

Acting as a Role Model and Resource: Student Development through Education and Advising

Lynn Brickley

*Kansas State University
Manhattan, KS
www.ksu.edu
leb9898@yahoo.com*

*Fulbright Educational Advising Center and
Károli Gáspár University
1088 Budapest, Reviczky u. 4/c
www.kre.hu
Adviser: Katalin Kallay/ Eva Petrőczy*

As a teaching assistant in Budapest, I was able to observe multiple dimensions of student need and student development. My position made it possible for me to serve as both an advisor and a teacher to Hungarian and other international students. Through these dual roles I was able to explore education from a new perspective, and work with a unique and important student population: international students.

Introduction

During my appointment as a Fulbright Teaching Assistant I split my duties between advising at the Fulbright Educational Advising Center, and teaching, at Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church, both in Budapest. As an advisor with the Fulbright Educational Advising Center (FEAC) my main responsibilities included advising

students on their educational options, making them aware of the information and resources available to them concerning U.S. universities, discussing the college application process, and leading workshops on essay, resume, and CV writing, as well as TOEFL preparation. Working as a professor at Károli Gáspár, my responsibilities were quite different, as I was in charge of teaching two English courses a semester, tutoring students for basic exams, and reviewing and editing theses. Overall, both positions facilitated high levels of interaction between the students and I, allowing me to work with them on a more personal level. This paper will serve as an overview and reflection of my experiences in each position.

A Synopsis of my Teaching Experiences at Károli Gáspár

As an assistant professor at Károli Gáspár University, the majority of my responsibilities were directly related to instruction. Working for the English department, I taught two courses each semester in English. During the fall 2006 semester I taught American conversational English, a language course, which focused on sharpening students' listening and speaking skills. All of the students I instructed were third to fifth year students, so their English was quite good; thus, the course was intended to polish their verbal skills, encourage their confidence when speaking publicly in

English, and allow them the opportunity to regularly interact with a native English speaker. As such, the syllabus included a number of assignments that required class presentations, both in groups and individually. These presentations were to be given on topics relating to American culture. In fact, both the presentations and the overall content of the courses were broken into units, with each unit and each assigned presentation addressing a different issue relating to American culture. Even though the courses were language courses, I felt it was important to include a cultural component, as well, since so much of the American English language is influenced by American culture. Additionally, I viewed sharing my culture as a welcomed obligation, as it allowed me to foster cultural exchange, the premise of the Fulbright program.

During the fall 2007 semester, each conversation course consisted of a unit on American pop culture, a unit exploring U.S. cities, a unit researching U.S. universities, and a unit where students were required to create an American style resume. The goal of each unit was not only to improve the students' English skills and their cultural awareness; it was also to offer practical learning opportunities. For example, during the unit in which students were asked to create American style resumes, they were also required to research an international job, and then participate in mock job interviews (in English, of course). The purpose of this assignment was three-fold: it allowed students to examine an aspect of American

work-culture, it allowed them to practice speaking English in a simulated real-life situation, and finally, it prompted them to evaluate their professional experiences and begin thinking about career choices. The unit taught on U.S. universities was similarly multipurpose, as it allowed students to research U.S. universities should they be interested in possibly studying abroad, it examined a part of American culture, and it demonstrated the differences between the U.S. education system and the Hungarian education system. Other units were constructed to be equally multi-dimensional, as well.

While this learn and present approach worked on many levels, the presentations often ran much longer than I had anticipated, which prompted me to revamp my syllabus for the Spring 2007 semester prior to teaching the course. Presentations were still included as a part of the course, but fewer were assigned in order to allow more time for discussion on the material that had been presented. For example, during the spring 2007 section of this course, I asked students to research and present on an American holiday. After their presentations, we spent time discussing the similarities and differences between American and Hungarian holidays, such as the Fourth of July and March 15. During these dialogues, they were not only able to learn about aspects of my culture, but I was able to learn about aspects of theirs, as well. I feel that the course flowed more evenly during this semester, as I was much more aware of the time restrictions I faced when I developed the content for the course. I was also more

confident in my own teaching abilities, and more aware of the teaching resources available to me.

In addition to teaching American conversational English during the spring 2007 semester, I also taught creative writing. (I taught one section of American conversational English rather than two and one section of creative writing.) The idea to teach a creative writing course actually originated from discussions I had with students participating in my fall 2007 conversation courses in which they mentioned to me that no creative writing course had been offered at the university before. There was a strong interest in the course, so I put in a request with my supervisor to teach the course and began developing a syllabus. Being that my academic background is in English literature and creative writing rather than linguistics, I especially enjoyed teaching this course. The level of talent demonstrated by my students was impressive to say the least, and their stories were entertaining and insightful. I would fully recommend a course like this be taught again at the university.

