Transcript- Go Global ED Podcast Episode 11 with Joanna Kukielka-Blaser & Mark Lilleleht, Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad (DDRA) Project Directors. Joanna is Director of the Fulbright Scholar and Fulbright-Hays programs in the Office of International Affairs at the Ohio State University. Mark is currently the Fulbright Coordinator at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. During the podcast, we discuss their responsibilities as DDRA Project Directors (PDs) and share suggestions and tips to guide administrators who may be new to the DDRA.

# [Host/Amy]

Welcome back to the Go Global ED Podcast. A production of the International and Foreign Language Education Team, also known as IFLE in the Office of Postsecondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education. My name is Amy Marrion and I'm a Program Officer on the IFLE team. I'll be your host for today's episode, where we take a deep dove into the role of institutional project directors on the Fulbright-Hays, Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Program, or DDRA for short.

Today, we welcome two guests Joanna Kukielka-Blaser and Mark Lilleleht, to speak to their role as institutional project directors or PDs for the Fulbright-Hays DDRA Program at their respective institutions. Joanna is currently the director of the Fulbright Scholar and Fulbright-Hays programs in the Office of International Affairs at the Ohio State University. Mark is currently the Fulbright Coordinator at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

The DDRA program is administered by IFLE and provides grants to colleges and universities to fund individual doctoral students who conduct research abroad in modern foreign languages and area studies for periods of 6 to 12 months. Project Director’s submit the DDRA application, administer the grant, and disburse funds. Should any students receive DDRA funding, PD’s must be appointed by the DDRA Applicant Institution, and this is usually someone in the Dean of Graduate Studies, student affairs or similar offices.

PDs advise all interested applicants on their application regardless of their field of study and play a key role in submitting the application. Without an appointed PD, or a project director, students would be unable to submit a DDRA application. Joanna and Mark have both successfully served as DDRA Project Directors for many years. We want to provide this opportunity for them to talk about their experience for the benefit of other schools wishing to get involved with the area to support their doctoral student’s needs.

# [Host/Amy]

Joanna, Mark, welcome to the podcast.

# [Joanna]

Thank you.

# [Mark]

Thank you.

# [Host/Amy]

We're really excited to have you both here today. So, we're going to start off with a pretty easy question, I think. So as a DDRA project director, what are some of your main responsibilities? And I think we'll start with you, Joanna.

# [Joanna]

Thank you, Amy. I think you've already mentioned some of the responsibilities, so I will I want to say that basically they spend the entire gamut of your standard fellowship advising. So, beginning from identifying students, recruiting students, shepherding them through the application process. And then, as you said, if successful, administering the grant on behalf of the university. And then on the more administrative matter it involves, you know, having a strong, solid understanding of the federal Department of Education regulation that are applicable to the grant, and then also understanding the internal university's regulations, which may be different.

And they want to say, finally, advocacy on behalf of the Title six Fulbright-Hays funding program. I think this is something that we also do at Ohio State to ensure that the funding for this very important program continues.

# [Host/Amy]

Okay, that's great. And Mark, would you like to add anything to that from your perspective?

# [Mark]

I think Joanna is hit on most of the really key points. I think one of the challenges that I faced when I first stepped in and that I think it's important to keep in mind it's certainly not insurmountable. Is that interface between the DDRA regulations and your own campus's institutional regulations and policies.

And it's certainly not something that you can't train yourself up on fairly quickly, especially if you've got institutional support.

But it's definitely for PDs at the application stage. You want to be having those discussions on campus so that you know what you'll be stepping into and the questions that you need to be addressing should you be successful in your application.

# [Host/Amy]

That's great. So, in short, as a PD, you're both administering the grant. You're doing a lot of communication across your campus, understanding those policies and regulations, and the best way to work with your own administration to advocate for the students and get those applications in and hopefully have some successful applicants.

