# **Transcript - Go Global ED Podcast Episode 12 with Fulbright-Hays Seminars Abroad program officers Matt Robinson and Mark Bladel sharing conversations with Norma Gonzalez, the Executive Director of the Argentina Fulbright Commission, and conversations with several 2023 Seminars Abroad participants from their pre-departure orientations.**

## Host Matt Robinson

Welcome to the Go Global ED Podcast, a production of the International Foreign Language Education Team or IFLE at the US Department of Education. My name is Matt Robinson and I'll be joined by my colleague Mark Bladel. We're program officers on the IFLE team. In today's episode, we will learn more about the Fulbright Seminars Abroad program, which is administered by IFLE. After covering the basics of the program listeners will hear from a director of an overseas Fulbright Commission who recently implemented a seminar abroad to learn more about what participants do on seminars, and what kinds of impact the program has. We then give listeners the chance to hear from some of the participants who take part in seminars abroad, to see who takes part in the seminars, why they apply to participate, and what they hope to gain from participating, including the kinds of curriculum projects that they develop.

## Host Mark Bladel

So first, let's tell you a little bit about the program. The Seminars Abroad Program funds individual educators and administrators to participate in a guided four-week abroad experience with other educators at the K-8, secondary or post-secondary levels. These fully funded international experiences are centered on a theme such as sustainability in Iceland and allow participants to gain a deeper understanding of the country they are visiting.

During the program, participants develop curriculum projects that they share with their colleagues and students at their home institutions. These seminars are run in partnership with Fulbright Commissions abroad so that they can leverage their in-country knowledge, teaching knowledge and connect participants with this country educators, students, scholars, and leaders. This summer, we caught up with a Fulbright director who ran a joint seminar to Argentina, Brazil, that hosted 16 secondary teachers and administrators.

## Norma Gonzalez – Fulbright Argentina Director

I'm Norma Gonzalez, I am the Director of the Fulbright Office in Argentina. I have been doing this for 25 years and I have the privilege of being a Fulbright grantee myself. This year we are working together with Brazil to host the seminar and I think that makes it good and special. So, Argentina, they are going to come to Buenos Aires to spend some time there, visit schools. Then from there we go to Cordoba and there they are going to see the very impressive Jesuit heritage that the city offers. Museums and Estancias. Plus, they are also going to meet with teachers and visit schools. Then we are going to go to Salta. There is the minister of Education himself will receive them and they will also meet with teachers, and they will do some tourism…I mean, they will see because Salta is a very different part of the country, the north of the country is very different from Buenos Aires and the center. So, they will see a lot of the landscape and the American and Native people heritage. They will visit groups of Native people there and then from there they will go to Mendoza. That is completely different. Also, because it's the wine country and also the Andes Mountains. So, they will see the very high mountains plus the wineries, plus a very active intellectual, academic life. They will meet with people from the university and then back to Buenos Aires to some more activities there. And from there they will fly to Brasilia. My colleagues from Brazil, the director, people who work with them, will come to Buenos Aires to spend the last three days with them there and then take them to Brasilia. And from Brasilia they will Manaus, they will go to Rio, they will go to, well, Amazonia. It's an exciting program. Just the fact that the final product is that they will write a curricular unit to teach in their schools about Argentina. Makes me very happy. Thinking that children will learn about Argentina at school makes me very happy.

And the people that come are amazing always. The Department of Education's sends us the very best people, they are very flexible. They make the most of the experience. I put free time all the time and it last like two seconds immediately. They schedule a lot of activities. They meet other people, they visit, they take so much advantage of the time they are there. So, summing up the people are the most valuable thing and the impact they have on the lives of so many others.

## Host Mark Bladel

Let's pivot now to the people who took part in these seminars abroad. We'd like to introduce you to a few of this year's participants.

## Heather Zajdel – Participant

My name is Heather Zajdel. I've been teaching in the Philadelphia Public Schools for, it's going to be my 17th year in the fall. And I started in the Kensington Neighborhood and the school I began and became a charter school. I want to stay in the district. So, I found the alternative region, which is for students who haven't found success in traditional environments or have been court ordered to attend a school that meets different needs and has certain standards for them. So, I spent most of my career in alternative schools, and this is my second year going in teaching in the Juvenile Justice Center. So, it's a school district school that serves students who are being who are waiting for either a trial or for a placement in a facility.

## Amy Perkins Participant

My name is Amy Perkins. I teach at Michigan, southwest Michigan. I teach US and world history, a history elective to high school students.

