

## ESSAYS

## Money, Anyone? Fulbright Program Funds for Group Projects

By Philip C. Brown

The U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) Fulbright Group Projects Abroad programs offer a unique and interesting opportunity for area studies faculty to extend their reach into professional schools, junior colleges, and precollegiate education programs in addition to permitting innovation within more standard area studies programs in our college and graduate education.<sup>1</sup> The Group Projects program may not be familiar to many, so I should note that these projects span four general project types:

- Short-Term Seminars
- Curriculum Development Teams
- Group Research or Study Projects
- Advanced Overseas Intensive Language Study

All projects are designed to be short-term (most projects we reviewed last fall were for six to eight weeks) and carried out in one of the countries covered by the program. The grant/award covers reasonable expenditures for the foreign study, but not generally for expenditures incurred in the U.S. Within these programs the Department of Education or Congress can establish particular priorities. For example, in 1999 intensive language programs were not considered; they were a major focus in the previous year. Nonetheless, the conception of the program

is both broad and flexible. This provides a number of interesting opportunities for area studies faculty.

As is true with other Fulbright programs, all applications are reviewed by panels of area studies specialists representing different academic fields. Each panel is recruited annually by the Department. Each focuses on one geographic area, e.g., East Asia, Africa, etc. These panelists discuss, evaluate and rank applications in an advisory capacity to the Department of Education. Department staff endeavor to create balanced panels. (NOTE: *It is possible for you to volunteer to serve as a panel member. Women and members of underrepresented groups are especially encouraged to apply.*)

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In the Group Projects programs, each area panel considered all types of projects and produced a single ranked list of proposals.

The overwhelming majority of projects reviewed by the East Asian panel in 1999



responded to the priorities the Department gave to K–12 curriculum development. All members of the East Asia review panel were very excited about the prospects of projects in this area. This emphasis provides a wonderful opportunity for nonspecialists to learn about Asia and other foreign areas, for specialists to extend the reach of their expertise beyond colleges and universities, and to expand the role of non-Western area studies in precollegiate curricula.

That said, it is also clear that this kind of program, in calling for cooperation between two groups that do not often work together, poses significant challenges in creating an effective program and application. In order to further

help realize the potential of these programs, I would like to offer the following observations regarding the good qualities in the applications we reviewed for the East Asia component of the program.

### I Issues of Specialist and Non-Specialist Collaboration

Particularly in the realm of K–12 curricular projects, but also in the case of non-area studies postsecondary projects, the review panel sensed clear benefits for those applications that were built on close cooperation between people who understood their own K–12 programs well and people who were area studies specialists, both in the U.S. and in the

country they proposed to reside in and study.

It is safe to say that relatively long-term advance preparation and consultation between area specialists and non-area studies (e.g., K–12 or professional school) practitioners is essential. Members of a school of education faculty with overseas experience can certainly contribute, but K–12 faculty/administrator or technical program (e.g., engineering) faculty input is especially useful.

The need for this cooperation is two-fold: while professional school faculty and secondary and primary school teachers who have never been to an Asian country do not have the experience to understand what possibilities might be presented by an overseas program and how best to take advantage of those opportunities, it is also difficult for an area studies specialist without experience in relevant pre-college or technical programs to

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understand the curricular needs of these programs.

Area studies participants should be prepared to consider what international and local transportation costs are reasonable, how to arrange for reasonably priced local housing, what local specialists can be recruited to contribute to the program, and what reasonable costs will be incurred in return for their participation. In thinking about networking on behalf of the project, area specialists ideally will also think about stateside contacts that can contribute to predeparture orientation programs. Indeed, the best applicants made extensive provision for predeparture reading, study groups and orientation that

capitalized on nearby area studies talent (existing courses, workshops), as well as incorporating those resources into post-return "debriefings."

Most importantly, an area specialist with lots of experience in the field can help define and structure participant overseas experience that could not be duplicated in the U.S. This, in fact, was among the biggest problems in the low-ranked proposals.

One proposal from a professional school reflected well-established connections, promised unusual contacts, and outlined cooperative projects with similar specialists in East Asia. The proposal also featured a plan that clearly promised to provide benefits

for participants that could not be duplicated in the U.S. and which went well beyond the insights and benefits of tours of great cultural landmarks. The best applications also benefited from specialists' advice in avoiding unreasonable claims as well as claims that could not reasonably be supported by planned activities or realistically implemented.

A number of the proposals we examined clearly had not had sustained input from area studies specialists. This showed up in proposing whirlwind tours to many sites—creating an itinerary that Cook's would have been proud to peddle to the retired rich, but which promised little in the way of distinct classroom outcomes for participants. Some budgets reflected U.S. costs for reimbursing lecturers, not the reasonable standards of the host country. A number of proposals made some effort at predeparture orientation, but most skimmed on this activity,

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## ESSAYS

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often leaving as basic objectives of the program elements that could effectively have been treated in predeparture readings, discussions, and lectures led by specialists, e.g., outline lectures on the country's history, contemporary political organization, etc.

One specific area where consultation with specialists appears to have been helpful was in clarifying the difference between meeting objectives associated with multicultural education (e.g., respect for Chinese-American classmates)

and those associated with understanding a different cultural region of the world. While there may be instances where objectives in these realms overlap, that is not always the case.<sup>2</sup> The objectives of the Fulbright program are described in the context of language and area studies, and grant objectives should give clear priority to structuring projects that fit within the USDOE Fulbright mission.

