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Recipient of a Fulbright Research/Study Grant (2008-09): "Economic Development and the Protection of Cultural Heritage in Macedonia"

Q & A with Prospective Fulbright Applicants at DePauw, February 25, 2010.

*The following notes do not represent Seth's exact words but attempt to convey the gist of answers that he and others in the group gave to our questions.*

*What inspired your project?*

While on a visit to Pompeii, I noticed a huge tarp thrown over an archaeological site next to a contemporary apartment block. It turned out that the neighbors living next to the site thought that the dig would ruin their apartments, so they got in the habit of throwing trash down into the site. This got me thinking about how countries preserve cultural heritage sites.

*Why Macedonia?*

As a Classical Studies major, I had studied ancient Greek and Latin but didn't know any modern languages. Macedonia has no language requirement, and it's part of the classical world. Also I noticed on the Fulbright website that there's a very favorable ratio of applicants to grants awarded.

*Can you describe a typical day?*

Not really! It was an enormously varied experience. Your real job as a Fulbright scholar, especially in a small country such as Macedonia where few Americans travel, is to be a diplomat -- a "coffee diplomat." The U.S. State Department emphasizes the importance of this diplomatic role. My State Department contact was not interested in my research project but instead urged me again and again to find ways to meet and mingle with Macedonians in social settings.

So, I met with friends and faculty members from the university for drinks in the afternoon, asked them to take me along with them to cultural events, and had a great time doing this. I also helped archaeologists translate their scholarly articles into English. They assumed I had completed a PhD at age 23.

*But the research project was important....?*

Yes, when you apply, you must present a project that is feasible and well-focused, one for which you are well-prepared. Your proposal must lay out a plan for a year of research, but also must demonstrate that you are independent, eager to accept new challenges, and that you will be able to live on your own in an unfamiliar country.

*How much experience do you need to have with the country itself?*

It's good to have "oblique experience" -- that is, to have done research related to what you propose to do in the country to which you are applying. You don't need to have direct experience with the particular country. (And if you've lived in a country for more than a few months, apply to a different country.)

*How would you say your Fulbright has affected your life and future?*

Well, it was the best year of my life up to this point -- but otherwise it's hard to generalize. Maybe in 15 years I'll see more fully how it fits into my life. The grant was for nine months, but I saved money and stayed on for a full year and learned the language. I'm applying for masters programs in urban planning and historic preservation for next year, and hope to return to Macedonia to visit and do more research there.

*Language?*

Some countries require that you know the language before you apply. Others, like Macedonia, do not. Even so, you have to explain in the application how you will learn enough of the language to get by. I found two intensive summer language programs in Macedonian in the US, and attended one run by the State Department in Tucson, Arizona for two months during the summer before the grant began. When I arrived in Macedonia, I took lessons in the language.

*What costs are covered by Fulbright?*

Fulbright covers your transportation to Washington, D.C. for the orientation program. You are also given a stipend to cover your airfare to the country. Half of the remaining grant (about \$15,000) is given to you as you leave, and the remainder comes in installments. I was making more than the President of Macedonia, more or less, but friends who went to countries such as Sweden barely had enough money for living expenses. There's a bit more compensation for the more expensive countries.

*How did you find a place to live?*

I stayed in a hotel for seven days and worked with a real estate agency to help me find an apartment. I stayed in this (very nice) apartment for six months; then moved in to another apartment with a friend.

*How do you find an "affiliation" -- someone to sponsor you during your Fulbright year?*

Perseverance and audacity are two qualities you need to find an affiliation.

You can Google universities and NGOs in your target country and then write to likely sponsors. I sent many emails before finding out that Macedonians don't read email. In my application, I explained that I was working on my affiliation with a university. There was a much easier path that I didn't know about. Prof. Belyavski-Frank speaks Macedonian; in fact she is translating Macedonian novels. She could have helped! There are people at DePauw who have connections

with many countries. It's not always obvious who they may be, so be sure to ask. I (and other Fulbright alums) would be delighted to work with current students who are applying for any of the countries in the Balkans -- especially, of course, Macedonia. Write to me!

*How does the Fulbright compare with Peace Corps?*

Lots of my friends in Macedonia were there as Peace Corps volunteers. The experiences are quite different. Fulbright is a big deal; it can open doors for you later on. On a Fulbright, you do a research project of your own design in a country that you have chosen. Peace Corps places its applicants, so you do not know where you might be going. Your work as a volunteer is "on the ground" as opposed to research that you shape and control. But Peace Corps volunteers have an excellent support network. The service lasts two years, so when you arrive in the country, those who have been there for a year help with your orientation and training.

*What about science majors who wish to do Fulbright projects?*

Most science projects are interdisciplinary. A physics major might propose, for example, to study the lives of astronauts in Russia who have returned from the space station; other science majors might want to research the social dimensions of a scientific problem or phenomenon. Just as a note: I got to know a Fulbright scholar in Slovenia who was there to study trout. He was an English major who happened to know a lot about fishing.

*What tips do you have for writing the Fulbright grant proposal and personal statement?*

It's important to *write the essay for the grant*. Address the questions asked of you; don't just freelance about the kind of research you want to do.

[Fulbright applicants from the senior class added to this discussion: If you have family ties with a country or region, talk about these. Illustrate your experience with another culture by telling a brief story. One candidate told about an epiphany she had while visiting the DMZ in Korea; another talked about an encounter in Spain with tourists from Holland. Applicants for English Teaching Assistantships (ETA) must come up with a supplemental project. One candidate has proposed to start a creative writing club; students will write in Spanish and English, focusing on food and culture. Another will study generational attitudes towards Americans and Japanese in Korea. A third candidate described a variety of activities she likes to do with children -- from soccer to cooking.]

*If you have a really good job offer in the U.S., should you really take a year to do a Fulbright?*

Yes. Having been a Fulbright scholar will set you up well for job offers in the U.S. when you return. As a returning Fulbright scholar, you become part of the State Department alumni association, a great network. The alumni association website includes job postings from around the world. You are given a "[fulbright.org](http://fulbright.org)" email address, nice for when you're applying for jobs and graduate programs.

*Thanks to Seth and others who asked questions and offered insights on applying for national scholarships at this good lunchtime meeting.*