wu himself never used "Wu Xian," the Pinyin rendering. Instead, when he published in English, he wrote his name "Hsien Wu." I changed the spelling of his name in the book to honor his choice.

I returned to the US with a better understanding of Chinese cultures, plural, and a new enthusiasm for communicating that plurality. Taiwan opened my eyes to ways in which people construct identities that include Chinese elements but are not necessarily defined by them, ways of being Chinese *and*. Or as some Taiwanese observers have put it, reversing the PRC's political claim that Taiwan is a part of China: culturally and historically speaking, *China is part of Taiwan*.

Back at my home institution, the University of Denver, I am picking away at the conflict-shaped mold that discussions of Taiwan and China get poured into these days. The person-to-person exchanges that Fulbright encouraged gave me new Taiwanese friends both inside and outside of the academy, friends I continue to chat with weekly online. That has allowed me to better understand how history and politics play out on the ground in East Asia. When the Taiwanese government threatened to deport residents who had migrated from the mainland but not officially cancelled their PRC household registration, my friend He Pei, who'd grown up in the PRC and moved to Taiwan as an adult, was able to explain more precisely what that meant and whom it affected. Such conversations help me give students a different kind of insight than they get from news reports.

I now work more deliberately to embed an appreciation of Chinese plurality and diversity in my teaching. Before, Taiwan showed up as a single lesson in my class on modern China, and I had focused on the perspectives of governments: the PRC's, Taiwan's, the US's, and the UN's. Now, I am building a class that focuses on the voices of dissenters and includes Taiwan as more than just a day: we will hear from and about the intellectuals purged in the anti-Rightist movement on the mainland but also the Taiwanese intellectuals suppressed in Taiwan's White Terror in the same period. We will examine not only the unsuccessful Tiananmen protests of 1989 but also the successful

Wild Lily protests in Taiwan the following year. I also aspire to give US students more-direct access to varied voices by connecting them online with my Chinese and Taiwanese colleagues' students, and ultimately, perhaps, by taking them abroad for an in-person experience.

Like *Zhuangzi*'s frog, many Americans currently have a limited view. We see news articles, editorials and political speeches flitting across our circle of sky and infer from them what China is. But the example of Taiwan shows that the world will always be more complex than we could grasp even if we were perched at the top of the well, much less from its bottom. The Fulbright ethos of building relationships between individuals—the frog-by-frog approach, one might call it—does more than revitalize discouraged China scholars like me. It also offers hope for a more-fruitful future involving the US, China, and Taiwan.

> ***"The Fulbright ethos of building relationships between individuals—the frog-by-frog approach—offers hope."***

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After giving a lecture, Hilary Smith discusses twentieth-century ideas about rice and health with Jia-Chen Fu at the Institute of Modern History.

BIOGRAPHY

Hilary A. Smith is Associate Professor of History at the University of Denver. She was a Fulbright US Scholar at the Institute of History and Philology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan in 2024. The book she completed while a Fulbright scholar is *Nutritional Imperialism: How Science Turned Difference into Sickness in China*, forthcoming from Johns Hopkins University Press. She can be reached at hilary.smith@du.edu. Learn more about her work at https://udenver.academia.edu/HSmith.

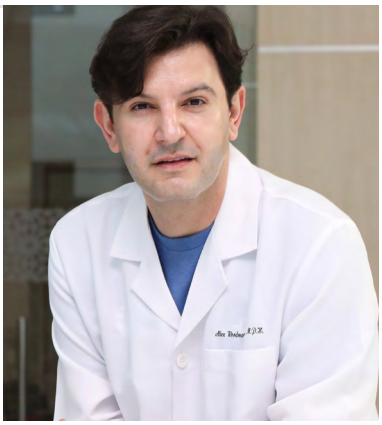
Food Dome Dietary Guidelines: My Fulbright Research on Mapping Obesity in the Gulf Region

Alexander Woodman

Abstract

My Fulbright research at Arabian Gulf University in Bahrain was mixed-method research that focused on a better understanding of the relationship between Gulf medical students' knowledge and attitudes about Food Dome dietary guidelines (FDDG). In this article, I share the qualitative findings of my research. Medical students were willing and eager to learn more about the FDDG. However, some of the main challenges were resource availability, cooking options, taste, culture, physical environment, time, and class pressure.

Keywords: Food Dome dietary guidelines • Gulf • Medical Students • Knowledge • Attitude • Behavior



The transition to university is recognized as a significant development period, marked by exploring one's identity and potential and ability to fit into social and spatial environments. Students' increasing autonomy and independence entail significant life changes and may be accompanied by less healthy behaviors, such as unhealthy food choices. Further global evidence from the past three decades suggests that students are increasingly choosing unhealthy foods due to a lack of knowledge and positive attitudes towards unhealthy foods, where taste and pleasure are some of the principal considerations in food choices.

Consistent with global trends, the burden of overweight, obesity, and obesity-related non-communicable diseases in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries has increased significantly over the past three decades, reaching epidemic status. Since more than half of the population in the GCC countries is under 30 years of age, regional studies have shown that students are the most affected groups in terms of overweight and obesity. The body of evidence on the determinants and factors associated with obesity among students in GCC countries suggests that examining students' knowledge, attitudes and behavior regarding food choices and physical activity patterns is critical. However, thus far, most studies conducted in the Gulf countries have focused on students' daily habits, behavior, and prevalence of overweight and obesity, rather than assessing their nutrition knowledge and the attitudes that influence their food choices.

Food-based dietary guidelines (FBDG) attempt to guide communities about food, diet, and health in a specific, culturally appropriate way and offer feasible recommendations for various foods, nutrition, and health policies and programs to improve population health and nutrition behavior.

Analysis of national and regional FBDGs of 85 countries showed that the use of FBDGs might be associated with a reduction in premature mortality at 15% (13% to 16%) on average. In 2012, the Arab Center for Nutrition developed the Food Dome dietary guidelines (FDDG) for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to prevent overnutrition, malnutrition, and micronutrient deficiencies, and promote physical activity (PA). However, there is no evidence to suggest that the FDDG was scientifically promoted or distributed to the general public through nationwide campaigns or by other means. While most authors in the Gulf writing on this topic tend to conclude their articles by advising students to follow national dietary guidelines, none of the studies conducted in any of the Gulf states has attempted to explore students' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in relation to national dietary guidelines or health nutrition.

Having grown up and been educated in the United States, one of the countries with the highest obesity rate in the world, I had the opportunity to observe the food choices of my peers, which led me to understand that there are many complex factors influencing people's attitudes and food choices. This is how I became interested in factors influencing Gulf students' food choices, and, thus, the aim of my Fulbright research was developed. This mixed-method research as part of my Fulbright Research at Arabian Gulf University (AGU) is the first to explore knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors in relation to the FDDG among Gulf university students. This study was a unique contribution not only to Bahrain, where the research was completed but also laid the foundation for future research in the rest of the Gulf countries, as well as making a significant contribution to mapping obesity in the region.

Food Dome – knowledge, attitudes, behavior

In this article, I share the qualitative components of my research, which is unique in that it allows the voices of medical students from the Gulf region to be heard, recorded, and published. Focus groups among Gulf medical students allowed them to qualify, clarify, and build a discussion of each other's responses, thereby providing me with an opportunity to immerse myself in the students' daily lives and explore the barriers and facilitators to adopting healthy or unhealthy lifestyles.

In essence, Gulf medical students drew a clear distinction between their pre-medical and medical periods, whereby during their pre-medical years, most students led healthy lifestyles and spent most of their time with their families. However, once they became students or, as they said, "medical periods," most respondents agreed that they all started to follow the same daily routine, which included waking up at the same time, running to classes or hospital rounds, eating, and studying, with the time and workload of classes being decisive factors for the rest of the day's activities, including meals.

FOOD DOME VS. FOOD PYRAMID

When respondents were asked to share their perception of a healthy lifestyle, most agreed that a healthy lifestyle is a balance between nutrition, physical activity, sleep, mental health, and avoiding unhealthy habits such as smoking. However, one participant suggested that there is no clear answer to what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. He also emphasized that a healthy lifestyle may vary from person to person and may not have a significant impact on their health.

Interestingly, this participant went on to suggest that even doctors have not come to a clear definition of a healthy lifestyle.

> *"I think there was no straight answer to your question. Because it depends on the person himself, because as you can see a lot of doctors or specialists and nutrition is what they agree and they disagree to each other (GB, P3, Male)."*

These arguments led to a discussion about the Food Dome, designed specifically for the MENA region. It turned out that the respondents knew about the Food Pyramid, but most lacked knowledge about the Food Dome. Thus, Gulf medical students were well informed about the Food Pyramid and its components but not the Food Dome. They even questioned the choice of shape, i.e., a dome.

> *"Is it dome because for Arab countries? (GA, P5, Female)"*

Only one student was aware of Food Dome as he had seen the FDDG earlier during a conference. However, the dome had been presented there in the form of a pyramid.

> *"So I've seen this. I've seen I've seen this in kind of the conferences before, but not any an exact dome, but they were talking about that we have a certain Arab food pyramid. So it was more of a pyramid than a dome, but with the same amount of servings (GB, P4, Male)."*

PROS AND CONS OF FOOD DOME

Gulf medical students perceived the FDDG as a clear and visually appealing conveyance of information through images. They also noted that it is common knowledge that food should not be shared equally, but rather according to the needs of the individual. However, as respondents explored FDDG, questions arose about food types and portion sizes, with a particular focus on protein and carbohydrates. They argued that Food Dome should include more protein as the basis of a healthy diet, rather than large amounts of carbohydrates. One student noted that the Gulf region already has a problem with insulin resistance, and consuming 11 servings of carbohydrates daily could worsen the situation.

"I was surprised about how much carbs like this six to 11 servings. Is that per day? Yeah, I think I don't know that. It's surprises (GA, P3, Female)."
"Yeah, it's really reciprocating how the data is in the Arab regions (GB, P2, Male)."

Only a few respondents who delved into the FDDG and its components argued that everything in the Food Dome is culturally and regionally appropriate, and when looking at the variety of grains or cereals these products are an integral part of the daily diet of the Gulf States. They also noted that most of the food is grain-based, and in terms of protein servings, it is consistent with the daily diet of the region.

"Initially I thought it is a lot. But for example when seeing of cereals he means one slice of bread I can see why he make most of it [carbs] (GA, P7, Female)."
"We do consume proteins for breakfast, evening breakfast, lunch and dinners (GB, P4, Male)."

When the subsequent discussion focused on changes that the Gulf medical students believed could improve FDDG, all respondents agreed on the need to include fluids, i.e. water, and how often it should be consumed. Gulf medical students expressed concerns about physical activity and time allocated to age groups, stating that the recommendations do not match the actual capabilities of children or adults in employment. They noted that there are many reasons why people in the region avoid physical activity, including hot weather, with most of the region's population instead choosing to sit inside and consume the same amount of food.

"that's when we see the issues [health] start to appear as well (GB, P2, Male)."

The respondents argued that the number of minutes for adults is not enough for energy balance and that more time should be allocated. One of the students also noted that housewives exercise more than 30 minutes a day, especially if they do not have helpers in the house: cleaning, cooking, walking, picking up children. This was followed by an interesting and thought-provoking argument:

"Just being at home and cooking, cleaning and going up and down doesn't mean it's enough physical activity they need to at least some 30-minute jog for instance, or some or walk (GB, P2, Male)."
"Yeah, they do. They do. This is considered heavy activity. Have you tried doing the laundry of a full house? (GB, P4, Male)."

These comments led to a discussion of modifiable and non-modifiable factors. Students emphasized that regional culture and weather have a significant impact on people's behavior, in most of the cases hindering compliance with the FDDG. However, they noted that there are also modifiable factors that can promote compliance with the FDDG, such as education from an early age. The discussion thus turned to how to spread knowledge about the Food Dome and how to educate people.

FOOD DOME EDUCATION

Gulf medical students shared their thoughts on the best possible ways to educate about FDDG. Events where healthcare facilities, schools, or restaurants come together to discuss the dangers of unhealthy foods or how much of a certain product to consume, were among the leading suggestions. They emphasized that these educational events should be free so that anyone can participate. Other suggestions included that food companies list the number of servings of each food, protein, and carbohydrate on their labels. They believed that this approach would encourage people to learn more about nutrition.

> *"I would like to add that not everyone knows how to read those labels. And they need to put it on the front the packaging how much each serving has for example four servings of protein (GA, P3, Female)."*

Most respondents agreed that Food Dome education should start at early years of education. They believed that if the Gulf region was taught about the Food Dome from an early age instead of the Food Pyramid, their food choices would likely be much healthier as adults, i.e., in line with local foods. They further argued that they were taught the Food Pyramid, along with recommendations created for the American population and their region, and it can be suggested that they, or at least some of them, were following the wrong recommendations all the time.

> *"Go to school and teach children while they are young and they will be more convinced what is wrong or right. In adult it is harder to change habits (GA, P3, Female)."*

The respondents suggested to stop TV or online campaigns on FDDG as they no longer have any impact and to start live actions in which supermarkets, government and researchers work together to promote healthier food using healthier ingredients. In a discussion about healthier ingredients, one student emphasized and others supported that:

> *"I think one other thing is that unfortunately, in our region, sometimes healthier options are more expensive. And that means that people will not be encouraged as compared to non healthy options, which are much cheaper and take less time (GB, P6, Female)."*

The concluding remark was expressed as follows:

> *"What we need in our region is to educate people about how to eat the same or how to get the same taste of the food you like, or how to make the same traditional food you like in a healthy way, that could be a good idea (GB, P4, Male)."*

CONCLUSION

My invaluable experience as a Fulbright Scholar allowed me to practice reflexivity as a hallmark of excellent research, allowing me to reflect again on myself as a researcher; on the cultural, historical, linguistic, political, and other forces that shape everything in the research, and on the social interactions between researcher [me] and participants. Medical students from the Gulf region, as future healthcare providers, were willing and eager to receive education to learn more about the FDDG and to rethink their food choices. However, some of the main challenges reported by the students in adopting the FDDG recommendations were culturally customary diet, price and availability of certain food groups. These arguments were echoed in global evidence, where the main barriers to following healthy lifestyles and dietary recommendations were social and cultural factors rather than lack of skills or knowledge about healthy eating.

"My invaluable experience as a Fulbright Scholar allowed me to practice reflexivity as a hallmark of excellent research."

Students' food choices are often based on resource availability, cooking options, food taste and culture, physical environment and, perhaps most importantly, time, class pressure, and food prices. I believe that this research has created a new direction and a set of hypotheses that should be explored in more detail.

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Alex Woodman Conducting Qualitative Interview
with AGU Students

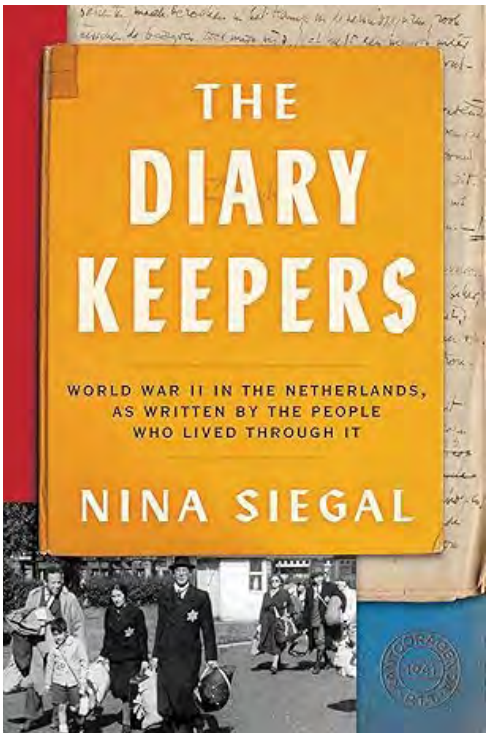
BIOGRAPHY

Alexander Woodman is a professor of preventive medicine and public health. He received his undergraduate and graduate degrees from UCLA, USC, and Harvard Medical School. His primary research focuses on advancing global health, medical education and practice. In his research, Alexander merges epidemiological data with state-of-the-art laboratory technologies to find new ways to understand a variety of health conditions impacting the daily life of the public. He can be contacted at alexwoodman.ucla@gmail.com.

REVIEWS

Hear Them Speak

by Cynthia Smith



The Diary Keepers: World War II in the Netherlands Written by the People Who Lived Through It by Nina Siegal, who had a Fulbright Fellowship in Creative Writing in 2014.

In The *Diary Keepers*, author Nina Siegal taps into the importance of first-person contemporary narratives during World War II and the Holocaust, by letting us hear the diarists in their own words. Anne Frank: The *Diary of a Young Girl* is famous throughout the world, but it was only one of many diaries kept in the Netherlands during this time. Siegal sheds light on less well-known diarists, giving a dynamic and multifaceted context for the events of World War II in the Netherlands.

It seems the Dutch citizenry was encouraged to keep diaries, not only by the unprecedented historical events of their time (starting with the German occupation in May of 1940), but also by a suggestion from the Dutch minister of education, arts, and sciences with the promise that the government would establish a new National Center for War Documentation. The idea of the preservation of contemporary voices in World War II was at the forefront in the minds of not only the Dutch citizenry, but also the Dutch leadership exiled in Britain.

Siegel opens with her personal connection to the topic: she's a descendant of a Dutch Jewish family, a fluent speaker of Dutch, and an accomplished *New York Times* reporter. While the atrocities that occurred at this time can make these pages difficult to digest, the author has the utmost respect and takes great care to let the diarists' work be representative of their individual voices and experiences.