And from the department's perspective, I did want to add one additional resource, which I'm sure Mark and Joanna are both very familiar with. It is called the International Resource Information System, or the acronym is IRIS. And IRIS is a system that we use to administer the grants. So, there is a log in, however, there's also a public-facing part of IRIS and anybody can use this to look up fellows or grantees who have received grants from IFLE. So if you are a new project director and you don't know anything about Fulbright-Hays, you don't know if anyone on your campus has ever had an award or they're current grantees or you're just, you know, looking for a starting point in addition to what Mark and Joanna have already spoken about, this could be just kind of a quick little research point where you are logging in to your computer and just looking up your institution to see if there have been any grants. And that could

provide a little bit of a pathway to see if there's anyone on your campus that you might be able to speak to about a Fulbright-Hays or any other award that was granted from the U.S. Department of Education to your institution.

And we'll provide some information about IRIS in the show notes. But I just wanted to mention that as another way that you might be able to start gaining your footing as a new project director. Okay. So, a little bit, I want to go a little bit into your background and history of working on the DDRA program, because I know that you've both have been project directors for many years now, so how long have you been in your role or how long have you been advising on the DDRA? And when you were new to that role, how did you gain your footing and how do you aim to best serve students at your institution? What resources have you used? How would you describe that experience?

# [Mark]

Sure. 2023 will be my seventh application cycle and it'll be my ninth cohort of awardees to work with. So, I came in in 2016, had a couple of folks still in the field, had a application that had been submitted, but whose applicants I was unfamiliar with and then have had six cohorts since then. I was coming at it with a decent fellowship advising background. So I'd worked with graduate students for many years prior, so I felt comfortable sort of in the general advising process, and we've been lucky to have a system set up here on campus that I was administrative system that I was largely stepping into, had to learn it and learn it in fairly fast hurry because we had students in the field at the time I stepped in, but the process was set up.

The real challenge for me, though I felt in my first application cycle was being a good, strong advising of potential applicants. And so, to that end, I basically sort of accessed all of the technical reviews I could get my hands on. UW has a very rich history of successful applications, and we had the technical reviews that DDRA sends back on file, and I basically read about 20 years’ worth to train myself up on what review panels were looking for.

# [Host/Amy]

Okay. Thanks for that. And I guess you were probably doing a lot of reading because those technical review forms contain a lot of information and just for our viewers or our listeners, we do provide feedback on all applications. So that's something to keep in mind. And Joanna, how about you?

# [Joanna]

So, I have been the project director for a d array for six years. Since 2000, seven. And unlike Mark, I stepped into a program that really didn't very much exist and I did not have a lot of experience with fellowship advising. So, this is an expertise that I built over the years through the experience of working with students, and I would say sort of thinking back and from where I started, I think one of the most important lessons that I would give was to really seek out mentors and look for synergies between the program that you're taking on and what is being already done on campus.

So, university these days will have fellowship advisors. So, connecting with those experts and learning from their experience, connecting with area study centers and your campus. If your campus has area study centers because there you have not only the natural pool of applicants but also faculty expertise and Fulbright-Hays has such an important part of building our national expertise in area studies. So great resource in faculty.

Another resource which is the National Association for Fellowship Advisors, NAFA. I want to say it's a fantastic network of people like Mark and myself who advise students and often test the reserves of information. I, for example, know at one-point last year another project director posted with the question, and I reached out.

We connected and I was able to help the student and I think just not being afraid to ask for help, I would say is, is an important quality to have. And finally, what Mark already said, the Department of Education has a lot of resources unlike any grant that I know. Students receive feedback from faculty on their proposals and Fulbright, his proposals are, you know, and I know this will sound like a contradiction, but they're very easy and very difficult at the same time, the proposal itself, they're very easy because you know exactly what goes into his proposal.

In fact, you even know in what order you should present the information to make it easy on the reviewers. You know how many points for each section, but therein also lies the complexity because it's a very compact, compacted, if you will, and sort of a very strategically build building of a case for funding, but getting access to test proposals, looking at those proposals and I required that my students read past proposals samples actually.

