Preparing international scholarship students for graduate education:

The case of the Open Society Foundations' Pre-Academic Summer Program

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Biographies

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Abstract

To support higher education, global philanthropies provide diverse funding to organizations, individuals, and networks. This case study focuses on a unique model in philanthropy in education: the Open Society Foundations' Pre-Academic Summer Program or "OSF Summer School." To prepare civil society leaders and activists for graduate level study, this month-long intensive program aims to mirror the academic environment and expectations of the grantees' host universities. Through this case study, findings show that the OSF Summer School teaches students academic skills and provides valuable lessons in interpreting academic culture. By funding and administering this initiative, OSF extends its commitment to educational access by providing programming designed for non-traditional profiles. This case study aims to inform other global foundations and higher education institutions working to prepare scholarship grantees, including individuals from marginalized communities, for international graduate education.

Introduction

Providing funding for higher education capacity development and student scholarships are key activities of philanthropic organizations (Martel & Talha-Jebril, 2021). Funders provide grants to universities worldwide for capacity building and infrastructure, to researchers for new technology development, to university partnerships for collaborations and knowledge transfer, and to students to cover or defray the cost of tuition (Jaumont, 2016). Among these various strategies, private foundations are also providing international scholarships for individuals to access and enroll in universities globally. These programs often are designed for individuals who would not likely attend universities outside their home countries due to the cost, barriers to information, or inadequate preparatory education. Based in a social justice or human rights approach, many of these foundation-led scholarships seek to select bright individuals from marginalized communities and often provide full tuition and fee support to reduce financial barriers for these students.

However, scholarship grantees who are able to acquire adequate funding for their education abroad may still encounter other challenges. To excel in an overseas academic context, students may need additional academic skills, language skills, books and supplies, and an internet connection—among other knowledge, skills, and resources—to excel in their new context. This is especially true for low-income, refugee, or other marginalized students (Dassin, 2009). One recent example is the situation for Syrian refugees seeking higher education in Lebanon; despite the number of scholarship programs available, Syrian students still face barriers in acquiring books and materials, foreign language skills, and lack academic and career counseling (El-

Ghali, Berjaoui, & DeKnight, 2017). Moreover, for some, pursuing a graduate degree means they have been out of academia for a considerable period of time and much has changed in academic culture and technology during their years away from academia.

In recognition of these challenges, many universities provide orientation sessions for international students and other pre-academic programming. In the United States, research on this topic is often found among publications related to support for international students—especially students from China—focusing on international student orientation (Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood, 2013), international student services (Ho, 2017), or in ways for faculty to engage international students throughout their degrees (Heng, 2017). However, there are few empirical studies on private philanthropic organizations who provide academic preparation in the form of a foundation-led summer academic program, especially for individuals who are going to receive a master's degree abroad.

This case study focuses on the Open Society Foundations' Pre-Academic Summer Program, or the "OSF Summer School," as an example of how a global foundation approached graduate level training specific to their scholarship population's background and experiences. Moreover, the OSF Summer School is not a case of another orientation program but is intended to convey a model of academic programming designed to augment and complement programming offered at students' host universities. This article focuses on the motivations for establishing the program, the program's guiding values, main program components, and identified challenges and opportunities. The goals of this case study are (1) to examine an educational program designed and administered by a global foundation as an effort to improve their grantees'

preparedness for and experiences while on an international scholarship program, and (2) to share this model with other foundations who sponsor scholarships, with universities who host these students, and for the participants themselves.

Literature Review

International scholarships are longstanding efforts by both public and private entities to provide education and seek larger goals for students, hosting institutions, and home countries and communities. Scholarships for students in low-income countries are prevalent, increasing in size and scope over time (Martel & Talha-Jebril, 2021). Campbell and Neff (2020) found that there are six main rationales for providing scholarships for students in the Global South, including skills development and human capital import, bilateral diplomacy, and international development and social change efforts in the home countries.

International foundations have funded thousands of scholarships over time, often targeting issues such as social justice, access for marginalized youth, higher education institutional development, and social movements (Aldersey, et al., 2019; Cosentino, et al., 2019; Silova, 2008). The Ford Foundation's International Fellowship Program (IFP) funded more than 4,300 students from 22 countries to study at a university of their choice, with the goal of providing access and promoting social change (Ford Foundation, 2021). A study on the Mastercard Scholars Program (Cosentino, et al., 2019) shows that "scholarships increase timely access to higher education, to higher levels of study (such as bachelor's degree programs instead of certificate programs), and to studies abroad" and that large scholarship programs are "an effective way to

improve access to university studies among vulnerable, disadvantaged, and underserved youth" (p. 7). While this case study focuses on international student scholarships, there is also considerable U.S. domestic funding for scholarships of similar student profiles and goals.

