COMMENTS ON FULBRIGHT FROM OLIN’S FULBRIGHTERS

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1) What did you do on your grant?

I am part of the Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship (ETA) program in South Korea. My grant places me in a Korean school where my job is to teach conversational English to students as well as sharing American culture. I actually got placed in a special science high school, so my engineering background was a great fit for my school. My students and I have common interests and I can prepare them for university where all their classes and exams are in English.

As part of my program, I live with a Korean host family and am immersed in the Korean culture. When I first arrived, I had a 6 week orientation where I studied Korean and learned how to teach English as a second language. Also with my program, I had two months off from teaching in January and February where I could travel and do other cultural activities. During my break, I visited Cambodia as well as interning at the US Embassy in Seoul.

2) What was the greatest thing that happened during the grant period?

It’s hard to choose one thing and say it has been the greatest thing during my grant. It might be the time I realized that I really was a part of my host family and that I understood the culture enough to fit in better. At that point I recognized that I had really grown and adapted myself to a different culture.

I have also really enjoyed traveling around Korea. I try to see something new almost every weekend. There are lots of festivals and sights to see. Korea has a very easy public transportation system, so I usually join some friends and we head to a new adventure each weekend.

3) What advice do you have for students applying for Fulbrights?

• Start the process early. I started over the summer, but I still had a lot to do in September and October, particularly with essay revisions.

• Look at your options – Fulbright has more choices than just studying at a university. You might want to ask yourself ‘Do I want to study or do something else?’ ‘Do I want to be fully immersed in a new culture (eg. Host family) or would I be more comfortable living on my own?’ When I asked myself these questions, I realized that I didn’t really want to study, but I wanted to have the experience of living in another country and really getting to know the culture, so the ETA program was a good fit for me.

• Make sure you are comfortable and excited to spend a year in an unfamiliar place with lots of unknown challenges. The Korean Fulbright Commission gives me support, but I am pretty much on my own most of the time. I have learned to ask for help when I need it, but also adapt to what is going on around me.

4) What would you do differently (either before or during the grant period)?

I think I would have tried to learn the language earlier on so that I would have come to Korea with a very basic language level. Instead, I began my Korean studies in Korea and it was pretty overwhelming. If I knew more of the language, I could more easily get around and understand
5) How would you answer this question "I am toying with the idea of applying for a Fulbright. Why is it a good thing to do?"

I think it is definitely a good thing to do. I have been exposed to many new people, ideas and cultures. I don’t think I would have ever gained the perspective on the world and on the perception of America if I had not been away for an extended period of time. I think personally I have become much more open to new ideas and learned to really be adaptable. I have also realized the things that are really important to me as I have spent a year abroad on my own.

I would highly recommend the Fulbright program. I wanted to spend a year immersed in a culture very different from that of America after college. Fulbright was a great choice because it was well organized, paid me a stipend, allowed me to travel and provided a structure to have a really meaningful experience.

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1) What did you do on your grant?
I lived in Lausanne, Switzerland and worked in the lab of Professor Jeff Hubbell at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology. My primary research was a mix of chemical engineering, biology and organic chemistry. I worked with a graduate student and a post doc tackling the problem of creating nanoparticles that would hold a specific chemical and release it slowly once the particles were embedded in the vessels of a human heart that is struggling with healing itself. The project was amazing, the people were amazing and the country is amazing.

2) What was the greatest thing that happened during the grant period?
This is a difficult question to answer. In short, the people are what made my year one of the best I've had yet. From friends to mentors I met so many amazing people. But the experience was so much more than even that; I guess, although it's kind of cheesy, Switzerland and the life I lived there is a part of who I am now. I perk up whenever I hear the country mentioned. I was fortunate enough to have enough miles to get a ticket to go back to Lausanne two weeks ago for my spring break and it felt that I had taken an 8 month vacation, not that I was on vacation visiting. Quite an indescribable feeling and one I wish I could explain via speaking instead of writing... I guess the greatest thing is I now feel at home in more than one culture.

3) What advice do you have for students applying for Fulbrights?
It's obvious and cliché, but if you don't apply, it won't happen. If you are worried about "using a year" put that thought out of your mind TOTALLY; I can't imagine a better way to have spent a year after Olin. I'm in grad school now and I am SO glad I didn't choose to go directly after Olin. Time to relax, figure new things out without too much responsibility, exploring new things, is, in my opinion, invaluable. If you studied abroad and liked it, consider going back and/or using your existing connections abroad to help you in your application.

If you've never been to where you want to do a Fulbright, don't let that scare you either. I think establishing communication that shows genuine interest and energy is your best ally in gaining some cultural aspects better.
support from a host institution. My guess is it would be more meaningful to establish a line of support with a specific person/professor than "an institution". If you are going abroad, consider this before you leave and while you are away. Perhaps finding a professor that does work you think is really cool. Not that you have to have too much face time with them during your Study Away, but talking with them and volunteering a few hours a week in his/her lab can prove invaluable.

