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*Fulbright New Century
Scholars*
Summative Evaluation

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INTRODUCTION

Created in 2001 by the Institute of International Education (IIE), the Fulbright New Century Scholars (NCS) program maintains the core structure of the Fulbright Scholar Program, which consists of individual research at a foreign institution. The NCS program includes a collaborative, multidisciplinary element that distinguishes it from the other Fulbright programs. Each year, approximately 30 outstanding research scholars and professionals from the U.S. and abroad focus collectively on a topic of global significance. Scholars from diverse disciplines work collaboratively with their international colleagues to seek solutions to critical issues affecting all humankind.

As described by IIE, what makes the NCS program unique is the opportunity for scholars to engage in debate and dialogue based on multidisciplinary research, and to develop new global models for understanding the social context within which nations and communities shape their responses to the many challenges of the 21st century.

Over the course of the year, the scholars come together for three in-person meetings in addition to their ongoing virtual communication. Scholars work under the guidance of a Distinguished Scholar Leader (DSL) who is selected via collaboration between the IIE Executive Director and contacts at the States Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA). DSLs assist with the selection of scholars for their NCS year.

Annual NCS topics are established by the State Department and have been as follows:

- Cohort 1:** (2001-2002) Challenges of Health in a Borderless World
- Cohort 2:** (2002-2003) Addressing Sectarian, Ethnic and Cultural Conflict within and across National Borders
- Cohort 3:** (2004-2005) Toward Equality: The Global Empowerment of Women
- Cohort 4:** (2005-2006) Higher Education in the 21st Century: Global Challenge and National Response
- Cohort 5:** (2007-2008) Higher Education in the 21st Century: Access and Equity
- Cohort 6:** (2009-2010) The University as Innovation Driver and Knowledge Center

Since the NCS program's inception, IIE has fielded surveys to scholars at the end of their grant year and developed summary reports for each year.

Now, as they looked to the future of the program, IIE decided external outcome assessment was warranted. As outlined in the Request for Proposals (RFP), IIE stated as its goal an assessment of how the NCS experience has affected the first five cohorts of scholars over time. They wanted NCS scholars to provide feedback about the overall effectiveness of the program and their suggestions for improvement and continuation.

In early 2010, IIE contracted with Goodman Research Group, Inc. (GRG), a research firm based in Cambridge, MA that specializes in the evaluation of educational programs, materials, and services. GRG's evaluation consisted of two components:

- (1) GRG reviewed and consulted with NCS program staff and provided suggestions for modifications to the electronic survey that NCS scholars complete after their grant year.
- (2) GRG designed and implemented online focus group discussions with a sample of scholars from the first five NCS cohorts to learn, from their own perspective, about their experiences with and outcomes of the Fulbright NCS experience.

GRG provided immediate feedback to IIE regarding the annual electronic survey. This report presents findings from the online focus group discussions among past participants about their NCS experience.

METHODS

ONLINE DISCUSSION GROUPS

GRG conducted five separate asynchronous online discussion groups, one for each of the first five NCS cohorts. This allowed for bringing together virtually a group of scholars from each cohort, with shared experiences, to reflect and comment on the NCS experience. While bringing scholars together face-to-face would be most preferable, the cost of doing so was prohibitive. Moreover, the scholars were used to communicating in the online mode. The asynchronous nature allowed for scholars to review and comment on their own time, while still engaging in an interactive discussion.

Sample Selection

IIE's NCS program staff sent GRG a list of contact information for all 158 scholars from Cohorts 1-5, with email addresses for 154 of the scholars. GRG selected participants through a stratified random sampling scheme. Each of the five cohorts was stratified by region, corresponding to the overall makeup of the cohort. For each world region represented in a cohort, we randomly selected (using a random number generator) at least one-third of those scholars, who were then invited to participate.

GRG's sample selection process was iterative. When a scholar declined, did not respond within one week, or when the email invitation was undeliverable, GRG invited another scholar from the same cohort and region.

