

**State Sponsored Political Socialization and Public Diplomacy Exchange Program  
Outcomes: The Case of the Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) Program**

by

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## PREFACE

Prior to my time at the University of Michigan, I spent several years living in countries of the Former Soviet Union working primarily to support fellowships and exchange programs funded by the United States (U.S.) government. My background in public diplomacy and international public affairs is what got me involved with these programs in the first place, and my work with these programs and their participants is, in large part, what led me to study sociology and public policy in graduate school.

As an administrator of U.S. government-funded public diplomacy exchange programs, I would send cohorts of high school and university students and early- and mid-career professionals on various public diplomacy exchange programs to the United States each autumn. When I met these same individuals again at the end of the academic year, I was always struck by how very different they were as compared to when I had first gotten to know them only a few months earlier. Their physical appearance and manner of dress were almost always dramatically different: the high school exchange program alumni were dressed and styled like they had just stepped off a big yellow school bus, and the graduate students and young professionals looked like just about anyone else one might find on a morning commuter train in Washington or New York.

It was the subtle social and cultural changes, however, that struck me the most. On returning to their home communities, these program alumni seemed to act, interact, and perceive the world in new and different ways than they did before they went to the U.S. The better I got to

know the programs and various cohorts of alumni, the more I began to wonder if there were systemic patterns at play regarding these changes I observed. The most pronounced changes I witnessed were in the high school students who participated in U.S. government-funded programs like the Future Leaders Exchange Program (FLEX), which is the main program being considered in this dissertation.

In conducting preparatory work for this dissertation, I found that much of the existing research on the individual-level effects of public diplomacy exchanges was either lacking in substance, methodologically weak, or simply nonexistent. From an academic perspective, these exchanges, much like the treatment of public diplomacy itself, fell into a rather nebulous interdisciplinary realm that touched on, but was not grounded in, any one discipline.

In an era of government budget austerity, value for money, and a critique of international development spending, public diplomacy and area studies programs are seemingly continuously under threat in the U.S. Many of these programs – like the United States Department of State’s Edmund S. Muskie Graduate Fellowship Program and the Title VIII Grant Program – have been eliminated or scaled back considerably in recent years. Even as the number of FLEX program countries has expanded in recent years, the overall number of fellowships awarded per year has declined.

By bringing a sociological perspective to the study of public diplomacy exchange, I hope that this dissertation will shine a small light on the impact of these programs and enrich the relevant literatures in social psychology, education, and political science, among other fields. Furthermore, I hope that it will also serve as a resource for the practitioners and policy-makers who fund, administer, and evaluate public diplomacy exchanges like FLEX.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

AUCA	American University of Central Asia
DOS	Department of State of the United States
ECA	Bureau of Educational & Cultural Affairs of the United States Department of State
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
ER	Early Return FLEX Students
EU	European Union
FLEX	Future Leaders Exchange Program
FREEDOM	Freedom for Russia and Emerging Eurasian Democracies and Open Markets
FSU	Former Soviet Union
IRB	Institutional Review Board
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics of the United States Department of Education
OPE	Office of Policy and Evaluation, Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the United States Department of State
PGAP	Pew Global Attitudes Project
PRC	People's Republic of China
SD	School Districts
SDDS	School District Demographics System
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
US	United States of America
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
YCO	Youth Cultural Opportunity Program

## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation presents research on the micro-level outcomes of public diplomacy exchange programs, which contributes to our understanding of the effectiveness of public diplomacy exchanges as tools of state-sponsored political socialization. Many evaluations conclude that public diplomacy exchange programs are successful in achieving their stated objectives of changing individuals' attitudes and behaviors; however, many outstanding questions remain regarding these programs' social impacts in the near term.

This research largely draws on data from one cohort of individuals who participated in the U.S. Department of State-funded Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) Program, as well as in-depth interviews conducted with 36 FLEX alumni from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan who participated in the same program between 2003 and 2011.

First, I found that, while some socialization outcomes may fall in line with funders' expectations, particularly immediately after completion of the program, the picture was more nuanced and complex in the near term. For example, some attitudinal indicators were not uniformly positive in the near term, which runs counter to what funders often purport to be the case. This lends favor to my argument that the rigorous selection of program participants may play a more important role than program participation in explaining alumni attitudes in the near term.

Second, this research also found that a misalignment exists between alumni and funders in terms of the perspectives of each regarding program outcomes, suggesting that a divergence

exists between the official and organizational intentions of public diplomacy programs and the way participants feel they have experienced them. In general, FLEX alumni saw program outcomes largely in terms of individual-level changes, such as the development of specific skills or capacities. They rarely saw outcomes along the lines of objectives and outcomes favored by program funders – that is, in terms of socialization or the development of transnational relationships. While individuals may see their status as a public diplomacy exchange program alumnus or alumna as an important part of their identity later in life, I posit that this post hoc understanding is centered on personal and professional outcomes as opposed to the objectives of program funders.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction**

In the most general sense, this dissertation is motivated by an attempt to understand the micro-level outcomes of foreign policy tools that states employ to influence people in other countries. Developed states use many different tools to exert power and influence over developing countries. Most of the political science literature, for example, concerns itself with state-employed “sticks” – such as regional trade agreements, strategic alliances, and International Monetary Fund loans – and “carrots” – such as food aid or most-favored-nation status.

It is easy to observe and account for the donor-funded construction of a new hydroelectric dam or the refurbishment of an existing power plant because the impact and intended outcomes are visible and relatively easily attributable. However, winning individuals’ hearts and minds can be just as important – if not more so – in a globalized world, where ideology matters and where interpersonal relationships and communication determine both the development of policy agendas as well as their ultimate success and failure.

Countries employ a variety of public diplomacy tools to influence directly or indirectly the attitudes and behaviors of foreign populations to suit national strategies and agendas. Examples of such tools include the construction or funding of cultural centers or foreign-language libraries, the broadcasting of television or radio programming in recipient countries, providing support to local non-governmental organizations, or supporting student, military, and

research exchange programs.<sup>1</sup> However, very little attention is given to understanding the individual-level outcomes that result from these public diplomacy programs and projects.

This dissertation focuses on understanding the near-term, micro-level outcomes of public diplomacy exchange programs, specifically using the United States (U.S.) government-funded Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) Program as a case. Each year, hundreds of students from across Eurasia<sup>2</sup> receive FLEX fellowships to come to the U.S. for an academic year, live with an American host family, and study in a local high school (American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS 2012a). Governments fund public diplomacy programs like FLEX because they expect that such investments will yield direct or indirect benefits in the long term and achieve strategic and policy objectives. Many evaluations conclude that these public diplomacy exchange programs are successful in achieving their stated objectives; however, many outstanding questions remain regarding their social impacts in the long term.<sup>3</sup> This dissertation will contribute to this understanding by examining the effectiveness of public diplomacy exchange programs in changing individuals' attitudes and behaviors in the near term. In other words, this dissertation answers the primary question: *do public diplomacy exchange program alumni become the kinds of people that funders want them to become?*

This dissertation will address this question from the perspective of both program funders and participants. First, I will examine the extent to which the attitudes of public diplomacy

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<sup>1</sup> In this dissertation, I define public diplomacy as a political instrument, used by states as well as other non-state actors, to “understand cultures, attitudes, and behavior; build and manage relationships... and influence opinions and actions to advance interests and values” (Gregory 2008: 724).

<sup>2</sup> “Eurasia” refers to the 15 successor states of the Former Soviet Union. In particular, this dissertation will use as its case a program that spans 10 of these 15 countries.

<sup>3</sup> This dissertation will look primarily at outcomes of public diplomacy exchanges up to five years after individuals have participated in a public diplomacy exchange program. As temporal designations such as short-, medium-, and long-term are subjective, for the purposes of simplicity, this dissertation will refer to this five-year period as being over the ‘near term’.



exchange program alumni have changed in line with funder expectations in the near term.

Second, I will examine public diplomacy exchange program outcomes from the perspective of participants: how and why individuals participate in such programs and the consequences of doing so.

The remainder of this dissertation will be outlined as follows. In the second chapter, I will present the justification and theoretical framework that underpins this dissertation. Chapter 3 contains a description of the FLEX program in more detail and the data that will be used in the analysis, followed by a discussion of the biases and limitations of the data and the case. The subsequent three chapters contain the substantive findings of this research. Building on one another, they present the findings of the near-term outcomes of public diplomacy exchange programs. Chapter 4 will discuss outcomes and indicators related to political attitudes and general political socialization, examining the extent to which public diplomacy exchange program alumni espouse attitudes that are in line with funders' expectations in the areas of (i) democratic values, (ii) social values and rights, and (iii) U.S. foreign policy and the role of the U.S. and other global powers as trustworthy international partners. Chapter 5 will discuss outcomes and indicators related to the social effects of public diplomacy exchange participation. The chapter will examine the social involvement of public diplomacy exchange program alumni, their attitudes about Americans, and the extent to which public diplomacy exchange program alumni have developed and maintained near-term contact with the classmates, teachers, and community member with whom they engaged while they were on the FLEX program. In drawing on the two preceding chapters, Chapter 6 presents an agentic perspective of participation in public diplomacy exchange programs, examining the ways in which individuals' aspirations and reported outcomes align with or differ from the expectations of program funders. It will

consider alumni expectations (i.e. what individuals wished to get out of the public diplomacy exchange program upon their selection) compared to their reported outcomes following program completion, particularly in the areas of geographical mobility, higher educational attainment, and occupational outcomes and interests. This chapter will also discuss how and why individuals reportedly participate in such programs and the consequences of doing so.

