

Final Report  
H.J Heinz Company Foundation Fellow 2006-07  
at the  
University Center for International Studies  
University of Pittsburgh

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## A. Executive summary

First of all I will thank H. J Heinz company foundation for giving me this great opportunity to come to USA and secondly I am very thank full to all UCIS (University Center for International Studies) staff, in particular to Mrs. Elaine Linn, Mrs. Karen Perkins and Mrs. Veronica Dristas for providing me on time support and guidance toward achievement of my goals and objective here at the University of Pittsburgh. Thirdly I am very grateful to my faculty mentor, Dr. Evelyn O Talbott and the Graduate school of Public health for allowing me to audit the classes. So far now I have been taking many classes, which are the fundamentals for the public health and particularly meeting the priorities and needs of public health in my country.

In order to deepen and broaden my knowledge in public health, I have had some chances to attend and participate as a presenter or as a discussion group member or as an audience for some public health meetings, global conferences or workshops. Meanwhile, being as a panel member for the monthly meeting of Salk fellowship program by the Jewish Health care foundation, enabled me to hear from many speakers and experts on some ethical issues in public health and medical practices.

One of the objectives of my fellowship is to develop professional networking relationships with the organizations working in my country. Since my arrival I have created contacts with a variety of organizations and their staff, many public health experts and professional.

The other most interesting achievement beyond public health is to understand the culture and social life and values of the great people in the USA. Therefore I have been attending many similar occasions or events. Besides I had made some travels to some states and cities to further explore about this great country and make new friends, which has enhanced my cross cultural understanding and knowledge about America.

## B. Personal objective:

1. To gain standard knowledge in some particular field of Public health, that is the priority for the public health sector in Afghanistan.
2. To be able to continue degree program in the school of Public health in future.
3. To build professionals links and keep long term contacts with them.
4. To attend some relevant, meeting and seminars, conferences and workshops in the USA that will enhance people's understanding about

- my country's (facts/current situation) and also to help me in my professionally development.
5. To visit some governmental and non governmental organization, that is working in Afghanistan (like; USAID, MSH, Emergency-USA, etc).
  6. To enhance my cross cultural understanding about the people (culture, tradition) and the government of the USA.
  7. To attend some of the American cultural or traditional events, throughout the year.
  8. To make friends from different origins and faith.

### **C. Professional objectives:**

To further explore about any possibility for making some degree program (MPH or PHD) in future at the Graduate School of Public health after completing my fellowship. Because holding a degree will enhance my courage and self-confidence, especially while attending any technical meeting in the Ministry of Public health or NGO community in Afghanistan. In the past, on behalf of NGOs, I was regularly attending some technical national meetings in Kabul, which motivated me to gain some formal education in this field for more productive discussions and decisions making.

In order to play an effective roll in rebuilding the fragile condition of health system in my country, I think the need to build human capacity is probably the most commonly cited need of the Afghan public health system, on the other hand our current health system mostly rely on expatriate experts, so if they evacuate the country we will not be able to maintain the health system functional. Therefore it is my goal to be involved in degree program in future.

### **D. My faculty mentor and classes:**

Dr. Evelyn O Talbott, from the department of Epidemiology is my faculty mentor and she has remained very supportive for me in choosing my classes and facilitating my attendance in classes. On the other hand she wanted me to accompany her to Belarus for doing some research study about breast cancer. Where I could learn more how to conduct a research study from exposure and outcome point of view, the theory we learnt in her class of Epidemiology 2110. After discussing with OIS section, I found that my visa status was not suitable to conduct such a study out of USA, because I have one entry visa and getting new US visa seems very difficult for Afghans in the 3<sup>rd</sup> country.

***Courses attended in fall term:***

- Principle of Epidemiology (Epidem 2110)
- Principle Statistics Reasoning (Biostatistics 2011)
- Quality Assessment (HPM 2207)
- Epidemiology Seminar (Epidem 2250)
- Epidemiology basis disease control (Epidem 2260) after a month I dropped this class.

I attended first 2 mentioned courses with taking all relevant tests and home assignments and its related computer Mini tab projects. While regarding the 3<sup>rd</sup> course that I did not take any of its tests or other assignments. And for the 5<sup>th</sup> course I attended only the seminar topics, which were very relevant to my country's public health conditions.