Recruitment

GRG and IIE took several measures to ensure a high participation rate for the online discussion groups. First, NCS staff sent an email in advance, informing them of the study commissioned by IIE and encouraging their participation. In the invitation, GRG emphasized the minimal time commitment required and the flexibility the online discussion group allowed. As a token of appreciation for participation, GRG offered scholars an electronic gift certificate to Amazon.com or tisbest.org (a website that allows individuals to donate to a charity of their choice). Finally, GRG used the continuous sampling and invitation process to replace potential participants who were unavailable or declined.

GRG invited participants by email in 8 different waves between April 21st and May 11th. In the first wave, GRG invited 56 scholars (10-12 per cohort). Over the course of four weeks, a total of 110 (70%) of former New Century Scholars were invited to participate in their cohorts' discussion groups. Of the 110 email invitations sent, 10 were undeliverable due to expired email addresses or email provider errors. 18 scholars declined to participate, 11 indicating that they were not available during the 2-week discussion group period. 46 committed to participation by completing the online registration form. Of those who agreed, 39 (85%) eventually participated in the discussion group.

Data Collection

Discussion group start dates for each cohort were staggered over 5 weeks, with each discussion “live” for two to three weeks (GRG designed this overlap so that discussion in one cohort could inform follow-up questions for another). At the start of each discussion group, GRG sent participating scholars an email with detailed instructions for accessing and contributing to the discussion, which was hosted on www.vbulletin.com. The email also contained a link to a list of Frequently Asked Questions that further explained how to use the online discussion board system.

GRG moderators posted a new discussion topic to the online forum every three to four days, and notified participants of the new topic by email. Participants were asked to check the discussion progress at least every other day, and to devote a maximum of three hours reading and contributing to the discussion over the official two-week period. During this time, GRG researchers continuously monitored the discussion and posted follow-up questions throughout to sustain the discussion.

After the four main discussion topics and a final closing question were posted, GRG notified participating scholars that the forum would be available for two additional weeks, giving them time to review the discussion and add additional comments. Discussion transcripts were digitally recorded and downloaded.

IIE STAFF MEMBER INTERVIEW

After a preliminary review of the discussion groups' data, GRG conducted an informal phone interview with the IIE staff member identified as the individual with the best background to comment on discussion data. This input has been used to contextualize the results of the online discussion groups.

DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR LEADERS' ONLINE SURVEY

Based on comments received from scholars, GRG decided to develop a brief online survey to send to the Distinguished Scholar Leaders (DSLs) from each of the first five cohorts. Four of the five DSLs were able to complete the survey, which consisted of six open-ended questions regarding their perceptions of their roles and responsibilities. DSL feedback is also integrated throughout the report in support of scholars' comments and suggestions.

RESULTS

In this section, we present a profile of the discussion participants followed by a summary of the discussion, organized around the four main topics of interest that IIE identified in the RFP. Each topic concludes with related recommendations. A final section includes general program recommendations based on the cumulative feedback, scholars' and DSLs' suggestions, and discussion with IIE staff

PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

In all, six to nine scholars from each cohort (2001-02 through 2007-08) participated in the discussions. Across all cohorts, each of the seven world regions was represented. See Table 1.

Table 1
New Century Scholar Discussion Group Participation by Cohort and Region

World Region	2001- 2002	2002- 2003	2004- 2005	2005- 2006	2007- 2008	TOTAL
Americas	1	–	–	–	2	3
East Asia and Pacific	2	2	1	1	1	7
Europe and Eurasia	–	3	–	3	1	7
Middle East and North Africa	–	–	–	–	1	1
South and Central Asia	–	2	2	–	1	5
Sub-Saharan Africa	1	–	–	–	2	3
United States	5	2	2	2	3	14
GRAND TOTAL	8	9	6	7	9	39

DISCUSSION TOPICS AND THEMES ADDRESSED

“In terms of satisfaction, I feel extremely grateful for the NCS year and the impact it’s had on my work. It feels like it has had a lasting positive legacy on my thinking, relating to both personal and professional things.”

