As the president of Seminole State College (SSC) in Florida, I had the privilege of traveling to Russia for two weeks in April with four other community college leaders and colleagues as part of the Fulbright Program Community College Administrator Seminar (CCAS).

Together with John Cox, president of Cape Cod Community College (CCCC) in Barnstable, Mass.; Brian King, president of Cabrillo College in Apts, Calif.; Charles Sasaki, dean of Arts and Sciences at Kapiolani Community College (KCC) in Honolulu; and Barbara Viniar, president of Chesapeake College in Wye Mills, Md., we had the opportunity to share knowledge and best practices with Russian administrators in postsecondary education and to lay the groundwork for institutional partnerships, faculty and student exchanges, and internships.

Each leader visited colleges in different regions of the country, coming together in Moscow at the beginning and the conclusion of our journey. Below, I share what we consider the most important lessons learned from this once-in-a-lifetime experience.

• American educators can learn much from the impressive programs of study developed by Russian educators that incorporate instruction in multiple languages. The Russians have successfully integrated international perspectives into higher education curricula. Their students are curious about the world and eager to interact with other cultures, all outcomes that American educators should strive to achieve with students.

• We were surprised at the high level of participation among Russian colleges in the Bologna Process, which helps ensure transferability of educational programs with institutions of higher education throughout Europe. U.S. colleges would do well to follow the Bologna model; sadly, as Viniar noted, U.S. colleges struggle to achieve that level of collaboration within their own states, much less across the nation.

• Our Russian counterparts are interested in fundraising and wanted to hear ways they might secure private support. Like us, the Russians struggle with budget cuts and a reduction in the college-bound population that will continue to impact enrollment.

• Russia’s colleges are exploring ways to revamp the current educational system to be more workforce-oriented. Like colleges in the United States, Russian colleges are grappling with the issue of educating students for jobs that don’t yet exist and trying to anticipate their training needs so curricula can be more responsive to economic demands.

• As a nation, Russia struggles to reconcile a projected long-term (20-year) population decline with a historical reluctance to welcome immigrants. Russian educators face the possibility of being forced to merge, perhaps even shutter, successful educational institutions. As president of a college with a large number of students who are Mexican immigrants, Cabrillo’s King was fascinated by discussions about immigration in light of the shrinking population.

The CCAS provided all five participants opportunities to build cross-institutional partnerships. In Voronzeh, about a six-hour drive south of Moscow, colleges that I visited expressed interest...
in forming an exchange program that would send some of SSC’s IT faculty to Russia to teach students and develop distance-learning programs.

Further south, at Astrakhan State Technical University, just north of the Caspian Sea, CCCC’s Cox demonstrated a learning management system during a meeting with faculty and instructional technology staff. Educators are considering the potential for student and faculty exchanges. And the Astrakhan State Medical Academy is considering offering virtual conferencing for nursing labs.

Also on the trip, KCC’s Dean Sasaki signed an MOU with a Russian university to send two Russian students to Honolulu. Sasaki was also named to the editorial board of a journal edited by a Russian faculty member. He plans to have select KCC faculty submit articles to the journal and share ideas and research with a new audience abroad.

If our experience with the CCAS taught us anything, it’s that international opportunities for student and faculty exchanges are huge. The only limit to the kind of partnerships we can form is our own creativity. None of this would have been possible without the doors swung open by Fulbright.

Want to Be a Fulbright Scholar?

According to its website, the Fulbright scholarship program offers 80 to 90 opportunities each year for academics and others who are qualified U.S. citizens to conduct research, study, teach, and exchange ideas with colleagues and counterparts in Russia. Here are a few examples:

**U.S. Fulbright Scholar Program:** Provides about 40 placements in the Russian Federation annually, to lecture and conduct research in a variety of academic and professional fields.

**English Teaching Assistants:** Places students in classrooms abroad to help teach English and serve as ambassadors to their host country for U.S. culture.

**The Senior Specialists Program:** Provides short-term academic opportunities (2–6 weeks) to U.S. faculty and professionals.

The office of the Fulbright Program in the Russian Federation helps arrange placements and other practical details for Fulbright participants in Russia, and administers the information and application process for Russian citizens. The J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board, appointed by the President of the United States, makes the final selection of Fulbright participants worldwide.

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