

Jakub Tesar`s Report on Professional Advising Leadership (PAL) Fellows Training Program in Washington, D.C, Spring 2008

From May 9 to May 23, 2008, the Educational Adviser of the J. William Fulbright Commission Jakub Tesar has participated at the Professional Advising Leadership (PAL) Fellows Program for Overseas Educational Advisers administered by the College Board and sponsored by the U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

The PAL program consists of three parts – one week of intense leadership training in Washington, D.C., one week of individual field research in selected area of expertise, and one week of the NAFSA conference.

The leadership training covered a development of self-assessment, time management, presentations skills, and research project planning. During the week, fellows had many chances to discuss advising challenges with the representatives of the Bureau of Educational Affairs. During the State Department Day, program participants visited the building of the Department of State, where the Deputy Assistant Secretary Thomas Farrell welcomed them. They learned about current updates on visa and SEVIS policies. They met with regional officers responsible for education, culture and public policy and discussed a position of the educational advising at the host organizations and shared best practices about cooperation with Public Affair Offices and American Corners.

Jakub`s research project was dedicated to successful marketing strategies for U.S. higher education. Already the first meeting was very productive. Jakub met with Richard A. Hessel, the principal of the Art & Science Group, a leading marketing consulting firm that concentrates exclusively on institutions of higher education and non-profit sector. They talked about the necessity of having a marketing profile of incoming international students and about an opportunity to collect data for such profile creation through the largest gate-keepers - testing programs like SAT and TOEFL. The collected profiles would serve for analysis of the international student market for U.S. institutions of higher education. They also talked about the possible visit of Mr. Hessel in Prague where he could provide Czech university representatives with presentation on professional educational marketing practices.

The field research of Jakub`s PAL program took place in Iowa. He selected three schools – University of Iowa, Iowa State University, and Grinnell College with an objective to learn more about marketing methods and practices of American universities.

The visit confirmed that different types of schools apply different strategic plans according to their individual conditions (including financial) and long-term policies. However, the experience confirmed that U.S. schools start to realize that they must dedicate more time and more support for international marketing than in the past. Schools that had not been actively involved in international recruitment like University of Iowa have already changed the policy.

All visited universities preferred a face-to-face recruitment. Traveling abroad to selected recruitment destinations is currently the most broadly used recruitment technique. Schools see a lot of potential in face-to-face events in electronic formal like chats, videoconferences etc. Most advanced schools have already started to build online communities as a virtual place for meeting with prospective students or started to be active in already existing Internet student communities. Schools see a lot of potential in utilizing current students and alumni for recruitment purposes.

The last part of the PAL program took place back in Washington, D.C. at the annual national NAFSA conference. Jakub participated at the two-day professional practice workshop *Marketing for the International Educator*. This workshop was organized and led by professionals with extensive experience in international educational marketing. The objective of the interactive MBA-like course was to train participants in a practical development of a comprehensive marketing plan for recruitment or study abroad program. The first day of the workshop was dedicated to methods of marketing analysis. Writing a marketing plan was a topic of the second day.

The PAL program brought several findings and outcomes as well as momentum for the work of educational advisers. Because face-to-face interaction is considered a crucial recruitment tool, advising centers should find ways how to help schools to interact directly with prospective students. The assistance of the local-based advising centers is also inevitable [and essential] in providing schools with enough information about the local

markets, applicable events, best timing, and other important information for planning of successful recruitment activities in a country or a region. Advisers should enhance ways of interaction and communication between the prospective students, current students, and alumni. As effective marketing is impossible without enough knowledge about the key groups of candidates, it is necessary to find ways how to collect data to create profiles of the typical student interesting in study in the U.S.

Due to the structure of the program that contains not only advanced training but also a research component, the PAL program is sometimes considered a „graduate school“ for advisers. Jakub`s research brought very concrete results that can be worked with and have potential to direct professionals in international educational exchange with the United States to new levels of performance.