IIE identified four general areas of interest for this evaluation study: (1) the effectiveness of different elements of program structure, (2), the results or products of the NCS year, (3) the extent to which scholars have continued to collaborate with each other, (4) the influence (if any) on policy makers or on the development of good governance. Discussion questions were developed around these themes and scholars’ responses are presented here. Throughout the discussion, scholars expressed their perceptions of their experiences during and since their NCS participation and offered suggestions for program elements to maintain, enhance, or modify.

General Reflections on the Experience

In general, scholars from each of the first five cohorts share positive overall feelings about their Fulbright NCS experience. Expressed by one scholar, *“It was a great experience personally and professionally and launched many ships.”* As the program served as *“a foundation for collaboration, networking and generating new ideas,”* scholars pointed to the value of the collaborations and lasting connections that have continued to influence their experiences going forward.

As conceived by IIE, the NCS program is unique in its multidisciplinary and collaborative approach. Scholars recognized and valued the opportunity to make connections with colleagues with whom they may not otherwise have interacted. While the majority of them focused on a joint publication as the tangible, desired end result, they identified the unique opportunity to engage with the diverse members of their cohort as an end in itself. *“The thing I value even more (especially because it was such a unique experience) were the less tangible rewards that came from the in-person meetings with scholars from around the world.”* Scholars recognized the NCS program as one of a kind: *“I wish there were more explicitly inter- or multi-disciplinary programs like this one.”*

“It was this joint working together that formed the glue of our relationships, which, frankly, are likely to last throughout our lives.”

Effectiveness of Different Elements of Program Structure

Across all cohorts, the three program elements scholars listed as contributing most to the program achieving its objectives (i.e., to gain new perspectives and formulate a set of recommendations for local, national, or international policy development) were:

- (1) In-person meetings,
- (2) Diversity of scholars and associated opportunities to collaborate with colleagues with different perspectives, and
- (3) Distinguished Scholar Leader (DSL) guidance and support.

Across all five cohorts, nearly half of the scholars (18 out of 39) agreed, *“The most productive elements were our in-person meetings and interactions.”* A few scholars noted that it might be tempting to make all of the program meetings virtual and host them electronically. There was agreement, however, that the

three in-person meetings, where scholars met in small subgroups to collaborate on their research, were a key program element that should not be eliminated.

The diversity of scholars and collaborative spirit of the groups contributed to a sustained energy and interest in the work. Expressed by one scholar, *“the greatest asset was the wonderful group of scholars who participated enthusiastically.”*

“The most useful experiences, not surprisingly, were the face-to-face meetings of the small thematic groups. We achieved much more together than we did electronically.”

Fifteen scholars noted that the range of disciplines and experience as well as expertise from different geographic regions helped to expand their professional research perspectives as well as their personal appreciation and respect for these differences. They believe that *“the strength of the NCS program is its reach and diversity.”* The different perspectives to which they were exposed enhanced their *“openness to and strong respect for difference (beyond simple intellectual recognition of this).”*

A number of scholars in each cohort (11 out of 39 altogether) said their leader (DSL) was a critical and influential element of the program; they appreciated the enthusiasm, creativity, expertise, and support. *“The DSL did the best job during the program not only in providing academic guidance but also giving us moral support and encouragement to develop our own career.”* Scholars had *“nothing but praise to offer”* for their DSL as well as for the NCS program staff.

The DSLs themselves described that their primary roles, beyond helping with selection of participants, was to support the scholars in their small groups and as a whole, *“to identify mutual interests among them,”* and to provide *“organizational and intellectual leadership to the group.”*

A few scholars noted there must have been quite a bit of logistical and administrative work to make the program run as smoothly as it did. Regarding the NCS staff, *“they were always accessible, attentive and responsive to our special needs (both substantive/intellectual and administrative/logistical).”*

“Support of the DSL was most crucial to getting the results we did get.”

