LETTERS

From the Bayous to the Sand Dunes: One Faculty Member's Year Abroad as a Fulbright Scholar

To the Editor. In August 2010, with the summer temperature of Doha, Qatar, reaching a balmy 125°F, I set out from Xavier University in New Orleans, Louisiana, to spend 1 academic year as a Fulbright Scholar at Qatar University's College of Pharmacy. Several aspects of this experience were in the realm of the familiar. Qatar University is a Canadian accredited college of pharmacy, with a pharmacy curriculum similar to that of US pharmacy schools. The mode of instruction is completely in English with the students being gleaned from the top 10% of high school graduates. Students supplement classroom lectures with clinical experience, with Western-based guidelines serving as the foundation of professional practice. It is here the similarities end.

Qatar is a small, oil- and gas-rich country located on the Arabian Gulf. Only 20% of the population of 2 million are Qatari nationals. As such, they represent the second wealthiest, per capita, nation on Earth. The remaining 80% of the population, including my students, are expatriates - people of other nationalities who work in Qatar on a temporary basis, ranging from months to years. As a teacher, my student population was dynamic and diverse. The students, all of whom were female, came from 3 different continents. They represented nations from Mauritania to the Philippines. In light of the Arab Spring, which brought an awakening of the desire for democracy through the Middle East, it was difficult to find a student who was not personally impacted by global events. Qatar is a nation that is the center of the Middle East's discussions on democracy, human rights, and economic reform. The entire year, even though I went as a teacher, I felt like a perpetual student.

The year was not all study; there were several opportunities for fun. Qatar, in 2010, became the first Arab country to win the bid to host the Fédération Internationale de Football Association World Cup. Qatar, being situated between the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, is a culinary epicenter where a Persian dinner fused with Indian spices might be followed by traditional Arabic coffee. We even participated in the extreme sport of sand dune bashing (not recommended for the faint of heart).

As a teacher, my experience was expanded when 2 fourth-year Xavier University College of Pharmacy students came for a 6-week Global Health/Academic rotation

at Qatar University. The Xavier students served as both instructors and students throughout the rotation. They had several opportunities to engage in professional discussions with Qatari students. They discussed the challenges of pharmacy that are universal, particularly the challenges of the evolving career of clinical pharmacy. As a teacher, it was gratifying to see the students connect as aspiring professionals.

All of these experiences were made possible by the flagship program of the Council of the International Exchange of Scholars, the Fulbright Program. The central mission of the Fulbright Program is to facilitate exchanges of teachers, scholars, and artists to serve as cultural ambassadors. Established under Senator J. William Fulbright in 1946, it has provided over 300,000 bilateral exchange opportunities for American and international scholars.

The Fulbright Program, which can be accessed via www.cies.org, begins accepting applications in February 2012. When reviewing the rosters of previous Fulbright Scholars, pharmacy faculty are not as well-represented as other disciplines, with clinical pharmacy faculty having even less representation. Pharmacy faculty should be encouraged to pursue a Fulbright opportunity because international pharmacy exchange under the Fulbright program remains an unexplored domain.

The Fulbright Program offers 3 grant opportunities: teaching grants, research grants, and a hybrid teaching-research grant. As a former "Fulbrighter," I can tell you that the success of a grant depends on the qualifications of the candidate and how well the grantee meets the needs and interests of the host institution. A successful first step is to establish contacts at a host institution abroad. It is always helpful to have a former grantee to review applications. Most importantly, the program is not just about what a Fulbrighter can bring to the host country. Equally important is what the Fulbrighter hopes to bring back home. I have brought back opportunities for collaboration with international colleagues and I hope to facilitate student exchange-opportunities for Qatari and US pharmacy students. More importantly, I have a year of memories and colleagues and friends that cross 2 continents who enriched my experiences as a teacher, a student, and an American. This experience would not have been possible without the Fulbright Commission, Dr. Peter Jewesson, Ms. Carolyn Clark, Dr. Shaikha Bint Jabor Al Thani, Dr. Kathleen Kennedy, and Mr. Klaus Heyer.

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