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Developing Scholarly Collaboration through Fulbright Programs

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Abstract

The demand for collaborative research is growing and many institutions and organizations encourage the creation of national and international partnerships. Faculty granted with a Fulbright award have an opportunity for international collaboration. The Fulbright program facilitates an international exchange of students and scholars and seeks to promote shared knowledge and mutual understanding. While personal narratives as well as several studies describe increased cultural awareness, little is known about the impact of the Fulbright experience on international collaboration. This qualitative interview study sought to understand if or how the Fulbright experience facilitated the creation of research partnerships and how Fulbright scholars' learning and development were supported while abroad. Findings show having a pre-existing network, transitional and social support, and professional opportunities because of their scholarly network impact the Fulbright scholar's learning and development. Findings enhance current understandings of international research partnerships and Fulbright's role in facilitating their creation, illustrating how these partnerships influence a scholar's research and teaching agendas.

*Keywords:* Fulbright, collaboration, communities of practice, international, research partnerships, scholarly networks

### Developing Scholarly Collaboration through Fulbright Programs

Increasingly, institutions of higher education demand higher levels of research productivity leading to visibility in grant funding, publications, and researcher accountability. Global networks of scholars having significant impact, primarily based in research institutions, is one method of achieving this visibility. As such, there is a growing focus on developing and utilizing collaborative research networks of scholars (Goode, Carter-Pokras, Horner-Johnson, & Yee, 2014; Kochanek, Scholz, Garcia, 2015; Lundgren & Jansson, 2016). Scholarly networks tend to have similar characteristics. Stantonen and Ritala (2014) argued that these networks typically have well-connected scholars at the center and scholars who perform better than others and are presented with more professional opportunities than less connected ones. These collaborations tend to be created with other scholars within the same field, who speak the same language and are within a close proximity geographically (Vidgen, Henneberg, & Naude, 2007; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001).

Yet, at times scholars get an opportunity to collaborate with other researchers internationally. One program that facilitates these types of connections is the Fulbright Program. The Fulbright Program is a highly competitive, merit-based program of grants for international educational exchange of students, scholars, teachers, professionals, scientists and artists. While studies have examined the nature and development of professional collaborations, there are few studies focused on how these collaborations are developed and maintained through the Fulbright Programs. The Fulbright programs have a long and rich history and have provided extensive financial and personal support, yet little is known about the impact of the program on the development of international scholarly networks and their long term research agendas. Hence, this study attempts to shed light on the whether or not scholarly collaborations are created through Fulbright grants, the nature of these

partnerships, as well as if and how scholarly relationships supported Fulbright scholars while abroad. Knowing these things is important given the longevity, funding, and need for cross-cultural understandings in research across the scientific community. The questions guiding this study are:

1. How do the Fulbright Programs provide faculty with the opportunity for the development of international scholarly collaborations?
2. How do Fulbright scholars develop and maintain communities of practice?

The answers to these research questions will help provide an understanding of how professional partnerships of scholarship are created and maintained from Fulbright experiences. Our findings offer a better understanding of the nature, development, and impact of these collaborations in regard to a scholar's research agenda, teaching and pedagogy, and professional viewpoint on the nuances of their own fields. As the need for collaboration in funded research expands, this study adds to the current knowledge base on the nature of research partnerships.

#### **Related Literature**

U. S. Senator J. William Fulbright (1904-1995) founded the Fulbright Program in 1946 with the express goal of promoting the international exchange of knowledge and enhancing cultural understanding between nations. Since the first U.S. participants travelled abroad in 1948, "over 300,000 American and international 'Fulbrighters' have participated in the program to date" (CIES, n.d.). Fulbright scholars practice in all disciplines of study and the program is active in 155 countries worldwide. Typically, the Fulbright Program awards about 8,000 grants a year with approximately 1,200 grants going to U.S. scholars and 1,600 going to U.S. students (CIES, n.d.). Alternatively, roughly 900 international scholars and about 4,000 students come to the U.S with the remainder of grants going to teachers and professionals (CIES, n.d.). The Fulbright program is primarily funded by "the U.S.

Congress to the Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA)" (ECA, n.d.). CIES (Council for International Exchange of Scholars) of the Institute of International Education has been responsible for administering the program for the past sixty years (CIES, n.d.). Fulbright offers an extensive variety of programs for scholars and students. Table 1 provides a list of these programs.

While there are numerous personal narratives reflecting on the experience of being a Fulbright scholar (c.f. Csikai, 2008; Deardorff, 2015; Duncan, 2013; Grenier, 2016; Rosenstone, 2016), there has been much less empirical research on its impact on individual learning, professional growth, and development of international scholarly collaborations. Of these studies on Fulbright experiences, a number discussed cultural learning (Biraimah & Jotia, 2012; Eddy, 2014; Opt, 2014; Skovholt, 1988) which was often in line with the stated goals of the Fulbright program: to promote mutual understanding between members of the United States and other countries. According to a longitudinal survey study by Biraimah and Jotia (2012), participants in the Fulbright program reported they were better equipped to work with cultural diversity and experienced an increase in factual, cultural, and linguistic knowledge as a result of their time abroad. Eddy's (2014) study indicated "when pushed out of their comfort zones, faculty members were open to new learning... [and] old and engrained understandings were tested in the new environment" (p. 23). The time Fulbright awardees spend abroad increased their level of awareness and respect for, as well as the capacity to work with, cultural, ethnic, and international diversity both at home and abroad (Burn, 1982; Dandavate, 2006;

