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## **International Scholarly Communities in Fulbright Programs**

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*Higher education institutions increasingly encourage and support interdisciplinary collaborations with the aim of high-impact research productivity. The Fulbright Scholars Program provides faculty with opportunities to form partnerships with colleagues internationally, yet little is known about the impact of the Fulbright experience on international collaborations. This qualitative case study sought to examine the perspectives of Fulbright awardees with a focus on understanding the development of scholarly partnerships and research collaborations. The researchers interviewed five Fulbright alumni from a research institution in the southeastern U.S. whose time abroad ranged from six weeks to one year. Findings not only enhance current understandings of the influence of international research partnerships on a scholar's research and teaching agendas, but also provide contextualized understandings of Fulbright's role in facilitating the creation and development of these partnerships.*

Higher education institutions, particularly research-extensive universities, face increased demands for research to address societal problems at

both the national and international levels. Faculty within these universities increasingly work in interdisciplinary and collaborative teams both at home in the U.S. and abroad, visibly demonstrating the impact of their research through publications and practical applications of their work. Global networks of scholars are able to share knowledge and skills across national boundaries, and, in the scholarly literature, there is a growing focus on developing and utilizing such collaborations (Goode, Carter-Pokras, Horner-Johnson, & Yee, 2014; Kochanek, Scholz, & Garcia, 2015; Lundgren & Jansson, 2016). Santonen and Ritala (2014) found that these networks typically have well-connected scholars at the center and that scholars who perform better than others 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 who are within a close proximity geographically (Vidgen, Henneberg, & Naude, 2007; McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001).

As scholars take on issues across the globe, they collaborate with other researchers internationally. To further facilitate these global connections, the Fulbright Program was developed as a highly competitive, merit-based program of grants for the international educational exchange of students, scholars, teachers, professionals, scientists, and artists. Fulbright Programs have a rich history of extensive financial and personal support ("Funding and Administration," n.d.), yet little is known about the impact of these programs on the development of international scholarly networks and their long-term research agendas. Hence, this study examined the extent to which scholarly collaborations are created through Fulbright awards, the nature of these partnerships, and how scholarly relationships supported Fulbright scholars while abroad. As one of the earliest and most distinguished programs aimed at fostering cross-cultural understandings among scholars, an examination of the impact of the Fulbright Programs on creating these research collaborations can be useful not only to Fulbright, but also to other organizations promoting international research and collaborations. Two questions guided this study:

1. How do Fulbright scholars describe their experiences in developing international scholarly collaborations?
2. How do Fulbright scholars develop and maintain international scholarly collaborations?

The answers to these questions help provide an understanding of how scholarly networks are created and maintained from Fulbright experiences. Our findings offer a better understanding of the nature, development, and impact of these collaborations regarding a scholar's research agenda,

teaching and pedagogy, and professional viewpoint on the nuances of their own fields. As the need for collaboration in interdisciplinary and disciplinary research across national boundaries expands, this study adds to the current knowledge base on the nature of these research partnerships.

### **Related Literature**

U. S. Senator J. William Fulbright (1904-1995) founded the Fulbright Program in 1946 with the express goal of promoting international exchange of knowledge and enhancing cultural understanding between nations. Since the first U.S. participants travelled abroad in 1948, “approximately 370,000 ‘Fulbrighters’ have participated in the Program” (“History,” n.d.). Fulbright scholars come from all disciplines, and the program is active in 155 countries worldwide. Fulbright offers an extensive variety of programs for scholars and students and typically awards funding through approximately 8,000 grants a year (“About Us,” n.d.). The current Fulbright programs are listed in Table 1.

While there exist numerous personal narratives reflecting on the experience of being a Fulbright scholar (Csikai, 2008; D’Amato & Singleton, 2001; Deardorff, 2015; Duncan, 2013; Grenier, 2016; Rosenstone, 2016), there has been much less empirical research about the program’s impact on individual learning, professional growth, and the development of international scholarly collaborations. Of the studies on individual Fulbright experiences, a number discussed cultural learning (Biraimah & Jotia, 2012; Eddy, 2014; Lamiani, 2008; Opt, 2014; Skovholt, 1988), which was often in line with the stated goals of the Fulbright program. According to a longitudinal quantitative study by Biraimah and Jotia (2012), participants in the Fulbright program reported that 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 Fulbright participants were receptive to learning new ideas and willing to challenge their former “old and engrained understandings” (p. 23). The time abroad increased awardees’ 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; McWhirter, 1988; Rivenbark & Bianchi, 2011; Sunal & Sunal, 1991). What these findings propose is that the Fulbright experience offers faculty an opportunity to enhance knowledge acquisition and intercultural understanding, thus encouraging growth and learning.

