

The Policies of the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board

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Policy Analysis

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The J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship board recognizes that in an increasingly complicated and globalized world, there is a growing need for the creation of community and understanding among the wide variety of the world's peoples and societies. Fulbright seeks to accomplish this by stimulating contacts between educated people worldwide through education and cultural exchanges facilitated by institutions of higher education. Through education and cultural exchanges, Fulbright hopes to establish shared interests, educational developments, achievements, and contributions being made towards a more peaceful and rewarding life for all people of the United States and other nations. Furthermore, Fulbright promotes international cooperation for educational and cultural advancement with the end goal of assisting in the development of "friendly, sympathetic, and peaceful relations" between the United States and other nations (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs A, 2013, p. 1).

Definition of Terms

Throughout the policy document there are twelve key terms that are central to understanding the rationale and purpose of the Fulbright program. Additionally, it is important to note that the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, the U.S. Department of State or the U.S. Department of Education administers all grants.

The Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange of 1961 (the Act): The 1961 law passed in the United States that legally upholds the policies set out in this policy document. The act provides grants for the exchange of college and university teachers, advanced postdoctoral researchers, college graduates and graduate students, primary and secondary school teachers and administrators and professionals that are specialists in their field. The objective of the act is to recognize the important relationship between fostering global understanding and education.

J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board (the Board): The Board is composed of 12 educational and public leaders appointed by the President of the United States. It is responsible for supervising the administration of the international exchanges the act enables, establishing criteria for selecting candidates for the program and giving final award approval to eligible candidates (Fulbright, 2013). While several agencies administer the various grants under the program, the Board has final approval for every proposal.

Fulbright Commissions/Foundation: These bodies are binational and autonomous and responsible for administering and supervising the Fulbright Program in their respective countries. Commissions are also a central source of information for colleges, universities, and organizations in the process of campus internationalization and are expected to host educational and cultural events that resonate with the goals of the Fulbright Program. A binational board is formed by a combination of U.S. Embassy representatives and host government nationals. Both governments and private corporations usually sponsor these commissions. Because each commission is independently run, there is a lot of flexibility for modifying the policies stated in the Act to their needs.

Fulbright Partner Countries: All countries with a Fulbright Commission or Post are considered a Fulbright Partner Country. Scholars who wish to go to these countries, or are from these countries, may participate in the Fulbright Program. Not all countries host all Fulbright Programs. Commissions in more developed countries often offer more scholarships. Presently, there are 163 partner countries worldwide:

- East Asia and Pacific – 29 countries
- Europe and Eurasia – 47 countries
- Middle East – 17 countries
- South and Central Asia – 13 countries
- Sub-Saharan Africa – 33 countries
- Western Hemisphere – 24 countries (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs B, 2013)

Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange: In every type of exchange, participants must be immersed in a host institution and complete projects that demonstrate their own educational and cultural interests and then learn about the similarities and differences of those interests from their host institutions. Through these exchanges, the Board hopes to promote international cooperation for educational and cultural advancement.

Special Academic Activities: This grant category includes Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad, Faculty Research Abroad, Group Projects Abroad and Seminars Abroad. All of these grants are supervised by the United States Department of Education. Under this category is the

Hubert H. Humphrey Fellowship Program which covers similar activities, but with an emphasis on professional development and non-degree academic work at the graduate level. Participants must be nationals from developing or emerging countries. There are some restrictions as to the types of projects that can be carried out.

U.S Students: This category covers two types of grants: 1) research projects and 2) English Teaching Posts. Students conducting research projects must propose their own projects, but the local Commission places English Teaching Assistants in a school. All candidates must be U.S citizens or nationals. Depending on the circumstance, students with dual-citizenship may be ineligible to receive this grant.

Students from Partner Countries: This category is for students who are nationals of a participating Fulbright country. They, or immediate family members, cannot be associated with any Fulbright Commission. Additionally, students can have no affiliation with the U.S Department of State more recent than 1 year. Students can apply to complete studies higher than a bachelor's degree and must have previously completed a bachelor's degree or sufficient years of experience for professional and creative programs.