Table 1

*The Various Fulbright Programs*

<u>U.S. Programs</u>	<u>Visiting Scholar Programs</u>	<u>U.S. Institutional Programs</u>	<u>Past Programs</u>
Core Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program	Core Fulbright Visiting Scholar (FVS) Program	Outreach Lecturing Fund	New Century Scholars Program & “Professionals Beyond Borders”
Distinguished Chair Awards	Outreach Lecturing Fund	Scholar-in-Residence Program	Visiting Specialist Program: Direct Access to the Muslim World
NEXUS Regional Scholar Program	NEXUS Regional Scholar Program	Afghanistan Junior Faculty Development Program	Middle East and North Africa Regional Short-Term Visiting Scholar Program in Science and Technology
International Education Administrators Program	Visiting Scholar Enrichment Programs	Junior Faculty Development Program for Lebanon	
Specialist Program	Arctic Initiative	Visiting Scholar Program for Iraq	
Fulbright-Fogarty Postdoctoral Awards			
Arctic Initiative			
Postdoctoral Scholar Awards			

McWhirter, 1998; Rivenbark & Bianchi, 2011; Sunal & Sunal, 1991). What this proposes is that the Fulbright experience offers faculty with an opportunity to enhance knowledge acquisition and intercultural understanding that encourages professional and personal growth and learning.

In a 2005 U.S. Department of State survey of the FVS program, many findings indicated that cultural learning and understanding, leading to changes in how scholars behave personally and professionally upon returning home, is a major outcome of the program according to returned scholars who completed the survey. Many U.S. Fulbrighters reported the opportunity to participate in the program and live abroad allowed them to gain insight of their own American culture, subjectivity, teaching methods, and/or the U.S. educational system (Dandavate, 2006; Downing, Hastings-Tolsma, & Nolte, 2015; Eddy, 2014; Emert, 2008; Heppner, 1988; Infeld & Wenzhao, 2009; Lamiari, 2008; Lentz, 2011; Opt, 2014; Wolf, 1993). It seems living and working abroad often increases an individual's understanding of their own culture as well as that of their host country. Not only do they learn from new experiences but often scholars see their own "blind spots and enhance cultural competence," (Lamiari, 2008, p. 396-397). But still more research is needed to understand exactly how international collaborative relationships affect scholars' learning and professional development.

Specific to the concept of scholarly networks, several studies reported the development of professional networks through Fulbright (Adams, 2011; Bearnot et al., 2014; Burn, 1982; Downing et al., 2015; Jackson, 1996; Lal, 2006; Lentz, 2011; Opt, 2014; Skovholt, 1988; Sunal & Sunal, 1991). Opt (2014) found a cultural mentor helped to build relationships with colleagues in the host country. Adams (2011) noted that socializing with both colleagues and members of the community was an important aspect of his experience. Over three-fourths of the respondents in Burn's (1982) survey study maintained the professional contacts made while abroad.

Downing, Hastings-Tolsma, and Nolte (2015) reported the Fulbright opportunity allowed for the development of professional connections in the field of nursing unparalleled by other programs.

These professional connections are at times maintained after the scholar returns home and have a lasting impact on the scholar's research and teaching agendas (Gonzalez, 2012; McWhirter & McWhirter, 2009; Mendelsohn & Orenstein, 1955; Skovholt, 1988). For example, Skovholt (1988) argued working collaboratively with international colleagues can "increase the excitement about one's work" and that he continued working with international colleagues "because it is stimulating and it is fun" (p. 285). Mendelsohn and Orenstein (1955) discovered these relationships had an impressive impact on research. Several Fulbright alumni reported the work they completed while abroad and the collaborations they created helped shape future research goals as well as their professional and teaching behaviors (Adams, 2011; Bearnot et al, 2014; Hedlund, 1988; Miller, 2005). Hedlund (1988) reported her Fulbright in Zambia altered her outlook on cross-cultural research and "significantly changed [her] professional concerns and career direction" (p. 290) in regards to professional affiliations, research, and teaching methods.

In addition to maintaining and working through newly developed scholarly collaborations, faculty returned home with new views on pedagogy, teaching strategy, training, and teaching content (Demir, Asku, & Paykoç, 2000; Emert, 2008; Hedlund, 1988; Heppner, 1988; Infeld & Wenzhao, 2009; Lentz, 2011; Meyer-Emerick, 2010; Miglietti, 2015; Tallman, 2002; Wolf, 1993). For instance, new ideas and perspectives gained from the experience are often incorporated into new teaching methodologies upon returning home (Infeld & Wenzhao, 2009; Lentz, 2011; Wolf, 1993). These changes include both the incorporation of brand new pedagogical techniques and perspective shifts or new attitudes toward teaching, learning, and classroom behavior (Emert, 2008). Miglietti's (2015) found the Fulbright experience enhanced knowledge of globalization for higher education faculty and they were likely to incorporate this



new knowledge in their classes upon returning home. Yet at the same time, goals of building professional relationships and learning new pedagogy are not always achieved (Emert, 2008). Emert's (2008) study indicated that scholars were more likely to fulfill goals that were completely in their control, rather than those that relied upon the actions of others (Emert, 2008, p. 227). Time played a part in the achievement of these professional goals as well as on the development of intercultural competency. For instance, the longer an individual stayed abroad the more likely they were to overcome cultural difficulties and become more comfortable in their host countries (Emert, 2008, p. 231).