As international foundations are providing scholarships, there is a considerable gap in how these international students are prepared for, welcomed into, and supported in higher education in western institutions (Baxter, 2019). Scholarship programs have been aware of this gap, as the Ford Foundation "recognized early on the critical importance of preparatory or pre-academic training as a way to enhance the academic readiness of Fellows who had the capacity but not necessarily the prior training to succeed in highly competitive post-graduate programs" (Dassin, 2012, p. 138). Training held by the IFP program was held in each students' country or in regional hubs, with "tailored individual and small group courses in areas including foreign language instruction, academic writing in the Fellows' own language, research methods, basic statistics, and computer skills for academic settings" (p. 138). Notably, this training differed by country and was considered primarily as a preparatory program to take up the scholarship opportunity.

This training is not just helpful but sometimes needed for international students to complete their degrees. Mamiseishvili (2012) showed that international students were less likely to excel in western academic environments if they had low English skills and if they faced barriers to social integration; conversely, they continued their studies when they followed degree plans, had high grade points, and were integrated into the university academic system. Akanwa (2015) notes that international students still face

barriers to engagement in academics and campus activities, questioning the perceived value of western higher education. In addition, scholarship students may face additional challenges of being caught between funders' expectations, family members' wishes, and their own plans for the future (Baxter, 2019).

Universities which host international scholarship students are often aware of this gap and aim to provide additional information via orientations, programming, and student support throughout the academic year (Small, Reyes, & de Vette, 2014). The type of programming varies by institution, yet often includes language learning, cultural transitions, introduction and ties to campus and community, and building social connections among international students and between domestic and international students. One such program in the U.S. showed that participants enhanced their academic skills, use of university resources, and academic and social engagement, among other things; yet they still faced barriers to acculturation and motivation (Kovtun, 2011). Small, Reyes, and de Vette (2014) noted that building relationships among and with international scholarships students is paramount in these orientation programs, aiming to connect students and staff "with whom IFP Fellows (and eventually other international students) could develop close, transparent, and trusting relationships during their period of study" (p. 82). These orientations and other support programming are often essential to both prepare students for their studies and to continue to provide support throughout their scholarship period.

While there are many examples of orientations and other support for international students at host university campuses, there are still gaps in the literature. One area that is not well-examined in this space is the issue of how these programs may be

developed differently for international students from underrepresented countries or for those who have been out of academic settings for a considerable amount of time. In addition, there is little information about how these programs may be an educational experience unto themselves, allowing for connections among the participants, international faculty, and OSF staff and consultants. As Ridge (2019) noted, philanthropic organizations rarely engage with academia, yet this case is an example of how one foundation is providing an academic experience for their scholarship grantees directly.

Context: The Open Society Foundations' Scholarship Programs

Founded by George Soros, the Open Society Foundations (OSF) are a network of national and regional foundations that work to build vibrant and tolerant societies whose governments are accountable to their citizens. To achieve this mission, the foundations seek to shape public policies that assure greater fairness in political, legal, and economic systems and safeguard fundamental rights (OSF, 2021). To promote open societies, OSF engages two principal strategies. One is to develop institutions that align with the foundation's goals. The other is to provide opportunities for individuals to enhance their knowledge, awareness, skills, and values to better promote their commitments to open societies and their capacity to contribute to advancing positive social change.

Scholarships have played a crucial role in advancing the second strategy (Neier, as cited in Brogden, 2018). Indeed, Soros' philanthropy began in 1979 with scholarships for Black university students under Apartheid in South Africa and later for Eastern

European dissidents to attend universities in the West. Since then, the Open Society

Scholarship programs has awarded over 20,000 scholarships in the social sciences and

humanities to students from around the world who come from closed or closing

societies (OSF, 2021). According to an internal document (OSF, 2019c), the

Scholarship programs' strategy fits within the overall mission of OSF by

> tak[ing] on the challenge of direct assistance to current and future change
>
> leaders in closed or closing societies, helping them explore the knowledge,
>
> ideas, and capabilities essential to building a healthy civil society. Scholarships
>
> staff design and implement programs that help selected individuals earn
>
> internationally recognized credentials and absorb instructive experiences
>
> generated by cross-cultural immersion, propelling these individuals towards
>
> productive participation in positive social change. (p. 2)

Notably, funding master's degrees has been an "integral part" of the scholarships

strategy at OSF (Brogden, 2018, p. 139). Likewise, these scholarships aim to reach

different goals than those typically sought by government-funded scholarships, such as

diplomacy, soft power, or skills development in line with international development plans

(Campbell & Neff, 2020).

The Scholarship Programs unit at OSF supports outstanding students from a

range of backgrounds to pursue their studies in alternative academic and cultural

environments (OSF, 2019b). Individuals selected for the award have demonstrated

leadership potential in the field of specialization and a proven commitment to open

society values. Scholars and alumni are also provided with professional networking

opportunities and platforms to engage on socially relevant topics of mutual interest,

cultivating a community of leaders and practitioners across local, regional, and cross-regional levels (OSF, 2019b). Scholarship Programs recruitment, application, and selection processes are designed to increase access for marginalized and non-traditional profiles.

