As I began writing this essay, I was in the middle of anticipating my own Fulbright acceptance or rejection. Unfortunately, I just found out that my application was not accepted, and I am understandably disappointed. Still, I found the entire application process intensive (also frustrating at times), but also invigorating, educational, structured, and very positive. I made important contacts that will be useful in the future; I benefitted from practice in writing a project statement, and I am eager to try again next year. Considering the Fulbright emphasis in this issue of Perspective, I am also keen to share some tips about the application process with my BYU-Idaho colleagues who might be interested in pursuing their own Fulbright experiences in the future.

With the increasing interest in the Fulbright Scholar Program here at BYU-Idaho, and with numerous Fulbright veterans from among our various colleges, I could hardly be expected to watch my History Department colleagues venturing off to exciting locations and not feel the hankering for my own international experience. In 2008, I had the opportunity to visit David Pulsipher on his Fulbright to Delhi, India, where he invited me to guest lecture in one of his classes. I have known for a long time that this is an experience I wanted. So after months of preparation and browsing the homepage for ideas about some desired locations, institutions, and types of awards, I went to work applying for my own Fulbright.

Every year, the firm deadline for a Fulbright application packet is August 1st, and applicants should expect to devote many hours, even days, to complete the process. This includes searching Fulbright awards, emailing relevant institutional contacts within the intended host country, writing and revising your project statement, soliciting references, and preparing all of your additional materials. Because I chose a European destination, my application writing process took over two months, taking into account the initial canvassing of awards on the Fulbright homepage, and researching those relevant institutional programs to fit my teaching interests, the writing of emails to numerous university departments in Europe, waiting for replies over the distance and delay of multiple time-zones, and then coordinating my project statement and other materials with the needs of my selected department. Applicants are only allowed to apply for one award, so your application must be specific, focused, and tightly articulated.

The Fulbright Program was the brainchild of Senator J. William Fulbright of Arkansas following World War II, with the intent to “sponsor U.S. and foreign participants for exchanges in all areas of endeavor, including the sciences, business, academe, public service, government, and the arts and continues to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries.” The purpose of the Fulbright program was seen broadly during the post-War years as an ambassadorial tool to grow American leadership in the world, and to build academic and institutional ties, for the purpose of “engaging constructively with the community
of nations.” Since the Senate’s unanimous legislation that funded Fulbright in 1946, thousands of U.S. and overseas scholars have taught and researched throughout the world. Today, Fulbright attracts some “800 U.S. faculty and professionals each year to 140 countries to lecture, teach, and conduct research.”1 Approximately the same number of foreign scholars come to the U.S. each year as part of Fulbright exchange.

The Council for International Exchange of Scholars has administered the Fulbright Scholar Program for over sixty years; CIES also offers other short-term international exchange programs for scholars and administrators. Fulbright is CIES’s “Flagship academic exchange effort,” and the two organizations share a homepage; indeed, a Google search for “Fulbright” will take you directly to CIES, with users able to toggle back and forth. While there are various Fulbright programs, the Fulbright Core Scholar Program is the most relevant program for BYU-Idaho faculty hoping for a Fulbright experience.

Beginning Your Fulbright Application:

Qualifications

Fulbright applicants must be U.S. citizens, have a PhD in an academic field, or other equivalent terminal/professional degree (a Master’s Degree in some cases, depending on the field.) Recent college graduates or graduate students seeking funding or support for degree completion are not eligible. (The Fulbright Student Program is for those applicants.) There are other short-term Fulbright opportunities, but the Core Scholar Program is the target for most university faculty.

Getting Started

You will first be required to create a user profile and password, for entering and exiting the registration process, and reviewing any steps already completed. Once you have a profile, you will receive periodic emails from Fulbright
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with announcements, online training opportunities toward improving your application, notices of upcoming awards and institutional openings, and other deadlines. Navigating the Fulbright webpage can be tricky, but a few exploratory visits will give you greater familiarity. And, once you begin your application process, the steps are easy to follow from section to section, with a preview and editing option prior to your final submission.