In sum, the majority of existing literature points to increased cultural understandings and improved learning in regards to pedagogy and scholarship. There is some research that indicated the impact of scholarly collaborations, yet little is known about how these relationships are created through Fulbright experiences and if they are sustained when the scholar returns home. A detailed understanding on the impact of Fulbright Programs on research and the development of scholarly collaborations is largely absent. With this overall lack of empirical attention, the purpose of this study is to examine the perspectives of Fulbright awardees with a focus on scholarly collaboration. This study contributes to current knowledge by adding empirically based findings on the impact of the experience on a scholar's learning, engagement in collaboration, and the development of international communities of practice for relevant interdisciplinary research.

### **Research Design and Methods**

The purpose of this study is to understand the creation of scholarly collaborations through Fulbright programs as well as if and how these partnerships support the learning and development of Fulbright scholars. This paper is the first part of a larger research collaboration across four institutions (three in the southeastern U.S. and one in Ireland) which used a

qualitative interview study (deMarrais, 2004). As researchers, we followed deMarrais' (2004) description of the purpose of interview studies seeking to learn about the participants' professional experiences in Fulbright through "long, focused conversations" thereby generating data that reflects "in-depth knowledge from participants about" this particular experience (p. 52). These interviews covered three areas: personal and cultural growth, professional development, and social supports. Participant selection was focused on Fulbright alumni employed at specific research institutions in the southeastern U.S. Five semi-structured, in-depth interviews lasting 45-60 minutes each were performed at each institution.

This paper reports findings from independent qualitative interviews generated at one research university in the southeastern U.S. Key concepts within this study's theoretical framework are the development of communities of practice (Hansman, 2008) and the concept of collaborative learning (Dirkx, 1997) within the context of scholarly collaborations developed through Fulbright programs. Dirkx (1997) explained that when individuals collaborate with others and learn within a group a unique learning environment is created. He proposed the group can be a "mediator of learning" and can take on both a supportive and nurturing role or a negative and destructive role in learning (Dirkx, 1997, p. 84). Groups maintain themselves successfully by attending to the needs of the individuals, managing dynamics, and establishing norms (Watkins & Marsick, 2010). The self-directed nature of learning in adults benefits this in that often ground rules can be established by the group itself, confirming that they pertain to the needs of the group (O'Keefe, 2009).

With collaborative learning as the foundation of this framework, this paper considers the growth and development of international collaborations facilitated through Fulbright. When these collaborations sustained and continue to grow it is possible a community of practice can develop. In these communities of practice learners create knowledge collaboratively and, while

their motivations may be different, continue the process of learning and working together (Hansman & Mott, 2010). Members in a community of practice, “share a common identity and learn from and with one another as they pursue interests, opportunities, and challenges,” (Watkins & Marsick, 2010, p. 66). This study examines the scholarly networks developed by Fulbright scholars as possible communities of practice that facilitate collaborative learning and development. As such, this framework underpins the core focus of this study by providing a guiding lens to understand how scholars use the opportunity of Fulbright scholarship to create, use, and maintain scholarly collaborations internationally.

### Participant Selection

To identify Fulbright alumni currently working at the specific research institution we contacted the university office of international education for a list of Fulbright alumni. Through email, we invited faculty members with a minimum of five years at the institution who had been Fulbright scholars. Table 1 includes demographic information about each participant including where they spent time abroad, how long they stayed, and which Fulbright award they received.

<i>Demographics of Fulbright Study Participants</i>				
<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Award Type</u>	<u>Time Abroad</u>	<u>Country Location</u>	<u>Subject</u>
Harry	Core Scholar	Ten months	Europe	Special Education
Kate	Travel Study	Six weeks	Asia	Education
Lara	Core Scholar	Six months	Oceania	Statistics
Mary Beth	Core Scholar	One year	North America	English as Foreign Language
Robert	Specialist	Six weeks	Europe	Coaching Education

### Data Generation & Analysis

Researchers conducted five in-depth open ended qualitative interviews (deMarrais, 2004) between May and December of 2015 designed to elicit rich descriptions of the participants' experiences each lasting between 45 and 60 minutes. Our interviews focused on five topical areas: 1) introductory (i.e. background of Fulbright award, if their families came with them, etc.);

2) social supports; 3) personal and cultural growth; 4) professional development; and 5) building collaborative relationships. Each interview was audio recorded. Researchers transcribed each interviews and de-identified the transcripts by replacing all proper nouns with pseudonyms.

#### **Data Analysis Methods**

With the aid of ATLAS.ti (version 7), we analyzed (Braun & Clarke, 2006) the transcriptions to develop our findings. We employed an inductive approach to thematic analysis which Braun and Clarke describe as “a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher’s analytic preconceptions” (2006, p. 83; emphasis in original). This method allows the researcher to note moments of importance in regards to the research questions in a way that is driven by the data rather than a frame imposed on the data by the researcher. We began by reading through the entire data set numerous times and listening to the audio recordings of the interviews in order to immerse ourselves in the data (p. 87). While reading through the transcripts we jotted notes indicating possible codes and/or themes (p. 87) and created a list of ideas regarding both the content of the data and what was initially striking in the data. This list became our set of preliminary codes (p. 88).