Figure 1 shows a graphic representation of the program elements perceived as valuable by scholars across all cohorts. The size of a word within the word cloud corresponds to the frequency of its use within the discussion group transcript.

Figure 1
Program Elements that Contributed Most to NCS Accomplishments



Recommendations: Program Elements

Based on scholars' comments, we recommend that IIE continue to devote program resources to travel for scholars. As they suggested, and as confirmed by NCS IIE staff, there was indeed significant time and effort expended to ensure that scholars were able to travel to in-person meetings. The international nature of the program certainly includes logistical challenges, and efforts made by IIE on behalf of the scholars will continue to be appreciated.

Beyond the current structure of the grant year experience, we recommend allocation of resources to facilitate continued scholar collaboration after the grant year has ended. Capitalize on the relationships established and scholars' interest in ongoing collaboration by creating opportunities and outlets (e.g., online forums) for scholars to maintain their correspondence and joint research.

Results or Products of the NCS Year

Across all cohorts, scholars were quick to identify tangible, concrete results of their NCS experience. Books, chapters, articles, conference presentations, courses, curricula, majors and degree programs were the most frequently listed. Most scholars found it difficult to quantify the concrete impact of their NCS experience; a handful of them described approximate numbers of people reached.

For example, one scholar explained that aside from publication, she co-convoked a workshop and 3-day seminar on her topic with 30 participants and 60 attendees, helped develop an undergraduate minor at her university that now boasts 250 students per year, and started a study abroad program, which has run for 3 years with 25 students per year; she was also centrally involved in winning \$1 million in grants for the undergraduate minor curriculum development as well as \$1.5 for a research ethics training program related to her field of study in Africa.

Figure 2 shows the program results listed by scholars across all cohorts. Research resulting in publications, books, and courses were the most frequent results, as reflected in the large size of those words.

Figure 2
Results or Products of the NCS Year



A few scholars who created courses or degree programs during or after their NCS year described ways they capitalized on their new perspectives and new information gained from colleagues and incorporated that into their own work, for example, assigning “*readings by many of my NCS colleagues in classes.*” This reflects another way in which working with others who share a topic of interest – but from a different discipline or perspective – enriched scholars’ professional life. Not only that, the experience led them to share the benefit of this collaboration with still others – in this case, students.

It was evident, through the discussions, that the majority of NCS scholars in each cohort believed the intended outcome of their NCS year was to create a joint publication with members of their subgroups. Some successfully completed a publication and some did not; the majority of participants listed individual publications in journals and books as well as conference presentations as the results or products of their NCS experience.

“In the end my subgroup did not produce a joint publication or research, but I don’t believe that was a loss.”

Those who did not complete a joint publication expressed a degree of disappointment, but some also felt that such a product should not define success for the NCS program. For example, several in the second cohort (2002-03) explained that their subgroup was too large and diverse. In the words of one scholar, they *“did not want to produce an edited volume that would be criticized by reviewers as lacking unity. ...The major difficulty was not the lack of enthusiasm, creativity or willingness to work collectively, but the enormous heterogeneity in respect to research interests.”* Suggestions were made for creating smaller subgroups, *“to enable more concentrated group work”* and they believed that with more planning ahead the subgroup research could be more cohesive and more likely to be sustained after the year.

A few scholars suggested that the absence of a group publication may have been a reason they were in less contact with one another after their NCS year. While they did not believe that *“encouragement or initiatives of the Fulbright staff”* could have changed the situation, some scholars noted that some initiative from NCS staff may have helped the subgroup *“to achieve a collaborative result and perhaps even to keep collaboration afterwards in case there would have been a concrete collaborative result.”*

Beyond presentations and publications, across all cohorts, 14 participants said that the NCS experience led them to new directions in research including, for example, a more international research focus, or a new leadership role as a Principal Investigator on a new project. As a result of their NCS experience, several scholars were invited to sit on panels and committees, and a few received increased and/or new funding for their research.

