

Fulbright New Century Scholars Program, 2007-2008
Orientation Meeting, 29-31 March 2007
Group Report

Group 2

Theme:

Mechanisms Within and Beyond the Schools that Affect Access to Higher Education

Members:

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Coordinator:

Kate Parry

The group began with a slightly different composition—Pepka Boyadjieva had not yet joined us and David Chapman was still with us—and with a differently formulated theme, namely, “The Role of K-16 in Limiting or Advancing Access to Higher Education.” We began on Friday by reintroducing ourselves and saying what our particular foci within this theme were. It soon became apparent that we had widely differing interests, coming from different disciplines and having different professional backgrounds. Yet it did not take us long to identify a common focus, articulated by Petr Matějů as the mechanisms by which, through the years of primary and secondary schooling, some students are steered towards higher education and others away from it. This common focus is reflected in the new title that we adopted for the group. *Mechanisms* are to be understood as social and psychological as well as systemic, and the reference to *beyond the schools* as expressing our awareness that multiple factors outside the education system itself significantly impact students’ success or otherwise within it. We deliberately chose the neutral verb *affect* so as to acknowledge the potential for factors to operate one way or the other, or in opposite ways with different populations.

On Friday morning we concentrated on what we could try to produce as a group by the end of the program. We identified five possible projects:

- A special issue of Edutopia (which can be easily arranged by Milton Chen; all group members would expect to contribute a 500-1000 word article).
- A special issue of TC Record (subject to negotiations with the editors; Irina Fishman will work on this with Richard Arum’s help).
- A conference on the theme “The opening up of closed educational systems”, with specific reference to East and Central Europe (to be organized in Prague by Petr Matějů).
- Communication strategies for “Pathways to higher education” directed beyond the academic audience to practitioners and consumers of schooling (Milton Chen and Stuart Middleton are experts on this, and Kate Parry is interested in working on it).
- A Grameen Bank for students: global micro-credit systems (suggested by Barbara Schneider and strongly supported by Milton Chen and Richard Arum).

As we discussed these, we realized that there were not of equal interest to all of the group, while some of them might well be of interest to members of other groups. We decided therefore to ask for an opportunity to present these suggestions as soon as possible so as to identify other possible participants.

On Friday afternoon, we developed these ideas into a powerpoint presentation and discussed what our mission statement should be. We decided on the following and incorporated it into the presentation:

Our purpose is to address transitions from secondary to tertiary education by studying the social, institutional, and economic contexts that frame those transitions.

We will be guided by a commitment to communicate our work to diverse audiences: policy-makers, practitioners, the general public, as well as researchers.

We were allowed, as requested, to present this material on Saturday morning, which gave us an opportunity to get feedback at an early stage. We responded to this feedback in the later part of the morning by articulating more clearly how our various projects were related to our theme. At Pepka Boyadjieva's suggestion, we adopted a theoretical framework that can be expressed as a matrix:

Levels	Enabling factors	Inhibiting factors
Macro/Systemic		
Mezzo/Institutional		
Micro/Individual		

Our different projects focus on different points in this matrix—on different levels, and/or the interfaces between them, and with different emphases on enabling and inhibiting factors; but in every case we are considering what determines whether individuals go on to higher education from secondary schooling and are focusing particularly on how these factors work for marginalized groups. We considered whether to present this matrix as an addition to our powerpoint presentation but decided not to as we had already had more than our fair share of time!

The discussions were tremendously stimulating, and we achieved a consensus remarkably quickly given the marked differences among us. We much look forward to working together over the coming months and we would all like to thank the Fulbright New Century Scholars Program for giving us this opportunity.