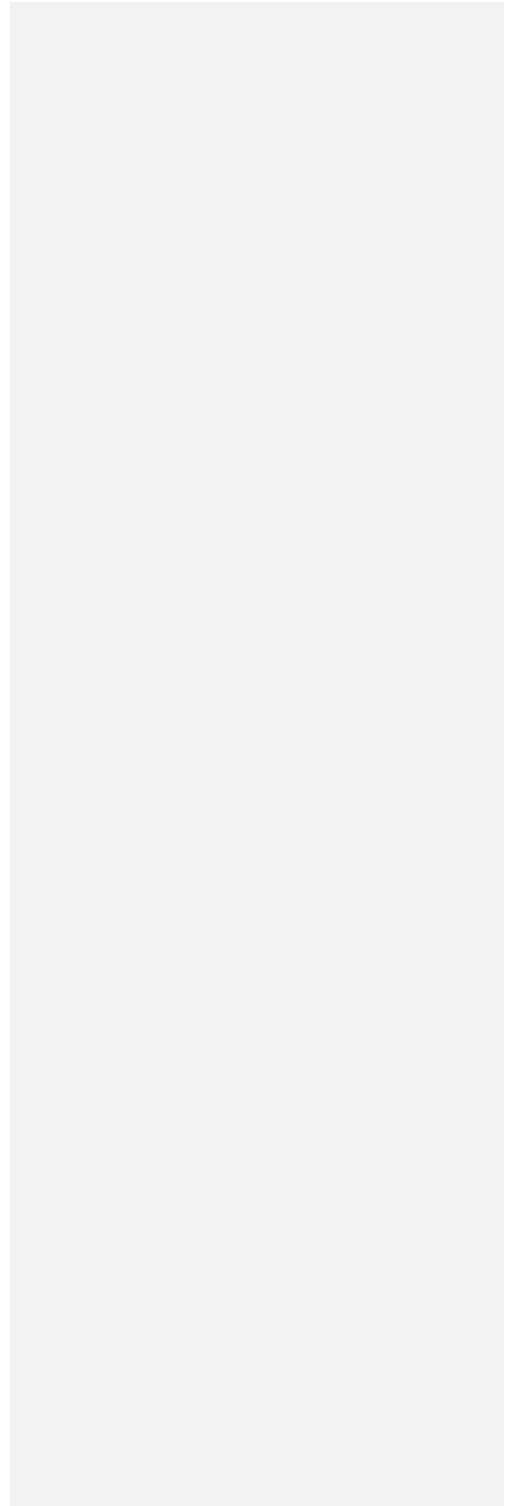
At this point we imported the transcripts into ATLAS.ti. We used the coding function to descriptively code and categorize the data (Maxwell, 2013) being sure to write code definitions for each code to ensure consistency in coding. While categorically organizing codes, we noted possible themes. After each interview was coded, we used ATLAS.ti’s memo-ing feature to write detailed analytic memos (Maxwell, 2013) about each interview based on our perceptions of the interviewee’s experience as a whole and a comparison of experiences across the data set. These memos became directly significant for the discussion section of this paper.

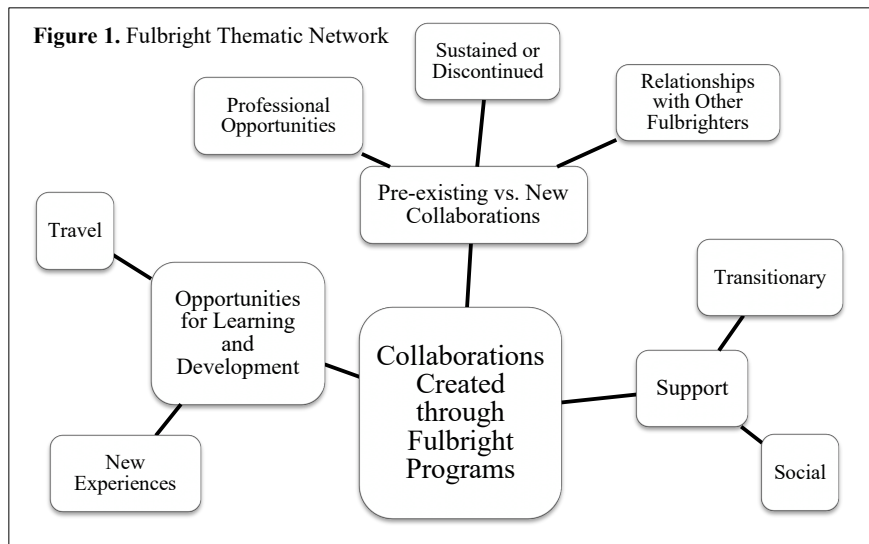
Following Braun and Clarke’s recommendations, we interrogated our themes to be sure they connected to the research questions. These themes holistically represent differing aspects

that influenced the participants' collaborations during their time abroad in two ways. First, the relationship between themes illustrates how Fulbright scholars were supported in creating or sustaining existing scholarly collaborations. Second, these themes signify how Fulbright scholars' maintained their collaborations leading to the development of an international community of practice. We turn next to the findings from the analysis.