As noted in the CSLA 2020 Application Guidelines (OSF, 2019a), students are selected for the scholarship based on the following criteria:

Competition for the Civil Society Leadership Awards is open and merit-based. Selection is based on an applicant's fit with the program's objectives as well the graduate admissions criteria of the participating universities. Academic excellence, professional aptitude, leadership potential in the field of specialization, proven commitment to open society values, and appropriate language proficiency are all important factors in evaluation. All eligible applicants will be reviewed by an international selection committee. The proposed field of study should be logical for the goals expressed in the essays, and the application itself should be organized and complete. Compelling candidates will be interviewed by a selection committee comprised of university representatives, CSLA staff, and partner organization representatives. (p. 3)

OSF Scholarship Programs have undergone shifts in geography and programming over the years, and most recently in 2014, significant programmatic restructuring resulted in a pivot away from focusing on the former Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, towards an emphasis on select countries in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. The shift in geography also included restructuring programs to eliminate a variety of smaller boutique programs with field-specific or geographic focuses to larger umbrella

programs. Chief among these was the Civil Society Leadership Awards (CSLA). The Disability Rights Scholarship Program and the Palestinian Rule of Law Program were the two boutique programs that remained.

CSLA provides fully funded graduate level scholarships in the social sciences and humanities for civil society activists and leaders from 17 select countries in Africa, Eurasia, the Middle East, and Asia, "where civil society is challenged by a deficit of democratic practice in local governance and social development" (OSF, 2016, p. 1). The program supports "individuals who clearly demonstrate academic and professional excellence and a deep commitment to leading positive social change in their communities" (OSF, 2016, p. 1) by supporting students from select countries to develop and improve their ideas and visions for leading change. In this paper, we refer to these grantees as having 'non-traditional profiles.' By this we mean that these profiles are often uncommon in western higher education, as they are from underrepresented countries, have likely had a gap from academia to pursue civil society activities, and may be members of marginalized communities in their home countries. We define western higher education as tertiary-level education that has a student-centered approach, is open to difference of opinion, and works towards benefitting society.[1]

Ideal candidates are those with, as OSF Scholarships Director Martha Loerke (2018) wrote, "unusual personal trajectories as well as those with more traditional resumes, seeking a mix of professionals, activists, and authentic local voices" (p. 198). Some of the grantees were mid-career, having a longstanding experience in civil

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[1] Many of the western education values and practices sought by OSF are embodied in the university that George Soros helped to found, the Central European University (CEU), which aims to teach and conduct research towards "the pursuit of truth wherever it leads, respect for the diversity of cultures and peoples, and commitment to resolve differences through debate not denial" (CEU, 2021, para. 5).

society. The scholarship includes "enhancements" that are designed to provide scholars with pre and post-scholarship support, and facilitate networking and collaboration within the OSF network and with alumni across participating regions. In addition to the Summer School discussed in this case study, enhancements include conferences and professional development opportunities during the program, funding for internships, and opportunities for alumni such as conferences and activities (Loerke, 2018). Enhancements represent 14% of the scholarship grantmaking budget (Brogden, 2018).

Methodology

Research questions

- How does a private global foundation prepare non-traditional international scholarship grantees for graduate level studies?
- What specific educational components have been deemed as most helpful to these grantees to prepare for graduate education abroad?

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework that undergirds this case study is the notion of education as a human right and that systems need to be in place to support marginalized students so that they succeed. A rights-based approach argues for adequate availability of education, equal access to education in both legislation and implementation, non-discriminatory school-based policies, and inclusive pedagogies (Tomasevski, 2004). As McCowan (2012) argues, this right to higher education should not be embargoed for the elite, especially when considering the benefits higher education affords for one's career and position within society.

Specifically, this framework is not applied only to extending opportunities to higher education to students in the scholarship countries. It also is about preparing those scholarships students for a new overseas academic environment, imbued with different values and understanding of knowledge, critical thought, and self-guided learning common in western higher education. The goal is to make the educational experience and academic achievement more accessible.

As Campbell and Mawer (2019) wrote, in a rights-based approach, "scholarship programmes provide additional access to higher education, often for those with extremely limited opportunity to pursue this right without financial support" (p. 173). In addition, in the Sustainable Development Goals, increased access to international higher education was advocated in Target 4.b which calls to "substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small island developing States and African countries." Using this lens of scholarships as a tool to remove physical, cultural, language, and information barriers to higher education, this case examines how the Summer School program complements the existing OSF scholarship to widen opportunities and access for select individuals from closed or closing societies; the program illustrates how it mitigates some of the barriers to learning that scholarship recipients may have faced due to under-resourced educational institutions and infrastructure in their home country (OSF, 2019c).

Method of case study

This paper uses a case study method to deeply understand how the OSF summer program is designed and is experienced by participants. Specifically, we draw

upon the *processual approach* developed by Bartlett and Vavrus (2016) which highlights how processes, people, and events are interconnected and influence how a case unfolds over time.

The case was constructed with data from two sources: internal documentation and Summer School participant interviews. First, we reviewed internal OSF documents produced in relation to the 2019 Summer School; during the 2019 program, there were two schools, one in Tbilisi, Georgia and one in Madaba, Jordan. Most of these documents were not created afresh for the 2019 program; they have been edited over time, reflecting the practice in 2019 and earlier Summer Schools. These included personal notes and files from each of us, as both the Summer School Program Officer who has developed and managed the program for over a decade (Rasjit), and a longstanding consultant for the program (Anne). From this group, seven were identified as being central to understanding the case and five are cited in this paper.

In addition, one of us (Anne) conducted semi-structured interviews in 2019 with 12 participants from the 2017 Summer Schools. The goal of these interviews—two years after their Summer School experience—was to gain a better understanding of their experiences with and engagement in the program. Interviewing the 2017 cohort was intentional, so the participants could consider how their participation contributed to their scholarship period, and in some cases, the next step after graduation. These alumni participated in the 2017 Summer School program in three different sites (see Table 1 for additional information). It is worth noting that during the interview period, residency shifted for several interviewees due to program completion and graduation, new employment, and visiting sick relatives. Therefore, an individual's location of

residence in Table 1 is at the time of the interview, not necessarily representative of their residency.

Table 1

Interviewees

Interviewee Number	Home country	Sex	Summer School Location	Residence at time of interview
1	Ethiopia	Male	Georgia	Germany
2	Palestine	Female	United States	Palestine
3	Myanmar / Burma	Female	United States	United States
4	Belarus	Female	Georgia	Poland
5	South Sudan	Male	Georgia	Uganda
6	Myanmar / Burma	Male	Georgia	Ireland
7	Azerbaijan	Male	Georgia	Azerbaijan
8	Ethiopia	Female	Georgia	Kenya
9	Ethiopia	Female	Georgia	United Kingdom
10	Belarus	Female	Georgia	France
11	Ethiopia	Female	Georgia	Germany
12	Democratic Republic of Congo	Male	Georgia	Democratic Republic of Congo

Note: In the home country column, we use the term for the student's country that interviewees used in their interview. The terms Burma and Myanmar were used interchangeably.

In the interviews, interviewees were asked about their experiences at the Summer School program, how the program had prepared them for their master's level studies, and how they perceived their own and their peers' experiences during the program. They were also asked about the relationships formed during the program and how they contributed to learning, both during and following the program. Interviews lasted 40-90 minutes and all were conducted via teleconferencing software. Extensive memos (two to three pages each) were created after each interview and were summarized in a 10-page comprehensive memo. In the analysis of this paper, the documents and interview memos were considered as relevant material to the findings. Quotes from the interviewees are included when they are particularly insightful to the larger theme.

Methodological limitations

This study has several methodological limitations. First, our research team has deep familiarity with OSF and the Summer School, given our long-standing relationship with the program. This familiarity allows us what Unluer (2012) calls an *insider researcher role*, with the possibility of introducing bias and being too close to the case to fully explore the boundaries of it. However, Unluer also notes that there is also a positive side, as we have greater insight than a researcher who has a one-hour interview with program staff. To mitigate our research bias, we included 12 interviews with participants across three different summer programs. The interviews were conducted by one of us (Anne) who did not have a previous or current relationship with the interviewees. These interviews allowed a broader perspective on the Summer

School than just one specific session, and beyond the internal OSF documents reviewed for this review.

In addition, we recognize the limitations of a case study as a method, especially in terms of representing other scholarships or other OSF programs. However, the aim of this case study is not to provide a typical example of an international student orientation or an educational program sponsored by global foundations. Instead, the case study provides a rich and holistic account of a unique model. As Stake (2006) has noted, a case study can share enough description so that the readers can learn vicariously from an encounter with the case.

The Case: OSF's Pre-Academic Summer School

The OSF Pre-Academic Summer Program or "Summer School" was launched in 2003 and has been held on various academic campuses in Issyk-kul, Kyrgyzstan; Istanbul, Turkey; Chiang Mai, Thailand; Syracuse, New York, USA; Tbilisi, Georgia; and Madaba, Jordan. Each year there are between one and three programs in multiple locations. In 2019, the majority of participants were CSLA grantees bound for master's degrees, although scholars from other OSF scholarship programs (i.e., the Disability Rights Scholarship Program and the Palestinian Rule of Law program) also participated. Potential scholarship holders are informed of the Summer School in the application materials and during the interviews, in addition to receiving information once they become finalists; this information notes that the Summer School's primary role is pre-scholarship academic preparation. Scholarship holders are strongly encouraged to

participate in the program as part of the scholarship package, but attendance is not required to receive the award.

In a typical Summer School, the number of participants ranges from 50 to 120 student participants and 15 to 25 staff, including OSF staff, international instructors, and local program assistants. The host university and a local educational organization or event organizer are contracted to provide logistical support. OSF covers all costs related to grantee participation in the Summer School program, including visa support, travel, accommodation, meals, and a stipend.