Chapter 7 contains the conclusion, which also includes recommendations for public diplomacy youth exchanges based on the research findings. Appendices can be found at the end of the dissertation that contain more background information and characteristics of the 2007-2008 FLEX Program cohort, information about and a copy of the 2013 web survey, information about the in-depth interviews conducted with FLEX alumni from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 2012, and a portrait of FLEX host families and communities.

## CHAPTER 2

### Theoretical Framework and Case Justification

Among foreign policy makers and soft power advocates, the widespread assumption is that public diplomacy exchanges serve as an effective way to engage populations in foreign countries and that individuals' attitudes and behaviors change as a result of their participation in these programs. While internal or funder-commissioned evaluations of public diplomacy exchange programs uphold these claims, there have been few academic studies to evaluate them (see, for example, Atkinson 2010; Miller 2006; Scott-Smith 2008; Snow 2009). Most of the academic research on study abroad and educational exchanges that exists is situated in the disciplines of education and communication, and this research generally suggests that the attitudinal effects of participating in an international exchange program are inconclusive regarding the effect of participation on an individual's attitudes towards the host country. Generally speaking, the effects of participation in a study abroad or similar experience on individuals' attitudes are thought to be largely context-specific (see Atkinson 2010; Marion 1980; Sell 1983; Seltiz and Cook 1962; Sigalas 2010; Wilson 2013). This is problematic in the sense that the study abroad and educational exchange literature generally cannot provide much guidance regarding assessing or understanding public diplomacy exchange outcomes and participants' political attitudes or other measures political socialization. Furthermore, while public diplomacy exchanges share many of the features of study abroad programs, as will be discussed in the next chapter, they are unique in that their main objectives are to influence the

political attitudes and behaviors of foreign populations in the long term and socialize exchange participants according to the preferences of the sponsoring country.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the study abroad literature is only of limited value for the purposes of this study.

Looking at public diplomacy exchange program outcomes through the lens of the globalization and world society literature would also seem to be a suitable theoretical frame for this project in that this literature examines the diffusion of globally-accepted norms, including Western notions of civil society (Meyer et al. 1997). While world society research suggests that ideational diffusion takes place through exposure to Western norms, it never fully addresses the mechanisms by which new ideas become internalized. Thus, this dissertation could advance this literature by examining and unpacking one mechanism through which this diffusion takes place, but the specificity and empirical nature of the case under consideration in this dissertation nature make such a framing suboptimal for drawing out generalization about the diffusion mechanism of Western norms.

Similarly, the literature on transnational identity and transnational capital is also appropriate to this study in the sense that FLEX participants are a cohort of individuals involved in cross-border interaction as well as internationally mobile (Kuhn 2011). Although young Eurasians participate in the FLEX program for only a short period of time with regard to how identity is constructed, the objective of public diplomacy programs is effectively to assimilate those participants into the United States and American culture—in other words, to become like Americans.

FLEX alumni also possess transnational human capital, such as foreign language skills, and as Atkinson points out in her comparative research on student exchange programs,

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<sup>4</sup> It is important to note here that assessing the effectiveness of governments' attempts to promote ideational change does not imply that I am advocating such a policy agenda.

“transnational communities of professionals [are those] who share similar life experiences and knowledge are more likely to serve as an effective socialization channel than unstructured exchanges of diverse persons” (Atkinson 2010; Gerhards and Hans 2013). This makes FLEX alumni particularly suitable to developing transnational identities and transmitting transnational human capital.

There are some types of transnational human capital that are expressed in the social world, such as one’s status as a FLEX alumnus or high degree of fluency in American English, but there are many types that are also intangible. For example, these include more psychological factors such as an individual’s critical thinking skills, cognitive flexibility, self-efficacy, moral reasoning, and other attributes that allow him or her to “understand and negotiate the various social, occupational and personal obstacles and opportunities they are likely to encounter [in] life” (Côté 1996). These psycho-social factors are also ones that FLEX program funders wish to influence. Thus, participation in the FLEX program provides participants with access to both visible and internal forms of transnational human capital, each of which relates to forming an individual’s identity, but also the formation of a collective FLEX identity. While the latter is not an explicit goal of FLEX program funders, it is clearly an important factor in ensuring that the FLEX program has an impact long after alumni return from the program. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

As this dissertation is focused primarily on presenting an analysis of the explicit objectives of funders (i.e. the socialization outcomes of participation in a public diplomacy youth exchange program), the remaining two sections of this chapter will draw on the political socialization literature to frame this dissertation and inform what we would expect to find by way of near-term socialization effects.

## **Political Socialization**

Political socialization, using the most basic and common definition of the term, is equatable with the state of an individual's political knowledge and comprehension (Sigel 1995). That being said, there are many different definitions and approaches to political socialization, which Kudrnáč (2015) notes fall into two broad categories: research that focuses on value and identity formation and personal growth and research that focuses on the transmission of political culture. This dissertation speaks to the latter group of political socialization research in the sense that public diplomacy exchange programs are primarily concerned with transmitting political attitudes and ideas among foreign populations. In this study, I employ Langton's definition of political socialization, which he defines as a "process, mediated through various agencies of society, by which an individual learns politically relevant attitudinal dispositions and behavioral patterns" (Langton 1969: 5). This emphasis on process and the role of mediating agents is important in the study of socialization outcomes related to public diplomacy exchange programs because, as I will discuss later in this chapter, socialization agents serve as important mechanisms through which political attitudes are transmitted to public diplomacy exchange participants.

Historically, the study of political socialization, as a sub-field of political science and sociology, can be traced to influential early- and mid-twentieth century research that was focused on trying to understand patterns in political attitudes and behaviors. Prominent examples include Merriam's (1931) study of civic training, Newcomb's Bennington College study (1967), and Inkeles and Levinson's (1969) international character studies (Niemi and Sobieszek 1977). By the late 1950s and early 1960s, a great deal of research had already been conducted on the relationship between political attitudes and behavior and a number of socio-economic,

psychological, and background factors (see, for example, Campbell 1960; Lipset 1960; Newcomb 1957).<sup>5</sup>

Herbert Hyman (1959) is credited both with naming the term political socialization and arguably cementing it as an area of study in the social sciences. He defined it as an individual's "learning... social patterns corresponding to his societal positions as mediated through various agencies of society" (Hyman 1959: 25). In *Political Socialization* (1959), Hyman reviewed studies related to topics that would later be considered political socialization, out of which he drew conclusions about how political behavior is learned. In particular, he noted that the pre-adult (i.e. adolescent) period and the effects of various "socializing agents" (e.g. parents, schooling, and peers) were important factors in the formation of an individual's political attitudes (Hyman 1959; see also Bender 1967; Chaffee 2005; Sapiro 2004; Torney-Purta 2000, 2004). The important role that various socializing agents play in influencing an individual's political and social attitudes – and at a particular period in that individual's life – is one reason why a public diplomacy youth exchange program was selected as a case for this research.

Generally speaking, most of the early research on political socialization focused on understanding the social mechanisms by which political norms and behaviors became instilled within Americans as well as the how the next generation of political citizens developed (among many examples, see Almond and Verba 1963; Easton 1965; Lipset 1960). With time, socialization research expanded to include the study of socialization processes among different groups of Americans (in other words, not just white, middle-class Americans), as well as the study of political socialization from both an international and comparative perspective (Niemi and Sobieszek 1977). Nevertheless, most political socialization research has tended largely to

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<sup>5</sup> I will not delve into the history and development of the study of political socialization or the various critiques of political socialization across the social sciences in this study.

focus on sub-groups of Americans (e.g. school-aged children, immigrants), and there has been very little research to date focused on transnational socialization. While this study still deals with a similar study population to that which is considered by much political socialization research – that is, school-aged adolescents in the United States – this study contributes to that dearth of transnational socialization research by focusing on socialization outcomes of a population of foreign adolescents who have spent a significant period in the country.

Furthermore, a great deal of socialization research has been done that tries to understand or isolate the roles and the effects of specific agents in mediating the political socialization process, the five most important of which are family and parents, schooling, friends and peers, the media, and volunteer associations and community service.<sup>6</sup> More specifically, much of this research has sought to understand or isolate the relative influence of each of these mediating agents on the political socialization process within different contexts or among different populations.

