

## **Breakout 8, Presentation**

# **Overseas Programs: Issues and Structures**

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### **Abstract**

Foreign travel, residence, and study are essential activities for the area studies specialist. Most critical is the need for Ph.D. students to travel to the country and region which they study as part of the dissertation research. Title VI programs today are overwhelmingly tilted toward supporting research, teaching, and study in the United States. However, the Fulbright-Hays 102(b)(6) programs provide the complementary overseas programs for Title VI. This paper examines the nature and extent of the four programs currently funded under Fulbright-Hays that support international research and training directly: Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad; Faculty Research Abroad; Group Projects Abroad; Seminars Abroad; and one program in Title VI, American Overseas Research Centers.

### **The Scholarly Necessity of International Travel and Residence**

To be an expert on a foreign area is to possess authenticity gained by personal experience in that country. All scholars actively studying foreign areas must travel regularly to the countries they study and, if possible, reside in those countries for more extended periods of research. To a certain extent, such travel is pleasurable, one of the rewards for becoming a foreign area specialist. But whether pleasurable or, at times, a burden, such travel and residence is not frivolous and not mere tourism, it is purposeful. For most area studies specialists, travel to his or her country and region of specialization is necessary to do original research. For some disciplines, such as anthropology, only personal contact will provide original data; for others, such as history, the most critical documentary sources are usually found in local repositories.

Regular returns to one's study region are essential for continuing language proficiency.

This is not simply a matter of keeping up enough of the language to direct a taxi driver, but rather to read newspapers, to talk with scholarly peers and colleagues, and to grasp the latest directions in one's field. For most parts of the world, the scholarly debate is conducted first in indigenous languages before it moves to English or other world languages. Travel in-country sharpens and hones language skills.

Area specialists must travel to create and sustain personal connections with indigenous scholars who study their own society. Historians of colonial and modern Argentina want to have their work accepted by Argentine historians and they must be part of the information network of that community of scholars. They need to attend and give seminars and lectures, engage in serious talk, advise students, attend workshops and conferences, and otherwise become accepted within a scholarly community. This interaction between scholars from North America and the host country is in fact one of the greatest strengths of area studies and area specialization.

Finally, perhaps the most important benefit conveyed by travel and residence is immediacy. The area scholar returns to his North American base with a new sense of the dynamism and vitality of society. He returns with a sense of continuities in long-standing symbols, myths, tropes, and an equally strong sense of continuing structuring and restructuring of culture. Immediate experience is the only way to fight the deadening effect of media-distorted U.S.-centric views on all parts of the non-Western world.

All active area studies scholars share a continuing, obsessive concern: How to pay for travel and released time so that they can return to the countries they study. This worry is most pronounced for young scholars who must write a dissertation and who require support for extended research and travel in a distant region. Distance, expense, difficult living conditions, and political difficulties continue to be more taxing for scholars working on non-Western areas beyond North America and Western Europe. Especially as scholars obtain teaching positions, acquire families and mortgages, and other responsibilities of everyday life, it becomes more difficult for them to finance foreign research and travel.

### **Fulbright-Hays Programs for Study and Research Abroad**

So self-evident is the need for foreign research and travel that the relative lack of emphasis found in Title VI funding and programs is surprising. The original Title VI legislation, the National Defense Education Act of 1958, ignored study and research abroad. Congress set up and funded programs to support teaching and research in foreign language and area studies in the United States, but did not address the American area studies scholar's obvious need for international research and experience. In keeping with the domestic mission of the U.S. Office of Education, these were to be domestic programs supported by monies spent within the United States.

The Fulbright-Hays Act of 1961 included support for research and study abroad by American scholars under programs stipulated in Section 102(b)(6). This was a minor aspect of the broader

exchange functions of the program. The next year President Kennedy officially linked the functions authorized in that section to Title VI goals within the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. This meant that four Fulbright-Hays programs—Seminars Abroad, Group Projects Abroad, Faculty Research Abroad, and Doctoral Dissertations Abroad—were to be housed in and administered by the U.S. Office of Education (now the Department of Education). But overall supervision and determination of final awards lies under the auspices of the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board. These Fulbright-Hays programs have provided critical support for foreign research and training of U.S. scholars in non-Western areas since their inception—though at dwindling levels of real dollar support. (Other cold war-inspired funding of scholarly exchanges has helped support work on Soviet bloc countries and on the People's Republic of China by programs administered by the Council on International Exchange of Scholars.)