***Courses attended in the spring term:***

- Health program Evaluation (BCHS-2558)
- Ethnographic and qualitative methods (BCHS-3007)
- Health Survey Methods(BCHS-3002)
- Managing Health Program and Projects (HPM)
- Seminars in Epidemiology
- Swimming

The first 3 above courses are used for Health Program Evaluation Certificate.

***Courses attended in summer term:***

- Community health assessment (BCHS-2563)
- Emergency preparedness and disaster response (BCHS-2579)
- Introduction to Statistical Methods 1(BIOS-2041)

English Language Proficiency test at Cathedral of learning on May 9<sup>th</sup> 2007.

**E. Conferences and Presentations:**

1. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual conference of GLOBAL PROBLEMS, GLOBAL SOLUTIONS, Health, Dignity and Human Rights. This was a 2 day conference (October 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>), focused on world wide challenges toward achieving the developmental goal of the United Nations Millennium campaign. I was a member of the panel representing Afghanistan, along with the other panelists from India, Sri Lanka and Tsunami. I had a presentation about "the effects of War on the public

- health in Afghanistan”, and was followed with a good questioning and answering session. This was a very good experience of actively attending such a useful conference. Meanwhile I was able to meet many experts and organization representative, for instance Dr. Alberto Colombie, the president of Emergency USA, who currently runs some key health projects in different parts of Afghanistan.
2. I had a chance to attend the American Public Health Association center (134th annual Meeting) about *Public Health and Human Rights* from November 4-8 in new convention Center, Boston, MA. This was another interesting experience to attend such a big conference with a lot of public health experts from different parts of the world. I attended most of the sections that were relevant to my-country’s public health priorities (especially public health in post conflict situation and community base health care, etc.) and I learnt a lot from their experience in addressing some challenges.
  3. Health Careers Futures, the Jewish Healthcare foundation and the University of Pittsburgh, center for Bioethics and Health Law accepted my application to attend their JHF Salk fellowship, comprised of totally 7 monthly meeting from October 2006 to April 2007. Each meeting introduces graduate students and scholars in a variety of health related disciplines to the prominent ethical issues facing the healthcare system today. Guided by healthcare experts and religious leaders, the sessions are structured in an intimate class setting and utilize the Socratic approach to teaching. So far now I have actively attended the following topics for discussions on (19<sup>th</sup> October “Healthcare Rationing” in Children’s Hospital, 16<sup>th</sup> November “Abortion and Contraception” in relevant hospital downtown, 14<sup>th</sup> December “Making money with healthcare” in Rodef Shalom and on January 18<sup>th</sup> the topic was “the cost and quality of care”). Finally we completed the entire requirement for this fellowship on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March and celebrating a graduation ceremony on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of April.
  4. I had a presentation over “Post 2002 Challenges in Afghanistan Public Health,” at Symposium on Afghanistan at Bloomberg School of Public Health at Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore on 8th of Feb 2007
  5. Giving a talk about Afghanistan at “over lunch talk series” of the UCIS on March 1<sup>st</sup>.
  6. Giving a talk about “Introduction to Afghanistan and its Public Health,” at Mercy Hurst College at Erie, PA on 15th Feb 2007.

7. I had the pleasure to give presentation about “Afghanistan from Alexander the great till Taliban and its current CBHC programs” at Californian University of PA on 8th March 2007.
8. I had the honor to give presentation about “Comparison of the Afghanistan’s health system between pre and post 2002”, at Carlow University school of Nursing on March 15th 2007.
9. And finally I had another opportunity to give a talk about “Afghanistan’s brief history and the people’s sufferings (health issues)” presented in the International Week activities at Washington & Jefferson College of PA on 3rd April 2007.