She uses nine diarists' points of view throughout the book. The diarists are from varying Dutch backgrounds: Jewish; those without political affiliation; members of the Dutch resistance; and Dutch Nazis. Siegal provides background and other relevant information for each of the diarists and their particular circumstances.

The organization of *The Diary Keepers* focuses on the dates of the diary entries, pointing out how the various diarists logged the events. Philip Mechanis, a 54-year-old Jewish diarist in Westerbork Transit Camp, for example, penned the following on Saturday, May 29, 1943: "I have the feeling that I am an unofficial reporter covering a shipwreck. We sit together in a cyclone, feeling the ship leaking, slowly sinking. Yet, we're still trying to reach a harbor, though it seems far away" (223-4).

Just a few days later, on Friday, June 4, 1943, Inge Jansen, a housewife and member of the NSB (a Dutch fascist organization) describes a very different life in Amsterdam: "I went with Adriaan [her husband and fellow NSB member], looking very smart and handsome in his SS uniform, to the Colonial Institute this afternoon, . . . We saw a film about the life of Friedrich Schiller" (230).

Siegal allows the voices of the individual authors to take precedence in the narratives. The juxtaposition of Jewish, resistance, Nazi, or Nazi-aligned experiences on the same day or surrounding a particular event reveals what was important to them to memorialize. Photos and documents are included throughout for additional support. Explanations of terms, places, and events, specifically related to Jewish culture, professions, and the roots of Dutch anti-Semitism are given for clarification. Supplemental information regarding the context for diary entries include the reason the diarist stopped writing, the fate of the diarist, and if possible, follow-up with the family of the diarist through interviews with living diarist or family members. Siegal also gives a comprehensive overview of diary publications, media releases, published works, and interviews with survivors in the final section of the book. This literature review, of sorts, is quite helpful for those wanting more information and sources on what happened in the Dutch Holocaust especially and to European Jewry generally.

Siegal further discusses how these sources have shaped the world-wide public perception of what occurred to European Jewry in the Holocaust. She attempts to process the disproportionally large percentage of Dutch Jewish victims who did not survive the war: "Of the estimated 140,000 Dutch Jews, only about 35,000 survived World War II" (11). Siegal discovered that the Dutch did not shelter Jews as well as Anne Frank's story would imply.

In recent years, it has become increasingly evident that the voices of those who were eyewitnesses to the Holocaust and World War II are ephemeral unless recorded. These firsthand voices are important to combat future forgetting and denialism on the one hand and issues with human memory on the other. Diaries should be considered a "first draft of memory," according to Siegal. In the conclusion, Siegal describes memorials erected in the Netherlands with loving detail and thoughtful prose. In reference to the Liebeschuetz Memorial, she writes, "The visitor must slow down to read each name. . . [T]hese names represent not just families, or family trees, but generations and diasporic kinship" (463).

"These firsthand voices are important to combat future forgetting and denialism on the one hand and issues with human memory on the other."

The importance of the opening of the National Holocaust Memorial Museum or the Dutch Holocaust Memorial of Names, just a few years ago, is an example of the recent Dutch public responses to contemporary antisemitism. Siegal ends this book with *"L'chaim,"* A toast: To life."

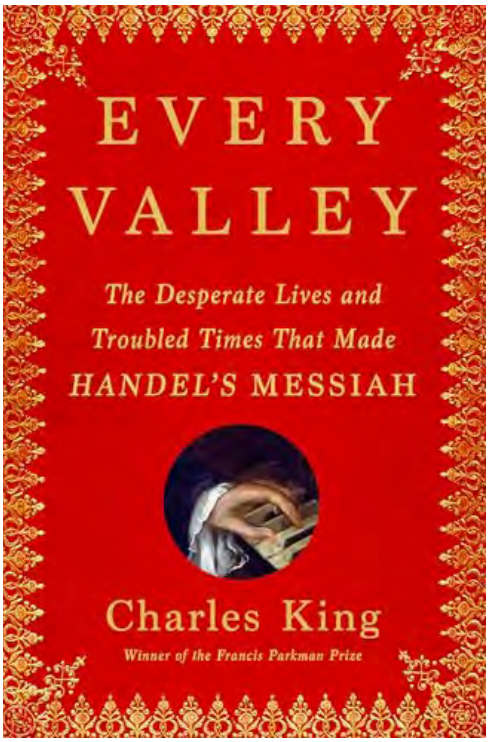
Nina Siegal. *The Diary Keepers: World War II in the Netherlands as Written by the People Who Lived Through It.* New York: Harper-Collins Publishers, 2023. 544 pages. $16.95.