The content of this course revolved around developing the basic creative writing skills necessary to produce a well-constructed short story, either in a fiction or creative non-fiction genre. The first half of the semester was devoted to lecture and in-class writing; the second, to producing and work-shopping short stories. During a "workshop" students would present their short stories to the class. We would then discuss different elements of the story as a group,

providing the author with both positive reinforcement and critical feedback. At the end of the semester, students turn in a revised version of their story for course credit.

In addition to teaching American conversational English and creative writing, I also kept office hours at the university. During this time I would generally work with thesis students, helping them edit their papers for grammatical errors and general language problems. I also spent this time planning lessons for a group of students I tutored for the English language basic exam. During the fall 2006 semester I tutored four students; during the spring 2007 semester I tutored a group of twelve. It would be my suggestion to the university to have future Fulbright teaching assistants offer a legitimate preparation course of this nature, rather than private tutoring time, as there is obviously a demand for it.

A Synopsis of my Advising Experiences at the Fulbright Educational Advising Center

The primary reason I chose Hungary as the host country for my Fulbright experience was because the teaching assistant position in Budapest offered the opportunity not only to teach, but also to work in an advisory role at the Fulbright Educational Advising Center. While my undergraduate degree was in English literature and creative writing, my graduate degree was in college

student development with an emphasis in counseling and advising. I loved that the Hungarian teaching assistantship allowed me to use both of my degrees in a very practical way.

During my time at the Fulbright Educational Advising Center I regularly interacted with students. Sometimes the interactions were brief (especially if the student was at the center simply to check out or return books from the FEAC library); other times I would talk to students at great length, and often, on more than one occasion. My role as an advisor was tailored individually to each student according to need. Every time I met with a student I tried to be very conscious of the fact that each student has a different background and different goals for his or her future. I would question each student, and then assess his or her development needs based on the answers given. That said, I was rarely the only one doing the questioning, as the students often had questions for me, as well. Even though each student had different needs, there was a basic gamut of questions I was regularly asked to answer. If students were applying to graduate school in the United States, they would generally ask for a list of schools in a certain area, or about a specific institution or program. Often questions about school ranking would come into play, as well. The graduate students that come into the center are generally the most focused in respect to knowing which program of study they wish to pursue, and usually just want help narrowing down their options while choosing a place to carry out their studies. The undergraduate

students who visit the center are just as (if not more) focused in terms of being motivated to reach their goal of studying in the U.S.; they are simply young and need direction. Many of the students I would talk to who were interested in applying for an undergraduate program in the U.S. had little to no idea where they should begin. Beyond the short list of Ivy League schools, they were not aware of the universities available; they often did not know the difference between a private and a public school, and many times were not even aware of the difference between an undergraduate program and a graduate program. They were sure of one thing though – they wanted to study in the United States! Thus, it was my job to help them find a starting point for their university application process. I would generally start by asking them why they wanted to study in the U.S. (the answers, surprisingly, were always different). I would then explain to them some basic things they needed to know (like the differences between public and private schools and undergraduate and graduate programs), and then give them a list of things they should consider (cost, geography, transportation, program of study, etc.). The main thing was simply to get the ball rolling, and to act as a knowledgeable resource for students (both undergraduate and graduate) when they had questions or concerns.

In conjunction with individually advising students, I also worked with students in groups, typically in the form of a workshop. On Thursday afternoons I led a weekly writing workshop where I

presented to students a basic outline for college admissions and scholarship essays, and also explained how to put together an American style resume. During this workshop, I would discuss with each student where he or she was at in his or her application process, and then go over the student's essay, resume, or CV, if requested. Some of these students just wanted a quick review of their materials; others wanted to go over their application essays with a fine-toothed comb. Either way, we would review their materials together, and I would provide whichever level of feedback they had requested.

Additionally, I also led workshops on TOEFL test taking strategies. The purpose of these workshops was to help the student get into the right mind-frame to take the TOEFL test. Some of the students who attended the workshop were quite fluent and prepared (some had even taken an earlier version of the test); while others wanted to gain a better idea of what the test would be like. Thus, not only were test-taking strategies included as a part of the workshop, but also the components of the exam were broken down so that each student understood exactly which areas in which he or she would be tested. Following this, each student was able to use a personal laptop with a headset and a microphone to practice taking the TOEFL in a simulated testing environment.

Personal Reflection

Coming into each position, I was not sure exactly what to expect. I knew I had to be flexible and open-minded. I honestly think that in my teaching position, however, I was sometimes too flexible and too open-minded, specifically during my first semester at the university. When I had taught university courses in the past, the syllabus had always been provided for me. This was the first time I had to create my own syllabus, and since I was not given any fore knowledge concerning the fluency level (and motivation level) of my students prior to arriving, I had to compromise a lot with my students on their assignments during the semester, especially due to time constraints (the course only met once a week). In fact, I would say I was a little too compromising, and in many ways the students took advantage of this. During the second semester I was much more rigid in the structure and requirements of the courses I taught. While this did not necessarily make things easier for my students, it certainly made the situation much easier for me. I also think it made my students respect me more, as there was never any doubt where they stood or where I stood concerning their course.