Program goals and key components

The program's principal goal is to prepare OSF scholarship grantees for their academic studies in line with the expectations of the scholarship partner universities. As stated in the 2019 OSF Scholar Welcome Packet, the Summer School was created to "to equip participants with the skills necessary to succeed in graduate-level academic programs in Europe, North America and select destinations in Asia" (p. 3). While the Summer School is intended to be preparatory, participants noted that it is "a learning opportunity unto itself" and that it was very helpful to those who had been out of academia for several years. Of the twelve interviewees, seven noted that due to professional or activism work, they had been out of an academic environment for a long time (up to 10 years in one case), so the Summer School was helpful to be immersed in "the culture of academia" again.

The month-long program focuses on scholarly writing, research, critical thinking, and other academic skills through intensive courses. All participants take an academic writing class and an interdisciplinary social science class, with a principal assignment of

a 2500-word research paper. Coursework included reading texts for content, identifying quality sources and citing texts, participating in class discussions, and presenting scholarly work. Students headed to Master of Laws programs (LL.M. degrees) focused on legal writing and field-specific curricula. Students headed to programs in France had coursework in French. In addition to these core academic components, the Summer School includes additional academic and extracurricular programing, such as a debate course, skills workshops (e.g., time management, research skills, critical reading), and mandatory student-instructor consultations. Other programming, such as cultural events and organized tours, are offered to the participants, encouraging social connection and learning about the host community.

The social science course topics vary by year and have included topics such as development studies, globalization and education, gender theory, law and human rights, and global social movements. The rationale of an interdisciplinary course is to allow participants to study theories and scholars related to their own field, while also exploring different disciplinary lenses and theories. One interviewee noted that this curriculum allowed them to get ahead during their scholarship, saying, "my [Summer School] paper was literally the pretext to my dissertation." Additionally, three interviewees said that their papers from the Summer School were used as evidence of their academic writing skills, so they were exempted from taking additional courses or lessons at their host universities. Although students are informed that the course topics are intended to be interdisciplinary, allowing for mixing of students throughout the Summer School, students have been critical of the course offerings, requesting classes focused on their specific field in order to more fully prepare for their graduate level studies, especially if

they are entering departments without basic subject vocabulary or foundational knowledge of a specific field (OSF, 2019c).

In addition, asking for student feedback and instructors' opinions was a central part of each Summer School, with the intention to adjust for subsequent years. The summer program has evolved over the years to incorporate feedback on curriculum design and to respond to the needs of students from different countries and educational contexts. Examples include: the addition of a Peer Learning seminar after students noted a lack of opportunity for structured peer learning; Wellness Sessions that include strategies for self-care; and a separate ESL course after both students and instructors noted the need. While students have requested field-specific social science courses, the costs and logistics of including the numerous fields of study represented by the group were considerable. In some cases, this could have meant separate classes for as few as two to three students, impacting the quality of classroom discussions and overall learning dynamics.

Moreover, scholarship grantees asked for additional customization of the curriculum to their scholarship host country, university, or field of study to enhance learning and preparation. This included focus on professional writing (in addition to academic writing) for applied master's programs, statistics and data analysis, types of examinations (oral examinations specifically), preparing dissertations, and comparative analysis. For students headed to Germany, they also asked for additional information about the nuances of the German higher education system. Five participants asked for greater focus on academic presentations (beyond public speaking), such as presenting research findings, preparing slides for academic talks, and responding to questions from

professors. While most noted that the existing classes addressed these skills to some extent, interviewees said this wasn't enough to be prepared for their academic studies. Notably, these challenges accompany a Summer School program aiming to equally design curricula and programming for students from multiple countries, backgrounds, and language groups to prepare them for various national higher education systems, cultures, and academic disciplines.

An important aspect of the Summer School is the academic staff who teach the courses. OSF selects these instructors based on criteria such as: experience living or teaching in students' home and host countries; interest in, and understanding of, a broad range of cultural contexts; shared language skills with students; and experience working with diverse and international students. Many of the instructors have multicultural and immigrant backgrounds, and many themselves have been international students. Instructors primarily teach at western universities—some which host OSF scholarships students—and some are OSF scholarship alumni themselves.

At the conclusion of the Summer School, a pre-departure orientation is held to provide specific information to grantees about their host universities and their scholarship grants. In 2018, a new initiative of regional workshops was added to the Summer School in Tbilisi, inviting OSF staff from regional and national offices to meet one or more cohorts of Summer School participants. These regional workshops allowed scholarship recipients to discuss relevant civil society challenges and efforts by region with students across schools and with OSF staff. Building community among participants is an important element of Summer School, and the program provides each cohort the opportunity to create a global network.

Program logistics

The Summer School program is held for four weeks, with classes and other activities held from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday on site at a university campus. Participants are asked to "be prepared to spend up to five hours daily in the classroom, with a significant amount of additional time each day spent on research and writing" (OSF, 2019b, p. 3). Libraries, computer facilities, and other academic support is available throughout the duration of the program, provided by the host university. Figure 1 provides an overview of a student weekly schedule from the first week of the 2019 program in Tbilisi, Georgia (OSF, 2019d, p. 1). It indicates how time is divided between classes and other programming, including a full day orientation before the program begins.