# [Host/Amy]

Yeah, that, that's really great advice and I think it's important for the students to do that. And then as a project director, having access to those resources and the feedback provided on the applications and seeing those trends and things that are, you know, a common theme for successful applications. And if you don't have access to all of those, we'll talk a little bit more about how new project directors can maybe get some mentorship from people who have maybe worked on the program.

We'll touch base on that, but I think this is all really great advice for anybody who's new to a project director role. So, moving along, my next question is related to applying for the DDRA. So, as I noted in the introduction, and you've also mentioned for doctoral students to apply for a Fulbright-Hays, DDRA Award, there has to be a project director.

# [Host/Amy]

There's no other way. Individuals are not able to apply. There has to be someone at the institution. Joanna Mark Helping to facilitate that process. So, are there any unique aspects of the DDRA program that you think would be helpful to share as a new Predator director? Learn more about DDRA. So maybe they've worked on other fellowships, but DDRA is brand new.

And Joanna, you kind of touched on this a little bit, but how is the DTI different from other fellowships and grants that you manage at your school? Maybe we'll start with Joanna again.

# [Joanna]

Thanks, Amy. So, I think the number one difference I would say is that unlike other grants like Fulbright,

U.S. Student Program, where the funding goes directly to the student, the Fulbright-Hays funds actually come to the university. And then the project director is really responsible for administering the grant on behalf of the student, which means having specific procedures in place to understand, for example, do I give all of the money to the student and send them on their way?

Or do I want to withhold a certain amount because that's a requirement of the university or for which is in our case, plus which I always feel like this is a good, you know, insurance, if you will, for students when they come back to make sure that they submit the final report. With that. Also, unlike other grants which we may administer, there is a part that the student is responsible for a visa by the Department of Education.

And then there is also the institutional project responsibility. And that means at the time of applying, there are separate forms that the project director has to fill out. And then after the institutional grant cycle ends, the project director is responsible for submitting the final report to the aforementioned IRIS, which we all love.

# [Host/Amy]

Oh, jeez. Yes, yes. So, there are a handful of reporting requirements, both for and project directors, and also applicants and potential fellows. And Mark, where you going to add something?

# [Mark]

Well, I think that, you know, Joanna has hit on all the key points. The other piece is the Department of Education continues to play a role in the disbursement of the awards to the individual awardees in terms of reviewing itineraries, time in country along those lines. So, they're sort of these multiple interfaces that project directors have to operate along.

And the awardees are always working through the project director rather than directly with the Department of Education. So, we're working with our home institution to requirements, with our awardees and their plans, making sure that, you know, plans are approved by the Department of Education. So, it's all of these multiple levels. And for someone stepping into the position new, whether it's totally new to an institution or new to their own role, it can seem a little daunting.

It certainly was very daunting for me when I stepped into it, even though I felt like I had there were a lot of systems already in place. But there is there are so many resources out there. Yeah. The office in D.C., you guys are so much there to help guide us through the process. Other you know if you can if you can connect with an established project director who can give you some guidance in terms of what's worked for them on their campus, all of that can be so useful.

And it's something that you don't have to have everything ready, made and in place at the time of application. And there's so many things that you're going to have to work through when you're administering the award. But it's definitely doable so long as you've got that buy in on campus that they want to support your student applicants for this award.

# [Host/Amy]

Thank you both for those really great insights. So how do you recruit for DDRA applicants on your campus? Obviously, there are some people who are going to come directly to your office if you're, you know, in the fellowship office. But there's others who, you know, maybe aren't aware of the funding or have other things going on. So, could you all touch on that experience on your campus?

# [Mark]

Sure. There's a lot of connecting through faculty members. You know, again, we are lucky here at UW Madison to have really robust area studies programs in place. And so, there's a lot of outreach through

them. There's a there's a faculty awareness of what's available. And so, a lot of students are coming to us directly. I do try to run a couple information sessions off applications cycle because the application cycle is always in terms of the start and the end date of it, it's always a little variable.