## Asra Ziauddin Participant

Hi, my name is Asra Ziauddin and I'm a teacher in the San Francisco Bay area in California. And for me, my background is social science. And so, I've been teaching a lot of different classes for some time. US history, world, history, AP world. But what's exciting in my district, which is a little smaller and it's serving students from Daly City and Pacifica, which are communities directly south of San Francisco, is that we're building our studies program. And what's really nice is that's the mandate that California passed. We're a little ahead of the mandate to provide a one semester ethnic studies course for all of our students. And so, we're really building it from scratch. And we chose to do a lot of the work together as teachers in collaboration for scope and sequence construction of it, revising it. And we're in the next year would be our second year of the pilot, so I'm going to be one of the teachers teaching it. And then so far, my role this past year, for example, has been bringing together the teachers as a teacher on special assignment and then connecting us to other districts that also have similar programs and maybe even more robustly developed programs. Just to see what we can model, what we can borrow from, and then just continue that real good collaboration.

## Sandy Schneider Participant

I'm Sandy Schneider and I teach in Allen, Texas. It's a suburb of Dallas. I'm at Mary Evans Elementary. I've been there for twelve years. Most recently, I took on the role of the GT specialist. So, I worked with gifted and talented kids, ages kindergarten through sixth grade. And this past year was my first year doing that. Prior to that, in my other 22 years of teaching, it's been many classroom ages kindergarten, second, third, fourth and sixth. So, lots of lots of experience.

## Gail Presby Participant

I'm Gail Presby. I'm a professor of philosophy at University of Detroit Mercy. I’m also affiliated faculty in the history department. So, I teach both philosophy and history courses there, and I am a director of James Kearny, Latin American Solidarity Archives.

## Meghan Alvarez Participant

My name is Meghan Alvarez and I am from Denver, Colorado. I currently teach in a small suburb of Denver called North Glen. I am at a small middle school. I teach sixth through eighth grade English language development. Specifically, I facilitate our newcomer program. So, I work with beginning English speakers who are brand new to the country, new to English, and that's what I'm doing now. I've been at my current school for four years.

## Kerri Packwood Participant

I am Kerri Packwood, and I've been teaching sixth grade history for the past three years in Springdale Public Schools. I work at a school called Don Tyson School of Innovation, and I have been teaching for 17 years next year will be my 18th.

## Host Mark Bladel

The diversity of participants is also reflected in their reasons for taking part in this program.

## Heather Zajdel

My students have really thrived off of working with kids across the world. It's given them the most powerful thing is seeing their value. So, when they can say, look, here's how we do things in Philly and here's what I have grown up with and here's what I what I know and what I would like to share it empowers students. It gives them voice. And learning about other cultures has made them more tolerant of peers.

## Asra Ziauddin

I applied for this seminar because a great opportunity in the sense of I work for a title one school, and I work for a district that in general has a 40% title on kids. And I think in that district there are not going to be many programs for teachers and students, honestly. So that we can use to actually go abroad. There are there's-- really hard to get funding. I think it's just time sensitive as far as our capacity to apply for grants. And so, one thing I was thinking is, okay, me as a teacher, if I can go and I can have a really interesting, enriching experience, I can incorporate it into my classroom and then also collaborate with other teachers around it.

## Amy Perkins

It's really invigorating to be around other motivated, curious teachers that are engaged in travel and just asking important questions for us. It feeds us. It fills our bucket in a way that maybe the daily grind doesn't. So, it introduces new insights, and we grow profoundly just through the company of each other. But then for my student population, I teach in a relatively small role, not especially diverse community, where the students are multigenerational farming, and they don't travel. A lot of them don't travel. They don't have the economic resources or quite frankly, don't have the curiosity. So, it's on the teachers to show the kids the wonderous world that we live in, and then, if so, introduce them to people from around the world. And technology enables us to do that without necessarily traveling at this point. And so having those kinds of collaborations that cross international borders and help our students connect with their peer group in topics like climate change, preserving democracy, all these things that these students are dealing with, COVID, in particular, it exposes for my students in a small community that they are very much connected. There's a peer experience that's happening globally, and our students and the small community need to know that despite that geographic distance and perhaps a language barrier, they have a lot in common with other people in the world.

## Sandy Schneider

So many of my students are Muslim. I thought, wow, this could really be a cultural exchange that would impact me to have a deeper understanding of my students and their families.

## Gail Presby

But as someone who's taken it on as an additional specialization, I'm always looking for ways to educate myself further so that I can share this with my students, and I can use the new material. What I learn about when I'm designing the courses that I offer to students and to have a chance to see history, go to historic sites, see historic buildings, and hear all of these specialists speak about current issues was very important to me, and so I really love the opportunity to be able to apply for the Fulbright. I'm glad to be here.