Figure 1

Weekly schedule

Week 1 – July 2019

	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Pre-09:30	07	08	09 8:45 a.m. – Touch Base Meeting (CU Garden)	10	11	12 *Deadline 1*: *Proposal to SoSci Instructor by 9:30 am SocSci Comments and sends to AW Instructor by 2 pm (Same Day). AW Instructor reviews Proposal and returns to students by 8:30 am Saturday*	13 Optional Outing: City Tour
09:30-11:30	Orientation Day – All Day	Academic Writing Class	Academic Writing Class	Academic Writing Class	Academic Writing Class	Academic Writing Class	
11:40-12:30		Debate 1	Debate 4	Student Consultations/Independent Research Debate 1	Debate 4		
12:35-13:25		Debate 2	Debate 5	Lunch Debate 2	Debate 5	Compulsory workshop: Thriving in a new environment 1	
13:30 -14:20		Debate 3	Debate 6	Debate 3	Debate 6		
14:30-16:00	Orientation Day – All Day	Social Science Class	Social Science Class	Social Science Class – Library Resources Workshop	Social Science Class	Social Science Class	
16:15-17:15 Post–17:30	17:00 End of orientation	ESL	ESL	ESL 18:00 – Photo Treasure Hunt	ESL	ESL	

As noted above, all master's-level OSF scholarship recipients are invited to attend Summer School each year, with the majority accepting the invitation. According to internal OSF records, 73% of scholarship holders participated in 2017; in 2018, 81% participated; and in 2019, 96% participated. The overall budget for the program has varied over the years and is dependent on factors such as location, number of participants, and cost of local logistics such as hotel, shuttle buses, and hosting institution. Scholars are provided with a stipend up to $400 USD, depending on location. A limited meal plan is included for all participants, faculty, and staff. Shuttle buses to and from campus are provided along with hotel accommodations, two cultural tours, and two to three evening outings and events over the course of the month. Over the past

few years, the average total cost per student has ranged between $4,500 and $5,500 USD.

Significant changes over time

While the core elements of the program remained the same since 2003, the countries where OSF has funded scholarships have shifted significantly, prompting changes within both the scholarship programs and for the Summer School. This shift is summarized in an internal document (OSF, 2019c):

The adjustment in programming and geography shifted our theory of change: whereas earlier we held the belief that access to alternative academic environments was a key path towards positive social change, our new intentions zeroed in on focused support for hands-on civil society activists, whose professional backgrounds, training, and trajectories differed significantly from our former cohorts. [...] We are increasingly selecting activist profiles from communities that are more dramatically marginalized, more exposed to active conflict, and more removed from educational resources enjoyed by our previous cohorts. While this is a positive indicator that we are indeed reaching the community-level change agents we seek to bring into our network, this also means that our current summer school structure needs to be re-evaluated to better serve the needs of the new profiles. (p. 1)

In trying to better understand the changes in Summer School over time, a review of program documents showed six main changes: (1) changing location of Summer School, (2) addition of extracurricular academic programming (debate courses, project design courses, and unstructured group discussions on current issues), (3) increased

focus on English language learning, (4) more structured opportunities for peer-to-peer learning and sharing, (5) intentional cohort building through regional workshops, and (6) increased mental health and well-being programming. Each is explored below, pulling from an internal Summer School Portfolio Review (OSF, 2019c) and the authors' notes of administering the program over the years.

As noted earlier, the Summer School program has been held in five different locations. This shift primarily reflected a need to change venue due to issues of security and ease of granting visas – specifically which countries quickly processed visas to individuals from participating regions. For example, the Summer School partnered with Bilgi University in Istanbul for a decade, as Turkey was granting visas at the airport to people of many nationalities. However, given increasing political tensions in 2016, the Summer School relocated to nearby Tbilisi, Georgia. In 2018, as OSF scholars from certain participating countries were facing more challenges acquiring Georgian visas, OSF sought an additional location to host students, leading to the opening of a Summer School in Jordan in 2019.

Debate was introduced into the curriculum in 2007 as a means of strengthening critical thinking and presentation skills. Additional academic and extracurricular programming was included over the years, each with specific goals in mind. After the geography shift in 2014, it was increasingly necessary to augment academic training with programming that targeted additional academic skills, including foundational English and research skills workshops aimed at helping students navigate critical reading, citation, and methodology effectively. Following the geographic shift, a majority of the new sending regions included vastly different classroom settings; there was less

exposure to basic research methodology, familiarity with discipline-specific content, and academic English proficiency.

In addition, students were keen to have skills that would help tie together their activist backgrounds with their future studies. One extracurricular program was a project proposal writing short course. This course aimed to provide students with skills associated with planning and implementing community-based projects in their home countries. Another example included informal discussion groups referred to as Summer School Salons, where students engaged in informal and unstructured discussions on current events and relevant regional issues. Students also participated in designated sessions where they could sign up to lead a workshop, aiming to support peer to peer learning.

