

ROTARY WORLD PEACE FELLOW FIRST REPORT—May 2007

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This Rotary World Peace Fellow, First Report—is an account of my initial experiences, thus far, as a participant at the Rotary Center for International Studies in peace and conflict resolution at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia. The report covers academic activities and progress, involvement with host area Rotarians, impressions of the program, successes and challenges as a Rotary World Peace Fellow; it comprises an assessment of these activities since I arrived in Brisbane from late February until now, the beginning of May—a little over two months.

ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES AND PROGRESS

The courses I am enrolled in this first semester are: *Ethics and Human Rights*, *Advanced International Studies*, and *Contemporary Peacekeeping*.

The classes are attended by students from around the world. The *Ethics and Human Rights* class for example has students from at least thirty countries. It was a nice surprise to encounter such a diversity of fellow students who have been involved in many activities and work related to peace studies and conflict resolution prior to the pursuit of their Masters degrees.

To add to the variety my current professors are from Germany, Switzerland and the United Kingdom; their experience, moreover, ranges from field work with the United Nations and diplomacy involving the Korean DMZ to research and teaching in the classrooms of Harvard and Oxford. The instructors are familiar with all the latest research and activities in their disciplines, top rated in their fields, and published worldwide.

The various individual perspectives and invaluable firsthand experience of our fellow students contribute significant input in the classes and serves to foster worthwhile conversations outside the classroom; the diversity is a welcome resource that augments the program's depth and enhances the transference of knowledge relating to world understanding, tolerance, goodwill and peace—it gives rise to an atmosphere that is seasoned with serendipitous pleasant discovery. The camaraderie and networks forming amongst the other peace fellows and students serves as a doorway into fresh ways of thinking and nurtures the seeds that will grow into lifelong professional relations.

About the first month and a half I experienced what I'll call "a matter of adaptation." With few tangible assignments and enormous *potential* reading lists, which range from required, recommended and supplementary reading, it took some getting used to the difference in the educational style in Australia, i.e. figuring out where to effectively focus my priorities. Once I understood the academic system at the University of Queensland—the learning is driven by personal interest where one can choose where to focus—I was able to advance with a purposeful direction and confidently attack the subjects with an effective systematized approach.

The coursework is an intellectual journey. The class readings and activities are creating a shift in my outlook as theories are synthesized. We are learning

ways to systematically think about and conceptualize topics of concern that can be utilized in practical application as a means for analysis, to guide actions, and toward peaceful solutions to pressing global problems. Acquiring these intellectual tools is stimulating and is already allowing me to uncover latent lessons from past international work and experience. I can see the practical application much of this study will add to impact my effectiveness in the field in the future.

INVOLVEMENT WITH HOST AREA ROTARIANS

The Rotary network in Brisbane has been welcoming and supportive it has served as an introduction into the community through individual connections. Rotarian support is fabulous and a resource that provides a sense of security to make everything much smoother when adjusting to a new environment.

When I arrived in Brisbane I was greeted at the airport by my host counselor, Paul Hudson. The Hudson family has been a welcoming and helpful resource—one of the highlights of my week is enjoying Sunday evening dinners at their home. They have shown me around some of the coast and helped out when I was initially settling in. Additionally, they have included me in many of their family events. It is like I've got family here in Australia. Over the Easter break Ville-Veikko Pitkanen, another Peace Fellow from Finland, and I enjoyed a few days on the Sunshine Coast with the Hudson family. Due to course conflicts I have not been able to visit my host club, the Windsor Rotary Club, as of yet—but, I'm scheduled to meet the club on Monday, June 4th, when classes will be out.

Rotarian Judy Magub has been an excellent resource for all things Rotary and has additionally gone out of her way to offer assistance and support wherever needed to the Peace Fellows; for example she brought bed linens and kitchen wares to all the new Peace Fellows that were lacking such items.

Rotary had an excellent orientation with many speakers on subjects uniquely Australian and about the programs of Rotary Down Under. Particularly useful were the presentations on public speaking and resources available through Rotary to ensure that we have a successful and worthwhile experience while a part of the Rotary family.

Beyond the above activities, Rotary has hosted some barbeques where we have been able to meet a wider membership of Rotarians outside of our host clubs.

IMPRESSIONS OF THE PROGRAM

The program is incredible: the pleasant Brisbane climate mixed with the first class academic facilities at UQ, the brilliance of the professors and the intelligence of the student body, in addition to the support provided through the Rotary network act together to compose an ideal ambiance for scholarly undertakings—this is truly a privilege beyond anything I could have imagined.

The school treats the Rotary World Peace Fellows as faculty. We are invited to many social functions restricted to faculty where we can relate to our professors and other academics on an informal level. This benefit allows Peace Fellows the exceptional opportunity to build greater bonds amongst the professional academic community at UQ.

The school sponsors a near weekly peace talk series bringing to the campus influential speakers from around the world to discuss their latest work and research in the fields of International Relations, Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution.

We—the Rotary World Peace Fellows—are advantaged to be provided an honors room on the same level and adjacent to many of our professors offices. This allows for convenient access to our professors and creates opportunities for more casual and spontaneous exchanges, permitting further intellectual exploration and instruction not obtainable in the standard classroom environment.

SUCSESSES AND CHALLENGES

My departure from the United States was quite hectic due to Australian Visa delays and uncertainty, until the day before my departure, of when I was actually scheduled to leave. Yet, once I was comfortably seated on the departing flight, I couldn't have been more excited to finally be on my way toward the opportunities which lay ahead.

As far as Australia compares to my experiences in North America, the cultural differences are very subtle and, when judged against other foreign environments where I have lived, the cultural differences are nearly nonexistent.

At a Rotary meeting in Carlsbad, CA, I overheard a visiting UK Rotarian remark, "England and the US are two countries separated by a common language." The same could be said of my initial impressions of the Aussie tongue. The language, when I first got here, was a bit confusing. I'd be requested to repeat myself quite often, as the locals didn't understand my English. It went the opposite way too; I'd have to ask others to repeat themselves when I didn't understand the sound of their English. It soon became apparent to me that the cross confusion was a matter of difference in the languages rhythmic articulation than any true vocabulary or dialect-related difficulties. This curiosity was easily overcome with further exposure to the rhythmic variation; as the ears adjusted, the need for repetitive assertions vanished and the two countries separated by a common language puzzle was remedied.

Other than the above minor challenges, everything has been quite smooth.

In March the University of Nevada, Reno, my undergrad *alma mater*, ran a story about the Rotary World Peace Fellowship and my arrival to Australia in

their publication the Nevada News. The article was titled, "Rotary award recipient adjusts to life in a foreign country."

When I was informed of my acceptance as a Rotary World Peace Fellow, the start of the program seemed so far away. At the present, the program seems like it will be over in next to no time. Time is flying—the first semester is nearly over. Before no time, we'll be graduating and out in the field working toward making an impact for a more peaceful global environment.

The opportunity to contribute to the Rotary mission is an honor. As I'm pushed in my classes and inspired by the instructors and fellow student alike, I am keeping a firm commitment to ensure my academic work remains at the center of my attention while getting involved as much as possible with all the opportunities available to contribute on campus and through Rotary network to multiply the impact of the program in the community.

I'm looking forward to the Rotary World Peace Symposium in Utah and the chance to meet present and past Rotary World Peace Fellows from the programs other sites around the world—while simultaneously increasing my depth of knowledge about Rotary International and the Rotary World Peace Fellowship program as it functions in other countries.