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For a political science professor with an interest in European politics, nothing could be more exciting than traveling to Germany right in the middle of the Eurozone crisis. That’s exactly what Marcella Myers did when she received a Fulbright Scholarship to attend a German studies seminar in June 2012.

Myers and an interdisciplinary group of American scholars traveled to Berlin for a 10-day German studies seminar organized by the Fulbright Institute of International Education. Most of their time was spent in Berlin, discussing the viability of the European Union, the shifting nature of European identity, and some of the monetary issues facing the European Union. Myers and her colleagues also visited Brussels, Belgium, to speak with politicians, representatives, academics and reporters on the issues facing European countries.

Myers first heard about the German studies seminar through her professor at Western Michigan University, who had participated in the summer seminar in 2011. In addition to semester- or year-long programs for students, Fulbright Program runs short-term summer seminars for professors, one of which caught Myers’ eye in the catalog. She contacted her professor, who advised her on the application process.

One stipulation of the seminar was that the participants needed to provide evidence of dissemination. Myers taught a class in comparative politics in fall 2012 which allowed her to incorporate much of what she learned, she says, “and the Fulbright group put together a proposal for the German Studies Review (published by the German Studies Association). Each of us wrote a short essay about the European Union crisis in Germany, which served as evidence of dissemination.”

As higher education continues to excise German language and literature programs, Fulbright’s German seminars aim to keep an interest in Germany alive among academics. Given the recent prominence of Germany and the rest of Europe in the news, “for better or worse, it was great timing to be there, in the middle of the financial crisis and as they negotiated the European Stability Mechanism (ESM),” says Myers. “We spent a lot more time discussing monetary issues and the future of the European Union than we did talking about European identity.”

For the last four days of the trip, the Fulbright scholars spent their time in Brussels, meeting representatives from EU countries, states and interest groups. “We talked a lot about how European identity developed, and how it’s possible for Europeans to create a common identity,” says Myers. “The sense we got from the politicians, academics and reporters we talked to was that no matter how bad the crisis was, the European Union was here to stay,” she says. In general, the European Union is moving towards further integration, although there are some problems along the way.

One question on academics’ minds is whether or not Europeans identify as Europeans or as citizens of their respective countries: “What’s been happening in the last 10 years or so is that people are identifying less with their national governments and more with their regional governments—so in a way it compounds the identity problem,” she says. How do you get people to think of themselves as Europeans rather than Berliners or Dubliners?

“It was very eye-opening to sit there and talk with people who are trying to navigate identity, policy and crises, and to get their perspective,” says Myers. For example, the group asked a representative from Ireland why Ireland...
hadn’t yet signed the Schengen Agreement, which allows for the free movement of people across borders within member states. He said, “We would love to, but that would cause us a problem with the United Kingdom [which has not yet signed] so we probably are never going to.” It makes you think about the complexities of the European Union, and changes how you view the EU a bit.

Myers’ time in Germany has also influenced her other research projects, one of which is a paper for the Midwest Political Science Association that examines the effects of privatization of the National Health Service in the United Kingdom. “In some ways it’s an extension of the discussion about austerity measures,” she says. “When people start talking about austerity measures, they often start looking for private solutions to public problems, and there’s high pressure to contract out government services.” What happens when a country runs long-term private contracts like those of the National Health Service, Myers says, is that the money usually ends up in private hands, thus contributing to income inequality.

Public policy, the system of environmental, housing, educational, welfare and healthcare policies that provide for the public good, has interested Myers since her graduate studies at Western Michigan University. “I’m very interested in issues of inequality, particularly in terms of economics, wage inequality, and income inequality. I think if we as scholars understand those things better, then hopefully we can educate people to understand them,” she says. “It’s very easy as an academic to write to your field, but if you can write in a way that non-specialists understand what you’re talking about and educate students to understand the real consequences of policy choices, then you can really make a change.

The conference was sponsored by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists’ Office of Archives, Statistics & Research and organized with the help of Andrews University’s Office of Research & Creative Scholarship. The General Conference has commissioned several research projects in the past, but this conference marked the first GC-sponsored partnership with Adventist researchers around the world. Many of the projects presented focused on describing the behavior of Adventist youth populations, global church communities, or pastoral families. These projects can provide valuable data for the General Conference, and can help them institute new policies or modify existing ones to promote the wellbeing of their members.

The General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists funded many of the researchers who presented, a “validation that what we’re doing is important,” says David Sedlacek, professor of family ministry and discipleship and director of masters’ programs in the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. Sedlacek presented the preliminary results of his own study, titled “Role Demands, Family Stressors, and Strategies for the Alleviation of Stressors in Pastors’ Families.” His research has immediate applications to how the church cares for its pastors—his study reported a high rate of depression, anxiety, addictive practices, loneliness and isolation in Seventh-day Adventist pastors and their families. With new interest in Adventist researchers’ work, trends like those Sedlacek has observed can be counteracted. “Our research provides a systematic way to make evidence-based changes, and to create best practices for the church,” says Sedlacek.

Alina Baltazar, director of the Center for Substance Abuse Education and Master of Social Work program director, also presented the preliminary results of her research, which investigates the reasons for participating—or not participating—in typical risk behaviors. [See “The Adventist Advantage: The Health Risk Study and Adventist Influence” on page 3.]

Conference attendees reported being inspired by the chance to connect with other Adventist colleagues and discover a network of Adventist researchers, and were “happy to know that their research is becoming a basis for church policy and decision-making,” says Galina Stele, research and program evaluation assistant in the Office of Archives, Statistics & Research.

A second conference has been planned for November 2013, to be held at the General Conference Headquarters in Silver Spring, Md. Its focus is “Discipling, Retaining & Reclaiming: Summit on Nurture and Retention,” and will include Adventist scholars, church leaders, and representatives from all 13 world divisions of the church.