U.S. Lecturers and Research Scholars: This group is Ph.D. or equivalent educators or professionals with substantial accomplishments or research who will work in collaboration with host institutions. They must be U.S. citizens or nationals and preferably have completed their education and professional training at U.S. higher education institutions. Recipients deemed Distinguished Scholars receive a higher stipend.

Partner Country Lecturers and Research Scholars: Same scope and requirements as U.S. Lecturers and Research Scholars. Must be nationals of a Fulbright Partner Country and cannot hold any form of U.S. citizenship or permanent residence.

New Century Scholars: These scholars must fit the same eligibility requirements as U.S. and Partner Country lectures and researchers, but the positions must include topics of global significance that are inter-disciplinary. The Board chooses topics of study and grant recipients. Scholars are selected from around the world to jointly work on projects under the specified topic.

Teachers from the U.S or Partner Countries: The requirements are identical for this category because teachers participate in a direct one-to-one exchange, including taking on the salary of their counterpart in the host country. Teachers must have at least a bachelor's degree and minimum three years of teaching experience and be nationals from their country of origin. Like the English Teaching Assistants, Teachers are placed in host institutions.

Evidence to Support the Fulbright Program

The policy makes it clear that “education requires a continuing act of faith,” and therefore it is often difficult to measure or predict the outcome of educational and cultural exchanges (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs A, 2013, p.1). On an empirical level, all grantees, cooperating agencies, Commissions and posts abroad, and the Board are required to submit regular reports on the functioning of the program and exchange experience. All reports are made available to the Board, cooperating agencies, Commissions and/or posts as appropriate. Additionally, the Fulbright policy provides details for the functioning of each type of grant and basic needs that will be covered during the duration of the grant.

Each grant is described under a uniform structure. The topics include grant definitions, selection criteria, academic and program factors, placement factors, eligibility factors, ineligibility factors, general terms of award (passport, visa, employment restriction, etc.), duration of grants, special factors for grants (postponement, retroactive and resignation), and revocation, termination and suspension of grants. Under each of these sections is information specific to the types of grants offered (discussed in the definition of terms). In general, this policy assures that educated and culturally sensitive people will be taking part in the program due to strict education requirements (no less than a bachelor's degree), required language proficiency in home and host country language, and acceptability to host country considerations for all categories.

Before the Board gives final approval for the selection of scholars, binational Commissions abroad and host institutions in the United States reject any scholar they feel does not fit the needs of their country specific programs. Furthermore, Fulbright does not discriminate based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, political affiliation, marital status, status as a parent, protected genetic information, or sexual orientation. Finally, basic needs such as a monthly stipend sufficient to live modestly while using the grant as the sole

source of income, stipends for dependents [spouse, qualified same-sex domestic partner or relative (child, parent or sibling)], health insurance, and a round trip flight to and from the host country are included in the award. This robust criteria is evidence of a thorough policy that is well organized and carefully written to achieve the goal of increased understanding between educated people from the United States and other nations.

Alternative Solutions

Alternative Solutions in this policy are presented in terms of funding options. The policy stipulates that the United States government is financially responsible for the grants it disburses. However, binational Commissions are expected to be financed by the U.S. Department of State, the local government, and by cooperating public and private agencies. Thus, commissions are encouraged to seek out private sponsorship when appropriate. For all research grants, scholars are encouraged to find outside funding for their projects. Having some of their grant financed by outside sources does not dilute the significance of being named a Fulbright Scholar, but does allow additional grants to be awarded to more people.

Finally, optional honorary grantee statuses exist within each grant category. This option is available to any scholar who is awarded a grant through the normal selection process, but decides to only accept the title and not the financial benefits of the award. These individuals self-select as not being concerned with financial benefits, receive the honor of being named a Fulbright grantee, and refuse or return all financial compensation to the local commission.

Desired Outcomes and Rationales

The Fulbright policies aim to create community and understanding using educational and cultural exchanges. To accomplish this goal, Fulbright tries to encompass as much of the world as possible and generate collaboration between educated individuals at all levels (students, professors, distinguished professionals, academics and teachers). The desired outcome is the creation of personal connections between United States citizens and foreign country nationals, international cooperation for educational and cultural advancement projects, and having grantees assist in the development of kindly, considerate, and peaceful relations between the United States and other countries of the world. Rationales for why these results will occur are stated in the descriptions of grantees, services offered, selection processes, and the formation and role of Fulbright Commissions.