Over the last thirty-five years these four programs have sent hundreds of Americans to non-Western societies for research and study. Two are aimed at groups: Seminars Abroad, funded in the 1995 fiscal year at just under one million dollars, sent roughly ninety high school and college teachers in ten groups on organized study tours of selected foreign areas in that fiscal year. Group Projects Abroad, funded at over \$2 million in FY 1995, supported some forty group efforts (with 600 participants) at enhanced language competence by in-country training, publications, contacts with foreign scholars, and linkages with foreign institutions. Core support for advanced research and training rests in the remaining two programs: Faculty Research Abroad, funded in FY 1995 at \$835,000, supported in-country research by roughly twenty-seven Faculty Fellows. The Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Programs, funded in FY 1995 at \$1.8 million, supported travel and research for roughly sixty-eight doctoral students from private and public U.S. universities. The FY 1995 \$2.6 million total for these two fellowship programs has decreased to \$2.3 million in FY 1996 and FY 1997.

This is not an impressive amount of money to invest directly in core funding for graduate student and faculty fellowships. Just under two-and-half million dollars a year to support foreign research and training in all world areas save

Western Europe and in all social sciences and humanities disciplines is less than adequate. This is especially worrisome in light of the recent dwindling of private foundation support for area studies in the United States. The Social Science Research Council has restructured and consolidated its area studies committees and adapted to reduced Ford Foundation monies formerly assigned those joint SSRC/ACLS committees for foreign area graduate and faculty fellowships. The end result has been a substantial curtailment of overall support for area studies field research.

## **American Overseas Research Centers**

Beyond individual fellowships, however, there are shared needs that all American scholars experience when they travel to foreign countries. Overseas centers or organizations mounted and run by United States-based consortia have proven to be extremely useful in easing the way for area studies scholars who are in residence in the host country. Generally when American area studies scholars have banded together to promote research, study, and teaching about a world region or a particular country and have created a site for American scholars to gather and from which they can be supported, the entire field has benefited. The Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC) lists fourteen such organizations as constituent members with centers in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. Another way to enhance foreign travel and research for scholars is by supporting and aiding these centers within the purview of Title VI legislation. The Title VI AORC program currently supports aspects of ten such centers.

Overseas research centers and the consortia that support them offer unique advantages for area studies scholarship. They unite area studies specialists from different, competing colleges and universities in a common effort. Overseas research centers exist to send American area studies specialists regularly to that region for research and training. Although often the recipient of federal funds from various programs, overseas research centers are private, not government, and have no official connection with U.S. embassies and other agencies abroad.

Most of the existing centers have been formed and continue to be managed by communities of

scholars. Typically each center is governed by a United States-based board of directors or trustees comprised of representatives named by the university members or elected by individual members. The organization itself is incorporated under U.S. law as a nonprofit corporation eligible for 501c(3) tax-exempt status as defined by the Internal Revenue Service. The center chair or president of the governing board and other officers and an elected executive committee supervise domestic and foreign secretariats of varying size and professionalism. Foreign operations are run by a paid executive director and his staff. The center itself comprises either rented or owned offices in-country that may include such features as a guesthouse, seminar room, library, and other amenities for visiting American scholars.

Scholars forming the constituency of each center have overwhelmingly and consistently ranked provision of fellowships to U.S. scholars for in-country research and training as their highest priority. Each center annually advertises its fellowship programs and solicits applications from predoctoral graduate students and from established scholars. An earlier tendency to offer twelve to eighteen months of support for foreign residence for the scholar and his or her family has shifted to a more flexible array of shorter-term three- to twelve-month grants. Many centers also offer language fellowships for both students and faculty who can take advantage of center-supported in-country intensive programs.

## **How Research Centers Function In-Country**

The center director and his staff serve as a sensitive listening post for scholars in the United States. Shifts in the prevailing official and academic climate are often detected first by center directors who make it a point to maintain wide-ranging official and private contacts and sources of information. Overseas center directors and their staffs put much time and energy into the process of obtaining research visas and project clearance from the host government. Depending upon the state of relations between the host government and the United States government and the repressiveness of the regime, this may be a simple set of routine procedures or may require persistence and refined negotiations on the part

of the center director. Often clearances are dependent upon affiliations for American scholars with in-country universities. The center director can be in a position to help establish these ties as well.

