



A Report of the Second Semester 2007

By Ville-Veikko Pitkänen, District 1430

Rotary World Peace Scholar
University Of Queensland, Australia



Ville-Veikko Pitkänen
Rotary World Peace Scholar
University of Queensland, Australia
S4125268@student.uq.edu.au
Tel. +85512297162 (Cambodia)

Rotary Coordinator Mr Michael Donlan
Sponsor Counsellor Mr Markus Harald
Sponsor District Governor Mr Heikki Helevuo (D1430)
Host Councillor Mrs Catherine Bonifant
Host Counsellor Mr Peter Ellis
Host District Governor Mr Steve Kruger (D9600)

This report is an account of my experiences as a Rotary World Peace Fellow during the second semester at the University of Queensland, Australia.

First, I would like to express my thanks the Rotary Foundation for its continued support for the Rotary World Peace Scholarship Program. I also owe special thanks again to Michael Donlan for his answers to the countless questions he receives from increasing numbers of peace scholars every year. He must be a superman handling all our matters efficiently day by day.

I am also grateful to the Rotary Finland; the Rotary club of Leppävirta and to my Sponsor Counsellor Mr Markus Harald. My compliments also to the Rotary District 1430 and to its DG Mr Heikki Helevuo, as well as, to the former DG's Mr Seppo Sinkko and Mr Kaapo Pulkkinen. A special thanks needs to be directed also towards Mr Edvin Seppänen, a Rotarian who played important role in my first steps becoming a Rotary World Peace Fellow.

Finally, many thanks to individuals in Australia such as Mrs Judy Magub, Dr Richard Davetak, and my host counsellors Dr Peter Ellis and Mrs Catherine Bonifant, and to other Rotarians with whom I have been in contact during my stay in beautiful Brisbane.

Academic activities and progress during the second semester 2007

During the second term of the academic year 2007-2008, I studied the following courses: "*Gender in International Politics and Development*", "*Conflict Resolution*", "*Culture, Conflict and Reconciliation*" and "*Peace Building*". During the first semester I had studied in particular theories of international studies. It was now time to apply these theories into issues occurring in the world. I move now to explain these courses and evaluate their contribution to my thinking.

Gender in International Politics and Development taught by Dr Susan Chamberlain focused on gender relations in an international context. Gender in this course was understood as complex systems of individual and social relationships of power that create the identities and roles of men and women and determine access to their material, cultural, social and psychological resources.

The course explored gender issues, e.g., by looking at these issues in different cultures through movies. In addition, the students were given free hands to select a specific country of which gender issues they wanted to explore more in their written reports. I selected to concentrate on Cambodia's gender issues since I that was a country I was I was going to spend the next few months after the course.

Since the course's participants, men and women came from various cultures and from different stages of life the subject stimulated several fruitful discussions. One of the fundamental contentions in gender studies is the debate on whether or not the gender has affected systematic inequalities for women. This contention is open to challenge and was discussed in the class. It was fascinating to hear what women and men from Thailand, Zambia, Mexico or Australia, for example, thought about gender issues in their country and how they tried to find answers to the gender challenges in their countries.

Dr Chamberlain introduced us also the theories explaining the operations of gender in an international context, and took us to consider the evidence for gender inequality in our world. We looked also how gender as a central part of our understanding of how international systems are explained might challenge existing theories. This way of seeing things was definitely one of the most useful assets I learned in this course. During the course I was able to develop a critical understanding of how gender bias is or is not present in academic approaches to international politics and development. Unfortunately, as the participants of the course found out many times, adding gender considerations in our thinking is not often transparent in international system. Adding gender considerations more frequently to our thinking of international matter would absolutely make our thinking more accurate and useful.

The course ***Conflict Resolution*** instructed by Dr Morgan Brigg introduced the students to the one of the most dynamic and rapidly evolving contemporary academic fields – *studies of conflict resolution*. The course provided students with knowledge of important theoretical underpinnings, processes, and skills vital in the conflict resolution field. These topics were particularly interesting for me since I have worked as a peacekeeper and in that work engaged several times in relevant activities to this course. Studying finally the theories of this field, after used my skills in real environment gave definitely much to me.