“The NCS program was a turning point in my work, moving from national policy issues to international”

Most scholars attributed these results to their NCS experience. One in particular described a process of receiving grants to extend work begun during the NCS year. The work resulted in *“influential publications in high-impact journals,”* and a book that is in publication. This scholar reports that these products have reached *“thousands”* and believes that this progress *“wouldn’t have happened without NCS participation.”*

A few others said NCS played a role in their subsequent work and accomplishments, but was not the only contributing factor. *“All these courses and grant proposals have largely benefited from my participation to the NCS program, but I would not go so far to say that they have been made possible through this participation.”*

The NCS experience also influenced scholars’ professional and personal perspectives. The program enhanced their curriculum vitae, afforded increased recognition within their own universities and communities as well as outside,

The way the NCS program brought so many together scholars to work together was considered the overarching success.

scholars from outside Europe and North America especially appreciated gaining access to outside universities and networks, and led to increased confidence in their work. One scholar expressed these two primary areas influenced by the NCS experience: *“Inserting the NCS program in the personal CV improves the CV performances, the NCS experience improves the personal confidence in the daily work, the collected NCS experience is used in numerous social moments, using the best practices from the US in professional behavior.”*

More generally, when reflecting on the outcomes of their NCS experience, participants listed individual and collective achievements, and felt the overarching success of the program was the way it brought so many scholars to work together.

“The positive effects of the NCS were reflected in this case by our individual publications.”

“I think our collective publication of the book, which came out of this grant, has given me recognition in the US academia, and I appreciate it much.”

“I think the program achieved a major success in bringing together scholars from diverse background to work on common themes. I learnt a lot and for that matter was able to use what I learnt from colleagues outside my region/locality to have some small local impact.”

Recommendations: Results of the NCS Year

Now that six cohorts have completed the NCS program, GRG recommends that IIE consider objectives and goals within the context of intended “end results.” The shape and structure of the NCS program can then be modified accordingly. Desired end results should be stated explicitly to prospective scholars and DSLs. For example, if a subgroup joint publication is an intended end product, then consider establishing the subgroups before the first in-person meeting so they can begin work immediately.

To maximize the impact of the program and increase the multiplier effect, we recommend that IIE track and compile scholars’ joint and individual research articles and project reports, and increase efforts to publicize their work, including their policy recommendations related to the year’s topic. Specific scholar recommendations include establishing an annual edited volume of compiled scholar research and reports and ensuring each year’s policy recommendations reach the appropriate stakeholder and policymaker audiences.

Collaboration since the NCS Year

Across all cohorts, scholars have continued to collaborate to varying degrees in the years after their shared NCS experience. Scholars have *“maintained both personal and working relationships with several”* of their colleagues. Email was used as a means of communication by a majority (21 of 39) of participants in all

cohorts. Some have taken more initiative to maintain contact (e.g., holiday or birthday cards to colleagues). Nearly all participants expressed a strong interest in continued correspondence, regardless of the extent of communication to date.

“We do circulate information occasionally about what we are doing, our achievements – personal and professional.”

There was significant ongoing correspondence among scholars immediately following their respective grant years, as many scholars worked to finish joint publications. Across all cohorts, 19 participants corresponded with NCS colleagues about a collaborative publication and/or to request feedback on an individual publication.

Beyond their joint work, global conferences have served as a means for scholars to connect. Most participants (23 of 39) noted they have met one another, both deliberately and coincidentally, at related conferences and other events; some have met NCS scholars from cohorts outside of their own and have established professional relationships with them as well. Additionally, 20 participants made references to in-person visits between NCS peers; most often, this meant a visit to present or lecture at another scholar’s home institution. A few noted they were in more contact with colleagues who worked in the same geographic region as they did.

