

■ JULIE E. KENDALL, Feature Editor, School of Business-Camden, Rutgers University

THIS DOCTORAL STUDENT ISSUES COLUMN is devoted to the Fulbright program, sponsored by the U.S. government. The guest columnist is a two-year participant in the Fulbright program. I hope you learn more about this stimulating program which is doing a great deal to further understanding among U.S. scholars and masters and Ph.D. students from all over the world.

Pursuing a Dream With the Help of the Fulbright Program

Ayman Hamdi Abu Hamdieh, Rutgers University

The U.S. government's international cultural and exchange programs began in 1938 with the establishment of an Interdepartmental Committee on Scientific Cooperation and a Division of Cultural Cooperation at the Department of State. Following World War II, the Fulbright Scholarship Program was authorized by an amendment to the Surplus Property Act of 1946; the Smith-Mundt Act of 1948 authorized other cultural and information programs. An Office of Educational Exchange was created at the Department of State in that year and the United States Information Agency was established in 1953.

According to the USIA exchange programs booklet, the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, known as the

Fulbright-Hays Act, consolidated the various educational and cultural exchange programs contained in other laws. Together with Smith-Mundt, it provided the basis for all overseas educational, cultural, and information programs. In 1978, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs was transferred from the Department of State to the U.S. Information Agency. In 1982, the U.S. Senate enacted a charter outlining criteria for the Bureau's programs.

The aim of this program is to enhance and advance the understanding between U.S. citizens and the peoples of the other countries. As a doctoral student, this pro-

gram meant a lot to me both for my academic life and my everyday experience. Not only was I able to pursue my doctoral degree through this program, I was fortunate to meet so many people in the states where I am pursuing my degree and people from all over the world.

The program offers assistance for either one or two years to study in the U.S. for non-U.S. scholars from around the world. At the beginning and the end of the study periods, the program offers two workshops to the participants. The first aims at preparing the

students to live in the U.S. and absorb the cultural shock the student is expected to have when he or she arrives. The second prepares the participants to return to their respective countries and accept the changes that have

happened to them, as well as the relationships and conditions in their respective countries.

Experiences Attending the Second Workshop

I was in the second workshop in Washington, D.C., in March 1999. Our group consisted of about 29 persons from around the Arab world; from Morocco in the west to Syria and Jordan in the east. We were introduced to processes that scholars studying abroad are expected to go through when they go back to their countries. Stud-

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ies show that satisfaction declines sharply when one returns to his country; afterwards, the adaptation process starts. This is called the "reverse culture shock," as opposed to the "culture shock" that one faces when one first comes to a foreign country.

Although the workshop was brief, it made a difference in our perception of what we would experience when we returned home. The feeling that one is not alone in this process, that it is a natural thing, and that it should even be expected gives a good dose of confidence to the participants.

When the workshop was not in session, our group had the chance to visit some of the interesting sites in Washington D.C. The museums of natural history, and air

and space were the most interesting to me personally. Sightseeing with the other Fulbright scholars was an excellent opportunity for us to meet and build a strong friendship that will endure for a long time to come. We have set our emailing list and now we have almost constant communication with each other.

These workshops in specific, and the USIA and the Fulbright program in general, are excellent opportunities for participants from all around the world. I would love to see something like this in our Arab world in which the experience and abilities of scholars are exchanged and used to their fullest potential.

One of the workshop participants, Lemiya Almas, summed it up well when

she said, "If anything, the Fulbright program has been to us exactly what it sounds like. It is a program that made us 'full' in the sense of being whole and opened up a bright future for us and our nations." ■

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