

An Evaluation of the Impact and Effectiveness of the Knight International Press Fellowship Program

Summary

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The question was simple: Does the Knight International Press Fellowship Program have an impact in the countries in which it operates?

The answer, based on evidence from 11 countries in which the Knight Program had a significant presence in the 1994 to 1998 period, is unambiguous. The recipients of the training offered by the Knight Fellows gave evidence of impact by word, action and concrete example. There is evidence as well that the Fellows changed key organizations in those countries in ways that serve journalism practice there.

A journalist in Ukraine, for example, said a workshop on AIDS given by a Knight Fellow greatly changed her attitudes about the disease and her understanding of

**Starting with a simple question:
Did the program make a difference?**

what journalists should do to help inform others about those suffering from it.

The editor of the community section of an Ecuadorian metropolitan paper said a Knight Fellow changed the way he covered news—from a focus on official sources to a focus on news about the common people. “He taught us to work with the people,” the editor said.

In Moldova, a Knight Fellow was instrumental in creating a media training center that today offers programs for journalists, publishes a magazine and provides leadership in the small nation on press freedom issues.

These are a small sampling of the many reports of the impact of the Knight International Press Fellowship program from 531 individuals on two continents who were asked about the effectiveness of the program. Interviews were conducted in eight languages in settings as diverse as newsrooms, restaurants, bars, university classrooms and offices, media centers and research laboratories.

As diverse as the process was, it focused on only a part of the activities of the Knight International Press Fellowship Program. It covered the period from when the Program began in 1994 until the end of 1998, when 84 working journalists completed 89 different Knight Fellowships. The assignments given Knight Fellows ringed the globe, from the Pacific region of Russia to Chile, from the Pacific Island nations to South Africa and from Albania to the Baltic states. Knight Fellow activities were concentrated most heavily in Central and Eastern Europe, although the states of the former Soviet Union also have hosted large numbers of Knight Fellows. A third area of concentration of the Knight Fellow assignments

was Latin America and the Caribbean. The evaluation examined the work of the Knight Fellows in these three broad areas. The 11 countries studied were the Czech Republic, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Chile, Ecuador and Peru.

Procedures for the Evaluation

To obtain reports of impact from those with whom the Knight Fellow worked, two colleagues and I attempted to find as many of those who worked with the Knight Fellows in the 11 countries as possible and to conduct interviews with them.

We used two interview techniques. First, we asked those we contacted to complete a written interview, generally with one of us in close proximity. Next, we

The Fellow “taught us to work with the (common) people.”

asked most of those we contacted to answer follow-up questions. The first questionnaire contained clusters of items designed to measure the perceived impact of the interaction with the Knight Fellow. The interview included a variety of questions designed to obtain both discrete indications of impact and examples of that impact.

We interviewed at least 31 people in each of the 11 countries we visited. The smallest number of interviews completed was in Poland, where we successfully contacted and interviewed 31 persons who had worked with the Knight Fellows there. We completed 92 interviews in Ecuador.

The 531 completed interviews include 269 with individuals on original lists of possible contacts provided by the Knight Fellows themselves and 262 with individuals whom we identified in the field. In the end, we completed interviews with 44.6% of those whose names were on our original lists and with 61.4% of those persons whose names we ultimately had in our database.

We were seeking evidence of impact of the Knight International Press Fellowship program on the journalists and on others in the country with whom the Knight Fellows came into contact, the practice of journalism in the countries visited by the Knight Fellows, the media and media-related institutions in the countries visited by the Knight Fellows and the countries themselves.

Impact on Journalists

The evidence of impact on working journalists and those aspiring to be journalists was clear. The first question in the self-administered instrument asked how much impact, if any, the Knight Fellow(s) had on nine different areas that included attitudes, knowledge and behavior. The questions covered such things as impact on career goals and ambitions and impact on knowledge of tactics and strategies to be used on the job. The level of self-reported consequences of the Knight International Fellowship Program were dramatic. Only in the case of one of the areas did fewer than six in 10 of the Fellows report at least some impact.