With the exception of the intensive language component of the group projects program,

there is no specific requirement for foreign language preparation or study; nonetheless, the East Asian panel reviewers were impressed by project components that created a structure in which participants could begin to study the appropriate foreign language even if it was only at a very rudimentary level. Even when language preparation was not directly at issue, we viewed favorably project components that offered the potential to increase participant awareness of the value of language study in fostering cross-cultural communication and understanding of a foreign area.

These program elements put participants in close proximity to Chinese, Japanese or Koreans who could not speak English but with whom participants might want to interact. (Conversely, we found ourselves frustrated with components, such as all-English-language Web sites and e-mail links, that promised vastly increased cross-cultural understanding without learning a language and based solely on communication in English!) Area specialists are in a particularly good position to help design and develop these kinds of experiences.

The comments so far detail the unique contributions that area specialists can make to these proposals; however, there is also a need for thoughtful input from non-area studies specialists, faculty from professional schools, colleges of education, and K-12 or junior college instructors.

The first problem is to clearly identify the programmatic needs that the project

aims to meet and fully explain the programmatic context. The best descriptions of this sort not only identified a curricular unit that would benefit from the overseas experience (e.g., the Korean family in the context of examining the ways in which different cultures organize family life), but explained the degree to which it fit in the existing curriculum, the degree to which it was a new curricular departure, and the degree to which this project had the potential to fit into curricula beyond their specific institution, e.g., the degree to which it met curricular needs of a district and/or state mandated curriculum. This material is best provided by the people who design and/or teach these units.

The best applicants described overseas activities that were directly and clearly linked to their programmatic objectives; these activities were also *uniquely suited to overseas activity* and did not duplicate programs that could have been pursued equally well in the U.S. at lower cost. Local contacts in each of the host country sites to be visited were appropriate to the project mission, clearly identified, and pledges of cooperation verified through letter, fax or e-mail.

Finally, we viewed favorably those proposals which made extensive provision for post-return "debriefing," including consolidation of project results, dissemination of curricular/resource materials, and communication with colleagues about participant experiences and what they learned. While most applica-

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tions followed program guidelines and made some provision for project evaluation, the best arranged for external evaluations of project results.

## II GENERAL ISSUES IN GRANT WRITING

While the preceding discussion has focused on issues unique to the group projects program, there are a number of other issues that are part of good preparation and grant-writing in general. The following comments reflect not only my experience reviewing the group projects program, but also reviewing applications for Fulbright Faculty and Dissertation Research Programs, as well as reviewing grant applications for other programs.

Well-crafted proposals shared the following attributes:

- Applicants had carefully read *all* requests for information and provided *direct answers* in response.
- Applicants *keyed each section of their grant narratives and budgets to the specific items requested* in the instructions and to the parallel components of the grant review forms (provided with the Fulbright application materials). This included answering questions even where there appeared to be only a need for pro forma responses. (Good applications were even creative in response to this kind of question.) Questions were not left blank; if separate sheets were attached, there was a clear reference to them.
- Applicants showed evidence of long-term, careful plan-

ning. They gave themselves time to do adequate preparatory research (e.g., which activities would be most helpful, who would be good local contacts, what nearby American resources could they capitalize on prior to departure, etc.). As part of this process, the best applicants had called the appropriate program officer at the USDOE to discuss questions, get model applications from previous years, and obtain assistance in other ways.

- Applicants wrote in an idiom and style that was understandable to people who were not specialists in education or a particular national culture. They avoided abbreviations and acronyms, and they explained local institutions (e.g., special schools, cooperative agencies and consortia, curricula, and the like).
- Applicants chose a limited number of objectives and clearly prioritized them, making sure that the most important goals would be met in the time covered by their grant. The best applications planned sustained

residence in a limited number of locations in order to create opportunities for more intimate contact with people in the host country.

Although not required in the grant application forms, well-focused applications tended to have an abstract, no more than a page, which clearly summarized the project objectives, rationale, methods, outcomes and evaluation procedures. The abstract appears to have served a dual purpose. First, it forced applicants to clarify in their own minds what they were doing and why. Second, it highlighted for the readers the main elements of the project. (Bear in mind that evaluators are looking at a number of long, complex applications; reinforcing your main points helps assure the reader won't miss something important.)

## III Summary

The observations above are based primarily on a review of last year's applications for support in the East Asian area studies program. I hope that these comments will be helpful to those who are consider-

ing application (or re-application) to this program in any field of area studies.

The Fulbright program provides a wonderful opportunity to expand the quality and impact of language and area studies. It deserves the support of area studies professionals through participation in the review process. Equally important, it deserves our support through active efforts to capitalize on the opportunities it offers through submission of a large number of high-quality project applications. ■

## NOTES

1. The group projects program is one of a number of activities funded by USDOE Fulbright. The most well-known of their Fulbright programs involve support for doctoral dissertation/faculty research, seminars abroad and bilateral projects. WWW links related to these subjects and other programs can be found at: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OPE/OHEP/iegps/index.html>.
2. Indeed, after presenting a panel of papers on "The Diverse Japanese" at the January 2000, Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association, one member of the audience commented that willingness to treat Japanese history as a story of diversity benefited not only our understanding of Japanese history, but also helped to break down stereotypes of Japanese-Americans in very constructive ways.

**NOTE:** In 1999 there were very few applications for Korea and Japan. The overwhelming majority focused on China. The overall distribution of applications was as follows:

Africa	21
East Asia	8
South Asia	4
Southeast Asia	4
East and Central Europe	8
Western Hemisphere (primarily Caribbean, Ibero-America)	10
Middle East	1

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