4) **What would you do differently (either before or during the grant period)?**

NOTHING! Spend quality time on your application and essays; think of all that might come out of it! As for my grant period, it started out fantastic and only got better from there. When I left Switzerland 12 months after arriving, I left at the peak of everything I'd been involved in; it was hard to leave a life that I cared about so much, but looking back, I'm glad I had the opportunity to leave on a high.

5) **How would you answer this question "I am toying with the idea of applying for a Fulbright. Why is it a good thing to do?"**

There are a million answers to this question that I think all boil down to: you should do a Fulbright because it's one of the best ways to expand who you are, who you know, what you know about the world, where you've been and what you can do in the future. I feel incredibly blessed to have connections all around the world now, both friendships and professional connections that might or might not impact my future career. I worked with and made friends with people from Switzerland, Germany, France, Italy, Denmark, Holland, Norway, Sweden, Croatia, Moldova, India, Japan, the Czech Republic, Algeria, Tunisia, Turkey, China, Korea, Taiwan, Canada, the US, England, Scotland, Spain, Iceland, Chile, Brazil and Iran (I'm sure I'm forgetting one or two). People I'll never forget and that have expanded who I am and how I view the world. I can't think of another way to access such resources so easily other than a Fulbright.

Joy Poisel Fulbright Grantee 2006-2007 University of Southern Denmark
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1) **What did you do on your grant?**

I was a non-degree Masters student at the University of Southern Denmark. I studied mostly in a program called IT Product Design. This is the program that inspired the UOCD course at Olin college. My class had 10 students from 8 countries. The lectures were taught in English. We learned through lectures and projects a lot about the theory and practice of User-centered Design. I also took a course in Mechatronics Engineering and a small course in the Danish language.

2) **What was the greatest thing that happened during the grant period?**

The best part about my grant was becoming friends with students from so many different countries. We compared our countries and cultures and made fun of each others’ a lot too. I learned about how living in a socialist country changes your outlook on life, work, school and more. I learned how different engineers trained in Eastern Europe are from those in the US. I learned that Disney characters such as Huey, Dewey and Louie have different names in other languages but almost always rhyme. In German they are Tick, Trick and Track. The diversity of my classmates enriched our projects and led to many great ideas and debates.
3) What advice do you have for students applying for Fulbrights?
You should definitely apply! But you need to be wise in where you choose to apply. Many people apply to France and Spain because a majority of US children learn French or Spanish. Instead, try to get creative in which country you apply for. Look at the Fulbright website so that you can tell what chance you have getting into each program. For instance, based on the number of applicants, there is about a 1 in 7 chance of winning a grant to Denmark but a 1 in 50 of getting one to France. If you don’t know a rare language, be creative about what you do know. If you know French, consider a French-speaking African country as it will probably be easier to get a grant there. As for me, Denmark does not require you to know any Danish to have a grant there. There are other such countries that only require English. Look for those if you are not confident in another language.

Next, make sure you find a topic and country that match with each other and with you. You need to be able to argue why the Fulbright group should give you money to study somewhere for a year, so you need to be persuasive. Also, it is very important to try and find someone at the foreign university who can champion for you and write you a letter of recommendation/acceptance saying they will advise you if you come. Remember that your Olin professors are absolutely amazing and probably have contacts all over the world. If you find a program you really want, ask around and see if any Olin profs have contacts at the school.

Also, definitely start your essays over the summer. The Olin Fulbright advisors will make you rewrite them over and over. I hate writing and don’t usually even make outlines or do rough drafts, but because of them, I think my essays were some of the best I have ever written.

4) What would you do differently (either before or during the grant period)?
I’m not sure what I would have done differently. I think I might have tried to travel more in Europe if I could have. The Fulbright grant is generous, so think about what places nearby where you will be living you would like to travel too. I also wish I could have had more contact with other Danish Fulbrighters, unfortunately they were all about 4 hours away from me. But if there are other Fulbrighters near you, make sure you travel/hang out/spend time with them.

5) How would you answer this question "I am toying with the idea of applying for a Fulbright. Why is it a good thing to do?"
I decided in late July before my Senior year that I wanted to apply for a Fulbright. (I was also applying for grad school and jobs because I had no idea what I wanted to do when I grow up…still not sure about that.) So, I advise you to start the application process even if you are undecided. At least spend the summer doing some research about where you want to study (country and program). If you find something that seems exciting, go for it. How often in your life will you get to spend a year in another country on someone else’s dime where all you have to do is learn? The one caution, applying for Fulbright is a lot of work. Once you get to Olin in the fall and you have Olin professors and others investing a lot of time in you, your essays, and recommendations; it would be unfair to just back out at that point. So if you decide to apply, go all out. You are very lucky to go to Olin because there are so many people who will give you more help and attention in this process than at many other schools. I am convinced I got my Fulbright mostly because of Olin and its Fulbright program, not because I’m anything special.