### **Findings**

The experience of a Fulbright award as described by the interviewees is personally and professionally enriching in a multitude of ways. Specific to understanding the impact of scholarly networks, our analysis generated the following three primary themes to explain how Fulbright provides scholars with an opportunity to create international and sustain existing scholarly collaborations: 1) the impact of pre-existing vs. new collaborations; 2) the type and amount of support received while abroad; and 3) increased opportunities for learning and development because of their partnerships. We employed Attride-Stirling's (2001) concept of a thematic network to display the relationships between our themes and sub-themes (Figure 1).





### Pre-existing vs. Newly Created Collaborative Relationships

Many applicants to various Fulbright programs have a pre-existing contact in the country in which they propose to study that serves as their sponsor. The involvement of these individuals varies dramatically. For participants in this study, if an extensive professional network existed beyond their sponsor that existed prior to their Fulbright award, there were more likely to have more opportunities for professional development and collaboration with other scholars. Thus, the degree to which a scholarly network existed prior to travel determined three primary characteristics of the Fulbrighter's experience: 1) their access to various professional opportunities; 2) whether their collaborations with international colleagues were sustained or discontinued upon the scholar's return home; and 3) the extent of their relationships with other Fulbrighters. We turn next to each of these concepts.

**Professional opportunities.**

Not all of the Fulbrighters had pre-existing scholarly relationships. In particular, Harry, a scholar from the midwestern U.S., struggled with this. His sponsor left for a sabbatical the day after Harry arrived and returned a week before Harry left. As Harry explained, “I basically had to create my own Fulbright experience.” Harry described his experiences as a “scramble” and that professionally he had a few good experiences but “not enough of them.” Not only was he on his own most of the time, but Harry felt challenged by the power dynamics of the department in which he worked. He revealed that several of the local faculty were unaware he was coming. In particular, his relationship with the department head was difficult:

I think there was a little bit of turf stuff going on because when I got there he didn't even know I was coming...I ended up going out and doing some visits with him at two schools when he was supervising students and teachers in the field. I went out and did a little bit of that with him, but he pretty much was not wanting to have too much to do with me.

Harry also struggled in working with people in his department as they often had dramatic differences in perspective in regards to practice in his academic discipline.

Another example of what happens when scholars lack pre-existing scholarly networks is Mary Beth, originally from the midwestern U.S. Through her own volition she forged new connections with individuals she met in the Spanish speaking country where she and her family spent a year. By creating these collaborative relationships with her host institution's faculty and Americans studying in the country, she participated in a conference, a poetry reading with her students and colleagues, and gave guest lectures. For her, the poetry reading was the most significant experience. She spoke of the importance of this experience, explaining “It was so neat to celebrate that literary tradition and be pulled out of my norms and into this new world.”

It seems without an already existing network in place, the Fulbright scholar had to be comfortable on their own and have the drive to work through challenges of navigating and creating international professional opportunities.

On the other hand, scholars with extensive pre-existing networks had greater access to professional opportunities than those who did not. For example, Lara, originally from the southeastern U.S., chose to apply for a Fulbright in an English speaking country because of her extensive professional network there. Her institutional colleagues facilitated a wide variety of professional opportunities for her while she was abroad. This surpassed her own expectations of the benefits of the experience. As she explained:

I had ideas of what would be nice to happen, being able to go to all the major universities, travel there and meet their teacher educators. I was hoping I could meet a lot of the school level teachers, work with them...I went over there and my colleagues made it happen. I got to all the major universities, spent time there, worked with their teacher educators, I traveled all over [the country] to meet with all different math associations and the major hubs and cities. I got to give seminars, deliver workshops, it was just a dream come true.

The differences between the experiences shows that the amount and quality of the professional opportunities available to Fulbright scholars were directly related to the longevity of their scholarly network. Those with existing international communities of practice had extensive opportunities for professional development while others struggled if they have to create their own connections upon arrival to their host country.

**Whether the professional networks were sustained or discontinued.**



In addition to the professional opportunities available to scholars, whether the scholar's network existed before their time abroad was related to whether or not they were sustained after the award time ended. Neither Kate, originally from the northeastern U.S., Harry, nor Mary Beth have continued working with their international colleagues. For instance, in regards to international projects Mary Beth reported that "nothing that will be long term" or "sustaining" came out of her experience. She attempted to translate the poetry of a colleague into English with the intention to publish and bring her colleague to the United States, but "that didn't go anywhere." For these scholars, their budding scholarly collaborations were ended when they returned home after their award time abroad ended.

In contrast, Robert, a scholar originally from the southeastern U.S., who already knew colleagues in the English speaking country he visited described his ongoing relationships with these colleagues as friendships. In his interview, Robert discussed how he appreciated the opportunity to be part of an international network but he would not describe these relationships as professionally "fruitful because nothing really came out of [them], there's no research." Lara, the participant with the most extensive pre-existing network, continues to work on papers with her international colleagues and is participating in a faculty exchange program with one of her new connections. In her interview, she expressed that she has "so many connections now" and that she'll never lose them. Yet, at the same time, she recognized that she was "very, very blessed" and had opportunities because of her professional network that other Fulbrighters may not have access to. These experiences show that the length of time a relationship has existed directly influences whether those relationships lead to international communities of practice. It is possible that this is because preserving an international community takes diligence on the part of every member that is focused and maintains the mutually supportive nature of the community of practice. When international scholarly relationships have previously overcome the stress of

existing across extensive geographic locations they are more likely to be sustained when scholars return home.