Biography

Cynthia L. Smith was a 2013 Fulbright Scholar in Musicology to Basel, Switzerland where she researched the Holocaust compositions of Viktor Ullmann, a Moravian composer who was imprisoned in Theresienstadt and murdered at Auschwitz. Presently, she is an Assistant Teaching Professor of Voice at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. Prior to her current position, she taught at KM Music Conservatory in Chennai, India. A Tennessee native and Western-classical mezzo-soprano, Cynthia, is an active performer and researcher of works by composers impacted by World War II, in addition to composers who are not often included in the classical canon. For more, visit: www.cynthialucilesmith.com. She can be reached at cynthia.smith@bsu.edu.

Handel's MESSIAH and the Librettist Who Inspired It

by James E. Crimmins



Every Valley: The Desperate Lives and Troubled Times That Made Handel's Messiah by Charles King who was a Fulbright Scholar in 2013 to Zambia.

Without Charles Jennens (1700-73), an amateur librettist and sometime editor of Shakespeare, George Frideric Handel (1685-1759) would not have composed *Messiah*, arguably the greatest oratorio ever produced. They were on different sides in the royal political divide of the day. The one, a non-juror who would have welcomed the return of the Stuarts, the other, a beneficiary of Hanoverian largesse. But this did not prevent a long if fragile friendship and a collaboration that produced the oratorios *Saul* (1735-39), *Israel in Egypt* (1739), *L'Allegro il Penseroso ed il Moderato* (1740-41), *Messiah* (1741-42), and *Belshazzar* (1744-45), among others. Each derived from Jennens's deep knowledge of the Old and New Testaments. *Messiah* stands out not only due to the scale of Handel's innovative and intricate composition of music and voices but also because Jennens's script, on which it is based, presents a "dramatized philosophy" of "the cosmic meaning of the prophetic birth, suffering, and resurrection of Jesus Christ" and an affirmation of the "staggering possibility" that despite the swirling chaos and conflict of the times "the world might turn out alright" (3-5). The whole crowned by the

uplifting "Hallelujah" chorus. Yet, Jennens's name rarely featured on the title page. Consequently, we know a good deal about Handel's life and career as the preeminent composer of the age, while Jennens has virtually disappeared from the *Messiah* story.

Charles King rectifies this omission in his wide-ranging history of the people and events that shaped the context in which *Messiah* was crafted and performed. Chapters are devoted to the religious and political turmoil caused by the Jacobite threat; the dawn of the Enlightenment produced by the works of intellectuals such as Locke, Leibniz, Bayle, Hume, and Voltaire; the popularity of literary satires and parodies like Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and Pope's *Dunciad*; Britain's colonization of North America and the horrendous slave trade from which so many made their fortunes; the plight of women in an entirely misogynistic society; the emergence of charitable foundations to assist the poor and indigent; and the evolution of musical styles and the culture of theatrical celebrity. King weaves together insights in all these topics to produce a rich panoply of ideas and action that sheds a powerful light on the creation and performance of the most celebrated musical production of the eighteenth century.

"We know a good deal about Handel's life and career as the preeminent composer of the age, while Jennens has virtually disappeared from the Messiah story."

Jennens was a country squire whose family had made a fortune from the iron industry in Birmingham. Educated at Oxford, he was a devout Christian who immersed himself in the sacred texts. He never married, living a gentleman's life at Gopsall Hall in Leicestershire surrounded by his extensive collection of paintings, sheet music, and books, and gaining a reputation as a generous patron of the arts, though his occasional despondency and irascibility made friendships difficult. Jennens's fervor for Handel's early baroque compositions brought him into contact with the transplanted German, and he began supplying his new friend with the unsolicited libretti that stimulated the composer's imagination. Jennens wasn't always happy with what Handel made of his scripts, including *Messiah*, as his correspondence makes plain, frequently sending corrections and suggestions, some of which were adopted, but there can be no doubt that without Jennens's contribution, *Messiah* would never have come into existence.