Length
Fulbright awards run from between five months and one year. For BYU-Idaho applicants, a five- or six-month award is best suited to correspond with our semester leave policy. Some of my colleagues have taken a full-semester leave and then taught 2nd block classes during the next semester, leaving time for a six-month absence from the university, while still only requiring a one-semester leave. It is also important to plan ahead with your department chair and college dean, to inform them of the time and duration of your leave, and then to submit your formal application for sabbatical while you wait. If you don’t get accepted, you can always cancel your leave. For example, a fall semester Fulbright would require that you submit your leave application during the previous fall semester, or January at the very latest.

Regional Differences
Some Fulbright regions, particularly in Asia, require you to submit a general application to a country of choice. With your acceptance, Fulbright will assign you to a specific institution in the country, and put you into contact with the necessary department associates. For European and South American Fulbrights, applicants must find a Fulbright offering at a specific institution and then match their requirements. (For example, I might seek awards in U.S. History in Scandinavian countries.) A second approach is to seek out scholars or departments on the Fulbright awards list that correlate with your specialization, and then propose a project that matches your expertise with the needs of that department. Either way, you will have to contact the department chair(s) or professors via email, submit a general statement of proposal for your Fulbright, and offer yourself to their program, with an indication of the approximate time of your Fulbright tenure. If the department expresses interest and accepts your proposal, you could be on your way to preparing your Fulbright Project Statement. If they decline your offer, you move on to the next department on your list and submit yourself for consideration again. The European Fulbright process is time-consuming and labor intensive. In waiting for responses from your emails, remember to be patient: you are navigating extensive time zone differences, as well as being in the middle of the summer vacation for many European schools. For that, I recommend beginning the canvassing much earlier than summer—give yourself two to three months for contacting institutions, simply to find faculty and chairs in their offices.

As I prepared to submit my Fulbright application, I probably contacted about twenty people at various institutions until I finally found one that responded with positive interest. From there, I could proceed to communicate about how my teaching would meet their department’s and university’s needs, and when they might fit me into their exam period (semester) schedule. Once chosen and agreed upon, the department is required to write a letter to Fulbright indicating their willingness to have you, which you will then submit as part of your application packet.
Project Statement
The Fulbright application primarily focuses on the applicant’s project statement, which is a typed, single-spaced, 3 to 5 page document outlining your interest in Fulbright and the country of choice, the area or topic of your expertise in teaching, how you bring something unique to that particular institution and teaching assignment, and how a Fulbright experience will benefit you in your future teaching and research. The project statement needs to be clearly expressed, thorough, and concise. The Fulbright website has many examples of past project statements for inspiration and modeling. Further, there are many Fulbright veterans who are willing and available in helping craft, edit, and review drafts of project statements.

Supplemental Materials and Requirements
Other materials that may be included in your Fulbright application packet include a language proficiency examination, sample syllabi from your relevant and/or comparable courses, and writing samples or artistic projects.

Recommendations
Fulbright requires three references. One of these has to be a department chair or college dean at the current educational institution who has observed the applicant’s teaching and/or scholarly activity. For the other two references, a sound approach is to avoid insularity. You don’t want all of your recommendations to come from the BYU/BYU-Idaho community, or just from Mormon scholars. Seek academic colleagues outside of the Mormon system, perhaps your former graduate school chair, dissertation committee members, or colleagues in your field, to diversify those who will represent you to the Fulbright committee.

Cultural, Spiritual, and Family Considerations
In seeking a Fulbright award, make sure that you take into consideration all factors that will affect your overall lifestyle. These may include but are not limited to: ease and cost of travel within the country or to neighboring countries, affordable and safe housing, primary and secondary education opportunities for children, closeness to an LDS community, affiliation with other expatriate Americans, natural beauty and access to wildlife or nature exhibits, opportunities for humanitarian service, and extent of economic development, especially as it relates to safety, food, cost of living, and transportation. In reading these thoughtful essays by some of our BYU-Idaho Fulbright veterans, you will be introduced to different teaching experiences, opportunities for sharing the gospel, the effects on children in creating family memories, and how Fulbrighters have come to important long-term reflection on their experiences. I hope that this essay also provides you some of the inspiration and tools necessary to pursue your own unique Fulbright adventure.

REFERENCES: