

Innovation and Cooperation in University International Joint Programs: a case study of a Romanian-American Program.

Abstract

Public administration faculty at Babes-Bolyai University and the Biden School of Public Policy and Administration, University of Delaware have conducted six courses over 15 years with the title “Learning to Be an Effective Public Sector Advisor”. The course has evolved from a study abroad field trip for American students to a joint course with faculty and graduate students from both institutions engaged in joint seminars and a two-week field trip in Romania, during which student teams work cooperatively on applied research projects that yield an understanding of the challenges, opportunities and improved understanding of cross-sectoral, cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary educational activity.

The “Engaged University” concept asserts that faculty, staff and students at institutions of higher education can serve an important function in the community by extending teaching and research into applied work with governments and NGOs. Not only is this a contribution to community development, it is an important component of graduate education in public administration and public policy. Attempts in the United States by faculty and students to fulfill this function have had mixed results – a factor that helps inspire this course. Students from both institutions experience interaction with a cross-cultural study team, public sector clients and media, and in so doing, acquire useful experience in practical, cultural and ethical dimensions of conducting applied work in public administration and public policy.

The practice of public administration and public policy advisory work requires appropriate personal and professional skills that are often influenced by local culture. Definitions, issues, priorities, policies and conditions affecting processes and results are not the same from one place to another. It can be helpful to consider how to adapt or modify “best practices” in one place before suggesting that they be adopted in another.

What questions are appropriate to ask during an interview? How should they be asked? How should findings and data be compared across cultures? What reporting methods help with client understanding? How to prepare for and respond to questions from the media? How to write an effective report? How to work effectively as part of a cross-cultural research team? Based on experience in the joint course, participants typically question some of what may have been taken for granted and reconsider how best to do group work, make presentations and write professional reports for clients.