I always try to work in one or two fall information sessions when students are kind of more tuned to, Okay, I'm shopping around for opportunities for the year to come, the summer to come, things along those lines. And it's a way to kind of get the word out there, start circulating, you know, just this awareness of what Fulbright, Hayes DDRA means and is possible and then just tracking people who essentially sort of express interest.

And then when the application cycle opens up, just hitting, you know, reaching out past applicants who maybe weren't successful at the last application cycle, working the faculty lines, working directly through departments and the area study centers here, and trying to get as many folks in the pipeline as possible.

Right. Right. Yeah. Okay. So, you're doing all sorts of things, working with faculty, tracking doctoral students along their journey information sessions. Joanna, what about you?

# [Joanna]

So, I would echo everything that Mark said, and we do that on our campus as well. One thing that I've experienced over the years, and I imagine Mark would agree, is that there is sort of this reputational benefit is, you know, once you have one hour, do you publicize that award? And that normalizes the idea of Fulbright, Hays, DDRA for our graduate students.

But we also rely on faculty and then with area studies centers. I actually request from our area studies center lists of our class, our these, the foreign language area study center awardees because students who are Saudis in the Ph.D. programs are really not truly and Adam adequately suited to Fulbright-Hays funding. I almost look at the class awards as a feeder into Fulbright.

# [Host/Amy]

Hays Yes. Yeah. The foreign language in Area Studies is another grant that is administered by the Ifo office at the Department of Education. For those who are unaware. Mark, were you going to add something?

# [Mark]

Well, Joanna touched on it, I think, when mentioning FLAS, but I think one of the things that we haven't done quite as well as I'd like to do and hopefully, we'll do better moving forward, is looking at these other awards maybe that that we award on campus that are campus internal as potential feeders as potential pools of applicants.

And I think we could do a better job. But in terms of, you know, any campus that's working with graduate students and maybe funding graduate students, maybe at the departmental level, at the college or division level, I think there's a really potentially a rich pool of applicants and certainly a pool of potentially interested graduate students who you want to perhaps get yourself in front of, have conversations with and certainly share, you know, what's possible through the DDRA program.

# [Host/Amy]

Yeah, I think that's a great point, too. Just kind of taking a moment to look at what your campus is offering, what sorts of funding opportunities there are, and are any of those people who are applying actually a good fit for this? So yeah, that's a great piece of advice. So, I think we're almost wrapping up here. This has been a great conversation.

# [Host/Amy]

I think we've really covered a lot of ground and hopefully provided some good insights to our listeners and maybe future project directors or new project directors or DDRA applicants. So, two last questions. The first one is that I know at University of Wisconsin and Ohio State, you've both had many DDRA fellows over the years. Where are some of your fellows today?

What are they up to? Are they teaching? Are they overseas or are they a combination of everything? I guess we could start with you, Mark.

# [Mark]

Yeah, I think we've got awardees all over the place. You know, we've had a couple of really exciting awardees in years past, most recently in 2018, we had one of our one of our awardees, Kelsey Huisman, who was in Ecuador and was one of those students who we had to pull out of country. And his rather harrowing tale of hers, they get her out at the start of the pandemic.

# [Host/Amy]

But for another podcast.

# [Mark]

Yes, but she was she's she was working on orchids with her DDRA and discovered a new species of toad during her time there. We had an award from 2008. Leila Hassan, who who's working, was working in East Africa with Lion Guardians. And a number of years later, she was named a CNN Top ten hero. It can be a real incredible lift that step ahead to four, you know, incredible.

Next steps and also just be incredibly instrumental and simply just making it possible for you, these students and awardees to achieve their goals of and the department's goals of getting into the classroom and sharing their expertise with the next generation of scholars and students at the institutions that they end up working at right.

# [Host/Amy]

That's amazing to hear some of these stories. How about in Ohio?

