

## **Professional Advising Leadership (PAL) Fellows Training Program May 9-31, 2008**

**A report by  
Rupali Verma  
Educational Advising Services Associate  
U.S. Educational Foundation in India  
New Delhi-110001**

Along with 12 other overseas educational advisers coming from around the world, I participated in the Professional Advising Leadership Fellows training program from May 9 to 31, 2008. The PAL program is supported by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) and administered by the College Board. The main aim of the PAL is to provide senior-level training and research opportunities for overseas educational advisers of the EducationUSA network. The topic of my research was "Strategic Undergraduate Admission Practices in the United States". The reason to choose this topic was to understand why students get confused when they gain admissions into some colleges and denied by others. As an EducationUSA adviser, it is important to give them guidance that will optimize student's chances for admission as well be able to explain the strategies adopted by Colleges in admitting international students.

My PAL fellowship training program had three main segments. The Washington Week from May 9 to 14; New York campus tour and meetings with admission officials from May 15 to 22; and NAFSA annual conference sessions from May 26 to 30. Janine Farhat, College Board was the designated PAL Project Manager and our contact person at the College Board.

### **Washington Week:**

The first meeting in D.C. consisted of an orientation for the PAL and USBT participants who were welcomed by Dorothy Mora, Program Officer at the Educational Information and Resources Branch of the Department of State. Together with Janine Farhat, Carol Blythe and Deborah Hefferon, who is an independent consultant, we all discussed our respective goals and objectives and the strategies to fulfill them. Amber Kelleher, an independent consultant based in D.C., conducted a three half day PAL Fellows Leadership Training Workshop. Amber, an expert communicator, effortlessly walked us through all aspects of leadership development. The main objective of this workshop was to understand how to increase effectiveness as a leader. How important is it to manage your time, prioritize work and make decisions. We were also introduced to the business ethics and the ethical responsibilities as a leader; how to make ethical decisions and become a better communicator. The innumerable handouts and interesting hand-on exercises were add on to the training. Amber also helped us making final preparations on how to introduce ourselves and describe about our projects to the group of people we will meet during the course of time. Importance of introducing EducationUSA center and how to make the most of our visit was also discussed during the workshop.

During the Washington week, we took the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) exercise which helped us to reveal the truth about ourselves. Overall the workshop and MBTI exercise encouraged communication among the PAL trainees enabling us to learn about and bond with each other.

Briefings and discussions at the State Department provided an opportunity for participants to have a face to face meeting with ECA officials. The welcoming address by the Branch Chief Educational Information and Resources Branch and the Education and Assistant Secretary of Public Affairs was appreciated by and motivating for advisors, especially in terms of being identified as partners in a dialogue. Access to international students provided a useful perspective as did presentations by other

participants at the sessions. Along with two other PAL fellows, we visited the American University and met Evelyn Levinson from the International Admissions office. She suggested that all the EducationUSA offices should have fact sheets including latest trends, updates on the local Universities, and important websites on their respective websites. How important is it to encourage international students to be realistic in their expectations was also discussed during the visit. Later she gave a campus tour and arranged meetings with students from India and Bulgaria.

The week comprised of many enjoyable yet informative activities such as the ice breaking session which gave advisors who hailed from many different parts of the world, an opportunity to know one another and bond through the common cause of “promoting U.S. higher education”. A visit to the Newseum, The Capitol Hill Building and Mount Vernon was an interesting experience.

### **New York Campus Visits Week:**

PAL teaches the adviser to be independent and to make his/her own decisions. During the Institutional visits, the PAL fellow is pretty much on their own. This gives an opportunity to see things from different perspectives: as an adviser, as a student and as a professional.

### **The topic of my research was Strategic Undergraduate Admissions Practices in the U.S. Universities. The main objective was:**

- To understand the changed admissions procedure at various offices involved in making decisions
- To gain an understanding into the requirements of International students seeking admissions
- To gain a deeper insight into the decisions taken by Universities regarding Merit and Need based finding

To meet the goals of my research, I was more interested in understanding the inside view of the undergraduate admissions process. I prepared a list of questions to ask the admission officers I was supposed to meet. The most important of which were the factors considered in evaluating an application, who should be offered admissions and the most important of all is why are applications rejected.

During the week I visited the following Universities:

- New York University
- State University of New York, Stony Brook
- State University of New York, Buffalo
- Canisius College, Buffalo

Each campus visit provided the PAL fellows an opportunity to give a brief presentation on their roles and responsibilities as an EducationUSA adviser and overview of their country’s higher education statistics and education system. The program enriched me with new knowledge and answered the questions I collected from my advisees. Following were some of the outcomes from these individual Institute visits.

### **Elements of an Admissions Model:**

What Colleges collect about an applicant defines what information they can use in making a decision. At the most basic level this generally includes:

- A basic application with background information of the applicant
- High school transcripts
- Standardized tests (SAT or ACT)

Other information that is frequently collected includes

- Counselor(or school) recommendation
- Teacher recommendation
- Essay(s) and/or personal statements
- List of extra curricular activities, achievements, work experience (resume)
- Other test scores (SATII)
- Interview reports
- Information about the school the applicant attends

Additional information, particularly for specialized programs or certain group of applicants, might as well include:

- Portfolios
- Auditions
- Financial statements
- Health examinations

According to Evelyn Levinson from American University, D.C., “We look at understanding applicant’s personal qualities as well their traditional academic qualifications.” It is important to certain traits such as leadership, volunteering, commitment etc in an applicant.