Table 1
Means of Communication since the NCS Grant Year by Cohort

	2001-2002	2002-2003	2004-2005	2006-2007	2007-2008	TOTAL
Conferences and events	7	3	2	6	5	23
Email	6	3	4	5	3	21
In-person visits, personal invitations	5	4	3	4	4	20
Conferring about publications	3	3	3	5	5	19
Topics of interest and developments in the field	4	4	1	2	4	15

Professional topics about which scholars corresponded after their grant years included: conferences and events of mutual interest, publications, developments in the field, requests for opinions from known experts in particular fields, academic networking (e.g., finding a position for a postdoctoral student), and on-the-ground projects.

“For me an important aspect is that I feel I could contact any one of my fellow Fulbrighter’s and receive their advice or guidance in their area of expertise.”

Participants were generally satisfied with the level of communication they had within their cohort following the grant year. The outcomes of their correspondence perceived as most valuable were primarily ways to keep one another informed about academic work related to their research, and included:

- *“Joint book publication”*
- *“Exchange of information regarding new relevant publications and academic events”*

- *“Connections to high quality experts, sources of information, and pieces of work via personal recommendation of NCS colleagues.”*

A handful of participants (5 out of 39) indicated they were not entirely satisfied with the level of communication since their NCS year. In particular, a few noted they wished there could have been more *“long-term collaborative relationships”* with NCS colleagues, and they suggested, *“this might have required more deliberate expectations and planning during the NCS process.”*

Regardless of their degree of past correspondence, all participants reported they have felt and continue to feel very comfortable requesting and sharing information with one another based on each other’s reputed areas of expertise. This is an important outcome of the program in itself and speaks to the strength of the community that was formed over the year. In fact, building a community was perceived by the DSLs as a key contribution they made to the program.

“Overall, I still feel very well connected to NCS colleagues: our interactions are not very frequent, but I feel I could get in touch with any of them at any time if I need their advice or help.”

Suggestions were made for follow-up structures the NCS program staff could set in place to facilitate continued collaboration. Many expressed interest in a five-to ten-year *“reunion of our cohort to allow us to reflect more systematically for you and to allow us to renew our bonds.”* As will be explained in the following section, many felt that at least several years were needed before it made sense to reflect on results of the NCS experience beyond the numbers of publications and presentations.

“If a reunion comes out of this threaded discussion, that would make it most worthwhile.”

Several took advantage of the online discussions created for the present evaluation study to reconnect, say hello, and identify upcoming conferences or other opportunities where they might be able to interact in person.

Recommendations: Sustained Collaboration

Based on the scholar discussions and on our conversations with NCS program staff, GRG recommends that IIE establish alumni networking opportunities like those used for other Fulbright programs. These include, for example,

- cross-program Fulbright enrichment activities in the U.S.,
- smaller Fulbright alumni organizations abroad, and
- social media outlets (e.g., www.alumni.state.gov, which is meant to be a networking opportunity for past and current participants in U.S. government-sponsored exchange programs).

Because of the more collaborative nature of the NCS program compared to other Fulbright programs, websites and/or other networking structures have strong potential for widespread use.

GRG recommends that IIE consider organizing a reunion for each cohort five to ten years after the grant year, in-person or via online forum. An NCS website

could host separate pages for each cohort, allowing communication both within and between past cohorts.

Due to differential Internet access in the various geographic regions, GRG recommends that IIE continue to be sensitive to the “*lowest common denominator*” in means of communication, and continue to support, to the extent possible, scholars from areas with poor communications infrastructures or legal restrictions on internet use.

After this report is submitted, GRG will re-send the database of past scholars to NCS staff, with more up-to-date contact information. This could serve as a catalyst to implementing some of the above mentioned alumni support efforts.