For each category, Fulbright recommends that grants be awarded to people from a diversity of academic backgrounds and locations (states and countries). Fulbright does not discriminate and accommodates dependents to ensure equal access for qualified applicants. Additionally, all grantees must have sufficient language abilities and cultural sensitivities to promote meaningful interactions and exchange in a short time. Fulbright does recommend that all awards encompass at least one school year (8-10 months) to derive as much benefit as possible on the part of the grantee and host institution. At the initial level, all grantees must apply through a U.S. educational institution or Fulbright Commission. This allows the institutions and Commissions to select the highest achieving applicants before the applications are sent to the next selection rounds in host countries and then to the board. This longer process allows the organizations that have (and will have) the most interaction with the grantees to find the most qualified applicants for their needs. To guarantee that the purpose of the Fulbright program is to collaborate on educational projects, students and scholars in the field of religion are only eligible if their primary objective is educational rather than pastoral or missionary. Finally, the variety of grant categories provides a broad range of opportunities for sharing education and knowledge around the globe.

The binational Commissions have the greatest responsibility to uphold the Fulbright goals and values. Commissions must be binational to involve and exchange of talents and services across national lines. By being responsible for administering Fulbright programs abroad, the binational Commissions are using their academic and professional strengths to work together towards academic goals. In short, they are acting out educational and cultural exchanges in their offices on a daily basis. Furthermore, because the Commissions are the most aware of the academic conditions in their country at any given time, they are given autonomy to determine which fields of study and types of grantees would be most useful to the grantee and the host country. The Commissions may also decide how many grants to disburse to U.S. citizens and nationals of their country, but the Fulbright policy recommends maintaining as much equality as possible in the interest of fairness. In addition to administrative tasks, Commissions are responsible for orienting grantees to the host country, guiding their experience, and being the first responders to any emergency. Logistically, this is ideal because the Commissions are in closest proximity to the grantees outside of individual host institutions. Finally, Commission members are encouraged to periodically attend meetings with the Board, the U.S. Department of

State, the U.S. Department of Education, cooperating agencies, and local institutions participating in the program to consult about the program and discuss areas for improvement.

Trade-Offs and Unintended Consequences

Autonomy and decentralization are strengths of this policy, but they also yield trade-offs and foster unintended consequences. One trade-off for allowing the binational Commissions so much autonomy in choosing who they select without knowing who the other binational Commissions are selecting is lower diversity of the overall awards granted to United States scholars. Even though the policy urges educational diversity, unique binational Commissions may find they have very similar needs. Another trade-off is autonomy lowers uniformity of experience. Every country and binational Commission is distinctive and will run differently based on cultural protocol and resources. However, this means the relationship the grantees have with the Commissions are vastly different. The policy sets standards, but the binational Commissions are not forced to follow any recommendations outside of a basic framework (regularly submitting reports being an exception). This makes it difficult to measure quality among the same program carried out in several countries.

The decentralization of the selection process and pre-arrival has several unintended consequences. Personal bias and a thirst for prestige limit the ethnic, gender and economic diversity of U.S. student grantees. Because higher education institutions are responsible for selecting candidates, it is natural to endorse the candidates with the most potential to be named a grantee. Based on the criteria, these will be students who have studied abroad, have an excellent academic record, and who have participated in research and/or volunteer experiences related to the grant. Many of the students who fit into this category are upper-middle class, white women. Even though all decisions are non-discriminatory, it is very likely that the highest percentage of U.S. student grantees fall into this category.

Once U.S. students, lecturers, researchers, and teachers have been selected, the binational Commission takes over administrative control. For Partner Country students, lectures, researchers and teachers, the collaborating institutions they administer the program. However, between the time the scholar is selected and arrives in the country, administration is in limbo.

The policy states that the scholars are responsible for taking a leave of absence from their work and assuring all their affairs are in order in their home country before departing. Scholars are additionally responsible for independently completing all required visa paperwork and

paying all related fees. If a problem should arise, there is no one person who can help the grantee with the situation. Thus, grantees must result to searching for help from a variety of government and cooperating agencies. It would be much simpler if the Board had a streamlined process for grantees to prepare for relocation with a diminished amount of red tape.