In 2018, Regional Workshops were introduced to facilitate cohort building between students attending the July Summer School session, who were primarily attending graduate programs in the U.S. and Asia, and students attending the August Summer School session, who were primarily attending graduate programs in the UK and Europe. During a three-day overlap in Tbilisi, Georgia, students had an opportunity to engage in conversations around narrative and identity; connecting to and building community; their own personal theories of change; and challenges facing their regions and home communities.

The shift in geography also underscored the need to provide structured support for mental health and well-being. With a larger roster of countries where active armed conflict and political instability prevailed, the intensity of the program brought forward mental health incidences that, in a few cases, resulted in students being unable to

complete the program. These indices guided program staff to provide professional mental health support during the Summer School program, in addition to arranging mental health support once a student arrived at their host university campus. Starting in 2014, counselors from Bilgi University in Istanbul were made available to students, however, none of the students were inclined to avail themselves of these services, perhaps due to cultural norms and taboos around mental health issues. Instead, students felt more comfortable speaking with their instructors or fellow students about their anxieties and stresses. Once the program shifted to Tbilisi, Georgia, in 2016, mental health professionals were once again brought in, but again, there was general reluctance to seek support. To address these challenges, instructors with backgrounds in clinical psychology and social work were asked to design a wellness curriculum for all students starting in 2019. The strategy was to engage mental health professionals who, as instructors on the program, were trusted and familiar to the students, and to invite all students to engage broadly in self-care—both while at Summer School and during their scholarships. The sessions were primarily focused on strategies for thriving in new and unfamiliar environments and accessing resources for mental health and well-being while away from family and community.

To help identify existing challenges and plan for future changes, OSF asks for input from partner organizations, instructors, and participants each year. This feedback is collected formally and informally, and the program adjusts its curriculum accordingly.

Student experience

When asked if the Summer School helped to prepare OSF scholarship grantees for their master's education abroad, all 12 interviewees said yes. Beyond just feeling

prepared, six of the 12 interviewees credited the Summer School with allowing them to "have a leap forward" during their academic programs. Interviewees noted that they had an easier transition to their host universities when they compared themselves to other international students, including to OSF scholarship grantees who did not attend Summer School. One interviewee put it this way,

> Without the Summer School program, I would not be able to successfully complete the master's, because when I was needing someone to guide me, I couldn't find it. And I only had my Summer School skills to use as a rescue and then move forward.

Interviewees also mentioned sharing resources from and knowledge gained at the Summer School with other international students.

In terms of participant learning, interviewees reported that their main learning was in terms of academic skills, including academic writing, citations, presenting academic materials, improving their language skills, and public speaking and debate. According to an internal report (OSF, 2019c),

> For many of these students, summer school is their first exposure to different academic practices and standards, with a majority of our students not having written a thesis-driven research paper. For a select few, it is as well their first time away from home, and consequently, their first time away from family and community. (p. 2)

To help to prepare well for their time abroad, OSF scholarship students noted that one important aspect was that OSF staff and instructors explained western academic culture and values, emphasizing why certain skills were deemed necessary at their host

universities. For example, instructors not only invited students to exchange opinions with them, but they explained how many western lecturers viewed dissenting opinions as critical thought and advancing the learning in the classroom. This is in stark contrast to some students' previous academic experiences, where faculty were considered an expert that should not be contradicted. Other components that alumni reported as very helpful included one-to-one consultations, invitations to approach instructors with questions or requesting additional help, leading class discussions, and peer-to-peer learning—many of which were novel academic experiences for the participants.

When asked about aspects of the Summer School that were most influential, seven interviewees mentioned the positive impact of the instructors. They called the instructors experts in their fields and "examples of civil society leaders." Instructors were credited as excellent teachers, encouraging and supportive, and role models for connecting passion to action. Four interviewees said they continued to communicate with their instructors about mutual civil society interests. In one example, an interviewee noted that their social science instructor's teaching and mentoring style "reshaped my definition of feminism" and caused her to be "less competitive" with other women. The interviewee also credits their instructor for changing her academic interests.

On a similar note, another aspect of the Summer School program that students found valuable was the international composition of participants, instructors, and staff. In just one example, the 2019 Summer School in Tbilisi, Georgia had representation from 12 different countries. In their interviews, alumni noted that they were so excited to meet people from new countries and to exchange experiences about civil society advocacy work in those contexts. Of the 12 individuals interviewed, 11 reported they

were still in communication with at least one other student or instructor, with the main form of communication being social media, specifically Facebook and WhatsApp.