Table 1  
The Fulbright Programs

<i>U.S. Programs</i>	<i>Visiting Scholar Programs</i>	<i>U.S. Institutional Programs</i>
Core Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program	Core Fulbright Visiting Scholar Program	Outreach Lecturing Fund
Distinguished Chair Awards	Outreach Lecturing Fund	Scholar-in-Residence Program
NEXUS Regional Scholar Program	NEXUS Regional Scholar Program	Fulbright Development Programs
International Education Administrators Program	Visiting Scholar Enrichment Programs	Junior Faculty Development Program for Lebanon
Specialist Program	Arctic Initiative	Visiting Scholar Program for Iraq
Postdoctoral Scholar Awards		Junior Faculty Development Program for Egypt
Arctic Initiative		Afghanistan Junior Faculty Development Program
		Junior Faculty Development Program for Tunisia

Many U.S. Fulbrighters have reported the opportunity to 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; Infeld & Wenzhao, 2009; Lamiari, 2008; Lentz, 2011; Opt, 2014; Wolf, 1993). It seems that 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, pp.

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 have reported the development of professional networks through Fulbright (Adams, 2011; Bearnot et al., 2014; Burn, 1982; Downing, Hastings-Tolsma, & Nolte, 2015; Jackson, 1996; Lal, 2006; Lentz, 2011; Opt, 2014; Skovholt, 1988; Sunal & Sunal, 1991). Opt (2014) found that having a cultural mentor helped to build relationships with colleagues in the host country. Adams (2011) noted socializing with both colleagues and members of the community as an important aspect of the experience. Downing et al. (2015) reported the Fulbright opportunity allowed for the development of professional connections in the field of nursing unparalleled among other programs.

In some cases these professional connections are maintained after the scholar returns home and can have a lasting impact on his or her research and teaching agendas (Gonzalez, 2012; McWhirter & McWhirter, 2009; Mendelsohn & Orenstein, 1955; Skovholt, 1988). Decades ago, Skovholt (1988) argued that working collaboratively with international colleagues served to "increase the excitement about one's work" and that he enjoyed continuing to work with international colleagues (p. 285). More recently, several Fulbright alumni have reported that 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) indicated that her Fulbright in Zambia altered her outlook on cross-cultural research having a significant effect on her with regard to professional affiliations, research, and teaching methods.

In addition to maintaining and working through newly developed scholarly collaborations, faculty have returned home with new views on pedagogy, teaching content, and training (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 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 new attitudes toward teaching, learning, and classroom behavior (Emert, 2008). Miglietti (2015) found that 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 scholars were more likely to fulfill goals, overcome cultural difficulties, and increase cultural competency when they spent adequate time abroad and were able to also work independently (Emert, 2008).

In sum, the majority of existing literature on the outcomes of participating in Fulbright Programs points to increased cultural understanding and improved learning regarding pedagogy and scholarship. There is some research indicating 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 of 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 of the Fulbright experience by adding empirically based findings on the impact of the experience on a scholar's learning, engagement in research collaborations, and development of international scholarly communities for relevant interdisciplinary research.

### **Research Design and Methods**

This study follows the design of a qualitative case study (Simons, 2009). Each participant in this study serves as a case, representing a unique aspect of the Fulbright experience. Using this design, we sought to answer the research questions through in-depth interaction with participants within a particular site. Overt generalization of data is not a goal of this study; instead, it attempts to provide "more detail, richness, completeness, and variance—that is, depth—for the unit of study" (Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 301). Five cases were selected and studied for the "purposes of illumination and understanding" (Hays, 2004, p. 218) of the characteristics of international scholarly communities developed through Fulbright programs. This article reports findings from five in-depth qualitative interviews conducted at one research university in the southeastern U.S. We followed deMarrais's (2004) description of the purpose of such interviews, seeking to learn about the participants' professional experiences in Fulbright through "long, focused conversations," thereby generating data that reflect "in-depth knowledge from participants" about this particular experience (p. 52).

