



Leadership in Participant-Centered Learning

Final Report of docent Jiri Hnilica, Ph.D.

Background

I am an associate professor at the Department of Business Administration, University of Economics, Prague, Czech Republic. In September 2007 I was appointed to the position of the Deputy Director of the Department. Since May 2008 I have been the Academic Director of MSc in International Management. This Master's program, with the embedded CEMS MIM program, is a full-time two-year academic training program for students at bachelor level with interests and career intentions in international companies and international environment.

I have learnt about the American Fund from my wife who attended an informative workshop on funding schemes available in the Czech Republic given by Fulbright Commission. Immediately, I have decided to apply because the Young Leaders Program covered precisely what I needed, i.e. excellence in leadership in education - for which no similar funding schemes are available (the most common schemes relate to "pure" scientific research, not leadership or education). To finalize the application form was quite straightforward. I was very clear about what I would like to be trained in: management of education (Master's) programs at universities with special attention to the application of case studies.

I found the interview atmosphere pleasant, almost informal however it was evident that the committee strived to learn as much as possible about the applicants. I think that future applicants would welcome if the language tests could take place in computer labs, without using rubber and pencils.

Visa and visa arrangements were rather challenging, stemming partly in the difficulty of reaching administrative staff at the University of Denver during the summer. I faced severe difficulties especially in obtaining DS form which issue was conditioned by submitting another form from the host institution, i.e. University of Denver. Fortunately, I could manage through my personal contacts at the Department of Management. Prof. Joan Winn, Department of Management, helped me tremendously with my challenges by her manifold personal involvements. Therefore in the end I was accepted by the Department of Management (home department of prof. Winn) although I formerly was in contact with the Department of Finance. In the end I received the DS form and was issued US entry visa and arrived as planned.

American Partners

American Partners were Harvard Business School (HBS) for my executive training (European Entrepreneurship Colloquium on Participant-Centered Learning) and University of Denver (DU), Daniels College of Business for my internship.

HBS is considered the best business school worldwide and the European Entrepreneurship Colloquium on Participant-Centered Learning I participated in at HBS only confirms that. My executive training was an intensive eight-day residential program designed for entrepreneurship faculty members who will play major roles in leading curricula development and research in their respective institutions over the next decade. The focus of the colloquium was on participant-centered learning, with a particular emphasis on case teaching, course development, and the efforts required to introduce participant-centered learning methods into a more conventionally taught curriculum.

The executive training exceeded my expectations. It took place on the HBS campus in Boston. All alumni are very well networked and invited to many follow-ups.

I was familiar with DU from Crystal Ball User conferences in Denver organized by Decisioneering, Inc. (now it is a part of Oracle) that I attended in 2006 and 2007. Shortly before my first visit to Denver – completely incidentally – I had the opportunity to meet Joan Winn, a professor from DU – during her stay at my home University in Prague. Professor Winn became my friend and key DU contact. She introduced me to her colleagues from Department of Finance with similar research and teaching interests to mine. Moreover now she is a Board member of NACRA (North American Case Research Association). In the past she has been many times awarded as the best case writer or teacher. I could not have better guidance on the topic. Also, I was in close contact with prof. Michael E. Williams (teaching Entrepreneurial Finance) and prof. Thomas Cook (teaching Financial Modeling) as explained below.

Brief Evaluation Statement

My objectives were fully met, both at HBS and at DU. To recall, my objectives were: “Further and thorough development of my leadership skills in participant-centered learning needed for my (prospective) positions at the University of Economics, Prague”.

Detailed Description

HBS delivered an excellent training with many practical aspects – all case studies we went through were sensibly organized – first half of the time we were treated like HBS students with famous “cold calls”, in the other half we discussed how to teach and implement the case study in/into classrooms as effectively as possible. It was simply a great experience where I received many contacts. More importantly HBS keeps in close touch with all course participants for follow ups.

In many respects, the stay at DU was great. First, I attended seminars given by prof. Winn (Organizational Dynamics), by prof. Williams (Entrepreneurial Finance) and by prof. Cook (Financial Modeling) which by itself was a great experience – esp. experiencing how professors use case studies or structure lectures. From many discussions with these professors (and students of courses I attended) I learnt a lot how they teach, how they write case studies, how they organize their research activities and how MBA programs are organized. Invaluable discussion circulated around the management of DU processes. On October 1 I attended NACRA’s Annual Meeting in New Hampshire which was absolutely one of the most important moments of my stay. We discussed various case studies in small groups of max 9 people and I learnt many important hints not only relating to my case study (which was after thorough reviewing process accepted for presentation there). The conference of NACRA enhanced my chances for the acceptance of my future case studies into NACRA’s highly regarded journal.