The Knight Fellows changed career goals, imparted knowledge about the basics of journalism, imparted knowledge about the audiences of the media and helped those with whom they worked think in new ways about the role of journalism in democracy. The Fellows also helped the majority of those with whom they worked carry out their jobs, understand tactics relevant to those jobs and work with people.

Impact on Journalism

The persons we interviewed also gave clear examples of the impact of the Knight Fellow on themselves and assessments of the impact of the program on other journalists. The Knight Fellows taught a “fact-based” style of journalism--not one that was based on opinions--we were told very frequently. This was seen as a major change in all of the countries visited. The comment of the Ecuadorian journalist about the subject of news also was a common one. The Knight Fellows said news should be written for the general audience, not for elites and not for other journalists. Many found this to be a revolutionary idea, but many said it was one they adopted.

Half of those we interviewed said the types of stories written by journalists had changed as a result of the work of the Knight Fellows; seven in 10 said the quality of stories had changed. Only one in five of the respondents did not report evidence of impact of the work of the Knight Fellows on the journalistic product in the country.

Impact on Institutions

We found less concrete evidence that the Knight Fellow had direct, lasting impact on the media and media-related institutions in the countries. Three in 10 of those we interviewed said they did not know if

the Knight Fellows had had impact on the “economic stability of the media in this country,” and only two in 10 said that they had. Several of those we interviewed said they thought the Fellows had influenced journalism instruction at universities in the country, but others expressed caution, saying such change was likely to be slow, with many relapses into an older, more theoretical type of instruction with few links to the actual practice of journalism.

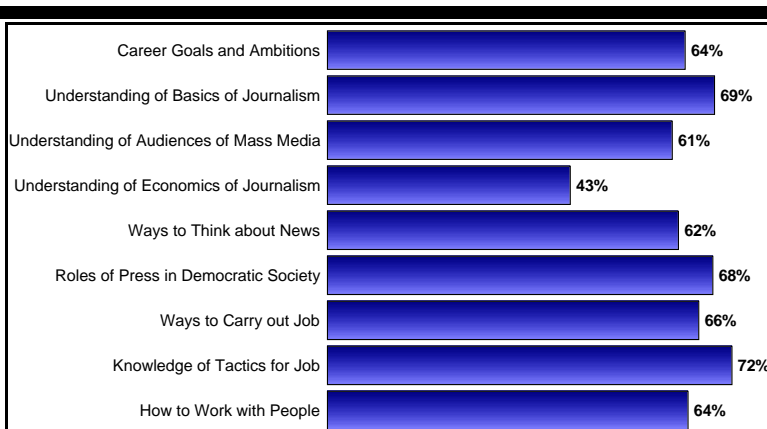
At the same time, we observed dramatic impact of the work of the Fellows on journalism training centers in many countries. In Moldova, a

Fellow was credited with having made the idea of such a media center a reality. The Moldovan center is now staffed by Moldovans, has an active program that serves the needs of journalists in the country and has even hosted a successful visit of another Knight Fellow. Fellows also had documentable impact on the programs offered by media centers in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania and made important contributions to the work of centers in Russia. A Fellow also laid the groundwork for an operating center in Ukraine. In Poland and Chile, we saw clearly how Fellows influenced the curricula of host universities. In the latter example, Fellows contributed to outreach training activities of the university that could be a model for journalism programs in the United States.

Impact on Countries

Did the Fellows have impact more globally on the countries in which they served? Many of those we interviewed were doubtful. We asked specifically if the work of the Knight Fellow(s) has had impact on “the functioning of democracy in this country.” Three in 10 said the answer was negative, and two in 10 said they did not know if there had been impact. Half, however, answered in the affirmative. Some of the things those who answered positively said suggest the impact could become even greater across time.

Sampled Impact of Knight Fellows



A television journalist in Moldova said the environment in his newsroom became more democratic as a result of the work of the Knight Fellow. “Reporters are trained now to express their opinions,” he said. “I listen to them and take that into consideration.” That was not the old way, he made clear, but it was at least a small step in the creation of democracy in his country.