Key concepts within this study's theoretical framework are the development of scholarly communities (Hansman & Mott, 2010) and the concept

of adult learning in groups (Dirkx, 1997; Imel, 1999; Watkins & Marsick, 2010) within the context of scholarly collaborations 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 that the group can be a “mediator of learning” (p. 84) and can take on either a supportive and nurturing role or a negative and destructive role. A common desired outcome for learning in groups is to generate knowledge to be used by the individual learners (Imel, 1999). Cranton (1996) noted that learning in groups occurs in three primary domains: *instrumental*, *communicative*, and *emancipatory*. Group members work to “jointly produce knowledge,” and this “knowledge may be used by an individual (as well as by the group)” (Imel, 1999, p. 56). 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 adulthood is a benefit to group learning as ground rules can be established by the group itself, confirming that they pertain to the needs of the group holistically (O’Keefe, 2009). It is the quality of interaction between members within the group that determines the quality of learning for the individual and the knowledge produced by the group (Imel, 1999).

With this framework guiding our analysis, we consider the creation of international collaborations facilitated through Fulbright. When these collaborations are sustained and continue to grow, it is possible for a community of practice can develop. Within 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). This study examines scholarly networks developed by Fulbright scholars as facilitating collaborative learning and development. Members of these scholarly communities work to “share a common identity and learn from and with one another as they pursue interests, opportunities, and challenges” (Watkins & Marsick, 2010, p. 66). 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 e-mail, we invited faculty members

Table 2  
Demographics of Study Participants

<i>Pseudonym</i>	<i>Award Type</i>	<i>Time Abroad</i>	<i>Country Location</i>	<i>Discipline</i>
Harry	Core Scholar	Ten months	Europe	Special Education
Kate	Travel Study	Six weeks	Asia	Educational Foundations
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 in Sport

with a minimum of five years at the institution who had been Fulbright scholars. Table 2 includes demographic information about each participant including where they spent time abroad, how long they stayed, and which Fulbright award they received.

### *Data Generation*

Between May and December of 2015, we conducted five in-depth open-ended qualitative interviews (deMarrais, 2004), each lasting approximately 60 minutes, that were designed to elicit rich descriptions of the participants' experiences. Our interviews focused on five topical areas: (1) introductory (that is, background of Fulbright award, if their families came with them, and so forth); (2) social supports; (3) personal and cultural growth; (4) professional development; and (5) building collaborative relationships (see Appendix A for the interview guide used for this study). Each interview was audio recorded. We transcribed the interviews and de-identified the transcripts by replacing all proper nouns with pseudonyms.

### *Data Analysis Methods*

With the aid of ATLAS.ti (version 7), a qualitative data analysis software (QDAS) platform, we analyzed the transcriptions to develop our findings. We employed an inductive approach to thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998; Saldaña, 2016), which Braun and Clarke (2006) 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" (p. 83; emphasis in original). This method allows a researcher to note moments of importance related to the research questions in a way driven by the data rather than a preconceived framework imposed on the data by the researcher.

We began by printing the interview transcripts, 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. While reading through the transcripts, we jotted notes in the margins, indicating possible codes, categories, and/or themes. From these notes, we 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. At this point, we imported the transcripts into ATLAS.ti to facilitate the remainder of our analysis process. Within the program, we used the coding function descriptively and conceptually to code and categorize the data (Maxwell, 2013; Saldaña, 2016). In developing our codebook, we wrote code defini-

tions and code memos (Saldaña, 2016) in the codes' comment areas for each code to ensure consistency in coding. Upon completing the coding process for each interview, we used ATLAS.ti's memo feature to write detailed analytic memos (Maxwell, 2013) about each interview based on our perceptions of the interviewee's experience as a whole. These memos facilitated a comparison of experiences across the data set, and they became directly significant for the discussion section of this article. After the codes were created, we categorically organized them using a system of prefixes in the code names to denote the categories. We then noted possible themes.

Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) recommendations, we interrogated our initial themes to extrapolate the pattern between them and ensure their connection to the research questions. These themes holistically represent differing aspects influencing 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 a sustained international scholarly community. We turn next to the findings from the analysis.