**Relationships with other Fulbrighters.**

In addition to building relationships with international colleagues, several participants expressed the importance of relationships with other Fulbright scholars. Both Mary Beth and Robert's interviews indicated this was missing from their Fulbright experience. Mary Beth did not mention ever meeting other Fulbright scholars during her time abroad. Robert had a similar experience and believed that at times the Fulbright organization would facilitated the opportunity for Fulbrighters to meet each other. He informed us that this may have been because of the time of year he went abroad and stated he did not "feel like there was a community of practice" and that he was the only Fulbrighter in the country at that time. He expressed regret for this by saying "there wasn't a meeting of Fulbrights, or the Americans. Whereas, they might have more of that during the school year."

A prime example of the benefits that came from having relationships with other Fulbright scholars is Kate who explained that though a close relationship with another Fulbrighter she explored the country and learned about local culture. In her interview, she mentioned that because of similar interests in architecture and art they became close and continued this relationship upon returning home. Lara reported that the Fulbright organization facilitated events for Fulbrighters in the English speaking country she visited. After these events, the Fulbrighters "contacted each other and got together and did things." She continues to maintain these relationships as well. Finally Harry reported that while he was abroad he and other Fulbrighters would "come back together" and "have a couple of dinners [with] all the people that were Americans [who] were there." Being able to create new relationships and benefit from already existing ones had a distinct impact on the Fulbright scholar's experience while abroad. Being

able to create new relationships through independence and determination often led to the scholar having a few professional opportunities and the possibility of continuing these relationships upon returning home. In contrast already existing relationships often led to more diverse and extensive opportunities for professional development and the sustainment of an international community of practice.

### **The Nature of Support Received Abroad**

Regardless of whether the supporting parties were from new or pre-existing collaborations, Fulbright scholars participating in this study received transitional and social support from scholarly and social networks. We characterize transitional support as support received by the host institution, the Fulbright organization, or individuals living in the host country providing Fulbrighters with help in regards to finding a place to live, helping with family, and introducing them to the context in which they will be working. For Mary Beth, her graduate student living in the country she visited and her faculty sponsor provided invaluable aid. She described her student as helping her “make the transition in all ways” and that she “helped with my housing and made associations with faculty.” Her faculty sponsor introduced her to other colleagues, his family, and his social network. Yet even with all this help, Mary Beth “felt isolated and alone and struggled” through her experience. Robert’s host institution provided him with housing and Lara’s colleagues found her a place to live in an “ideal location.” Lara expressed the importance of this by saying, “it’s not like I could travel to the other side of the world and go apartment shopping.”

In contrast to transitional support, social supports are those received in regards to socializing with others and those that lead to understanding the social culture of the host country. For those who spend their Fulbright award without these supports, the experience can be socially challenging. For instance, Robert mostly travelled and socialized on his own, saying that on days

he did not go into the office he would “take the bus down and wander around” the city by himself. Interestingly, the few social relationships Robert did create were maintained after he returned home. As another example, Kate primarily socialized with other Fulbright scholars. In contrast, Harry, Mary Beth, and Lara had more extensive support networks. Harry participated in a local climbing society. He would go on long hikes with the group on weekends, sometimes camping overnight. He said through this he was able to connect “with people who loved the outdoors” and this became an experience that led to his own personal growth. Mary Beth built connections with her sponsor and his family and was invited to “celebrate the birth of his baby boy” at the family’s baby shower. Yet at the same time, Mary Beth’s interview richly described her family’s struggle to live in different culture. Lara joined the faculty on their Friday evening trip to a local bar and “immediately became part of the social” networks within the department. While receiving social and transitional support often made the Fulbright experience more accessible, it did not guarantee ease. Regardless, our findings indicate that without any support at all it would be extremely difficult for Fulbrighters to navigate their experience at all.

### **Opportunities for Learning and Development**

Participants’ learning and development were supported through their partnerships with other scholars in two primary ways. The first is learning through travel and the second is learning through experience. Many of the participants in this study reported that because of their international colleagues they were provided with travel opportunities through which they learned about local culture and customs in addition to experiencing professional growth and development. Lara’s travel experience was the most extensive. First, she stated that the Fulbright organization emphasized that “it was important that you became part of their country. They wanted you to immerse yourself into the culture of the country, learn the history of their country, and spend time travelling as a tourist of the county.” The Fulbright organization offered

Fulbrighters and their spouses the opportunity to learn about the local culture by visiting traditional, tribal community meeting places. Lara described this experience as “a true immersion.” Likewise, Kate became very interested in local culture, specifically spirit houses. While she travelled with other Fulbrighters, she explained:

I started to get fascinated with the spirit houses and so I would take pictures. I did a lot of photography and I took pictures of all the different spirit houses. I tried to find out about the role of the spirit houses and the culture. I tried to hang out more on the streets. I just watched, I’m an ethnographer. So it was really an opportunity to learn about the culture.

For Lara and Kate, travelling around the countries in which they stayed led to the development of more cultural competency and individual learning.

