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PAL Topic: Short-Term Exchange Programs & University Partnerships

Professional Advising Leadership Program – PAL

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After the approval of my proposal to participate in the 2010 Professional Advising Leadership PAL Fellow Program, sponsored by the United States Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), I was contacted by Janine Farhat from College Board and Debbie Hefferon, College Board PAL Faculty Consultant, in March 2009 since they were my key contacts to administer the PAL program.

This was the beginning of an e-mail based orientation, composed of six modules including different assignments with feedback, which ended in June 2010. Each of the PAL fellows received the same modules containing questions about our experience, objectives for the PAL program, and specific interests to help College Board coordinate our training in order to reach our professional goals and contribute to advising in our region and other EducationUSA Advising centers around the world. This also enormously helped us to be better prepared to conduct our research project.

As part of this orientation process and to complete each of the modules on a specific deadline, we performed significant research over the Internet, books and contacts that were related in some way with our project. In my case, I contacted my REAC, several EducationUSA colleagues in my region, and Areta Galat: my mentor. Also, I visited a variety of Guatemalan universities to find out about the programs that they are already carrying out with universities from abroad, and these visits gave me an idea on how the university's partnerships begin and work.

The nine PAL fellows arrived in Washington, DC on May 15, 2010, and our training was carried out at the offices of College Board. Our schedule included a three-week period spending one week in Washington, DC, one week for campus visits in the cities previously selected by each of us, I chose New Orleans, and the NAFSA Conference in Kansas City. However, some of us applied to a post-NAFSA campus visit, and I was selected to visit some universities in New York.

During my visit to New York, I was able to share my finding on my PAL project and ask questions in relation to the programs that the universities are carrying out. In the case of NASSAU Community College, they showed interest in supporting students through their language department and other fields, so I am very interested in this program for our high school students at IGA. I found out that Stony Brook has a strong program in sciences; the Dean of Engineering from one of the most prestigious Guatemalan private universities had previously requested my support in finding a school with this criterion, and I saw a possibility with this institution.

Based on the information found during my campus visits, and the interest showed by the U.S. universities to continue creating university partnerships to attract more international students to their institutions, and of course, to send their students to study abroad, I feel that my PAL project will be of mutual benefit. The main interests for the Guatemalan universities have been to reinforce specific fields of study, to open more international academic programs and to bring professors from abroad to teach within their universities and to train their professors using new teaching tools and technology.

The PAL program was very demanding and highly interactive, and sometimes very stressful. However, it was a very enriching and remarkable experience for me.

Washington, DC

As part of our training, all of the PAL fellows shared their projects and received some feedback from Debbie Hefferon, Janine Farhat and our colleagues. We received orientation on leadership and presentation skills, preparatory work for meetings which included the review of our questions for the persons we will be visiting at different organizations and universities; we also received individual feedback related to our projects.

Each PAL Fellow had the chance to meet with their ECA program officers, and Micaela Martinez from Mexico and I met with Bernie Burrola. We were able to share our PAL project, including goals and outcomes, and to discuss different issues related with our EducationUSA Advising Centers. In my case, I also shared the information and the flyer for the next Community Colleges fair that will take place in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala next year.

In addition, all PAL fellows spent a half day, lunch included, at the State Department. There we were able to listen to series of presentations, and Ms. Caryn Danz, ECA Branch Chief, opened the program by offering information on the EducationUSA strategic plan, including information such as the State Department grant opportunities, Benjamin A. Gilman Scholarships, EducationUSA website, electronic resources, on-line training courses, social media in EducationUSA, the expanded outreach to US higher education, EducationUSA ethical issues, and study abroad programs. Bernie Burrola, Diane Young, Marty Bennett, and Gina Anderson were in charge of the presentations.

As part of my PAL meetings, I met with Jeanne-Marie Duval, Deputy Executive Director at the Higher Education for Development (HED); Linda Jewell, Vice President at the International Student Exchange Programs (ISEP); Father Charles L. Currie, President at the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU); Christa Olson, Associate Director at the American Council on Education (ACE). Ifeanyi Olagbaju, PAL fellow from Nigeria, and I visited the Northern Virginia Community College and met with Paul McVeigh, Vice-President for Global Studies and Programs.

CAMPUS VISITS: New Orleans, Louisiana

I was able to visit four universities: University of New Orleans (UNO), Loyola University, Dillard University and Tulane University.

I contacted my personal contacts at UNO and Loyola in advance, and they helped me to arrange my appointments at both universities. I was scheduled to meet with the individuals in charge of the departments related with my PAL project, and personnel from different departments such as admission officers, student services, study abroad programs, English language programs, and others.

Despite having contacted Tulane in advance, my meeting with them was not nearly as successful as I had hoped. I sent several messages to each of the persons recommended by Tim Wright and Janine Farhat to contact at this university, but they did not respond to me. After calling Mr. David Godwey, Director of the Office of International Students and Scholars in Tulane, while staying in the US, he offered to arrange a

meeting with the person in charge of study abroad program. I was looking forward to that meeting however, I was very disappointed when upon my arrival at the Tulane study abroad office since the person with whom I was supposed to meet with did not show up.

The persons at Dillard University shared that they are not managing any exchange programs since they had some administrative changes and the position was recently filled. They also shared that their students do not travel abroad very often as they prefer to stay in New Orleans.

NAFSA Conference, Kansas City, MO

All the PAL Fellows had a busy schedule during the NAFSA conference and were well prepared for the days events since we had reviewed the individual session topics in advanced to choose the ones that were best related with our PAL topic. We also had some activities assigned by College Board and the State Department, and received several reception invitations to attend, including a visit to the University of Missouri in Kansas City, which were very useful for networking.

The conference was very worthwhile and rewarding, and I found more session options connected with my PAL topic this year than at last year's conference in LA.

The first meeting with College Board was the PAL debriefing where we were able to share with our PAL Fellows the results of our research project during our campus visits. After that, we had the closed luncheon and Diane Young accompanied us.

We also participated in the "EducationUSA Workshop: New Strategies", which information was previously offered to the PAL Fellows during the State Department visit; however, it was very useful to participate in the workshop again because we were able to hear important comments and questions made by the EducationUSA colleagues from different regions.

The EducationUSA booth at the Expo Hall gave us a strong image this year and this gave us the opportunity to share who we are and what we do as EducationUSA Advisers. Power point presentations were sent in advance to Rita Moriconi and Rosemarie Arens, REACs, including information on our countries, the educational system for each country, the numbers on Open Doors, and our center's statistics, to be presented at the booth.

As part of my PAL program, I had arranged a meeting with Mr. Francisco Marmolejo, from the Consortium for North American Higher Education Collaboration (CONAHEC). He has been working with universities in Latin America, and the main purpose of his institution is to advise and connect institutions interested in establishing academic collaborative programs in the North American region. As a result of our conversation, we are planning to have a video conference with the Guatemalan universities in order to invite them to join his institution.

The NAFSA conference also gave me the opportunity to give out invitations for the 2011 Community Colleges Fair, which will take place in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala. I was able to do this during the EducationUSA country fair, while visiting the expo hall, during the Community Colleges luncheon and other activities.

As always, the NAFSA Conference and the college visits, although consuming four weeks of time spent in the USA, are the best opportunities for EducationUSA advisers to continue their professional growth and learn about so many topics, network with all of the other advisers, university faculty and help redistribute the information obtained upon their return to their home countries. It is an experience I enjoyed, and I appreciate having this opportunity.