The intertwined lives of other notables who had a bearing on the work's creation and performance are also explored by King, among them Jonathan Swift; William Hogarth; the monarchs Queen Anne and the first two Georges; the philanthropist Thomas Coram; the slave prince Ayuba bin Sulay Diallo; and some of the musicians and singers with whom Handel worked, not least the immensely talented Susannah Cibber, the long suffering wife of the scurrilous Theophilus Cibber, son of the actor and theatre mogul Colley Cibber. Susannah Cibber enjoyed an illustrious stage career but her place in King's tale is as the emotive contralto soloist in the premiere of *Messiah* in Dublin in 1742, for which she gained rave reviews. There was some criticism

of Handel, mainly for mixing scripture and stagecraft—it wasn't until 1750 that the work was performed in a religious setting (the chapel of the Foundling Hospital) but from that point on, *Messiah* became a regular fixture in London's calendar of musical events.

King's book is written in an accessible style with an acute eye for detail, bringing together a knowledge of philosophy, musical form, social and political history, and scriptural exegesis. Anyone who has listened to *Messiah* will feel instructed by this book, and for those who have yet to experience it, were they to read King's study, they will almost certainly seek out the oratorio to enjoy in all its moving glory.

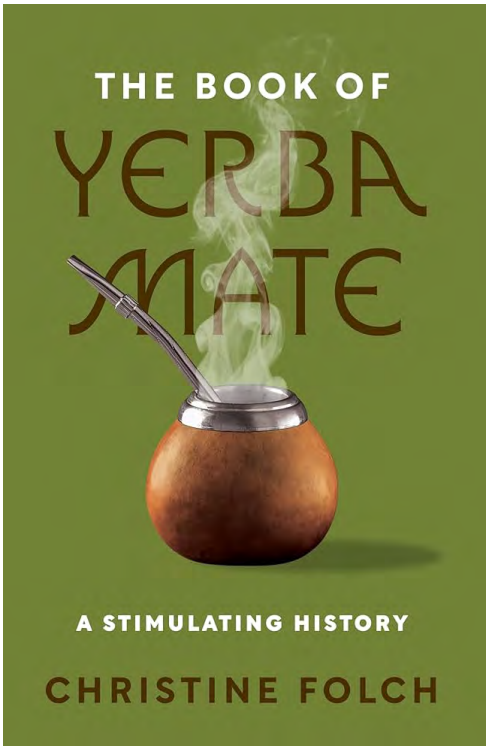
Charles King, Every Valley: The Desperate Lives and Troubled Times that Made Handel's MESSIAH. New York, NY: Doubleday, 2024. 335 pages,. US $32.00.

Biography

James E. Crimmins earned his first two degrees from the University of Wales (Swansea) and now lives in Canada where he was awarded a doctorate from Western University. He is Professor Emeritus and Research Fellow at Huron University College (Western). In 2012-13, he was Fulbright Visiting Research Chair at Vanderbilt University and has been the recipient of many other awards and fellowships. His numerous published articles and books in the history of political thought include most recently *Utilitarianism in the Early American Republic* (Routledge 2022), *The Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of Utilitarianism* (Bloomsbury 2013, pbk 2017), and *Utilitarian Philosophy and Politics: Bentham's Later Years* (Bloomsbury 2013). Professor Crimmins can be contacted at jcrimmin@uwo.ca.

More Than a Drink: The Global Journey of Yerba Mate

by Benjamin Junge



The Book of Yerba Mate: A Stimulating History by Charles Folch, who had a Fulbright Dissertation Research Grant to Paraguay, 2008-2009.

Yerba mate, a caffeinated herbal infusion made from the leaves of the Ilex paraguariensis tree, is more than just a beverage—it is a social ritual, a marker of regional identity, and increasingly, a global commodity. Across Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, and southern Brazil, it is as common to see people cradling a cuia (gourd) and bomba (metal straw) as it is to see coffee cups elsewhere. Cultural anthropologist Christine Folch's excellent new book, *The Book of Yerba Mate*: A Stimulating History, traces the odyssey of this storied beverage, from Indigenous Guaraní traditions to the Jesuit missions, through wars of independence, and into the hands of contemporary global consumers.