Influence on Policy or Policy-Makers

As described earlier in this report, participants’ comments focused more on academic goals such as publications than on goals related to a wider policy impact, or the creation of NCS policy recommendations. Generally, participants were not able to describe any notable influence of their own cohort’s recommendations on policy, nor did they all recognize global policy change as a program objective. Ten participants stated explicitly that they were unaware of any visible influence of their cohort’s work or recommendations on policy or policymakers. Rather, they believed the impact of their collaborative work was seen in their own research and in their own local communities. “*Individual impact, definitely. Local impact, yes.*”

“I suspect our individual research, scholarship, and presentations have contributed the primary impact.”

“I do not think that our recommendations had any direct impact. But I did not have the impression either that this was a key objective of the NCS program.”

While they believed it would be “*hard to trace global changes to particular recommendations of the group,*” most scholars recognized and identified local impacts of their (often individual) research.

A few scholars (5 out of 39) described individual work that may have had an impact on policy. Three participants indicated that their NCS cohort had some impact on scholarly discourse within their field as a whole, scholars from two different cohorts were asked by their governments to assist in reform, and some scholars made a difference locally through their work with NGOs.

Participants provided examples that they believed reflected influence of their collaborative experience. One scholar explained that the subgroup published an article that has had impact “*in academic circles and beyond,*” evidenced by hearing references to it from different presenters at a recent conference and its listing as one of the “*10 best articles in recent years*” in *Higher Education Management and Policy*.

Another gave an example of how the joint work has influenced public discourse:

“The work of our group has had an impact on the debate about international student circulation in the sense that there is more attention to the south-south flows of students, international student flows as a global market instead of a south-north market, and about the deficiencies of methodology and data on international student flows.”

Several scholars, particularly in the earlier cohorts (i.e., when the themes and topics such as *health* and *conflict* seemed to be broader in scope), stated that if actual policy change was meant to be a program goal, their final presentations in D.C. did not reach the appropriate audience. Scholars’ reactions included: the audience should have included policymakers with relevant influence, the presentation seemed like an exercise rather than an actionable set of recommendations, and the presentation did not seem like the best use of their time. Stated by one DSL: *“I felt hat our group was pushed to devising a group statement at the end of the program which was largely used for a public event with no follow-through.”*

“The process of developing recommendations seemed contrived for a final meeting and press conference.”

At the presentations in DC, *“there were mostly officials from the State Department dealing with educational or cultural policies, or with the Fulbright program itself.”* Scholars from earlier cohorts perceived Fulbright NCS themes in later years as *“more in line with the audience we had at our collective presentation in Washington.”*

Overall, participants highlighted the fact that NCS brings together a group of scholars with *“diversity in knowledge and social and educational background”* who might not otherwise work together. The research that comes about is *“likely to have a wider applicability by virtue of the fact that the participants are drawn from a more varied background.”* With deliberate attention to publicizing and disseminating the research, there is likely to be more opportunity to make a larger impact.

Recommendations: Policy-Related Outcomes

“If you would like to have tangible impact directly you have to include from the start also the key stakeholders at the local, regional, and global level in defining the themes and make those more focused on their demands.”

If policy change on a local, regional, and potentially global level is an NCS program objective, GRG recommends this should be stated explicitly in all program materials including announcements and applications. Steps should be implemented to ensure all participants work toward this goal with a common research question in mind more deliberately from the onset of the program year.

GRG also recommends that the breadth or depth of each cohort’s topic correspond with the policy-related objectives. For example, for a broad topic such as *“Ethnic/Sectarian conflict,”* producing a publication or organizing a conference would be a more realistic goal than even short- to medium-term policy change.

Based on our discussions with NCS staff, it is evident that NCS program goals and objectives have evolved over the years since the program’s inception. A

more deliberate focus on research that has “on the ground” impact would suit the current interests of the program and could be implemented if conveyed as a goal early on. Scholars would be well-advised to be “*working diligently to form meaningful working groups at the first cohort meeting.*”

Some scholars felt their joint recommendations were too general, making it hard to measure impact. A more deliberate effort with built-in follow up would be needed to make them work.