Also, I almost finished my book on risk analysis and Monte Carlo simulations – I discussed the content esp. with prof. Cook and I received many important remarks which hopefully could enhance the quality of the book. I presented the book intentions to Oracle in Denver and they promised further cooperation (such as including a 3-month trial version of their software into my book).

Organization and Time Schedule

At HBS it was really “full-service” training and we were accommodated directly on the campus. When staying at DU I have rented a flat close to DU campus which I really appreciated (from Internationalization Office at DU I was sent some contacts to local companies renting flats). For just several month stays it is not easy to get a car and without a car it is really difficult Especially when one rents a flat which is not equipped with furniture as I did (no equipped flats were available at the time). However the flat was OK. It was neat, clean and very close to my office at DU. However, the closest grocery was more than one-mile so shopping for me was sort of a trip.

Training facilities were great both at HBS and DU. At the beginning I faced troubles with administrative clearances at DU (like access to DU network and WiFi) however I shared the office with prof. Winn and could use her computer so it was manageable. Some administrative requirements may be quite restrictive and inconvenient to foreign students and visitors. For example, I needed six signatures for getting permission to access DU WiFi, yet nobody could tell me clearly from whom.

I was in very close contact with prof. Winn, prof. Williams and prof. Cook. The “social” drawback for me was that there is no PhD program at DU so I could not chat with PhD students as I am used to. However as I was instructed it is intentional because they are fully focused on thorough quality in MBA programs and not on PhD programs. If I succeed in getting again some funding for a short-time stay in the US, I am welcome to teach the whole course and not only to participate partly as I did.

I attended HBS from July 15 to July 25, 2008. I stayed at DU from September 22 till December 19, 2008. With my obligations I could not stay any longer. In general I consider the length of my stay completely appropriate for my purposes.

Program Cost

In total, I spent approximately what I expected. The international travel costs were lower than expected (air ticket was cheaper than what I had paid a year ago – prob. due to exchange rate fluctuations), monthly maintenance costs were slightly lower as well. They might have been even lower – however with grocery stores far away - I usually patronized student restaurants for daily meals. Medical insurance was also lower (Generali quote was lower than GTS). I paid slightly more for visa arrangements because I did not know about SEVIS \$100 fee I was supposed to pay. I paid significantly more for local transportation and contingency. The reason is that although I planned a trip to the conference in New Hampshire I hoped I could finance it from my Czech Science Foundation grant. However, in the end I could not. The higher contingency costs relates to my accommodation in New Hampshire and furnishing my flat (bed, table, chairs, dishes etc.).

Item	Cost Estimate in US\$	Actual Cost in US\$
Executive training seminars	4,250	4,250
Internship	0	0
Administrative fees (visa, registration fees, etc.)	100	200
International travel	2,100	1,300
Local transportation	500	700
Medical insurance	500	250
Monthly maintenance	7,800	6,600
Contingency	250	1,100
Total	15,500	14,400

In the end I spend slightly more than stated above because I bought many textbooks (not included in the table) and excess luggage (twice 150 USD, also not included).

With regard to exchange rate fluctuation I found really advantageous that I had brought some USD in cash and therefore was not that exposed to the wild FX changes (when in Boston exchange rate was close to 14,50 CZK/USD, in December when in Denver, it was close to 20 CZK/USD). Maybe the American Fund could bear the whole FX risk, and with a form of FX hedge, offer a fixed rate to funded students for all tranches – with the exposition of 15,000 USD, even 1 CZK change in FX rate leads to 15,000 CZK.

Program Benefits

There are many benefits. I identified many sources for obtaining case studies and other study material for students which with my position as an academic director I may implement into the Master's program I supervise. In addition, the whole Faculty of Business Administration could be trained by NACRA Professionals (I got to know them personally) in the process of Faculty Development which is just about to be launched at my institution. I learnt a lot about how to write case studies and how to integrate them into curricula which enhances my personal chances for successful publications in US journals. I established networks esp. among people from Harvard Business School, University of Denver and NACRA. I may help my colleagues to publish case studies in the US and to use these case studies in their teaching.

A unique benefit was due to the fortunate timing of my stay – I had many opportunities to get good insights into the American culture due to the turbulence in the financial markets and the US presidential elections.

Risks

The risks relating to the implementation of my new experience are given esp. by two different cultures and therefore, to a degree, different teaching methods. The case studies training approach is still quite rare at my university. Conventional lecture-based methods prevail. This is not the case of US where case studies (at business schools!) do prevail. Both teaching methods are different and require different teaching skills.

These risks may be mitigated: 1) from my position as an academic director I may influence the way the Master's Program I am responsible for is organized, 2) a majority of young teachers are ready and eager to learn new skills.

Moreover due to the efforts of our dean and rector to require ECTS label (a well-accepted quality standard) cases and participant-centered learning will have to become our standard. So I hope it is a matter of effort and of time to succeed in implementing the knowledge and skills I brought from the United States.