In addition, interviewees noted that the program did not provide enough structured time for engagement with their peers in order to exchange experiences and insights about their civil society activism work while having the unique opportunity to be together for one month. Notably, 10 interviewees stated they wanted to learn more from their peers' experiences as civil society leaders, including "stories of serious activism and courage" and individuals' "hidden moral energy of their braveness in risky situations." Interviewees wanted to know how their peers worked with elected officials, held the government accountable, and challenged corruption; how they stay focused and dedicated to their causes, especially in difficult environments; and wanted to identify innovative approaches to influencing change from other contexts that could be "borrowed" and applied in their own contexts.

Discussion

The OSF Summer School's chief goal is to prepare the Foundation's scholarship grantees for the master's-level academic programs that they are about to enter. As noted in the case study outlined in this paper, the focus of the program is on enhancing academic skills that are expected in the classrooms at the host universities. In this way, OSF is providing a non-credit academic experience in itself. Since 2003 OSF has designed and administered an intensive educational program, recruited an international team of instructors and partners, and contracted an international campus.

This program is viewed as an extension of OSF's goal to expand educational access to promising civil society leaders. The scholarship grant provides selected individuals with an overseas educational experience and access to global professional networks; the Summer School enhances the chances that the individual will thrive and excel in this new environment. While the scholarship itself removes *financial* barriers to international education, the Summer School program attempts to remove *academic* barriers, by introducing students to skills, knowledge, and culture of academia at their hosting institution. Over time, with the geographical shift of OSF target countries, the Summer School has also shifted its offerings to better accommodate the grantees; these changes have included, for example, the addition of classes to build English language proficiency.

In addition, the OSF Summer School differentiates itself from other pre-academic orientations in that the curriculum was designed, funded, and administered by a global foundation—not by the universities that host students. This allows OSF to provide a specialized context for the uncommon profiles of these students in western academia. OSF does this by designing programming that intentionally bridges home environments and academic host universities, honors different cultures, and recognizes both civil society activist and academic identities. In this same vein, instructors are specifically selected based on their profiles and their abilities to provide skills and context for the unique profiles of these students. Furthermore, the Summer School does not duplicate orientations at the host universities, which typically focus on specific campus services, meeting international peers, and selecting courses. In fact, many of the OSF grantees go on to attend the orientation at their host universities.

In terms of the programming provided, OSF grantees noted that they greatly benefitted from the academic programming, especially in terms of western-style academic writing, including referencing and citations, crafting an argument, avoiding plagiarism, and enhancing their language skills. They also reported that they benefitted from understanding the western academic culture, including participating in class discussions and engaging their faculty members, both in class and during one-to-one consultations. Participants both noted that the emphasis on these aspects were useful both to those grantees for whom this was a new culture, and for those who had been out of any higher education environment for several years.

In addition, comments from Summer School faculty reported that the logic, argumentation, and English levels of students who participate in the Summer School significantly increased. Several instructors have observed that many students struggle at the beginning of the program yet improve during the program and leave able to write a short research paper (OSF, 2019b). However, past participants of the Summer School noted that they wanted a greater opportunity to connect with each other as civil society activists. They wanted to hear from their peers about their experiences in advocating for change at home, holding other governments' accountable, and their knowledge of international networks that shared similar goals. As OSF selects scholarship grantees that have both academic and civil society leadership qualities, the grantees were keen to also learn from others' experiences—including alumni of the scholarship and their instructors.

Implications and areas for future research

This case study aims to provide insight into how one global foundation is offering its own educational programming to advance its goal of removing barriers to, and in, higher education. Through the example of the OSF Summer School, the findings aim to share strategies for funders, policymakers, administrators, and evaluators of international education programs, especially programs for under-resourced students or students from the Global South. To increase access, this case study shows the value of going beyond funding a scholarship. It shows the importance of providing academic programming to bridge the students' previous experience and their next stage to enhance educational success during their scholarship period.

Notably, the case study illuminates how not only academic skills are important but also deconstructing the values and cultural context of western academia. Additionally, the findings of this case study are intended to inform universities which host international students, especially those on scholarships or from marginalized populations. By helping students understand these cultural codes, they can better navigate their host universities.

However, there is not a single set of academic values, and instructors have had many challenges in attempting to defend the perceived patriarchal and neoliberal values of western academia—especially as many instructors are activists themselves and working to reform their own institutions or systems of power in higher education. Further research is needed to better understand how to both prepare international students to excel in a system, as well as to help them identify the pressing injustices in the context in which they are studying.

Additional research could also illuminate the ways that an intensive summer pre-academic program influences the instructors who participate in the program. First, some of the interviewees reported that they kept communication with their Summer School instructors. How might these relationships influence international networks or specific projects in either scholarly or activism fields? Second, additional research could illuminate how instructors in these programs might adjust or alter their teaching once they return to their regular posts. How might one's pedagogy shift after teaching a specialized group of students, if at all?

In closing, it is worth noting that the OSF Summer School program is an extensive—and expensive—undertaking, likely beyond the reach of many institutions of higher education. Yet the findings aim to identify ways that universities or other orientation programs might include programming that addresses gaps to cultural knowledge through explaining the values underlying western academia. Notably, this educational experience might be especially valuable to students from closed societies or other marginalized communities.

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