Very little socialization research, however, has focused on, as Owen (2011: 4) put it, “exploring the interaction between, and [the] joint influence of, various agents in the political socialization process.” This is an important consideration with socialization research, and the socialization process in general, because people are not influenced by agents independently and within a vacuum; the influence of any one agent would clearly have effects on other domains of an individual’s life. This is a particular point to note in socialization research such as this – that is, research focused on atypical groups of individuals in unique socialization environments – if

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<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that there has also been a great deal of research conducted on the relationship of other factors and socialization outcomes, including neighborhood effects (Campbell 2006; Gimpel, Lay, and Schnknecht 2003), period and temporality effects (Alwin and Krosnick 1991; Sears, Valentino, and Sears 1997; Verba et al. 2005) and cohort effects (Firebaugh and Chen 2015; Miller and Shanks 1996), to name a few.



for no other reason than socialization processes within these populations are much less studied or understood.<sup>7</sup>

This dissertation is just such a case in that it involves the transnational socialization of public diplomacy youth exchange program participants. In populations like these, I would argue that it is the interaction between, and joint influence of, various socialization agents that mediate the entire socialization process. Despite their similarities (e.g. as active, engaged, English-speaking adolescents who are interested in spending an academic exchange year in the United States), FLEX program participants are a diverse group of individuals. Some of this diversity, such as the fact that participants come from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, is even built into the program design and selection of participants. Once they are on the program, each experiences his or her exchange program year in unique ways, as there is a great deal of diversity in the host communities and families in which participants live and in the high schools they attend. Thus, it would be challenging, and perhaps substantively meaningless, to attempt to isolate the individual effects of various socialization agents in populations like these. As such, this dissertation will be concerned not with the individual or relative effect of each socialization agent, but rather with the cumulative outcomes of this state-sponsored socialization process within a population of public diplomacy exchange program participants.

I will now provide a brief overview of the research that exists across the five major socialization agents – family and parents, schooling and formal education, extracurricular involvement and volunteer and community service, peers, and media – to illustrate the important role that each plays in socialization outcomes and to situate better this study.

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<sup>7</sup> I use the word “atypical” here to describe groups of individuals that are not typically the types or groups of individuals that have been studied by political socialization researchers (e.g. students enrolled in American high school civics classes).

## Family and Parents

Early research viewed parents as the primary political socialization agent (see Campbell 1960; Greenstein 1965; Hyman 1959; Jennings 2007). Later research, however, found that this relationship was not as direct or as pronounced as had been asserted previously (see, for example, Connell 1972; Hess and Tourney 1967; Jennings and Niemi 1981; Niemi and Sobieszek 1977) and that other agents were also likely to have a great deal of influence on the political socialization of children and adolescents (Jennings and Niemi 1968). Nevertheless, research suggests that there are still certain areas in which parents appear to have strong influence on the political socialization process. For example, different studies found that factors such as levels of parental education, political knowledge, and civic participation are positively related to outcomes such as the levels of political knowledge, civic development, and voluntary community service of their children (McLeod, Eveland, and Horowitz 1998; Niemi and Chapman 1998; Niemi and Junn 1998; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Niemi and Jennings (1991) found that parental influence on the political partisanship of their children is strong in early adolescence, although this influence was seen to wane somewhat over time (Miller and Shanks 1996). The transmission of similar political attitudes from parent to child does seem to occur, but only when parental attitudes are strong and consistent over time (Jennings, Stoker, and Bowers 2009). Finally, research shows that the children whose parents discuss politics with them are more likely to engage in politics later in life (Levinsen and Yndigegn 2015; McIntosh, Hart, and Youniss 2007; Quintelier 2015; Schmid 2012), and children whose parents engage in politics are also more likely to engage in politics later in life themselves (Cicognani et al. 2012; McFarland and Thomas 2006; Plutzer 2002; Verba, Schlozman, and Burns 2005). Despite these many caveats, the parent-child (or in the case of FLEX participants, parent-host child)

relationship represents one of the most important mechanisms for the political socialization of young adults and one where parents appear to have a strong influence on the political socialization process of youth.

### Schooling and Formal Education

Much of the research – and the recent research, in particular – on the relationship between schooling and formal education and the political socialization of youth supports the notion that formal education is the strongest correlate of political knowledge (Chaffee 2005; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1997; Hyman, Wright, and Reed 1975; Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry 1996). In fact, the entire schooling experience, both curricular and extracurricular, is seen as being important to citizen development (Conover and Searing 2000; Horowitz 2001). Socialization research is less uniformly conclusive, however, on the specific components of formal education that are related to increased political knowledge. For example, while some early socialization research found that civics classes had little or no effect on most students (Beck 1977), more recent research suggests that schools and individual classes do have significant effects on student political learning (Berliner and Biddle 1995; Chaffee 2005). Niemi and Junn (1998), for example, found that high school civics courses are effective at enhancing political and civic knowledge. Teaching methods – particularly those which promote critical thinking and open discussion – and curricular content were also found to have a positive effect on civic and political knowledge, as did civic education during a student’s final years of high school (Andolina et al. 2003; Campbell 2008; Hess 2009; Horowitz 2001; McLeod et al. 2010; Niemi and Junn 1998; Torney-Purta et al. 2001).

In general, socialization research in the area of schooling and formal education found that civic knowledge is related to many different attitudinal measures – such as support for democratic values – and the increased likelihood of an individual’s political participation (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1997; Hart et al. 2007; Humphries, Muller, and Schiller 2013; Popkin and Dimock 1999). Both curricular and extracurricular affairs at schools have also been shown to have a positive effect on political behavior later in life (Humphries et al. 2013; Niemi and Junn 1998). As with political knowledge, educational attainment levels were found to be consistent predictors of political and civic participation and engagement (Nie et al. 1996; Verba et al. 1995; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1995). For example, research found that students who attended schools that provided civic training (such as letter writing to officials and debate) in the classroom were more involved in civic and political affairs during and after graduation than students in schools that did not (Chaffee 2005; Keeter et al. 2002).

Taken together, not only are the roles of formal education, schooling, and parents the most-studied agents in political socialization, but these are also of importance in studying socialization within a youth public diplomacy exchange program as they are perhaps the two most important groups of agents in the day-to-day lives of FLEX participants during their time on the program. While each of these agents represents different mechanisms involved in socializing young people into a particular value system, collectively they do so in different ways and often towards different ends. Since the socialization process happens in a complex, dynamic social environment, it stands to reason, therefore, that outcomes should be studied in terms of the joint socialization processes of many agents.

## Extracurricular Involvement and Volunteer and Community Service

Participation in extracurricular, community, and volunteer activities is another important agent in the socialization of youth and adolescents. While this relationship is well established, Torney-Purta et al. (2010) point out that much of the literature surrounding this socialization agent remains somewhat fragmented. Only a few studies have examined how participation in community service contributes to an increase in civic knowledge or the development of good citizenship skills and attitudes among adolescents (Chaffee 2005; Conrad and Hedin 1991; Wade and Saxe 1996). Research suggests that adding a service component to a civics course enhances the positive effects of that civics course and that civic knowledge is most likely to increase when the service component is academically-oriented (Chaffee 2005; Cohen, Kulik, and Kulik 1982; Conrad and Hedin 1991; Dewsbury-White 1993; Hedin 1987). Shumer (1994) found that high school students in a service learning program achieved greater academic improvement than did a comparison group, and Hamilton and Zeldin (1987) found that high school students who interned in local government showed increased knowledge about local government compared to students who did not. Some studies even suggested that a course in political participation could produce similar outcomes to an active service learning experience (see Chaffee 2005).

In all, research generally suggests that youth participation in civic-oriented extracurricular (e.g. student government) and voluntary associations (e.g. Boy or Girl Scouts) has a positive effect on young adults' and adults' levels of civic engagement and political participation (see Andolina et al. 2003; Campbell 2006; Frisco, Muller, and Dodson 2004; Hart et al. 2007; Jennings and Stoker 2004; Jennings 2007; McFarland and Thomas 2006; Sherrod 2003; Smith 1999; Stolle and Hooghe 2004; Verba et al. 1995). Similarly, such participation has also been found to be related to more participatory attitudes and skills (Beck and Jennings 1982;

Chaffee 2005; Holland and Andre 1987; Verba et al. 1995). Research also suggests that extracurricular and community involvement that situate youth in real-life environments (such as volunteering in voter turnout campaigns) helps them to develop political knowledge and skills, among other attributes (McDevitt and Kiouisis 2006; McIntosh and Youniss 2010).

Compared to most American high school students, extracurricular activities and volunteer and community service play a relatively present role in the lives of program participants since each FLEX student is required to be involved regularly in some form of volunteering or service in his or her host community in order to remain in good standing on the program (see, for example, AIFS Foundation 2012). This is not to suggest that volunteer, extracurricular, or community involvement necessarily would have a greater impact on socializing FLEX students than on their American classmates, but rather that it may have the potential to do so by virtue of the prominent role it plays in the structure of the FLEX program and in the daily lives of FLEX participants.

### Peers

Peers are an important political socialization agent, especially as young people generally spend increasing amounts of time with their friends and classmates, relative to others, as they progress through adolescence and into adulthood (Chaffee 2005; Dostie-Goulet 2009; Harris 2010; Hepburn 1998; Huebner and Mancini 2003). Research shows that peers and peer groups are seen as likely to influence the development of youths' political attitudes and behaviors (Jencks and Mayer 1990; Torney-Purta et al. 2010). For example, Niemi and Jennings (1974) found that while parents' influence appears to be more significant with respect to measures such as political partisanship and voter choice, peer influence was a more important factor in

influencing whether youth believed 18-year-olds should be allowed to vote, for example (Jennings and Niemi 1974). Campbell (1980) found only a weak effect of peers on political interest; however, other research highlighted that these effects were likely to be clustered within similarly-interested or -disinterested peer groups (Dostie-Goulet 2009; Koskimaa and Rapeli 2015).