Reactions to Programs and Fellows

We anticipated that some of those who came into contact with the Knight Fellows would find some of the things the Fellows taught to be somewhat irrelevant. There were some who reported difficulties resulting from the economy and from the political environment of host countries. Overall, however, most of those we interviewed did not see many constraints on the effectiveness of the Knight Fellows.

“Reporters are trained now to express their opinions.”

We also included items on the survey instrument designed to measure reactions to the Knight Fellows themselves. We asked if the Knight Fellow provided the respondent with new ways of thinking about things, helped solve the problems the individual felt were most relevant, worked with the respondent to come up with solutions to problems, and was open to suggestions from the person we interviewed. By overwhelming ratios, those we interviewed gave the Fellows good marks on sensitivity to respondents’ needs.

Amount of Impact Did Vary

In general, we found evidence that the Knight Fellows had relatively more impact on the learning of specific skills and on some basic attitudes about journalism, and relatively less impact on more fundamental attitudes, such as those about the role of journalism in a society, about the Knight Fellow’s country of origin, or about the country where the Fellow worked.

For the most part, the programs of the Fellows served people actually working as journalists or preparing for journalism careers. Four in 10 of those we interviewed reported they had some formal training in journalism. Many tended to be young, with one in five of those we interviewed being less than 25 years old, and three in 10 being from 25 to 34. Also, about four in 10 of those we interviewed were women.

We selected the 11 countries we visited because of their similarities and their differences. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia were part of the Warsaw Pact. During the Cold War, these countries were controlled by Soviet politics, but they retained a strong degree of national identity. These independent identities offered tremendous advantages after the fall of the communist system. In contrast, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine were incorporated into the Soviet state, and much was done to crush the national identities, particularly in Moldova and Ukraine. The three Latin American countries had none of these experiences with communism, yet each has struggled historically to develop strong democratic institutions.

We found that impact of the training—though high in all cases--varied among the countries. Hungary, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine and Ecuador were countries with generally high levels of impact. Impact was small, in comparison with the other countries, in the Czech Republic, Poland Slovakia. Chile was about average in terms of impact, and two countries, Russia and Peru showed a mixed picture of impact—greater on some of our measures and less on others.

We found two characteristics of the interaction of Fellows with those they worked with in the host countries to be important predictors of the level of impact. The first, particularly, is not surprising. The more time the

Fellow spent with those with whom she or he worked, the more likely there was to be impact. The more varied the types of interaction between the Fellow and the persons with whom she or he worked, the greater the reported levels of impact. In other words, it is better to spend a week with the training program than a day, but it also is better, regardless of amount of time spent, to meet socially with the “students” outside the session, go with them on assignments and talk one-on-one, than it is to do any one of these things by itself.

We also found that programs outside the Capital were more likely to be effective than those in the Capital, and that those individuals who participate voluntarily are more accepting of what is taught than those who are required to do so by their bosses.

Hungary, Romania, Moldova, Ukraine, and Ecuador were countries with generally high levels of impact.

One nonfinding is rather important. Once we eliminated the influence of the country and the influence of the characteristics of the person we interviewed, the characteristics of the Fellows made relatively little difference in determining impact.

Findings in Perspective

When we began the evaluation, we did not know what to expect. We did not know how many people we would be able to locate, how many of those we located would be willing to talk to us or what those we interviewed would tell us. We found that people were willing to go to great lengths to talk to us. For example, among those we interviewed in Ecuador was a journalism instructor and working journalist who traveled late in the evening from a community outside the Ecuadorian mountain city of Cuenca to meet with us, simply because he wanted to tell us how important the program had been to him. In Moldova, we interviewed two Russian-language journalists, who traveled—at some personal risk—to the capital city of Chisinau from the breakaway Republic of Transdniestra to tell us the same thing. Those traveling to complete the questionnaire rarely asked for compensation for the expenses of their travel, though it was always offered and sometimes accepted. They came because the Knight Fellow had meant something to them and because they wanted more help in the future.

In a very real sense, they communicated through their actions what they said in the interviews. The Knight International Press Fellowship Program meant a great deal to them. It changed their attitudes, gave them new knowledge, and changed their behaviors.



Courtyard of a metropolitan paper in Ecuador.