Recommendations for Improvement

Overall, this is a thorough, well-conceived policy. However, added detail and centralization would increase quality and diversity among and across Fulbright programs and streamline the relocation process. More details should be included for the binational Commissions about how to interact with grantees once abroad. As it stands, the orientation topics are outlined, but there is no mention of length or support services that could be offered. For example, for many grantees, the orientation is the first time they enter their host country and a primary concern is where they will live. Therefore, finding housing, and giving time to find housing should be included in the orientation and counseling abroad section.

On a related issue, Commissions “are urged to follow actively the progress of U.S. grantees, to provide appropriate counsel and guidance whenever necessary, and to arrange, as appropriate, periodic lectures or social activities designed to bring together Americans and other nationals of the participating country” (Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs A, 2013, Chapter 100, p. 10). Not specifying how the progress of U.S. grantees is to be followed, what is appropriate counsel and guidance, and how often lectures and social activities should be held opens a wide range of interpretation. More exact language such as, host monthly check-ins with grantees to measure progress, be prepared to discuss issues of homesickness and identity crisis, and host a community lecture, movie screening or social hour once every three months would keep the activities and support offered by Commissions more consistent worldwide.

Lastly, one domestic office should be responsible for helping all grantees through the visa and relocation process prior to arrival in their host country. In the host countries, Commissions and institutions are the best points of contacts because they are local. Similarly, it makes logical sense to give administration of the visa process to a home country entity instead of leaving grantees without support during a sometimes difficult and confusing process. In short, adding more details to ensure quality across regions and programs and adding one centralized process to help grantees with pre-departure needs would strengthen the policy.

SWOT Analysis

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats are identified for grantees, host institutions/binational Commissions, and both.

Key: Grantees: **G**, Host institutions/binational Commissions: *HI/BC*, Both: Both

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• G: There are several different types of grants and opportunities to receive a Fulbright Scholarship.• G: Scholarships are awarded in several academic disciplines.• G: Grantees awarded a monthly stipend, health insurance, and a travel allowance for travel to and from the host country.• <i>HI/BC</i>: Autonomy to deliver the program compatible with the home country and institution.• <i>HI/BC</i>: Ability to select grantees that fit the needs of the country/institution and provide the best educational exchange experience possible.• <u>Both</u>: Emphasis on mutual understanding and interaction with the host country.• <u>Both</u>: Tool of measurement (monthly reports) is clear.• <u>Both</u>: Lots of opportunities for collaboration with public and private cooperating agencies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• G: Lack of support in applying for visa and relocating (especially difficult with dependents).• G: Health Insurance is given to the grantee, but not to dependents.• G: Emphasis is on mutual understanding, but no specific opportunities are presented for spreading that value outside of grantee's project.• <i>HI/BC</i>: Unable to judge diversity of group because not connected with other HI/BC's.• <i>HI/BC</i>: Funding is not fully elaborated. Responsible for forming public and private partnerships.• <i>HI/BC</i>: Limited resources make it difficult to follow grantee progress• <u>Both</u>: No timeline other than annually and at the end of grant given for reports.• <u>Both</u>: Autonomy makes it difficult to ensure quality among programs of the same type in different countries.

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • G: Establish an academic and professional network abroad. • G: Honor of being Fulbright Scholar could lead to more academic opportunities after being a grantee. • <i>HI/BC:</i> Collaboration with private agencies to implement more local and regional activities that promote educational and cultural exchange. • <i>HI/BC:</i> Autonomy to employ culturally specific innovative activities and programs with limited oversight. • <u>Both:</u> Maintaining an alumni network of grantees and HI/BC employees can create a diverse and collaborative community worldwide. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • G: Increased numbers of students enrolling in higher education and increased professional development opportunities abroad create greater competition for scholarships. • <i>HI/BC:</i> Cooperating agencies may stop cooperating and funding HI/BC's. • <i>HI/BC:</i> Private scholarships with streamlined processes may surpass Fulbright as the desirable grant for educational exchange. • <u>Both:</u> Political instability may close BC's and offer fewer opportunities for grantees. • <u>Both:</u> Global economy could decline and less funding would be available to sponsor the HI/BC's and grants.

References

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