Little research exists on the effect of political discussions among peers (Amna et al. 2009; Levinsen and Yndigegn 2015). Quintelier (2011) found that, together with family members and voluntary participation, peer discussions were among the most important predictors of political participation and that the more young people (age 16 to 18) discussed politics with their peers, the more likely they were to engage in politics themselves. Research also found that civic discussions among peers were more strongly related to young people's civic orientation and political engagement than similar discussions with their parents or other family members (Ekstrom and Ostman 2013; Levinsen and Yndigegn 2015; Quintelier 2015). Some research also revealed the effect of shared civic attitudes among peers. For example, Campbell (2006) found that strong civic norms in an adolescent's school were related to a greater likelihood that that individual would vote more than a decade later, and Kahne and Sporte (2008) found that peer support for academic achievement was positively related to civic and community participation.

### Media

The final socialization agent of the five is the role of the media, which is likely to play the least prominent role (among these five types of agents) in the lives of FLEX participants while on the program. As Martin (2009) points out, most of the early political socialization research treated the role of mass media in influencing political development largely as an

afterthought (Atkin 1981; Graber 2005; Martin 2009). By the 1970s and 1980s, however, a growing body of research illustrated that mass media plays a role in affecting children's perceptions of politics (see, for example, Atkin and Gantz 1978; Connell 1971; Conway et al. 1981; Rubin 1978; Torney, Oppenheim, and Farnen 1975). Like other socialization agents, media is not a singular influence, nor does it exist independently of other socialization agents (Samaniego and Pascual 2007).<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, contemporary media and other forms of information and communication technologies that exist today have radically altered the media landscape compared to even two decades ago. Thus, the role of media as a political socialization agent, as well as its relationship to other socialization agents, arguably changes at a more rapid pace than other agents. Nevertheless, there is some recent research on which we can draw to understand the relationship between contemporary media and the political socialization of adolescents.

Verba et al. (2005), among others, found that factors such as a family's socio-economic status (e.g. income, the number of books a family has in their house, and whether or not a household receives a daily newspaper) has a positive influence on political socialization; however, as Putnam (1995) points out, daily newspaper readership has been consistently declining since the late 1920s. Some of that decline can be explained by an increase in the use of other media such as radio, television, and the internet, although some research has shown that there has been a decrease in recent years in the viewing of television news by young adults (Buckingham 1997). McLeod (2000) points out, however, that in terms of political learning among adolescents, newspaper and news magazine use has positive effects that are stronger than

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<sup>8</sup> It is important to note, however, that perhaps more than with any other mediating agent, access to particular media content is not only self-selected by the individual, but it is also influenced or controlled by parents, teachers, and other adults (van Deth, Abendschön, and Vollmar 2011).



the negative effects of television time, for it is content that makes a difference within television use. In other words, he notes that watching news has beneficial effects, whereas watching entertainment (which is the largest component of television time) has a negative influence on civic knowledge.

The growth of media, social media and communication technology has meant that adolescents have greater access to digital forms of media than in the past. In fact, by 2010, young people spent over eight hours a day accessing media content (Rideout, Foehr, and Roberts 2014). Pasek and colleagues' research (2006) found that internet use is associated with greater levels of civic participation. Similarly, Romer, Jamieson and Pasek (2009) found that the use of the internet for informational (i.e. non-entertainment) purposes was positively associated with civic engagement in adolescents and young adults. Similarly, Lee's research (2006) found a positive relationship between college students' internet news consumption and these individuals' feelings of internal political efficacy (in other words, an individual's perception of the extent to which he or she can successfully participate in political activities and processes).

Taken together and in the context of this study, the role of peers and news media generally are not as pronounced in the day-to-day lives of FLEX participants like host families and host schools. However, they are still important agents in that they have a role to play in jointly mediating the socialization process, especially given that research has shown that factors such as peers, peer discussions, and non-entertainment media can influence political values and orientations.

### **Contributions of this Study**

Overall, socialization research has shown that each of these five agents plays a role in the political socialization of the next generation of young adults. In particular, parental education, political interest and involvement, and parents' discussion of politics with their children are all seen to be important, positive factors in political socialization, as is the quality and duration of a young person's formal education. Civics education (both curricular and extracurricular), as well as civic and political knowledge, is also seen to be an important factor, and youth participation in civic-oriented extracurricular or volunteer opportunities has been found to be positively related to civic knowledge, interest and engagement. Finally, adolescents' access to informative and news media content was also seen to have a positive effect on political socialization.

Whereas these agents seem consequential in driving the general political socialization of young adults, the literature generally fails to consider the interaction of various agents on socialization outcomes, particularly in complex or atypical socialization environments such as public diplomacy exchanges. This study adds to the political socialization literature not only by contributing to a better understanding of the near-term consequences of state-sponsored socialization efforts, but also by contributing to our understanding of the outcomes of a transnational socialization project among a population of foreign individuals during a formative period in their lives.

Based on what we know from this wide-ranging body of literature on the effects of specific socialization agents and on the important role that political socialization played in underpinning the design of the FLEX program itself (discussed in more detail in Chapter 3), we can reasonably make the case that the process of participating in a public diplomacy exchange program will have some effect on the political socialization of this group of participants in ways

that sponsoring governments would like. However, I would argue that these agents co-mediate the socialization process in an interactive way and therefore should be understood considering their joint socialization outcomes rather than as discrete agents which have independent effects on FLEX participants. This is because FLEX program participants are, by design, a diverse group of young people who come from different backgrounds, live in different host communities, and attend different host schools. Thus, this dissertation will be concerned not with the individual or relative effect of each socialization agent, but rather with the cumulative outcomes of this state-sponsored socialization process within a population of public diplomacy exchange program participants.

### **Case Justification**

There are many different types of public diplomacy exchanges, and each has its specific objectives and target population. This dissertation will focus on those public diplomacy exchanges that target adolescents and young adults. Although the period of time defined as adolescence varies across social, cultural, and institutional contexts, it is seen as a critical period in the social, emotional, and mental development of an individual (Dornbusch 1989). In the psychological literature, adolescence is generally defined as a period that starts with the biological onset of puberty and ends at some socially- and culturally-relative point where an individual achieves self-sufficiency (Blakemore and Mills 2014; Salmela-Aro 2011). Psychological research also suggests that adolescence is a period in which individuals are particularly sensitive to social and environmental stimuli and cultural susceptibility (Choudhury 2009; Crone and Dahl 2012; Fiske 2009).

A large body of research has examined the effects of major life events – such as parental separation and divorce (Amato and Keith 1991), physical relocation (Hagan, MacMillan, and Wheaton 1996), or the death of a loved one (Servaty and Hayslip Jr. 2001) – on adolescent social development. Sociological literature overlaps with and advances this line of research on human development and change and has shown that the experiences of different cohorts of children and adolescents – across time, place, and historical conditions, for example – are related to differential effects and outcomes across the life-course (Elder 1974, 1980). Furthermore, life experiences and transitions were also found to have an effect on subsequent changes in individuals' attitudes (Elder 1975; Elder and O'Rand 1995). Social psychologists have also found that attitudes are susceptible to change via processes of social and peer influence and persuasion (Petty, Wegener, and Fabrigar 1997).

Direct and prolonged exposure to another society or culture is yet another way in which an adolescent's attitudes can be impacted and shaped. Much has been written about immigrant assimilation, for example (see Alba and Nee 2003; Waters and Jiménez 2005), and participating in an international exchange experience is another mechanism by which attitudinal changes can take place. Experiencing life in another society and culture as an adolescent could arguably have a greater effect on behaviors and political attitudes across the life course than study abroad experiences later in life, such as a traditional junior year abroad or a professional-level exchange as an adult (Ghitza and Gelman 2014; Searing, Wright, and Rabinowitz 1976).

As a case, one additional reason that an adolescent cohort is more illuminating than a cohort of undergraduate or professional exchange participants has to do with the effects of cumulative advantage. While socioeconomic factors relating to the test case in this dissertation will be discussed elsewhere, sociological research tells us that the favorable relative position of

an individual can be compounded over time. Factors such as socioeconomic status, income, and the level and quality of education can produce further relative gains for that individual across the life course (DiPrete and Eirich 2006; Mayer 2009). In the context of this dissertation, individuals who participate in educational exchange programs later in life, therefore, are likely to be individuals who have had exposure to experiences, opportunities, and resources earlier in their lives that would have attracted additional capital and opportunities for them, thereby increasing the likelihood of their continued high performance and positively divergent trajectories from the rest of their peer cohort (DiPrete and Eirich 2006; Merton 1968). By looking at a cohort of adolescent participants, this dissertation seeks to control for some of the effects of these cumulative advantages on socialization outcomes.