During the course we developed our understanding of selected conflict resolution processes including, e.g., third party mediation and facilitation. In addition, we practiced some of the key skills and qualities of negotiator in a variety of conflict scenarios. During the course, students conducted experiential training exercises in a set-up conflict where every participant had a role to play. This was without doubt an effective learning exercise to all of us; it gave us a chance to learn a great deal about different 'players' and their roles within a conflict. It was interesting to learn how the needed qualities of negotiators may change in different processes and in different roles in conflict resolution. Dr Brigg succeeded well in providing students a good introduction of basic conflict resolution skills to be applied in, not just in participants professional lives, but also in their personal lives.

One of the most important things I learned in this course came with the realization of how vast the conflict resolution field is. It was equally fascinating to learn how important role culture plays in conflict resolution. This course was happened also in multicultural settings. Thus, it was interesting to hear what students from variety of backgrounds had to say regarding conflict resolution. I learned that the conflict resolution skills which may work in Finland would not be so easily applied in India or some other culture where conflict resolution culture is build in wholly different foundations. During this course I also wrote one of the most exciting papers

I have written in Australia. In this particular paper I dealt with the problem of negotiating with terrorists – Should one negotiate with terrorists? Is it possible? If yes, in what circumstances?

One of the reasons I ended up selecting to study the course - **Culture, Conflict and Reconciliation** – was the course's dynamic instructor *Dr Martin Weber*. I had taken Dr Weber's course in the first semester and knew that his course, which explored the cultural aspects of conflict and reconciliation, would be a mind-blowing experience. This was not flawed thinking. – the course ended up to be the most fascinating course so far during my studies as a peace fellow.

Dr Weber's course explored social and political challenges and dilemmas occurring in the context of inter-cultural encounters. A key object of the course was to learn about how to systematically question routine assumptions we make in the context of dealing with 'difference', and how such assumptions are implicated in attempts to resolve clashes and conflicts. Dr Weber brought in fascinating examples of inter-cultural encounters from historical and contemporary world. He also gave us examples of different ways in which people have tried to make sense of different cultures when encountering them.

The paper I prepared for this course examined indigenous peoples: how, from my view, we see indigenous people instrumentally valuable. This holds back our way to deal with indigenous issues more effectively.

The only course which had some shortcomings during the semester-two was the course **Peacebuilding**. This of course was more due bad luck than incompetence of the course designers. The initial instructor of the course was constrained to leave the course at its early stage and the course had to be run by backup staff. This had some consequential effects on the course. However, also this course taught important things to me. Most importantly, I got to practice writing funding proposals, a crucial skill to people working in the field of international development. During this course I was able to examine deeper the issue of human trafficking.

Other Relevant Activities

The most remarkable involvement with Rotarians during the second semester was without a doubt the World Peace Symposium held last June in Salt Lake City. The symposium was an excellent opportunity for peace scholars to meet each others and to discuss about ideas. It was appealing to meet other scholars studying at other centers, as well as, to meet alumni fellows and to see what kind of career paths they had chosen. To have so many ex-peace fellows already in important positions around the world is a huge inspiration for all the current peace fellows.

During the tour in the US, I had also an opportunity to attend, from among over 2,000 applicants, to the Social Change Workshop at the University of Virginia in June 23-29. This workshop was organized by Institute for Humane Studies. The one-week intensive meeting brought together graduate, post-graduate- and PHG-students from all over the world to discuss of topics related to social change and economics. It offered an exciting faculty line-up including the Nobel Laureate, economist James Buchanan, philosophers David Schmidtz and Gerald Gaus, and evolutionary psychologist Robert Kurzban. The work-shop full of talented people all over the world worked also as a brilliant opportunity to promote our peace program. Some of the

students had heard about it, and others who had not heard about it felt great curiosity towards it. I am grateful to the Rotary Foundation for making this conference possible by allocating me some conference funding to execute this trip to Charlottesville, Virginia.

Other significant event was the October's Paul Harris Seminar at the University of Queensland. There, I was delighted to meet Rotarians who I was already familiar with, as well as, other Rotarians from Australia who had come to see what kind of program the University of Queensland is running in Brisbane. I must say I felt impressed seeing all the devoted Rotarians coming to Brisbane from many parts of Australia. These people are truly capable of cultivating the message of this scholarship within other Rotarians in Australia. The Paul Harris seminar 2007 was a great example of the elaborateness of the Fellows from the class 4. The day was culminated in a sparkling BBQ-dinner brought together by my host club - *Rotary Club of Brisbane Planetarium*. Thanks again for Judy Magub and other members of the club for all the work they had done for us.

