The sad news of the death of Senator William J. Fulbright, an American whose name is almost synonymous with progress, peace, and friendly relations among nations, saddened people the world over. The ideas he put into practice in promoting the international exchanges of scholars, such as the JFDP program, have made the world so much better.

The JFDP program brought five of us to IU’s School of Education to study university administration and attend classes and seminars organized under Donald Hossler, Chair of the school’s Educational Leadership and Policy Studies department.

Before coming to the U.S., we thought we already knew much about different aspects of American life, but the reality of being here far surpassed our expectations, and very soon it became clear how much we still did not know. It had always seemed to me that U.S. education had comparatively few problems. What surprised me was how many problems were still waiting to be solved here, and how similar they were to what we face in Russia. For example, we share concerns regarding the decline in professionalism of undergraduate students, the rather low level of knowledge in the high schools, and the research vs. teaching debate in the universities. While the reasons for these situations may differ, the problems remain the same in both countries.

Certain things in American universities really appeal to me and make me envy the life of American students: the well–equipped laboratories and electronic facilities for quicker and easier access to knowledge and information; the range of student services and student organizations; the availability of resources to help students communicate better with each other, take good lecture notes, and solve personal problems. And how lucky they are to have fine sports facilities that few Russian universities could afford! A really positive aspect is the American way of teaching which encourages self-confidence in students through discussions and seminars rather than through the more traditional lecture format.

IU is known for its good contacts with universities in other countries. I am sure that when its professors visit our Russian universities they will gain from that experience, and contribute even more to our mutual benefit. I am personally grateful to everyone involved for the warm hospitality and the opportunities given me in my stay here.

When I first learned that I was a “lucky finalist” for the JFDP program, I felt not only joy but also a sense of bewilderment, as I knew so little about life in the United States, yet really wanted to experience an American university from the inside out. At Moscow State, I am an associate dean for student affairs, and so I was eager to share my experiences with American colleagues. Yet everything that I saw at IU was so different from what I was used to.

The first thing that struck me is that the campus is like a whole town, with only young citizens, well–planned transportation, television everywhere, and something totally new to me called “Greek housing.” The idea that students often go to another part of the country for university study is also different, as most young Russians try to enter a university close to home. Indeed, American students enjoy a lot of freedom. Yet my conversations with Dean of Students Richard McKaig have convinced me that students are not as independent and self–sufficient as they might appear. The university is very well aware of what is going on, and I’m sure Dean McKaig has spent sleepness nights and busy weekends on the job.

I discovered that American universities train specialists in student affairs, whereas at home, our administrators are at the same time classroom instructors without any specialized training in administration. While I think that Russian deans and associate deans might be more effective if they had had special training, the fact that they also see students in the classroom can help them better understand students’ needs.

The classes I attended at the School of Education were always interesting and challenging—one simply cannot be a passive listener. I also didn’t know how fortunate I was to be assigned to IU and to have Donald Hossler as my mentor. What surprises me, however, is that the doctoral students in the program, who are so dedicated to their future work, also have the worry of finding suitable jobs, even after years of study and sometimes several degrees. I can only hope that their education and skills will not be wasted—society cannot afford to be extravagant about this!

Like all visitors to this country, I leave IU and the U.S. with my own story. My America will always be those whom I met at Indiana University, wonderful people with open hearts.

International Programs, May/June 1995 15