Temporally, this dissertation will use as a case a public diplomacy exchange program lasting one academic year as opposed to a shorter program that lasts just a semester or summer in length. Some research has been conducted on the effects of exchange program duration; however, it should be noted that scholars have also been quick to point out the limitations that are common among many of these studies. These include, for example, that much of the research canvases a broad range of student values, competencies, experiences, and interests across a wide range of programs, populations and countries, which makes generalization difficult. Furthermore, much of the research has been conducted using small sample sizes or without comparison groups, and nearly all of this research focuses on university-level exchanges. Very few examine longitudinal impacts. The research generally concludes that, compared to programs of shorter duration, longer-term programs such as an academic year abroad result in more positive outcomes on measures about which program administrators and educators care. These include intercultural learning, cultural integration, second-language acquisition, student values, and

academic competencies, to name just a few (see, for example, Davidson 2010; Dwyer 2004a, 2004b; Flack 1976; Grove 1983; Hensley and Sell 1979; Isabelli 2003; James 1976; Kauffman and Kuh 1985; Koester 1985; Marion 1980; Medina-Lopez-Portillo 2003; Morgan Jr. 1972; Salter and Teger 1975; Stauffer 1973).

Like program duration, living arrangements vary across study abroad and public diplomacy exchange programs and can include host family, dormitory, or independent housing options. For example, during high-school-level or gap-year exchanges, students are typically immersed in the language and culture of the host country in a way that other exchange participants are often not (Marriott 1995). While there is significantly less literature on the effects of living arrangements than there is on program duration, research in the area of educational exchange has largely held that the home stay environment is integral to mastering a foreign language (for example, Brecht et al. 1997; Paige et al. 2002; Schmidt-Rinehart and Knight 2004; Ward and Kennedy 1993). Some research also discusses the important role of host family placements and the support that host families can play in the cross-culture adaptation process (Lapkin, Hart, and Swain 1995; Spenader 2011).

This dissertation will use as a case a cohort of individuals who, as adolescents, participated in an academic-year-long public diplomacy exchange program. Compared to other cohorts of individuals who have participated in other kinds of public diplomacy exchanges for other durations of time, the literature would suggest that selecting this type of case would generate positively biased estimates of what we might expect regarding treatment effects of public diplomacy programs in the near term. In other words, given the widespread assumption among foreign policy makers and public diplomacy program advocates that public diplomacy exchanges are highly-effective mechanisms for ideational change, using a case that would

theoretically generate positively biased estimates of this positive ideational change is advantageous. Such a case would theoretically present “best-case” outcomes in the near run, illustrating the upper-bound limit to the kind of effect socialization programs might have.

Finally, geographically speaking, this dissertation will rely on a U.S. public diplomacy case from Eurasia because of the importance that public diplomacy has played in recent history of the United States and this region of the world. The Soviet Union (USSR) and U.S.-Soviet relations dominated United States’ foreign policy and strategy for much of the second half of the twentieth century. It was during this period that the U.S. began to invest heavily in public diplomacy programs (Snow 2009). Some research suggests that U.S. public diplomacy programs have played a strong role in exporting American cultural values and technology to the USSR and also a strong role in providing exchange opportunities for individuals who would later act to support the liberalization of Soviet state institutions and become human and social rights advocates, for example (Atkinson 2010; Bu 1999; Nye 2004; Richmond 2003).

With the collapse of the USSR in the early 1990s, the U.S. no longer saw the need to devote large amounts of money to fighting communist ideology. Instead, the then-reduced and constrained public diplomacy funding shifted to programs that aimed to bring about social and political ideational changes in a more direct manner (Finn 2005; de Lima Jr. 2007). For example, even today, countries in Eurasia and Eastern Europe are some of the only ones in which the United States funds public diplomacy exchanges for adolescents. Part of this is because Russia and the other Eurasian countries that comprise the Former Soviet Union (FSU) are still critically important to U.S. foreign policy in a host of areas, including military policy, human rights, multilateral trade and investment, and other U.S. geostrategic interests in Asia, the Middle East, and Europe.

Finally, it should be noted that because the FLEX program emerged in part as a direct result of this unique historical public diplomacy relationship between the U.S. and the USSR, the findings of this dissertation are, in part, endogenous to and a reflection of that relationship. As a result, findings from this dissertation should be considered in light of this unique context. This is not to say that these findings do not have any broader relevance to political socialization outcomes as a result of participation in other public diplomacy programs in Eurasia (or similar secondary school programs in other geographic contexts), but it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to make generalized claims that these findings apply to all U.S. government funded public diplomacy exchange programs. Thus, relating these findings to other types of programs and with other regions of the world must be approached with caution and with careful considerations given to the specifics of those public diplomacy programs and those contexts.



## CHAPTER 3

### Description of the Study, Sources of Data, and Limitations and Biases

#### Overview

This chapter will begin with a description of the public diplomacy exchange program that will serve as a case in this dissertation, including a brief discussion of how individuals are selected into this program and what program finalists experience during their academic year on the exchange program. Following this, I will describe the list of data sources that will be used in this dissertation. This chapter will conclude with a discussion of some limitations and biases inherent in both this case and the sources of data.

This dissertation will rely on data from participants of the U.S. Congressionally-funded FLEX Program, which was the centerpiece public diplomacy exchange created as part of the 1992 Freedom for Russia and Emerging Democracies and Open Markets (FREEDOM) Support Act's Eurasian Secondary School Initiative. It is currently administered by American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit organization (American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS 2012b). The program provides fully-funded exchange fellowships to nearly one thousand high school students each year from fifteen Eurasian countries.<sup>9</sup> High school students who are selected to participate on the FLEX program come to the U.S. for one academic year, live with an American host family, and study

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<sup>9</sup> These countries are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Estonia, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Ukraine. The FLEX program used to operate in Belarus, Russia and Uzbekistan, but it no longer does in 2017.

in a local high school. Between 1993 and 2017, over 25,000 Eurasian youth have participated on the FLEX program (American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS 2017).

The stated goals of the FLEX program are as follows:<sup>10</sup>

- “FLEX students will acquire an understanding of important elements of a civil society, that includes concepts such as volunteerism, the idea that American citizens can and do act on their own to deal with societal problems, and an awareness of and respect for the rule of law.
- FLEX students will show willingness and a commitment to serve as agents for change in their countries after they return home.
- FLEX students will develop an appreciation for American culture.
- FLEX students will interact with Americans and generate enduring ties.
- FLEX students will teach Americans about the cultures of their home countries and teach citizens of their home countries about the United States” (United States Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs 2008).

While nearly all publicly available<sup>11</sup> materials on the FLEX program downplay its public diplomacy function, the FLEX program embodies the nature and intent of a typical public diplomacy exchange. A 2007 discussion paper from the Department of State’s (DOS) Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) spelled out its public diplomacy mission clearly and succinctly:

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<sup>10</sup> Although these goals have been modified slightly since the program’s inception, these five current goals still reflect the spirit and intent of the program as it was originally designed.

<sup>11</sup> I emphasize “publicly available” to stress the fact that the United States Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs maintains other information and data about the FLEX program that is not publicly available (Peachey 2009).

“As with other Exchange Visitor Programs, the underlying purpose of the [FLEX] Program is to further U.S. diplomatic and foreign policy goals by encouraging positive academic and social experiences. Upon return to their homelands, experience has shown that these students will share the knowledge and goodwill derived from this experience with their countrymen. As part of this public diplomacy initiative, *sponsors*<sup>12</sup> *have both the obligation and the opportunity to influence positively these students’ attitudes and perceptions about the United States and its people*” [emphasis added] (United States Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs 2007).

Statements like this reinforce the fact that exchanges like FLEX are indeed firmly situated within a public diplomacy agenda and that one of the primary objectives of these programs is to influence participants’ attitudes.

### **FLEX Program Operations**

This section will present an overview of the structure of the FLEX program in order to provide sufficient context for understanding the population of interest in this dissertation. The competition for selection into the FLEX program is open to all school students meeting the eligibility criteria for the participating country of which they are citizens. Those individuals who are selected to be program finalists – in other words, for participation in the program – spend an academic year enrolled in a U.S. high school while living with an American host family.

There are several restrictions on the kinds of students who are eligible to participate on the program, the two most important being age and year in school. Grade restrictions vary based on the type of school system prevalent in each participating country, but generally speaking, students can take part in the FLEX selection competition if they are full-time students in the last

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<sup>12</sup> Although it is unclear from the original text, it is assumed that ‘sponsors’ in this context refers to all parties involved in the administration process of the FLEX program, that is, DOS ECA, American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS, and placement and coordinating organizations that work with the students once they are in the United States on the exchange program.

three years of high school. This is usually the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, or 11<sup>th</sup> grade in most Eurasian countries. Students are also only eligible to participate in the FLEX competition if their birth date falls within a specific range. This means that applicants are eligible if they are generally between the ages of 14 and 16. Thus, selected finalists participate in the FLEX program when they are generally between the ages of 15 and 17.

FLEX finalist selection takes place across designated administrative regions referred to as “testing centers”. Each participating country is divided up into testing centers, the number of which varies slightly from year to year depending on budgets and U.S. embassy priorities in each participating country. Generally speaking, testing centers consist of preexisting administrative designations in their respective countries (e.g. one or more province or region, or administrative sectors of a large city like Moscow). During the 2012-2013 testing season, for example, there were 145 testing centers across the ten participating countries of Eurasia (American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS 2012c).<sup>13</sup>

The following paragraphs describe the FLEX finalist selection process, in other words, how the tens of thousands of FLEX applicants from across Eurasia are narrowed down to the short list of program finalists and alternative finalists. In total, there are three rounds in the FLEX selection process through which applicants must advance in order to become a finalist (Table 1). The theoretical – or generally expected – percentage of students who advance through successive

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<sup>13</sup> This is the latest year for which figures on testing centers could be obtained. This number has changed in the intervening years because the list of participating countries has changed. Note that a slightly different – but similar – testing process also takes place for students with disabilities. Between 1993 and 2015, over 240 students with visual, hearing, motor, and other disabilities from across Eurasia participated in the FLEX program (American Councils Ukraine 2015).

rounds of FLEX program selection is presented in the top row of Table 1, while actual selection data for the 2001-2002 cohort, provided as an example, is presented in the second row.<sup>14</sup>

The selection process begins in autumn.<sup>15</sup> Rounds 1 and 2 generally take place in September and October.