“[Scholars] *need another mechanism to push and follow up.*”

“*They [recommendations] may have had some traction if there was a process beyond the final conference to disseminate them.*”

GENERAL EVALUATOR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE FULBRIGHT NCS PROGRAM

Based on the discussion groups, interviews and conversations with IIE NCS program staff, and feedback from DSLs, GRG makes the following general recommendations as the New Century Scholars program enters its seventh cohort year.

GRG recommends that now, after nine years of operation, IIE reflect and re-evaluate the overall program goals and objectives and ensure that promotional materials, applications, and information provided to prospective scholars are aligned. For example, after the grant year, consider whether program success would be measured by a joint publication, a set of policy recommendations, and/or an on-the-ground action plan for immediate or future implementation.

If the desired end is a joint publication, consider creating more focused subgroup topics and more homogenous cohorts; if the desired end is development of community initiatives, place someone with applied experience within each subgroup and give subgroups more time to work together earlier in the grant year.

Additionally, GRG recommends that the NCS program staff make their selection criteria and decisions transparent to all participants, including the DSL. For example, the deliberate inclusion of scholars with both academic and applied experience reflects a deliberate strategy for achieving program objectives.

Working together, scholars with both academic and applied professional experience can draw on past research, create an action plan, and work with the appropriate policy makers to implement projects in communities locally and globally.

GRG recommends the program promote as a central feature of the program, the diversity of participants. The diversity is a key element of the program, and can be considered both a strength and a challenge of the program overall. As stated by one scholar, a more targeted and specific set of outcomes would be an improvement, “*given the fact that the NCS scholars’ diversity and spread is its great strength, but at the same time a weakness if one is looking for tangible impacts on the national and local levels.*”

Some participants, particularly those in the earlier cohorts, believed it would have been easier to collaborate if they had more in common. One DSL suggested it would be advisable to obtain feedback on the “*collegiality*” of prospective participants when checking references.

Finally, GRG supports recommendations offered by scholars to build in follow-up after conclusion of the grant year. This may include not only ways to correspond and maintain collaborative efforts, but also to keep participants apprised of any influence their work has had on the larger community and on future NCS cohorts.

“I think it would be helpful to think of a program like NCS as a longer-term effort—which doesn’t necessarily mean support over a longer term – but the idea of building in follow ups or reunions over time would seem important for the purpose of evaluating the impact of the project but also re-energizing the efforts that the project launched.”

Past scholars would appreciate sustained communication with the NCS program staff in terms of learning about achievements of their colleagues, outcomes of later cohorts’ research, and summaries of findings about the program overall.

GRG recommends the development of an NCS artifact to recognize and celebrate the collaborative work of participants in each grant year. A few scholars suggested ways to develop a product that would honor the work undertaken by each cohort, including a final book publication with an introduction written by the DSL that could present “*the key work undertaken under the year’s theme.*” Rather than a focus on each subgroup creating a publication, this larger book could have contributions from most, if not all participating scholars in the cohort, be widely disseminated and “*serve as a lasting contribution and capstone achievement, the influence of which will percolate downwards to the diverse national and local levels.*”

GRG recommends IIE create a system to maintain records, including challenges, successes, and lessons learned from each NCS cohort. Systems in place for follow-up with past participants would help to maintain continuity of the program as scholars move around, IIE staff change, and the program itself is modified each year.

Overall, nine years after the program's inception, Fulbright NCS scholars from each of the first five cohorts have seen significant results and are left with positive feelings about their experience. They reflect on their work with their colleagues fondly, attribute much of the success of the program to the supportive Distinguished Scholar Leaders and IIE NCS staff. They welcomed the opportunity to reflect and share their experiences, and they recall the program as a unique turning point in their professional as well as personal lives.

“The architecture of the program was innovative, and helped us expand our perspectives on our individual projects. The connections we made with other scholars at those meetings were (and continue to be) exceptionally helpful, as others have noted, but I continue to think that the NCS program in its design was the spark.”

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