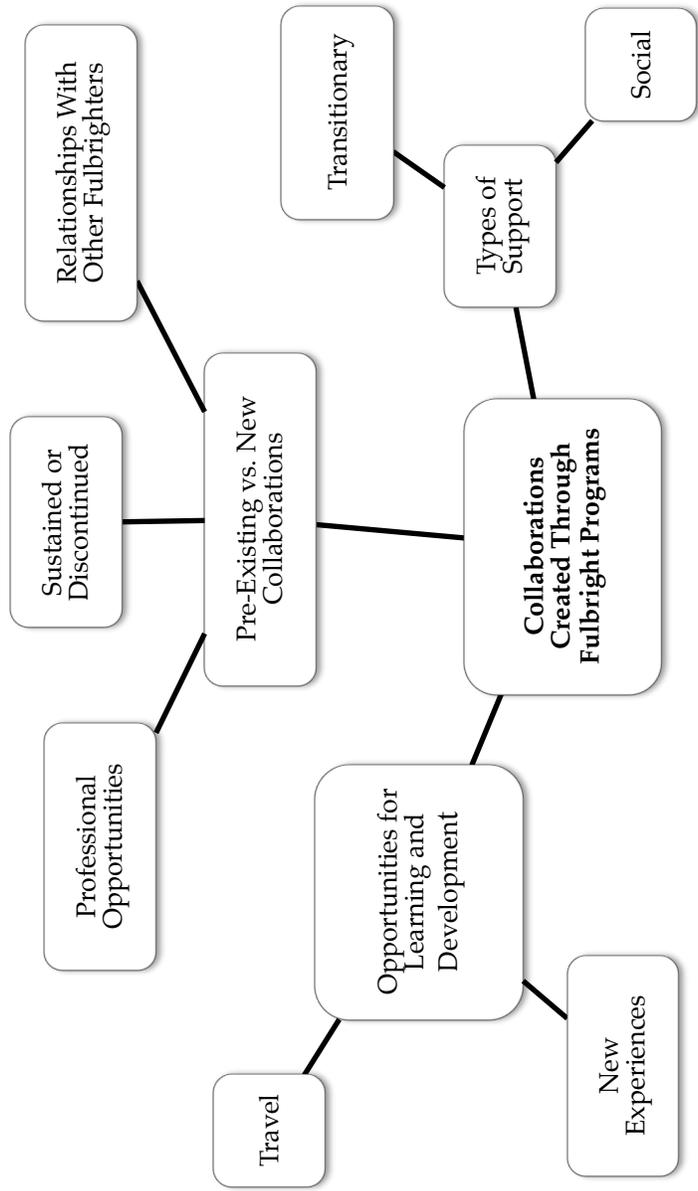
## Findings

The experience of a Fulbright award as described by the interviewees is personally and professionally enriching. Specific to understanding the impact of scholarly networks, our analysis generated 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 professional support received while abroad, and (3) opportunities for learning and development made possible 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 (see Figure 1).

### *Impact of 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 who serves as their sponsor. The involvement of sponsor individuals varies dramatically. For participants in this study, if an extensive professional network existed beyond their sponsor prior to their Fulbright award, they were more likely to

Figure 1  
Thematic Network of Major Findings



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 characteristics of the Fulbrighters' experiences: their access to various professional opportunities, whether their collaborations with international colleagues were sustained or discontinued upon the scholar's return home, and the extent of their relationships with other Fulbrighters. We turn next to each of these concepts.

### **Types of Professional Support**

Not all of the Fulbrighters had pre-existing scholarly relationships. Harry, in particular, struggled with this. His sponsor left for a sabbatical the day after Harry arrived and returned a week before he left. As Harry explained, "I basically had to create my own Fulbright experience." Harry described his experiences as a "scramble," and 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 the department as they often had dramatic differences in perspective regarding practice in his academic discipline.

Mary Beth was another scholar who lacked a pre-existing network but was able to reach out on her own to forge new connections 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 that a Fulbright scholar who was without an already existing network in place, like Mary Beth, had to be comfortable, independent, and have the drive to work through the challenges of navigating and creating international professional opportunities.

On the other hand, scholars with extensive pre-existing networks had greater access to professional opportunities. For example, Lara applied for a Fulbright in an English-speaking country because of her extensive professional network there. Her institutional colleagues facilitated a variety of professional opportunities for her while she was abroad. These actions surpassed her own expectations, 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 among these experiences show the amount and quality of the professional opportunities available to Fulbright scholars were directly related to the pre-existing nature and longevity of their scholarly network. Those with existing international scholarly communities had extensive opportunities for professional development, while others struggled if they had to create their own connections upon arrival to their host country.

### **Opportunities for Continued Professional Networks**

In addition to the professional opportunities available to scholars, whether the scholars' network existed before their time abroad was related to whether or not they were sustained after the award time ended. Neither Kate, Harry, nor Mary Beth has continued working with international colleagues. Mary Beth, for instance, reported that "nothing that will be long term" or "sustaining" concerning research projects 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 ended when they returned home.