**Table 1: FLEX Selection by the Numbers**

	Round 1 (R1)		Round 2 (R2)		Round 3 (R3)		FLEX Finalists (F)
Theoretical	R1 = $a$ applicants	→	R2 $\approx$ 30% of $a$	→	R3 $\approx$ 33% of R2	→	F $\approx$ 20% of R3 (or 2% of $a$ )
Actual (2001-02 Program Year)	N = 51,583 applicants	→	R2 = 14,646 (28.4% of R1)	→	R3 = 6,091 (41.6% of R2)	→	F = 1,211 (19.9% of R3 or 2.3% of $a$ )

Source: Aguirre International 2003.

All eligible students who meet the grade and age criteria are welcome to participate in Round 1 (R1) of testing. The first round of the selection process consists of a 16-question, multiple-choice test, the primary goal of which is to assess an applicant’s knowledge of English and ensure that he or she has at least a basic level of comprehension. Approximately 30% of students score well enough on the Round 1 test to advance to Round 2 (R2), which takes place the following day. For example, during the 2001-02 selection process, 14,646 out of the 51,583 Round 1 participants advanced to Round 2.

The cutoff score for passing the Round 1 test varies across testing centers. For example, in urban centers where the knowledge of English among high school students is high, an

<sup>14</sup> Aggregate data presented here on selection for the 2001-2002 cohort was taken from an externally-produced FLEX program evaluation (Aguirre International 2003b). This is the only year for which I could find publicly available data on FLEX selection.

<sup>15</sup> Most of the information about the three rounds and finalists of the FLEX selection process was taken from the website of the American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS office in Kyrgyzstan (American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS - Kyrgyzstan 2012).

applicant may have to receive a perfect score in order to advance to Round 2. In a remote, rural testing center where knowledge of English is not as strong, on the other hand, the cut-off score might be much lower. The reason for these varying standards is that knowledge of English is not a primary determinant in the selection of FLEX program finalists. Furthermore, by ensuring students compete with peers from their own region, this model guarantees more geographical diversity is built into the selection of program finalists.

The Round 2 test consists of two parts, the first of which is a standardized English language test like the Pre-TOEFL or TOEFL Junior.<sup>16</sup> In the second part of Round 2, students write three timed essays in English in response to a set of established questions. Essay questions generally involve students writing about their ability to overcome difficulties (e.g. “What difficulties have you faced over the past 2-3 years? How do you overcome them?”); deal with unexpected or unfamiliar situations or outcomes (e.g. “Has there been a situation where everything didn’t turn out as you expected? What did you do?”); be self-aware, particularly regarding strengths and weaknesses (e.g. “What are the three most important qualities you can identify in yourself? How have they helped you?”); and express themselves and communicate with others (e.g. “During a misunderstanding with a friend, how did you get out of the situation?”).<sup>17</sup> After the standardized tests and essays are completed, these testing materials are sent to the FLEX central administrative office. There, the standardized English-language tests are computer-graded, and independent committees of trained assessors read and evaluate student

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<sup>16</sup> TOEFL stands for Test of English as a Foreign Language. See Educational Testing Service website for more information about the TOEFL Junior, [https://www.ets.org/toefl\\_junior](https://www.ets.org/toefl_junior)

<sup>17</sup> This analysis was achieved based on aggregating and organizing thematically the material contained on webforums devoted to the FLEX program and FLEX program selection. Many Russian-language webforums are easily accessible through basic internet searches (examples include EFL.ru 2006, Future Future Exchange 2015, and VK.ru 2012).

essays “based on...factors considered critical for exchange experience success” (American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS - Kyrgyzstan 2012).<sup>18</sup>

The students who are among the top third of Round 2 candidates advance to Round 3, which takes place in November and December (Aguirre International 2003b). For example, this consisted of 6,091 individuals out of 14,646 Round 2 test takers, or slightly over 40% of Round 2 candidates, during the 2001-02 selection process. FLEX contestants complete only complete formal applications for the program during Round 3. These applications consist of medical health certificates, letters of recommendation, and high school transcripts, among other materials. At this point, Round 3 applicants also write additional essays and participate in individual and group interviews. Both group and individual interviews take place in front of a two-person team consisting of one seasonal, contracted FLEX recruiter (who is an American citizen) and one American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS staff member. Many times, this staff member is also a FLEX alumnus or alumna.

After the applicant participates in the interview and submits his or her application (generally from approximately November until March or April), a trained group of approximately 150 independent volunteer evaluators meets, reviews, and scores applicant essays, applications, and supporting documents. This committee of independent evaluators decides the list of finalists and alternates for each participating country based on funding and the number of available fellowships allocated by the DOS (American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS - Kyrgyzstan 2012).

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<sup>18</sup> American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS websites state that overall “selection is based on numerous factors, including the student’s English ability, personality, social skills, academic achievement, and leadership potential [and that] parents’ place of work, title or position, or economic status has no effect on finalist status.” (American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS - Kyrgyzstan 2012).

The list of finalists is generally announced in the spring, completing the roughly seven- or eight-month selection process. The number of students who are interested in participating in the FLEX program varies from year to year, but in general, only about two percent of initial Round 1 participants go on to become program finalists (Aguirre International 2003b). For example, out of the 6,091 individuals who advanced to Round 3 in the assessment process in 2001-02, only 1,211 – or about 20% – became FLEX program finalists or alternate finalists.

A few months after final selection takes place, both FLEX finalists and alternate finalists participate in a program orientation. FLEX finalists leave for the U.S. in July or August and spend the academic year living with a host family, usually studying in a local, public high school.<sup>19</sup> Once the program concludes at the end of the academic year, FLEX alumni return home. They have no formal obligations as alumni – either on the part of American Councils, their exchange placement organization,<sup>20</sup> or the DOS – with the exception that they fulfill a two-year home residency requirement because of their J-1 visa status.<sup>21</sup>

### **Sources of Data**

This dissertation will rely primarily on the following sources of data, each of which will be described in this section: pre-program and post-program surveys of the 2007-2008 cohort of FLEX participants (conducted in 2007 and 2008, respectively); a single-panel, cross-national web-survey of 2007-2008 FLEX alumni (conducted in 2013); and in-depth, semi-structured

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<sup>19</sup> Only a small minority of FLEX finalists attend private school in the United States, which is the decision and at the expense of their host family. In the 2007-2008 FLEX cohort, an estimated 4% attended private school while on the program.

<sup>20</sup> Among other things, these placement organizations arrange school and host-family placements and monitor student success in their host environment throughout the academic year.

<sup>21</sup> This is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.



interviews with 36 adult alumni of the FLEX program from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (conducted in 2012).

#### Pre- (2007) and Post- (2008) Program Surveys of the 2007-2008 FLEX Cohort

In November 2008, the Office of Policy and Evaluation (OPE) of DOS ECA published an outcomes assessment of the FLEX program using data from the 2007-2008 FLEX cohort (United States Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs 2008). In conducting this evaluation, the OPE relied on two sources of data. The first set consisted of population-level statistics taken from pre-program, pencil-and-paper surveys administered to all FLEX finalists and alternates (N=1,135) at the time of their respective pre-program orientations in the summer of 2007.

The second set of data was taken from a self-administered, web-based survey of 2007-2008 FLEX participants (finalists) that was conducted between April 8 and June 10, 2008. This post-program survey was conducted among the same cohort of FLEX finalists that had completed the pre-program survey during the summer of 2007, some 10 to 12 months earlier. At the time they completed this survey, these FLEX participants were about to finish, or had just finished, their time on the program. Seven hundred and seventy-nine students out of a population of 1,094 responded to the post-program survey, yielding an overall response rate of 71%.<sup>22</sup> Since the FLEX program does not require participation in any post-program events – unlike the

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<sup>22</sup> It is important to note that the population that completed the pre-program survey (2007) differs slightly from that of the post-program survey (2008) by 41 individuals. Mostly, this decrease is the result of two primary factors. First, students who participated in the Belarusian Youth Cultural Opportunity (YCO) Program (n=30) were included in the initial analyses but not the post-program survey. Second, there was a slight attrition in the FLEX program during the academic exchange year.

mandatory pre-program orientation – it would be impossible to compel all FLEX alumni to complete a post-program survey and obtain population-level data as was collected in 2007.