Upon arrival in-country U.S. fellows are offered a variety of aids to help them get settled in and begin their research. For many non-Western countries this is an extremely important and much appreciated service. Even veteran scholars enjoy being met at the airport when their trans-continental flight arrives at four in the morning; having guesthouse accommodations for a few days; obtaining sufficient funds in local currency without delay; being assisted in opening a bank account; finding living accommodations, and so on. Center directors are a repository of sound advice and a source of referrals for graduate fellows arriving for the first time to do field work. Advice in regard to circumspect behavior as a foreign research scholar is especially useful. For example, in India certain politically troubled border regions are no-go zones for foreigners, and foreign scholars need to observe these rules or risk expulsion. In some countries radically changing one's research agenda from the proposal approved is also risky and the center director is often well placed to judge whether changes are reasonable and acceptable.

The premises of the center are a site where American fellows can gather and socialize, but they are also the venue for seminars and talks by fellows and local scholars. The attractiveness of the center is also enhanced by maintaining

useful working library collections and computerized bibliographic and database access to libraries in the United States. Some centers have programs that offer modest grants to indigenous scholars that permit them to travel to the center and interact with American fellows in organized workshops.

Despite their private, voluntary organization, overseas research centers have been viewed by many local scholars as neocolonial institutions. Hostility to American scholars tends to rise and fall as relations between the host country and the United States go up and down. Generally, however, American overseas research centers have simply continued about their business of facilitating scholarship. As they have done so, they have won the respect of more moderate, less anti-U.S. scholars. Now, with the end of the cold war, these charges are diminishing. Today, there is every opportunity to build new centers and to improve upon the work of long-established centers without the burden of anti-American sentiment. American overseas research centers offer many strengths: community-building among American scholars; single-minded fund-raising capacity; standard-setting competitions for fellowships; in-country information; help with practical aspects of doing research; and a site for intellectual activity. The centers certainly cannot and are not intended to displace university-run programs and funding for foreign research, but they do have assets that should be encouraged by Title VI appropriations and programs.

## **Breakout 8, Rapporteur**

### **Overseas Programs: Issues and Structures**

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Our breakout leader, Professor John Richards of Duke University, led our group through the main points in his excellent paper. At the outset he made clear that his paper was “pitched to faculty and graduate students.” It did not attempt to address faculty opportunities abroad that are not related to area and foreign language studies and expertise, undergraduate study abroad, or other kinds of overseas programs. The focus of the sessions was on the overseas programs of the Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC), and to a lesser extent on Fulbright-Hays, Section 102(b)(6); in particular what Richards called the core programs: support for doctoral dissertation and faculty research abroad. The Seminars and Group Projects Abroad Fulbright-Hays programs were apparently perceived as having lesser priority because of their lesser or less direct contribution to area studies research.

A key question addressed in the session was: Is there enough support for these overseas programs to enable them to meet the needs for area studies research by graduate students and faculty? Related to this, Does synergy among the programs leverage and extend their contributions?

In his paper, Richards made the case for support of overseas programs for area studies scholars in terms of how essential it is for them to be able to do original research in the country/region of their specialization. Spending time there is also very important for sharpening and maintaining scholars’ foreign language skills and to enable them to create and sustain connections with local scholars.

A major challenge, even obsession, of area studies scholars, is how to pay for their periods abroad. At this point the overseas programs group emphasized the impressive benefits offered through the fourteen CAORC research centers (ten currently receive funding through Title VI). Benefits include the following:

- Most of the centers are managed by a community of scholars;
- Center costs are partly supported by cost-sharing on the part of the participating U.S. scholars;
- Centers also engage in fund-raising, for example, with foundations, to help cover their costs;
- Centers provide practical assistance to U.S. scholars, for example with visas, helping find housing, even meeting arriving scholars at the airport;
- Centers may encourage and facilitate collaboration with scholars in the host country but much more in some countries than others; and
- Centers’ activities constitute a “field-building endeavor” that benefits many scholars, not just those at a center at a particular time.