In contrast, Robert, who already knew colleagues in the English-speaking country he visited, discussed his ongoing relationships with these colleagues as friendships rather than research partnerships. In his interview, Robert described 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 had “so many connections now” that she would “never lose them.” Yet, at the same time, she recognized she was “very, very blessed” to have had opportunities because of her professional network that other Fulbrighters may not have.

These experiences show that the length of time a professional relationship has existed directly influences whether those relationships lead to international collaborations. Lara’s scholarly relationships existed for years before her Fulbright experience, and she had a history of scholarship with these individuals before she spent six months abroad. In contrast, Kate and Mary Beth had no pre-existing relationships before their Fulbright assignments, and none of the new relationships they made while abroad were sustained when returning home. It is possible that this is because preserving an international community requires diligence on the part of every member to maintain the mutually supportive nature of the community. When international relationships have previously overcome the stress of existing across extensive geographic locations and national boundaries, they are more likely to be sustained when scholars return home.

### **Relationships With Other Fulbright Scholars**

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 that these relationships were 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, at times, the Fulbright organization should have facilitated the opportunity for Fulbrighters to meet each other. He did note that the lack of continued relationships with other Fulbrighters could have been because of the time of year he went abroad. He expressed regret for this, saying, “There wasn’t a meeting of Fulbrights, or the Americans, whereas, they might have more of that during the school year.” Robert stated he did not “feel like there was a community of practice” because he was the only American Fulbrighter he was aware of in the country at the time.

A prime example of the benefits resulting from having relationships with other Fulbright scholars is Kate, who explained through a close relationship with another Fulbright scholar she explored the country and learned about local culture. In her interview, she mentioned that they became close because of similar interests in architecture and art 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.” Kate continues to maintain these relationships as well. Finally, Harry reported that while he was abroad, he and other scholars 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 scholars’ experience while abroad. Those who created new relationships through independence and self-determination were offered professional opportunities and had the possibility of continuing these relationships upon returning home. In contrast, already existing relationships led to more diverse and extensive opportunities for professional development and the sustainment of an international scholarly community.

#### *The Nature of Support Received*

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 finding a place to live, helping with family, and/or introducing them to the context in which they will be working. For Mary Beth, both a graduate student living in the country and her faculty sponsor provided invaluable aid. The graduate student helped Mary Beth “make the transition in all ways”; she “helped with my housing and made associations with faculty.” Mary Beth’s faculty sponsor introduced her to other colleagues, his family, and his social network. Yet even with all of this help, lacking an extensive pre-existing scholarly network led to Mary Beth’s feeling “isolated and alone,” and she “struggled” through her experience. As further examples of transitional support, 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 help 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 socializing with others and lead to an understanding of the social culture within the host country. For those who spent their Fulbright award without these supports, the experience was socially challenging. For instance,

Robert travelled and socialized primarily 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 socialized primarily with other Fulbright scholars.

In contrast, Harry, Mary Beth, and Lara had more extensive support networks. Harry participated in a local climbing society. He went on long hikes with the group on weekends, sometimes camping overnight. He said through this group he was able to connect “with people who loved the outdoors,” and these outdoor activities became an experience leading 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 trips 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 its ease. Regardless, our findings indicate that without either of these supports, 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: learning through travel and learning through experience. Many of the participants in this study reported that due to international colleagues, they were provided with travel opportunities that enhanced both their knowledge of local culture and customs and their professional growth and development. Lara’s travel experience was the most extensive. 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 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 greater 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 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. There she was able to lead seminars and work with others in statistics education. She 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 he considered important professional opportunities. Travelling allowed the Fulbright scholars to learn about and from local culture as well as participate in professional events. All participants believed that the more extensive the collaborations and opportunities to both travel and engage in the local cultures, the more meaningful their experiences were.

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 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 explained 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 to try to communicate with people" that was enlightening. For Kate and others, participating in and coming in contact with the local cultural 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 networks.

## Discussion

In many ways, Fulbright is a test of an individual's ability to survive on one's own. How the scholars approached the experience and interacted with others clearly shaped their views. For those with existing social and professional networks abroad ready to support them during their stay, it was easier to make connections and develop personal and professional collaborations. Alternatively, for participants like Harry, who believed he received little support from his host institution and the Fulbright office, an independent nature is essential to navigating the experience successfully. Harry set up his own opportunities to travel, participate in conferences, and give guest lectures. His own endeavors 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, a likely result of this lack of support coupled with his forced level of independence.