#### A Single-Panel, Cross-National Survey of 2007-2008 FLEX Alumni (2013)

Using a University of Michigan institutional license of Qualtrics online survey software, I developed a self-administered web survey for the 2007-2008 cohort of FLEX alumni. This survey measured many the same indicators and contained many of the same questions that appeared in both the 2007 pre-program and 2008 post-program surveys, thereby allowing for a comparison across three points in time. The survey also contained questions and measured indicators that I developed in order to assess important, individual-level characteristics about the FLEX participants, such as their socio-economic background, prior educational and social experiences, information about their host family and host experiences, and social and professional experiences since they returned home from the FLEX program. The 2013 assessment yielded 306 completed and valid surveys for a cohort response rate of 29%. Estimates presented using 2013 data were weighted by sex and country to control for the convenience sample relative to the 2007 baseline. More detailed information about the survey and its implementation can be found in Appendix II.

#### In-depth, semi-structured interviews with FLEX alumni from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (2012)

The 2013 cross-national web survey was preceded by in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with 36 FLEX alumni of various cohorts from Kyrgyzstan (n=20) and Tajikistan (n=16). In part, these interviews were meant to help elucidate themes and topics that would be tested in more detail in the 2013 cross-national web survey. These interviews were also

an attempt to insert participant voice into this research and to contextualize the quantitative findings. Since topics such as mobility, migration, professional and educational goals and trajectories, and Eurasian geopolitics were originally considered an important part of this research project, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were chosen as case countries for these interviews because of the relevance of these topics to these countries. More information about the 2012 in-depth interviews and the selection of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as cases can be found in Appendix III.

### **Limitations and Biases**

Despite the contributions that this dissertation can make in helping to understand better the near-term outcomes of participation in public diplomacy exchange programs, there are a number of things that this dissertation cannot do. I will first begin with a discussion of limitations of this case, followed by limitations and biases of the 2007, 2008, and 2013 survey data. Finally, I will conclude with a discussion of the limitations and biases of the 2012 in-depth interviews.

#### Limitations of the Case of the FLEX Program

Russia and the other Eurasian countries that comprise the FSU are critically important to U.S. foreign policy in several areas, and Eurasian countries are some of the only countries in the world in which the U.S. funds public diplomacy exchanges for adolescents. Thus, we should be cautious about suggesting that findings from this case study could be broadly generalized to all public diplomacy exchange programs, even other U.S.-funded programs operating in Eurasia.

Next, we know from the preceding chapter that FLEX program finalists are not representative of the population of Eurasian adolescents from which they are drawn. The fact that students are selected for participation into the FLEX program based on several different characteristics – many of which are subjective – means that this cohort, by definition, is not a representative sample of the general population. For example, a 1998 study conducted by the United States Information Agency in Russia found that, relative to others in their age cohort, FLEX alumni were more likely to be female, urban-dwelling, wealthier, have come from better-educated families, and have gotten better grades in school (United States Information Agency 1998).<sup>23</sup>

Finally, we cannot assume that any FLEX program effects at the cohort level are comparable to the effects of a similar exchange program of Eurasians in a destination country other than the U.S. or of a population of non-Eurasian adolescents in the United States. As was discussed in the research justification section, previous research on educational exchange programs suggests that the effects of program participation on a host of outcomes are context-specific.

### Limitations of the 2007 and 2008 Surveys

We must also be cautious given some limitations and biases inherent in the 2007 and 2008 FLEX pre-program and post-program survey data. The data that are used in this analysis were taken from the OPE's *Key Findings Report* (2008), which only presents summary statistics

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<sup>23</sup> This is not to suggest that FLEX participants are the 'elites' of their respective countries, as that is an inaccurate description. Elites with the financial wherewithal would likely pay for their child to participate in a typical study abroad program rather than have him or her go through the lengthy FLEX selection process in hopes of being awarded one of the few coveted spots.

at the cohort-level. Despite repeated requests, it was not possible to obtain individual-level data on this cohort or even the breakdown of information by country of origin (Peachey 2009).

The first major difference between the 2007 and 2008 surveys is that the mode of each survey is different. The 2007 survey data were taken from pre-program, pencil-and-paper surveys conducted with all FLEX finalists and alternates. FLEX program staff administered these surveys at pre-program orientations that were held in each of the participating countries in summer 2007. The second set of data comes from a self-administered web survey conducted between April 8 and June 10, 2008. While web surveys tend to have lower response rates than some other modes (see, for example, Sax, Gilmartin, and Bryant 2003), such a mode was the most optimal choice for surveying this cohort given both financial considerations and the fact that FLEX alumni are geographically dispersed, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

Third, a comment must be made about language and reliability with regard to the 2007 survey instrument. The pre-program survey was only administered in English during FLEX pre-program orientations. At that point in time, while program finalists' levels of English were deemed sufficiently good enough to participate in the exchange program, the level of English of many of these students was far from fluent. Thus, some of the phrasing, terms, and appropriateness of some of the questions in the survey may have made some of the response values unreliable. Take, for example, this question from the 2007 survey: "The Rule of Law is fundamental to a functioning democracy". Non-native English-speaking high school students may not know the phrase "rule of law"; even if they did, these adolescents may not have even formed an opinion on the subject. Similarly, the fact that the surveys were administered across various locations in Eurasia and proctored by untrained individuals means that we cannot be completely confident in the ways in which terms such as "rule of law" would have been

interpreted and described to FLEX finalists, should they have asked survey administrators for a definition or explanation.

Fourth, some of the questions contained in the 2007 survey were designed poorly and could have elicited ambiguous or biased responses. For example, one of the questions asked respondents “To what extent are you involved in... civic or political activism (e.g. elections, volunteering)?” There are two problems with the wording of this item. First, this double-barreled question asked about both activism – which may be interpreted very differently in the FSU than in the U.S. – and volunteering activity. While volunteerism may be complementary to activism, there are clear differences between the two (Eliasoph 2013).

In addition to bias, we must consider that some alumni may be discouraged from answering some questions like these truthfully because they might worry about the confidentiality of their survey responses and that their true feelings about their native country might be linked to their identity. While this may not be as much of an issue in relatively more progressive post-Soviet republics like Georgia or Armenia, this might certainly be a concern for young students from Turkmenistan, for example (Smith and Leigh 1997). Similarly, FLEX finalists and alumni respondents may feel compelled to answer questions such as “The United States is a democracy that works well” more affirmatively than they might otherwise in front of FLEX program administrators and the DOS, thereby resulting in a positive bias because of social desirability (Tourangeau and Smith 1996).

There are a few other small differences in the survey construction that should be given some consideration. To start, some sets of questions vary in the values assigned to their five-

point Likert scales. For example, some questions ask about favorability,<sup>24</sup> while others ask whether an individual “agrees”<sup>25</sup> or “somewhat agrees”<sup>26</sup> with a given statement. While a number of studies suggest that researchers need not be too concerned about the reliability of data derived from scales with different numbers of response categories (see, for example, Bendig 1954; Preston and Colman 2000), consideration should be given to the way in which culture may affect response patterns (Heine et al. 2002; Lee et al. 2002). Similar concern should also be given to the ways in which these changes in response categories might affect data reliability and across waves.

Some questions were also worded differently, albeit similarly, across the different survey waves. For example, the primary question asking students about the goals they would like to achieve while on the FLEX program changed between the pre-program and post-program survey. Not only did the wording vary between 2007 and 2008,<sup>27</sup> but also there was one fewer response item from which to choose in 2007 compared to 2008. The 2007 survey also allowed write-in responses, while the 2008 survey did not.

Finally, as was briefly touched on earlier in the paper, the population that completed the pre-program survey in 2007 differs slightly from that of the 2008 post-program cohort in two main ways. First, the 2007 population also includes those individuals who started the FLEX program but who returned home early from the program for various reasons. During the 2007-

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<sup>24</sup> Strongly unfavorable, generally unfavorable, neither favorable nor unfavorable, generally favorable, strongly favorable

<sup>25</sup> Strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree

<sup>26</sup> Strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree, strongly agree

<sup>27</sup> In 2007, FLEX finalists were asked the following: “There are many different reasons participants wish to go to the United States. Please choose the three most important reasons you have for going to the United States”. In 2008, FLEX alumni were asked the following: “Exchange programs provide participants with many important opportunities for learning and engaging from other countries. Please identify the three most important accomplishments of your program”.

2008 academic year, 64 of the 1,110 FLEX finalists returned early, which is nearly six percent of the finalists (Peachey 2013). Second, there was a difference in the number of Belarusian Youth Cultural Opportunity (YCO) Program students (n=21) who were included in the 2007, but not the 2008, analyses.<sup>28</sup> Changes within and among specific sub-groups of the reference population across panels need to be taken into consideration with regard to analyses as well, since there are likely important endogenous characteristics unique to these sub-groups (e.g. Belarusian YCO participants or students who return early from participation in the program) that make them different from other FLEX participants. In the end, no survey is without flaws or shortcomings, but examples like these illustrate that consideration must be given to specific elements of these surveys when conducting analyses and interpreting data.

#### Limitations of the 2013 Survey

Next, we will turn to the limitations and biases inherent in the 2013 FLEX survey, some of which are the same as those in the 2007 and 2008 surveys. First, unlike the 2007 survey, which was a census of the FLEX finalist population, and the 2008 survey, which surveyed nearly all FLEX alumni, the 2013 survey yielded responses from nearly a third of all eligible members of the 2007-2008 cohort. Accordingly, we must consider the ways in which this sample of FLEX respondents might or might not be representative of the population of alumni from which it is drawn.