Travelling further facilitated opportunities for professional development. Mary Beth travelled around her host country to collect data for her research project. She sat in on classrooms in country observing adults learning Spanish as a second language through immersion programs. Lara was supported by her host institution to visit her colleagues in a neighboring country. Here she was able to give seminars and work with her colleagues in statistics education. Lara said that as a result of these experiences she is “doing some research pieces with them” and the collaboration is ongoing. While Harry’s experience was more difficult, he was still able to travel and give talks at a “couple of different teaching colleges” which were important professional opportunities. Travelling around the country in which they were staying allowed Fulbright scholars to learn about and from local culture as well as participate in professional events. When collaborating with international scholars the occasions to travel were more extensive and meaningful.

In addition to learning and professional development through travel, participants described times where they learned through experiencing the culture in their immediate area.

Robert described meeting lots of people in his host city by exploring. He said that by experiencing the daily life of the people who lived there he learned a large amount of the culture of the city, his host organization, and the integration of the organization into the country's larger culture stating that the organization's specific "culture and its influence were basically sometimes inseparable." Harry's experience taught him about how his particular field was different in this country than in the U.S. In his interview, he specified that he gained a new "perspective on how different services can be in education in general." Kate reported it was not so much the people she travelled with that stood out to her, but the opportunity to "learn about the culture – such a different culture – and try to communicate with people" was enlightening. For Kate and others, participating in and coming in contact with the local culture and traditions made them feel like they had professional and personal learning experiences. Receiving a Fulbright award facilitated these experiences and they often occurred through the scholars' international personal and professional network.

### **Discussion**

In many ways, Fulbright is a test of an individual's ability to survive on their own. For participants like Harry, who received very little support from his host institution and the Fulbright office, an independent nature was essential to successfully navigating the experience. Harry set up his own opportunities to travel, participate in conferences, and give guest lectures. It was his own independent endeavors that encouraged him to branch out, create relationships, and pursue professional opportunities. In his interview, Harry discussed how he did not make any long term professional relationships while abroad, it is likely this is due to the lack of support he received and his forced level of independence. For those with existing social and professional networks abroad ready to support them during their stay it is easier to make connections and develop personal and professional collaborations. Robert seems to have had a similar experience.

While he talked about making a few connections, he mostly discussed how he worked on his own to integrate himself into the organizational culture and social atmosphere of the country. In contrast to Harry's longer stay, Robert's Fulbright was only six weeks long, a factor that may have influenced the level of support he was offered. Thus, it is clear the Fulbright experience is a very individualized opportunity.

From our data we found developing a professional and personal network of colleagues and friends made the time spent abroad rewarding and meaningful. Our findings mirror those of previous studies in that during the time abroad many of our participants added to their professional networks with enduring partnerships (Gonzalez, 2012; Hedlund, 1988; McWhirter & McWhirter, 2009; Skovholt, 1988). Additionally, socialization is an important factor both in creating these relationships and in sustaining them after a scholar returns home. With high levels of transitionary and social support, professional collaborations created during a Fulbright experience can lead to a sustained international community of practice and scholarship.

Lara's experience most effectively displays this community as she described many scholarly projects through which she continues collaborating with her international colleagues. During her interview, she discussed projects she was actively working on with her colleagues at that time. This continued collaboration accurately represents a community of practice because in these communities, "through mutual engagement, participants engage in collective processes and common activities designed to build a joint enterprise of a shared repertoire of knowledge and resources" (Hansman & Mott, 2010, p. 18). These communities often influence the research agendas and teaching perspectives of our participants in addition to the discussions found in previous literature (Adams, 2011; Bearnot et al., 2014; Hedlund, 1998; Miller, 2005). Regardless of the existence of some sort of professional network, Fulbright is still a challenging experience. Participants reported challenges in regard to learning about the academic culture and social

culture of their host country, managing differing perspectives in their academic field, living in an infrastructure different from what they are used to, problems of implementing research and data generation, and challenges in regards to clear understandings of what is expected of the scholar during their time abroad.

The collaborations created through Fulbright facilitated many types of learning for our participants. Adding to existing literature our participants indicated that they learned an extensive amount about the culture in which they lived and that which they came into contact with through travel (Heppner, 1988; Jackson, 1996; Dandavate, 2006). Our findings echo those of Dandavate (2006) who reported that his study's participants "develop[ed] a mindset of greater empathy and respect for cultural diversity" (p. 21). Further, Jackson (1996) argued for the importance of person-to-person encounters in the host country for learning everyday popular culture as well as for seeing the perspectives of others on one's own culture. Participants also learned about their own social and academic culture as well as their taken for granted assumptions (Demir et al., 2000; Emert, 2008; Lentz, 2011; McWhirter, 1988; Opt, 2014). For instance, Opt (2014) found that Fulbright scholars often learn more about the "taken-for-granted" of their own culture (p. 29). We illustrate these points through the words of Lara:

When you go into another country and you immerse yourself in that culture you realize what's great about that country but at the same time it gives you time to get away from the noise that bothers you in your own country and reflect. I'm even more open minded now than ever after going to another culture, being with different people, different life styles and being able to be a part of that.

Supporting Lara's remarks, Kate stated Fulbrighters need to be willing to take risks and navigate uncomfortable situations. On this point, Adams' (2011) study indicated that because of these many challenges, Fulbright scholars must be flexible and willing to create social and professional



relationships. Our findings echo these and when these challenges were overcome, the relationships and professional collaborations created while abroad can be strong and “enduring” (Adams, 2011, p. 621).

