

Journalism, Culture and Government in America

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Abstract

Coursework at the University of Maryland, internship at the International Center for Journalists in Washington, DC, and study tours at US government, media and cultural organizations – these were the three main components of the Humphrey fellowship program, which I completed during the academic year of 2004/2005 in the United States. Eleven other media professionals at a midpoint in their careers from Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin-America also participated in the non-degree program at UMD. This provided a unique opportunity to obtain first-hand experience about their countries and cultures, as well.

The Humphrey fellowship program is not research oriented. Its main objective is to give the possibility to the participants to develop professionally through academic study and direct work experience. As a consequence, this paper will not tackle a single project. Instead, it intends to summarize the activities which were part the Humphrey fellowship program during the year.

1. Course work at the University of Maryland

As a Humphrey fellow, I had the opportunity to audit two courses per term at any department of the University of Maryland. In the fall semester of I took the following courses:

- Theories of Journalism and Public Communication
- American Studies: The Body, Sexuality, and Society

For the journalism theories class I made a presentation on the concept of public sphere and German social scientist, Jürgen Habermas.

In the spring semester I got enrolled in the following courses:

- Intercultural Communication Theory
- Journalism Ethics

For the communication theory class I prepared a presentation on the Cultural Schema Theory, focusing on the adjustment of sojourners in different cultural environments.

In both terms, together with the other ten Humphrey fellows residing at the University of Maryland, I attended a weekly seminar on media and politics, supervised by Humphrey program director, Professor Lucinda Fleeson. During the sessions each fellow gave a lecture on the state of the media in his/her country, thus I prepared an in-depth presentation on the challenged encountered by Hungarian media 15 years after the collapse of communism. In the framework of this series of seminars we

also had discussions with experts from US media organizations and government agencies. These sessions tackled the functioning of government and media. During the fall semester a special emphasis was placed on the then ongoing US presidential election campaign and the outcome of the elections.

At UMD I also participated in a panel discussion on press freedom issues in Central and Eastern Europe which was open to the whole college community. I talked about the situation of the Hungarian media including ownership, legal framework, content, professional standards, self-regulation. The group of UMD Humphrey fellows was involved in social work, as well. We gave presentations about our countries to high school students in the Washington DC area and helped homeless people in a downtown shelter.

2. Internship at the International Center for Journalists

In order to develop professional skills and obtain first-hand experience in an American work environment each Humphrey completed a two-month internship at a US business entity, governmental office or non-for-profit organization. I worked at a Washington-based media NGO, the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ). The Center is dedicated to helping journalists worldwide raise the standards of journalism, especially in places with little tradition of a free press. ICFJ was founded in 1984 in

the belief that vigorous, independent media are essential building blocks on which democracy, freedom and human rights must be based.

During the internship I worked in close cooperation with ICFJ vice-president, Susan Tallalay who was responsible for fund-raising activities. I also assisted project managers dealing with programs in Central and South Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States.

I was focusing on the following fields of activities: I identified funding opportunities and potential partner organizations in the European Union for the International Center for Journalists. I assisted to write grant proposals, including a major Middle East media development project. I collected feedback on completed ICFJ projects from former course and workshop participants. I conducted research and collected data for www.ijnet.org, the ICFJ website specializing on media training. Finally, I gave presentations to American media professionals before they started to train journalists overseas.

Coming from the media development field, I profited greatly from the internship at ICFJ, because I had the opportunity to learn about new fundraising tools and management methods, improve my grant writing skills and make new professional contacts.

3. Visits and meeting at government, media and cultural organizations

During the Humphrey year fellows were encouraged to participate in field trips, visit US institutions and attend public lectures and workshops. The Washington DC metro area and the closeness of New York provided an extremely wide range of opportunities for professional enrichment and exploration.

Regarding governmental and legislative institutions, the Humphrey group from the University of Maryland visited the White House, the State Department, the Supreme Court and the US Congress in Washington. In New York we made a field trip to the UN headquarters and attended Secretary General Kofi Annan's and former US president Bill Clinton's joint press conference.

In New York we also met with editors at several news organizations, including The New York Times, ABC Television, CNN, and the Bloomberg news agency. In Washington we attended public lectures, panel discussions and briefings at the Foreign Press Center and the National Press Club. We had access to the programs organized by the World Affairs Council, and I took part in several events at the School of Advanced International Studies of the Johns Hopkins University, including the presidential election party, November 2, 2004.

My fellowship had a special emphasis on American culture. Thus, I attended numerous performances and exhibits at the following institutions: The Kennedy

Center, the Studio Theatre, the Shakespeare Theatre, the Wolf Trap, the American Film Institute, the National Gallery of Art, the Museum of the American Indian, the Smithsonian International Gallery, the Phillips Collection in the Washington area. I also visited the Museum of Modern Arts, the Metropolitan Museum, the Guggenheim Museum, the Whitney Museum, and the Neue Gallery in New York, and the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco.

In November 2004 in Washington DC a conference was held for the nearly 200 Humphrey fellows residing on different campuses all around the United States. The sessions tackled issues on public education in the US. In May 2005 the graduation ceremony of the Humphrey program took place in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

I profited tremendously from the Humphrey fellowship program both personally and professionally. It gave me an opportunity to obtain further knowledge on media, communication and culture through academic coursework. I also gained substantial professional experience by interning at a top US media NGO. I equally had the opportunity to be part of a wide range of cultural and social events, and get a deeper understanding of US society, politics and history. Simultaneously, I shared experience with fellows from Russia, Montenegro, Bosnia, Benin, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Morocco, Afghanistan, India, Nepal, and Brazil. This allowed me to get more insight into international, regional and global issues.

Nephrology Research

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