### **Factors Considered**

All Universities I visited had the same say that it is difficult to develop a comprehensive list of factors every college and University uses to evaluate applications for different discipline.

Academic Achievements, Quality and Potential

Non Academic characteristics and attributes

- Secondary school profile is important to know about the applicant. Experienced admission officials have built up the considerable knowledge about most of the schools students apply.
- Some institutions encourage or even require interviews, either on campus or locally with alumni, and utilize the interview report as part of the review process- as an additional way to find out more about the student than what is revealed on paper.
- Apart from the personal statements, supplemental essays are also generally required for consideration for honors programs and special academic scholarship programs.

### **NAFSA WEEK**

The debriefing component of the PAL program before the NAFSA conference week was very informal. The PAL group met over Dinner. Each of us was asked to share highlights of our visits. For me, the visit to Canisius College, Buffalo was an exhilarating experience. The PAL fellows recommend guidelines for future programs through feedback from alumni and the current PAL group and discuss effective ways to integrate PAL alumni into the EducationUSA professional network.

### **NAFSA: Association of International Educators**

The 60<sup>th</sup> annual conference and expo of NAFSA: Association of International Educators was held in Washington, D.C., May 25 – 30, 2008. This year’s conference theme was, “Shaping the Future of International Education,” examines the value of international education in the larger context, innovations in campus internationalization, the effects of global and regional trends, as well as the impact of technology. Former President of Mexico, Vicente Fox welcomed all the registered 9,200 participants and declared the conference open. President Fox is known as visionary leader with a deep understanding of the economic and social challenges facing Latin America. He is one of the world’s

most important voices on the contemporary geo-political landscape and the role of business in the developing world.

High-Profile Plenary Speaker included Shashi Tharoor, former Under-Secretary-General, United Nations and the topic for discussion was “Examining Public Diplomacy and its Effects. The moderator was Judy Woodruff, The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer, Keith Reinhard, Business for Diplomatic Action and Hisham Melham, journalist, Annahar, Al-Qabas, Radio Monte Carlo, and Al-Arabiya The panelists representing explored the conduct and goals of public diplomacy, with an emphasis on the vital role of international education and was sponsored by the Qatar Foundation – Education Society.

The objectives of the session were:

- a) to discuss on the views of the topic used by the United States in the last 60 years;
- b) the relationships between foreign policy and public diplomacy during that period;
- c) the impact of international business on cross-cultural understanding and the creation of the “flat world.”

The plenary address was followed by a highly engaging Q&A for more than twenty minutes. The session attracted a houseful audience of close to 350 people.

I also attended the session “India on the Edge – Promoting International Exchange and Partnerships” chaired by Janine Farhat, The College Board and the presenters were, Dr. Rajasekhar Warriar MD, Vice Chancellor, Manipal University, and Bhushan Patwardhan, Chief Academics - Manipal Education. Presenters described the recent developments in India relating to international student mobility- particularly the March 2008 Emerging Directions in Global Education (EDGE) conference in New Delhi and outline examples of successful international twinning programs between India and other countries. It was also announced that the 2009 EDGE conference will be held in New Delhi, February 9 -11.

### **Country Fair at NAFSA**

This year’s country fair session was unique for USEFI. The six member strong advising team from across India, which included advisers from Bangalore, Chennai, Kolkata and New Delhi, was led by the USEFI Kolkata EAS Coordinator. The two-hour fair was extremely busy for the advisers with hundreds of institutional representatives turning up to talk to the presenters. The India table had the country’s flag as its backdrop and Indian handicrafts as additional decorations. Handouts included brochures on USEFI services to students and U.S. institutions; Annual Report, News letter “IF”; Country Fact Sheet; USEFI general brochure; EAS brochures, Fulbright brochures, advertisement solicitation materials; Institutional Membership Program brochures; etc. This year’s visitors showed keen interest in study abroad programs, institutional membership program and other forms of collaboration as well.

**Advice for the Future PAL Fellows:** Make note of the fact that the PAL program greatly differs from the USBT, as it implies a very independent research project. Be prepared to be very active in scheduling your own appointments. Keep in mind that your time in the U.S. is limited, and you will have to make most of it. Therefore, contacting key persons and organizations well before you arrive is a must- it can save your time and prevent you from going to meetings that do not turn out fruitful.

**Acknowledgements:** My REAC Kathleen Kisting Alam and former Country Coordinator, Dr. Vijaya Khandavilli for igniting the spark and having confidence in my abilities. Dorothy Mora, Program Officer, Department of State & Ella Clement, Program Officer, Department of State, for accepting my PAL proposal. Janine Farhat and all her colleagues at The College Board for looking after our individual project needs. Debbie Hefferon, Educational Consultant for being a wonderful mentor. Last but not the least my supervisor, Luna Das for her constant encouragement.

\*\*\*\*\*