Our findings suggest having a professional network more smoothly facilitated learning and created a safe environment for Fulbrighters to engage with ambiguity. As a result of these learning experiences, participants described the development of new perspectives in regards to teaching, learning, and researching. The development of new perspectives adds to current understandings of the impact of Fulbright in these areas (Biraimah & Jotia, 2012; Infeld & Wenzhao, 2009; Miglietti, 2015; Tallman, 2002; Wolf, 1993). In these ways, in keeping with its mission, Fulbright is an opportunity for scholars to grow personally and professionally with an increase in international awareness and intercultural competence (Dandavate, 2006; McWhirter, 1988; Meyer-Emerick, 2010; Opt, 2014; Rivenbark & Bianchi, 2011; Sunal & Sunal, 1991).

Overall, this study describes both the various ways that the Fulbright experience impacts scholars and how the experience influences the development and sustainment of professional partnerships. Fulbright can be personally significant and our participants expressed feelings of being better global citizens, having improved intercultural competence including a broadening on personal and professional perspectives in regards to cultural difference, an increase in a desire to travel abroad, a deeper understanding of their own culture and traditions, and a general appreciation for the opportunity. All of this study’s participants conveyed they would take part in Fulbright again given the chance and often encourage other colleagues and students to apply. Professionally, the time participants spent abroad led to feelings of increased professional legitimacy and prestige, an expansion of research agendas and collaborative work, changes in pedagogy upon returning home, and more fluency in regards to practice as well as scholarship.

#### **Implications for Further Research**

This study offers a better understanding of how international scholarly collaborations support faculty development and continued learning. It informs future research in attempting to understand the nature and impact of international collaborative research on individual scholars. In this way, our findings contribute to existing knowledge on the importance of professional networks to scholars' lifelong and professional learning. Continued research in this area may determine additional insights on how the Fulbright experience impacts scholarship, learning, and collaborative research. For example, the challenges of this study's participants suggest Fulbrighters must be flexible and open to change while abroad (Adams, 2011; Duncan, 2013). Future scholarship could attempt to understand the necessity of Fulbright scholars' need to be willing to develop new perspectives and problem solving skills to deal with both expected and unexpected challenges (Biraimah & Jotia, 2012).

#### **Implications for Fulbright and Potential Fulbright Scholars**

Knowledge obtained from this study aids in understanding the impact of receiving a Fulbright award on faculty learning and development. Specifically, it offers a better understanding of how scholarly collaborations created through Fulbright experiences support an evolution in personal and professional identities for faculty. Knowledge gained from this study could help the Fulbright Commission in evaluating the impact its awards are making to professional scholars internationally. Finally, these findings can inform scholars applying and/or preparing for a Fulbright award. As mentioned by Adams (2011) and Duncan (2013) a certain amount of preparation is necessary for a successful Fulbright. For instance, potential Fulbrighters should consider who is going to be part of their support network while abroad. As Fulbright typically does not assist scholars in finding a host institution (Rivenbark & Bianchi, 2011), potential scholars may need to work to ensure their questions regarding living, transportation,

and support transitioning to a new country and culture. Finally, potential Fulbright scholars should work to make the role they will play in their institution is clear before travelling abroad.

### **Conclusion**

Receiving a Fulbright award is an academic honor and thousands of faculty, independent scholars, and students apply each year to spend time studying and living abroad. While there is yet more to learn, our study helps contribute a detailed understanding of how the experience abroad impacts the individual and how this experience influences the development and nature of their international professional networks. With the demand for collaborative research increasing, understanding how these relationships are formed and maintained is invaluable in utilizing and applying them to new research opportunities. Thus, this study helps paint a clearer picture of the significance of these partnerships, the professional opportunities that created as a result of them, and how a scholar's learning and development are supported through them.

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**SCORING GUIDE**

- ✓ Title follows APA guidelines and adequately
- ✓ Abstract and keywords are included in accordance with APA guidelines
- ✓ Introduction is engaging, provides a roadmap and all relevant information expected in this section of the paper and is of appropriate length
- ✓ Literature review is not overly long, but clearly situates the study in the scholarly literature and makes a compelling case for the need for this study
- ✓ Research design and methods are clearly, concisely, and meaningfully articulated, citing the methodological literature to an appropriate extent, and includes discussion of reflexivity and ways that quality was ensured
- ✓ Findings are substantial and compelling, making a clear argument with adequate support for the claims being made. Data is used effectively as support. Visual representations are meaningful and cited according to APA guidelines. The findings clearly answer the research questions, fulfill the purpose of the study, and propose a solution to the stated problem.
- ✓ Discussion does not present new findings, rather it makes connections back to the literature, proposes implications for further research and practice, and clearly answers the “so what?” question as to how the findings are significant to the target audience.
- ✓ Conclusion brings satisfying closure to the paper, echoing larger issues raised in the introduction and synthesizing the key points and leaving the reader with a clear understanding of the study’s larger relevance.
- ✓ References are double-spaced, include all literature cited in the paper, and do not include literature not cited in the paper.
- ✓ Reflections are meaningful, thought-provoking, and demonstrate growth and awareness of necessary next steps to continue development as a scholar.
- ✓ The paper is highly polished with few to no errors, follows APA style completely in both citation and formatting style, makes a clear and compelling argument, and uses headings successfully uses signposting to transition between sections. The reader does not get lost in the manuscript.
- ✓ No more than 25 pages in length excluding references

Score25/ 25 all grades are in the eLC. final grade A

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