I think organization was (and is) a big issue at Károli Gáspár, both for the students and the faculty. The beginning of the spring 2007 semester was somewhat discouraging for me, as my courses had not been posted online, so for a while students were not only unable to enroll in them, they were also completely unaware

they existed. Once students were finally enrolled, the enrollment was much lower than I had anticipated (specifically for the conversation course – there were five students enrolled during the spring, whereas there had been fifteen, the maximum, in each of the two sections during the fall). This meant I had to once again restructure my syllabus, as group work was not the possibility it had once been, simply due to a lack of numbers.

I do not think the lack of organization at the university (by both faculty and students) is due to a lack of competence. On the contrary, the faculty is very well educated, and the students are extremely bright. Unfortunately, the faculty is spread quite thin, as each person has multiple duties, and as such, some things become overlooked. As for the students, I was fortunate to have students who were incredibly focused and self-possessed. These students, however, were few and far between. Most of my students simply seemed unmotivated. I do not know if this is because they do not have to pay for their education (at least not in the way U.S. students pay for it), or if their lack of interest was merely in the subject I was teaching or the way I was teaching it, but either way, I found myself frustrated many times. If there is anything this job had taught me, it is to voice my frustrations, rather than be polite for the sake of being polite. This was a lesson I feel I learned the hard way in many respects, but one I will not have to be reminded of again.

As for my work at the FEAC, short of adjusting to a new work environment and becoming better acquainted with the

Hungarian education system, I have not felt I have faced any significant challenges (at least not unwelcome challenges). In fact, even on days when I was feeling rather sour, I still looked forward to working there. That kind of satisfaction is rare for most people, and so I felt (and feel) quite fortunate.

There were many highlights during my advising experiences. I remember I had a very young student come into the center for advising who wanted to play tennis at a university in the U.S., but was not sure how to apply to schools. It turned out, the student was completely unfamiliar with U.S. college admissions processes, and actually was not even sure how to begin researching schools. All of this on top of the fact that he wanted to play collegiate tennis, which meant he needed to learn about NCAA regulations and recruitment processes, as well. I ended up speaking with him for nearly two hours that day. After we were done, he was so grateful he bought me a candy bar at the nearby buffet and gave it to me as a token of appreciation. While it is always nice to receive chocolate, the real perk was knowing I had been able to help him.

Likewise, I had another student who had come into the center to seeking advising concerning his application for an L.L.M. program at Harvard. The student came in several times for advising, as subsequently, we kept in touch even after his application had been submitted. He recently e-mailed me to inform me that he was accepted into the program. While I certainly cannot take much credit for this, as the student was (and is) quite brilliant,

I know that the advising he received must have been useful, as he brought a friend seeking admission into the same program into our center for advising just a few days ago. Often, once students get the advising they need, we do not hear from them or of them afterward, so I think instances like this, where referrals are made, are clear indications that the advising we give is helpful and that the students we advise benefit from our services. Why else would they refer us? Thinking about things like this helps motivate me as an advisor. It is rewarding to know that I am helping students make decisions and take steps that could potentially change the rest of their lives.

All in all, I would say I have learned a lot from both experiences. Despite obstacles, I think my passion for working in the field of education has increased, and I am looking forward to sharing and applying what I have learned in future workplaces. I am especially glad to have had the opportunity to work with international students (in any capacity), which was my main goal when pursuing this assistantship.

Monumental Politics: the Symbolic Political Discourse in Postcommunist Hungary

Inna Livitz

*Harvard University
Cambridge, MA
www.harvard.edu
livitz@gmail.com*

*Vas County Archive
9700 Szombathely
www.vaml.hu
Adviser: Dr. György Tilcsik*

Abstract:

The problems of transition in postcommunist countries have been extensively studied in the past 17 years from countless perspectives – historical, anthropological, economical, sociological, political, to name just the most prominent fields. My original and ultimate interest within the broader question of transition is in the political function of historical monuments and museums in Hungary, and their presentation to foreign visitors. Thus my approach is necessarily rather broad and integrative, combining evidence and theories from various branches of the social sciences. Although Hungary experienced a calm transition to postcommunism in 1989-1990, the country's political scene has remained very polarized over the past seventeen years. In the following discussion I explore the Hungarian political discourse and the historical references it employs. I argue that the lack of trust in democratic institutions plays necessitates establishing a historical context that legitimizes the government. I then investigate monuments and