#### **F. Meetings and making professional links:**

1. Meeting Mr. Mark A. Nordenberg the chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh on the 1<sup>st</sup> November 2006. I found him a very impressive and friendly man; we had a brief discussion about my personal objectives in the university and back in my country.
2. I met Dr. Alberto M Colombi, the President of Emergency USA, who has a very nice intentions and feeling about the expansion of programs in Afghanistan. Then he introduced me to his vice president, Dr. Edmund Ricci, who is also the director of the “Institute of Evaluation Sciences for Community health” at GSPH. So for my spring term I am very interested to attend his classes in evaluation program. Besides Afghanistan is suffering from 7-8 million land mines and unexploded devices, that caused many disabilities. So Emergency is interested to establish a rehabilitation center for land mine victims in one of the provinces in Afghanistan. So I will work on this project and will do my internship with Emergency.
3. I had a chance to see different reputable organization, working in Afghanistan, like Management Sciences for Health (MSH) in Cambridge Boston, which was my employer, so I had an office tour to their headquarter and had appointments with some senior management staff. Besides MSH provided all my accommodation for my stay at Boston to attend the APHA conference.
4. I had a chance to meet the ambassador of my country and his first secretary in Springfield Virginia. He was delighted to meet Afghans who are in USA for gaining knowledge and educations. So he assured me for his further official support to gain my goal.
5. I was honored to meet Dr. Donald Burke the dean of the school of public health and briefed him about my stay and future plans.

6. I had the honor to meet Dr. Wishwa Kapoor, MD, MPH, and the director of the institute for Clinical Research Education in Pittsburgh.
7. I attended the 89<sup>th</sup> commencement ceremony of Seton Hill University on 12<sup>th</sup> May and had the honor to talk to the dean there.

### **G. Participations in some activities and events:**

1. I attended Emergency USA presentation and photo exhibit about Afghanistan on 26<sup>th</sup> of October in Pittsburgh. And I was asked to give a brief speech about my county and my own understanding about Emergency projects in the country. Meanwhile I also met the executive director of Global links and many other medical staff (expatriates), who are working in my country.
2. I went to Global Link ware house, in order to do my part in preparing the shipment of medical and non medical supplies to Afghanistan, so I wrote in (Pashto and Dari) over the boxes, which were shipping to schools and hospitals, in order to categorize and distribute it easily there.
3. I had two phoned-interviews with Voice of America, by their specific youth and Education section that has some broadcasting programs for Afghanistan from Washington DC. In one program I was answering the questions of the interviewer about the objective of my academic stay in Pittsburgh and about my supporting agency at the university. The 2<sup>nd</sup> interview was live answering to the questions from people of different provinces of Afghanistan, they had their specific questions and suggestions for me and I was communicating with them via phone.
4. Completing the first level of English conversation class at the Belfield church. And will continue to attend it for the spring term as well.
5. Attending some Saturdays workshops series in Biomedical sciences (Grant writing , management skills, making presentation)

### **H. Touring and enhancing cultural understanding of USA.**

1. Having the honor to visit some historical sites, especially in Washington DC (White house, Washington monument, museums, capitol building, etc), New York City (Manhattan city, statue of liberty, Empire state building, etc), Boston Massachusetts (Harvard University, Cambridge, etc), Virginia (Springfield, Alexandria, etc), Baltimore, Maryland (National Aquarium, etc) and San Francisco, CA (Santa Cruse, Fisherman wharf, Napa valley, Berkley, Sausalito, etc.)



2. I had a chance to visit New Wilmington (the Amish people), who has a different lifestyle than usual Americans, I liked their gorgeous handcrafts. This was another experience about the diverse lifestyle and believes in USA.
3. Attending some of Salsa lessons, American football, wedding ceremony at church, some Museums, spending a night with American hosting family, Nutcrackers' ballet dance, Halloween, Thanks giving, Christmas night, bowling, ice skating, snow tubing, Easter dinner, and much more has been increasing my understanding of cultural values in USA. For most of inside-Pittsburgh activities and events, I am thankful to Tim Allen from PCIV, who regularly coordinated these activities for all PCIV members.

### **I. Future plans**

I hope to be able to fulfill my dream to continue my MPH program at the school of Public health.

### **J. Conclusion**

Till the end of my fellowship program and during my stay in Pittsburgh I have had lots of achievements. Because, I accomplished most of my objectives that I planned at the University of Pittsburgh. Therefore I am highly appreciating the on time support of all nice staff from UCIS (Global Studies) and the school of Public health. I will try my best to transfer my knowledge and skills to the health system in my country. This fellowship will help me to fill some shortages in the areas of community-level health care and relevant decision making. That has prioritized the mother and child health. And finally I will be able to become an active part of the system of our new government, how to address the preventable causes of the high maternal and infant mortality rates in Afghanistan.

Thanks you all for being supportive and kind.

Regards

Abdullah Hanif