# [Joanna]

So, like in in in Mark's case are students and, you know, all over the United States, most of them are in tenure track or tenured positions. And in fact, over the years, I, I have heard from our students about how important Fulbright Hayes was in there in their job search. Having the award on this CV does make a difference, because if the award allows you to develop expertise and experience in the country, in the region that you bring in early in your career, already having had the Fulbright Hayes Award and as Mark already said, I think it's exciting to see where these young people end up and, you know, continue training the next generation of area study and language experts, which is so needed, you know, for our country and for our academia.

# [Host/Amy]

Yes, I totally agree. And, you know, they part of all their success is having people like you, too, in these roles and guiding them through the process. So, it's really wonderful to hear, hey, so is there anything else that you all would like to add? Anything that we've missed or any last thoughts or pointers or…?

# [Mark]

Well, I would just reiterate Joanna's point. If you're if you're a potential project director at an institution which maybe doesn't have a history of awardees or maybe there's been a gap, apply, apply, if you've got students who are interested, if you've got students who would be good. DDRA candidates, if you have had students approach you and say, hey, I'm interested in the Fulbright-Hays, DDRA, get an application and have the conversations on campus that you need to do.

Reach out to people like Joanna and myself and you know, through NAF, through whatever resources you might have looked back in your history, if there's previous awards and awardees and you can get a record of who was the who was the project director back then, have those conversations and really do what you can to get an application. And it can be a little bit daunting, some of the paperwork, but it's definitely, definitely possible and to really get in that process and make it a part of what you do year to year is will not only be valuable for the campus, but it's going to be valuable for your students now and for the students in the years to come.

# [Joanna]

And I would just like to add that in addition to everything, I want to echo what Mark said, but also on the sort of personal note, I want to share just how much I have learned professionally over the years that I've supported students and have been forced to venture into disciplines and areas and parts of the world that are not necessarily very familiar to me, but how beneficial it has been for my own sort of personal growth, which is just an additional benefit to sort of seeing how we're impacting or helping to impact academic careers of, you know, of our future educators and leaders of universities.

# [Host/Amy]

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, in addition to the lots of paperwork and application materials, I feel like, you know, I read these applications as well and I learn so much and learn about different regions of the world and some really great work that the fellows are interested in doing. So, it's definitely hopefully adding balance to the responsibilities of, you know, getting through the application process, but then seeing those outcomes and what everybody is up to and all their respective fields.

So, I'm glad that it's been a positive opportunity for you. Joanna and Mark, I want to say thank you so much for joining us on the podcast today. It's been really, really insightful hearing from you and we are looking forwards, opening up a new dairy competition soon and hopefully connecting you all with some project directors and also seeing some new applicants from your institutions.

# [Mark]

Thank you so much, Amy.

# [Joanna]

Thank you. Thank you, Amy. Thank you, Mark.

# [Host/Amy]

Thanks for listening to the Go Global Ed podcast production of the International and Foreign Language Education Office at the U.S. Department of Education. Be sure to follow us on Twitter, at Go Global ED and subscribe to our newsletter to learn more about upcoming podcast episodes and other info updates.

# Guest Bios:

Joanna Kukielka-Blaser is the Director of Fulbright Scholar and Fulbright-Hays Programs in the Office of International Affairs at The Ohio State University. Previously she served as the Director for International Partnerships. In 2016, Joanna received the Fulbright Scholar Grant for International Education Administrators (IEA) to Germany. Joanna has lived and worked in multiple countries and speaks, Polish, Russian, and German. She holds an M.A. degree in Russian Language and Literature from The Ohio State University.

Mark Lilleleht is the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Fulbright Coordinator, working across the full array of Fulbright & Fulbright-Hays programs available to UW-Madison students, faculty, staff, and alumni. He has served as the campus DDRA project director since 2016 and has worked at the UW- Madison in various international education & opportunity-focused roles since 2005. He's a graduate of the University of Virginia (BA in Anthropology & Foreign Affairs) and the University of Wisconsin- Madison (MA in African Languages & Literature).