## Host Mark Bladel

As we mentioned earlier, participants are expected to design curriculum projects that they incorporate into their work back home. These projects allow folks to take what they've learned abroad and share it with their students, colleagues, and local communities. Now, as part of the application process, we asked prospective participants to think creatively about how they might leverage this knowledge in their current roles. We asked some of our participants how they intend to implement what they learned in their seminar this summer.

## Heather Zajdel

The vision I have is having students’ kind of have a real world maybe service-learning aspect where they're involved in a climate change issue, and they discuss it with peers in South America or they learn from case studies in South America. So, my personal concern is because my students are in the situation, they're in, we might not be able to have these conversations as an ideal situation, but learning at least from like what is going on, the history, the people, what they are seeing, the biodiversity that exists in South America, how can they understand that and contextualize that where we live? What actions need to be taken? I want to light a fire to get the kids interested in the future of our planet.

## Sandy Schneider

I want to sort of combine English language arts with social studies and social emotional learning to help my students realize that students all over the world have stories with commonalities. My students love soccer. Students in Jordan love soccer. You know, my students love to write about family celebrations, their celebrations in Jordan. And just to see how we can see our commonalities. The more I've traveled the world, the more I've realized kids are kids and we have so much in common and that needs to be celebrated and emphasized.

## Meghan Alvarez

I project because I work with students who are new to the United States. A lot of them have their own story of coming to a new country in a new language. And I really wanted to keep it student centered around that experience. And then being able to use their new language skills to communicate their personal stories of migration and personal stories of coming to a new country. So, I decided to center it on that. My hope is that I can connect my students with students in Jordan, a sort of a cross-cultural exchange to share their stories.

## Kerri Packwood

So, I would love for the students to be able to present something like a multimedia project that captures a glimpse into a snapshot of Jordan at three or four or five at different points in history and let that be their choice. Like what stood out to them, what was going on in Jordan at this early point in history? What was going on in Jordan? What did it look like? You know, what achievements did you see represent it at a certain point in history? And then like, the goal would be to sort of have this ultimate project that kind of just captures Jordan past, present and perhaps beyond.

## Host Mark Bladel

These seminars abroad, application goes live each year during the fall. And during this time, we welcome eligible educators and administrators to submit applications for a seminar on the topic of applications and preparing for this process. Norma Gonzalez had this to say.

## Norma Gonzalez -Fulbright Argentina Director

First of all, I would say apply because it will definitely change your life. I hear this over and over and over again. Not only that, but you will change the lives of so many people. Your presence in the other can do. We touch the lives of so many others and then you will bring back so much. You will be forever an ambassador for the country you visited. So, I think this is critically important. And then again, sometimes we disqualify ourselves with, oh, this is such an important program and my will never get the scholarship. Well, this is not true. Do apply. And they show us a complete picture of yourself. Not just that you're a good teacher, but also other things. Your involvement with the community, your commitment to come back, share, give back, your leadership qualities. So, all that, all the things that make you a complete person.

## Host Mark Bladel

Past Participants also shared some advice for potential applicants to the Seminars Abroad program.

## Heather Zajdel

Anyone can be a Fulbright, or you have to have the caring and the vision, and you have to take the time to really think through what you would like to take away from a program. I think that's the most important thing, but if you are willing and you care about your kids and giving them the opportunity to really thrive. If you expect that you will get a value of bringing the world into your classroom, I think as long as you communicate that, I forget the initial question, but I think that's oh, who can do this. Like if you have that caring, I think you're a Fulbrighter. And I think a lot of teachers have imposter syndrome and or we're told we're not worthy of certain things a lot or that's the image of educators. But I have met and connected and I've I felt my place at the table through Fulbright.

## Amy Perkins

Do it. And even though you doubt yourself, you might feel like, oh, I'm not Fulbright caliber or I, you know, I'll never get selected, that Fulbright is specifically looking for a diversity of scholars, a diversity of teachers that bring to the cohort different perspectives and different questions that need to be answered. If you're a committed professional and you are curious and open minded, apply because you do have a solid chance at getting it. And don't defeat yourself and deny yourself that opportunity. Apply and see what happens.

## Host Matt Robinson

We hope you enjoyed this deep dove into the Fulbright Seminars Abroad program and we encourage you to be on the lookout for information on next summer seminars abroad applications when we open applications later in the fall. Thanks for listening to the global podcast, the production of the International and Foreign Language Education Office at the US Department of Education.

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