Robert seems to have had a similar experience. While he talked about making a few connections, he 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. Despite this variation, length of stay did not seem significant in the Fulbrighters' ability to make connections. Thus, it is clear the Fulbright experience is a very individualized opportunity. It would be good for future research to focus on the impact of this individualization—including the influence of length of stay—on developing the profoundness and significance of the Fulbright experience.

From our data, we found that developing a professional and personal network of colleagues and friends made the participants' time spent abroad rewarding and meaningful. Our findings mirror those of previous studies, in that during their 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 scholarly community. Lara's experience effectively displays this community; she described many research 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. Lara's scholarly community represents an aspect of communities of practice in which "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). Such scholarly communities often influenced the research agendas and teaching perspectives of our participants in addition to the discussions found in the literature (Adams, 2011; Bearnot et al., 2014; Hedlund, 1998; Miller, 2005).

Notwithstanding the existence of some sort of professional network, Fulbright is a challenging experience. Participants reported challenges in 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 were used to, problems of implementing research and data generation, and challenges regarding clear understandings of what is expected of the scholar during the time abroad. Potential Fulbright scholars may benefit from keeping these challenges in mind as they apply for Fulbright awards. Findings from this study indicate that regardless of the time spent abroad and the existence of a scholarly network, the Fulbright experience is one in which participants must be willing to work independently and have confidence in their own ability to influence the success of their experience.

The collaborations created through Fulbright facilitated many types of learning for the participants. This learning described by this study's participants addressed each of the three realms of learning in groups described by Cranton (1996). The participants described moments of *instrumental*, *communicative*, and *emancipatory* learning concerning cultural awareness, pedagogy, and scholarship. Adding to the existing literature, the participants indicated that they learned an extensive amount about the culture in which they lived and with which they came into contact through travel (Dandavate, 2006; Heppner, 1988; Jackson, 1996). 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). Furthermore, 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 toward one's own culture. These interactions encourage participants to learn 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 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 that Fulbrighters need to be willing to take risks and navigate uncomfortable situations. To this point, Adams (2011) indicated that because of these many challenges, Fulbright scholars must be flexible and willing to create social and professional relationships. Our findings echo these, suggesting that when these challenges are overcome, the relationships and professional collaborations created while abroad can be strong and long lasting (Adams, 2011).

Our findings suggest that 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, the participants described newly discovered perspectives in teaching, learning, and research. The development of new perspectives adds greater understanding of the impact of Fulbright study (Biraimah & Jotia, 2012; Infeld & Wenzhao, 2009; Miglietti, 2015; Tallman, 2002; Wolf, 1993). In these ways, and 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; Meyer-Emerick, 2010; Opt, 2014; Rivenbark & Bianchi, 2011).

Overall, this study describes both the various ways the Fulbright experience impacts scholars and how the experience influences the development and sustainment of professional partnerships. Fulbright study can be personally significant. The participants expressed feelings of being better global citizens; having improved intercultural competence, including a broadening of personal and professional perspectives regarding cultural difference; increasing their desire to travel abroad; deepening their understanding of their own culture and traditions; and gaining a greater appreciation for the opportunity. All of the study's participants conveyed that they would take part in Fulbright again given the chance and would encourage other colleagues and students to apply. Professionally, the time participants spent abroad led to feelings of increased legitimacy and prestige, an expansion of research agendas and collaborative work, changes in pedagogy upon returning home, and more fluency in practice and 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 into how the Fulbright experience impacts scholarship, learning, and collaborative research. For example, the challenges encountered by this study's participants suggest that 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). Finally, future scholarship could more deeply examine the nature of international scholarly communities developed through Fulbright experiences to understand how they relate to communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991, 2005); how communities of practice develop among, and benefit, faculty (McAlister, 2016; Smith, Hurst, & Murakami, 2016; Voegele & Stevens, 2016); and the concept of communities of inquiry (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000, 2001; Garrison & Vaughn, 2008).

*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. These findings can also 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 and develop a network of scholars with whom to work during the experience. Potential scholars should also have an independent nature and a willingness to work to determine the success of their own experience. As Fulbright typically does not assist scholars in finding a host institution (Rivenbark & Bianchi, 2011), potential scholars may need to

work to ensure they have support regarding living, transportation, and transitioning to a new country and culture. Finally, potential Fulbright scholars should work to clarify their roles and contributions with the host institution before travelling abroad.

### Conclusions

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 still more to learn, our study helps contribute a detailed, rich, and deeper understanding of how the experience abroad impacts not only the individuals themselves but also 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.

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