During the second term, I also continued to enjoy of visits to my host club and of visits to other Rotarians. These activities gave nice change to the hectic semester.

Impressions of the program

Academically, the School of Political Science and International Studies at the University of Queensland proved again to be a world-class place of learning. As mentioned, during the second semester of studies our courses were more practically oriented and we got chances to concentrate more into specific topics we felt close to. The first semester had prepared us by teaching us the theory base of international studies and we were now more prepared to apply these theories into actual issues occurring in the world.

I feel that the designers of the program have done great work. The program truly works and I sense many others agree with me. The course "Peace Building" was a small exception, but the same unfortunate event could have had happened to any given course.

Salt Lake City's Symposium was again an amazing manifestation of the Rotary's competence to bring people together. It was fantastic to meet and exchange ideas with peace scholars from other Rotary centers, as well as, with Rotarians all over the world. The symposium was truthfully an effort that will strengthen the network among the Peace fellows and Rotarians.

Locally, in Australia one important milestone for us was that my dear classmate, Vikas Gora, an Indian peace scholar, got finally his wife, Harini, to Brisbane. Harini had a pleasant welcoming party full of feeling at one of the beautiful parks of Brisbane. I feel, with my wife Liisa, a great pleasure that the couple is reunited again. It can be so hard to live apart from ones' beloved ones.

Other important high points for my family were all the guests visiting us from Finland. With them, we did eye-opening diving trips to Cairns and Port Douglas, a city tour to Sydney and a road trip to the capital Canberra. I felt proud to be able to show my relatives some nice spots of Australia.

Our son, Luukas, who just turned 2-years, has grown up a lot. He has made some Aussie-friends and learned quite a bit about the linguistic secrets of Australia. It has been so wonderful to see how he has enjoyed of living in Brisbane. The city is a perfect place for families with its spacious green parks and all the playgrounds in them. On the other hand, I know how much his grandparents and relatives in Finland miss him already. One year, especially between the years one and two is developmentally a long time in child's life. From that point of view, I have started to wait our return to Finland.

During the time of my studies, I have got quite a many inquiries from people interested of the World Peace Scholarship Program. I have advised potential applicants form surprisingly many countries, among others from Mexico, Macedonia, the US, and in particular from Finland. It has been wonderful to see how people are increasingly interested of the program. The awareness of the scholarship is rising.

A great deal of the second semester flied also by searching a place for the "Applied Field Experience" to be conducted during the summer between the second and third semesters. The AFE is a course that allows students to develop their practical skills in a relevant environment. It is like a practical training. I decided to conduct my AFE in Cambodia with a non-governmental organization 'Children of Cambodia', operating in the capital Phnom Penh. The NGO works within the issues of human trafficking and orphans. I feel certain that Cambodia will be a fascinating, but also a challenging place for my family. Somehow I have a feeling that the 3-month trip to this country will again memorize us to appreciate all the fine things we take for granted in countries as my home country Finland. I will report of the Cambodia's experience in my next Rotary report.

The coming semester in Brisbane will certainly be an interesting one for many reasons. First of all, after Cambodia, my family will move back to Brisbane, which itself will be an exciting event. Secondly, it will be exciting to meet all the new fellows who have started their studies at the University of Queensland. Thirdly, the semester is going to be interesting since I will spend it by preparing my masters thesis, which I have selected to conduct on Cambodia's trafficking in human beings for sexual purposes. I am going to examine this issue while staying in Cambodia. The semester will include also my Class' Paul Harris seminar, which will need some essential preparation. The last Paul Harris seminar set a high standard for us, so we need to do our best. Lastly, between all the mentioned activities, the last semester will be a semester of future considerations – Where will be our home after the scholarship ends?

I close this report with a picture of my son Luukas in Australia. Thank You again of this wonderful opportunity. Have a marvelous year 2008!

With Respect,

Ville-Veikko Pitkänen
Rotary World Peace Scholar (D1430)
University of Queensland, Australia