> ***"Across Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, and southern Brazil, it is as common to see people cradling a cuia (gourd) and bomba (metal straw) as it is to see coffee cups elsewhere."***

Despite its deep roots in South American history and daily life, yerba mate remains relatively underappreciated beyond the region, often overshadowed by coffee and tea in global markets. Yet, as Folch demonstrates, mate has shaped economies, fueled political movements,

and even traveled across continents, finding a foothold in Middle Eastern markets, wellness trends, and specialty cafés worldwide. The first section of Folch's book, *Origin Stories*, traces yerba mate's Indigenous Guaraní roots and its eventual industrialization by the Jesuits, who systematized production and aroused suspicion among colonial authorities. The second section, *Remaking the World of Mate*, examines mate's entanglement with nationalism, war, and scientific discovery. One of the book's standout chapters explores the figure of the gaucho cowboy and his association with mate drinking, particularly in Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay, where nationalist movements of the nineteenth century romanticized the gaucho while largely overlooking his precarious place in society. Mate also played a role in one of South America's bloodiest wars—the War of the Triple Alliance (1864–1870)—as control over mate-producing territories became a strategic concern. Folch also discusses how scientists, entrepreneurs, and governments sought to industrialize mate production, ushering in an era of commercialization that would set the stage for its current global expansion.

The final section, *Mate Culture Goes Global*, offers one of the book's most compelling contributions, particularly in its analysis of yerba mate's adoption in the Middle East. Folch provides a rich account of how Syrian and Lebanese immigrants brought mate from South America back to their homelands, where it has since become an ingrained cultural practice. The discussion of Islamic legal debates (fatwas) on mate consumption adds another layer of intrigue, illustrating how mate's cultural significance shifts across global contexts.

One of the book's outstanding qualities is its ability to weave historical and anthropological research into a compelling narrative. Rather than a dry academic treatise, *The Book of Yerba Mate* reads as a thoughtful and exciting journey through time and geography, accessible to both specialists and general readers. Folch blends archival discoveries, historical case studies, and anecdotal storytelling to illustrate how mate has shaped political and cultural landscapes—and her writing remains lively and engaging throughout.

Beyond its historical depth, Folch's book is highly relevant to contemporary debates on sustainability, globalization, and cultural identity. It raises important questions about deforestation, monoculture farming, and labor conditions in mate production, and highlights how mate consumption has evolved through migration, trade, and transnational cultural flows. The book is also impressive for its interdisciplinary methodology, drawing from historical archives and economic reports, as well as interviews, participant observation, and firsthand accounts.

Admittedly, the book's geographical focus leans somewhat toward Spanish-speaking Southern Cone countries, leaving Brazil's mate culture and scholarly perspectives underexplored. (Anthropologists like Rubem Oliven, for example, have examined how urban middle-class Brazilians have reappropriated gaucho traditions—including mate drinking—as a marker

of regional identity.) Additionally, Folch devotes less attention to mate's expansion into mass-market products like bottled beverages and energy drinks, and the labor conditions and economic inequalities surrounding mate production are not explored in depth.

Reading this book took me back to 2002–2003, when I was a Ph.D. student and Fulbrighter conducting anthropological fieldwork in Porto Alegre, Brazil's southernmost state capital. At first put off by mate's bitter, earthy taste, I eventually became addicted. In Porto Alegre, mate drinking was an omnipresent public ritual—from university students carrying specialized thermos-backpacks to families strolling through Redenção Park on Sunday afternoons, cuia in hand. I recall attending community meetings during my research on participatory democracy, where a shared mate gourd circulated among activists as naturally as conversation. Mate was more than a drink—it was a form of social bonding and cultural identity. Two decades later, I still drink mate daily in the traditional gaucho style, even though my Hudson Valley surroundings lack the camaraderie of southern Brazil.

Folch's fascinating study has taught me how mate is part of a much larger and more complex history—one shaped by colonial economies, transnational migrations, and global markets. Her work has deepened my understanding of mate not just as a cultural practice, but also as a commodity that has fueled wars, sustained communities, and found new life in unexpected corners of the world. Whether one comes to this book for its historical depth, cultural insights, or simply an interest in mate itself, it is a rewarding and thought-provoking read.

Christine Folch, *The Book of Yerba Mate: A Stimulating History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2024. 264 pages, $29.95.

Biography

Benjamin Junge is Professor of Anthropology at the State University of New York at New Paltz. His research focuses on political subjectivity, social mobility, and class identity in Brazil. Junge is the author of *Cynical Citizenship: Gender, Regionalism, and Political Subjectivity in Porto Alegre, Brazil* (University of New Mexico Press, 2018) and co-editor of *Precarious Democracy: Ethnographies of Hope, Despair, and Resistance in Brazil* (Rutgers University Press, 2021). Junge is a two-time Fulbrighter: As a US Scholar (2018, Brazil), he conducted ethnographic research in Recife on class mobility and political transformations. Under a Dissertation Research Fellowship (2001-2002, Brazil), he conducted Ph.D. research on leftist political representation in Porto Alegre. He can be reached at jungeb@newpaltz.edu.

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