Discussions in the breakout group affirmed that the situation of the overseas centers varies. While some are regarded as an important asset by host country scholars and people in general, where there are strong anti-U.S. feelings, as one person in our session put it, a center may be

regarded as “a neocolonial hangout for American scholars.”

Trends relating to and affecting the overseas research programs and centers were briefly touched on. Because American scholars find it increasingly difficult to get away from their institutions for a full year, “hiatus” programs are developing that enable a scholar to spend two summers or other shorter periods at an overseas research center instead of a full year. Support for centers by the host governments may be more available than some years ago, although it may not be to a center’s interest to accept such assistance. Finally, the recent trend to redefine area studies—for example, to include environmental studies and to focus on global issues—has important implications for the overseas research centers.

It was agreed that the Title VI funding of the CAORC centers has been enormously helpful, the centers now being in much better shape than when they did not have this support. In some cases it was vital in saving centers from “going under.”

The overseas programs group looked at the career stages of area studies specialists in order to question whether increased support at certain stages, or of certain programs, would help larger numbers to emerge at the end of the pipeline or trajectory.

Increasing support for Group Projects Abroad by giving more K-12 and college teachers international education experience abroad could result in their interesting students at these levels in the international field, a first step to recruiting them to the area/international studies fields.

## More Support Needed for Student Overseas Research

More support for undergraduate international studies and study abroad would strengthen this important phase in nurturing future specialists. This is especially true as there is virtually no federal support for undergraduate study abroad through Title VI and Fulbright-Hays. (There was little or no discussion at the conference of the National Security Education Program, NSEP, which provides scholarships for several hundred undergraduate and graduate students to study abroad in countries highly relevant to

area studies, i.e., outside of Western Europe, Canada, or Australia.) It was noted that while students eligible for federal financial aid should be able to apply it to study abroad, too often institutional reluctance should not but does limit students’ access to it.

Graduate students interested in area studies can seek dissertation research abroad funding through the Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Abroad program, the Title VI Foreign Language and Area Studies (FLAS) program administered by National Resource Centers, and the Fulbright (IIE) scholarship program. NSEP graduate support also is available for certain designated world areas, although professional associations for some world areas have discouraged use of this funding in their region.

The final phase, Faculty Research Abroad under Fulbright-Hays, provides crucial support to established area studies scholars.

Whether funding at each phase is adequate was beyond the group’s focus. It was generally agreed, however, that persons entering the pipeline at an early stage and not emerging at the end as new area studies specialists should not be seen as having wasted the support they received but constitute an important product: internationally interested and educated citizens.

The discussion of what stages should receive emphasis brought a very strong statement in support of undergraduate study abroad. Participants pointed to its significant impact, negligible federal funding, and very limited participation, especially compared to the large number of foreign students in the United States (some 450,000 but only 80–100,000 U.S. students abroad, although such figures are unreliable). Others mentioned participation of European students in the intra-Europe exchange, sponsored by the European Community, formerly ERASMUS and now Socrates. In response to the comment that far too high a proportion of U.S. study-abroad students go to Western Europe, it was suggested that area studies specialists should be much more active, even proactive, in encouraging American undergraduates to study abroad in non-Western countries.

## Two New Questions

Two other questions were raised in the breakout: (1) Does the involvement of U.S. area studies

specialists in the CAORC centers facilitate relations, exchanges, collaborative research, and even affiliations between U.S. and foreign universities? (2) If the Fulbright-Hays label and its services and identity were terminated so that 102(b)(6) became the international dimension of Title VI, would the programs involved continue to function effectively?

The general response to the first question was that the Overseas Research Centers certainly facilitate collaboration between U.S. and host country scholars, and when the U.S. scholar's home university has the resources, as tends to be the case with the major research universities, exchanges of scholars between the U.S. university and countries abroad is lively and productive. The group recommended that the

National Resource Centers develop more links with the Overseas Research Centers to promote more scholarly collaboration between them.

Whether it would help the Fulbright-Hays programs if they no longer had this label but instead were redefined as the international or overseas component of and amalgamated with Title VI was, in the group's view, difficult to predict. On the one hand, if integrated into Title VI, the overseas programs might share in the strong support Title VI has had in recent years. On the other hand, to some people the Fulbright name is valuable in opening doors and as a historic asset. The group was thus undecided on how best to resolve the issue.