There are a few ways in which the 2013 survey could be biased, some of which are illustrated in Table 2. First, while the percentage of female participants on the FLEX program

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<sup>28</sup> YCO was essentially the same as the FLEX program, but it was registered as a different program entity in Belarus.



generally outweighs the percentage that is male,<sup>29</sup> male respondents are underrepresented in both the 2008 and 2013 surveys, and to a much greater degree in 2013, compared to 2007. Despite the fact that early research on web survey response rates found that men – and particularly, more affluent males – were more likely than women to complete web surveys, this underrepresentation of males in repeat surveys is not unsurprising or inconsistent with what we would expect among foreign-language-study or study-abroad populations (Salisbury, Paulsen, and Pascarella 2010, Sax et al. 2003). Similarly, during data collection for in-depth interviews with FLEX alumni from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 2012, male FLEX alumni were much less likely than females to give consent to participate in the study.<sup>30</sup>

Second, respondents in the 2008 and 2013 panels also tended to be from slightly more urban areas than in the baseline 2007 census. I would conjecture that this is not only the result of more alumni living in urban areas – in other words, because of rural alumni having moved to urban areas over the course of this five-year period – but also because we might expect urban alumni to be more likely than non-urban alumni to respond to the survey because of having more regular internet access. While internet access expanded greatly in Eurasia between 2008 and 2013, in 2008 many people in small towns and rural areas had limited access, which was likely restricted to dial-up service or internet cafes (International Telecommunications Union 2013). Thus, in a pay-by-the-minute environment with relatively slow-speed internet, we would expect fewer respondents from rural regions and small towns.

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<sup>29</sup> High school exchange student populations are generally have a high percentage of females (see Hammer and Hansel 2005; Weichbrodt 2014, for example).

<sup>30</sup> This runs a bit contradictory to what we might expect in the United States. Research conducted during the early years of web surveys suggests that men – particularly more affluent men – are more likely to complete web surveys than women (see, for example, Sax et al. 2003).

**Table 2: Representativeness of 2008 and 2013 Survey Respondents  
Relative to the 2007 FLEX Census**

	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2013</b>
Sample (Population)	(1,135)	n = 779 (1,094)	n = 306 (1,072)
Survey date	Jun – Jul 2007	Apr – Jun 2008	Apr – May 2013
Current age	15.70	16.49	21.52
Sex (% male)	32.33	28.59**	23.20***
% currently living in capital or another city	62.15	69.04***	69.94***
% who reported attending public school	88.39	—	89.54

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1 relative to the 2007 baseline data

Third, we might also expect that FLEX alumni who have a favorable attitude about the United States or who had a positive experience on the FLEX program would be more likely to respond to the survey. These alumni respondents would likely be those who keep their contact information up-to-date in FLEX alumni databases, and they are also those who are presumably more likely to read emails where announcements about this study were placed. Furthermore, they are also likely to be more active in FLEX alumni community life than other alumni, and they may also be more likely to want to share their positive thoughts and experiences by participating in this research project (Tourangeau and Smith 1996).

For these reasons, we could plausibly assume that this non-random sample of respondents to the 2013 survey could positively bias the findings, particularly on questions relating to political attitudes and social involvement. In a way, this positive bias could be beneficial to the aims of this study. Given the widespread assumption among funders and public diplomacy program advocates that these exchanges are highly-effective mechanisms for ideational change, having positively biased estimates of political attitudes and social involvement could theoretically present “best-case” outcomes five years after program completion with regard to the kinds of effects program participation might have on socialization or other funder objectives.

Fourth, whereas the 2007 and 2008 surveys were fielded only in English, the 2013 survey was fielded in both English and Russian. Creating versions of the survey in each of the official

languages of the participating countries (Armenian, Azeri, Georgian, etc.) would have made cross-national and cross-linguistic comparisons more difficult because of the need to ensure the meanings of questions and response codes were the same across all languages. It would also have added considerable complexity and cost to the overall preparation of the survey instrument. In the end, no statistically significant differences were found between the primary descriptive characteristics – such as age, sex, country, location, and type of high school the alumnus or alumni completed – when comparing those alumni who completed the Russian-language version with the English-language version of the survey.

Fifth, disaggregation of responses by subgroups of alumni – e.g. on the basis of sex, religion affiliation, or country of origin – was not always possible in order to conduct more detailed analyses of the survey data. In part, this was due to the small sample of respondents to the 2013 survey once data were disaggregated, which resulted in wide confidence intervals in some cases. Even when disaggregation was possible, there was also not always a great deal of variation in estimates across sub-groups.

Finally, the 2013 survey neither included YCO respondents from Belarus (as was the case with the 2008 survey), nor FLEX alumni from Uzbekistan. The primary reason for excluding Belorussian alumni, in addition to the fact that the YCO program is treated as a distinct public diplomacy exchange program, is that these individuals were not surveyed in 2008. While Uzbekistani FLEX alumni were surveyed in both 2007 and 2008, they were not included in 2013 because the FLEX program, like many U.S. government-sponsored public diplomacy exchanges, is no longer operational in Uzbekistan. Thus, there was no comparable outreach mechanism in place that would allow for those 2007-2008 alumni to be contacted.

### Limitations of the 2012 In-depth Interviews

As is the case with most qualitative research, the purpose of conducting interviews with FLEX alumni from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan was not to interview a representative sample of the population of all FLEX alumni from those countries. Since the onus is on FLEX alumni to provide American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS and DOS with updated contact information, a complete population frame of FLEX alumni does not even exist. Thus, even given the purpose of this qualitative research and outreach constraints, there remain certain limitations and biases inherent to these interviews.

Despite their similarities, consideration must be given to the choice of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as case countries, as they are quite different from one another and also do not have internally homogeneous populations. To start, the titular language and culture of each country is different. The Kyrgyz people were historically a nomadic, tribal people who speak a Turkic language, whereas Tajiks were a settled population that speak an Indo-Iranian language. As such, the countries have very different pre-Soviet social structures, languages and cultures.

During the Soviet Union, massive attempts were made by the state to homogenize citizens of constituent republics in order to create a more homogenous Soviet society, identity and culture. Since the break-up of the USSR, however, these two countries have had different political experiences. Tajikistan has been ruled by the same president since the early days of the country's civil war in 1992, and Kyrgyzstan has experienced two revolutions (in 2005 and 2010) and has had four presidents (as of 2017) since gaining independence. These different contemporary political factors alone could have an influence on the way that young people in each of these countries perceive power, the role of the state, and democratic institutions, as well

as the way they discuss them while being interviewed. Thus, we must be cautious about making too broad of assumptions regarding the similarities of the populations of these two countries.

Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are also different from other countries of the FSU. From a socioeconomic standpoint, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan lag other FLEX-participating countries on many indicators, and they are the least developed among FLEX-participating countries on some others. For example, they have among the lowest life expectancy at birth, the lowest health expenditures per capita in purchasing power parity terms, relatively low access to improved water sources, the highest population growth rates, and the largest percentage of the population that lives in non-urban areas (World Bank 2016). Thus, young FLEX alumni from each of these countries may have different aspirations or post-program experiences from each other but also from FLEX alumni from other, more developed Eurasian countries. Furthermore, because nearly all alumni who were interviewed were identified through advertisements placed on email lists that target either FLEX alumni or alumni of all U.S.-funded public diplomacy exchange programs operating in each country, there is also an inherent self-selection bias in the kinds of individuals who were interviewed from each of these countries.

Second, given that the FLEX program has been functioning in the FSU for nearly 25 years, none of the alumni who participated on the program in its early years expressed an interest in being interviewed. This is unsurprising since older alumni are probably less likely than younger, more-recent alumni to stay connected to a community of high school exchange program alumni. Relatedly, American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS and DOS staff who work on FLEX alumni programming do not have up-to-date contact information for older alumni because fewer older FLEX alumni provide updated contact information to these institutions (Peachey 2011). Therefore, we can expect an overrepresentation of younger, more

recent FLEX alumni. As was the case with the 2013 web survey, we might also expect those alumni who felt they had very positive or meaningful experiences on the FLEX program, or those who had more positive views about Americans and the United States, to be more likely to express an interest in being interviewed than other members of their respective alumni cohort.

Third, we should also consider the role of status. My privileged position as an interviewer who was both a doctoral student and American might positively influence individuals to participate in these interviews. Nonetheless, since we know that public diplomacy exchange programs attempt to positively influence participants' attitudes, this is advantageous to the dissertation in that it provides insight into the attitudes and behaviors of individuals who are perhaps the FLEX program's most ardent supporters.

Fourth, even though there are FLEX finalists from practically each province of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan annually, by in large, alumni move to the capital city or abroad to attend university. Very often, alumni stay in the capital cities, go abroad, or live in locations other than the ones in which they grew up after they graduate because of the lack of opportunities in the small towns and rural villages from which they came.<sup>31</sup> Although internet access and mobile broadband are expanding rapidly in these two countries, alumni in the capital tend to have the most reliable internet connections and make regular use of email and email lists. Thus, it is logical to expect that alumni who live in the capital cities are more likely than those in other, non-urban locations to read and respond to advertisements on email lists, even if there are large numbers of FLEX alumni living in rural and remote locations.

Fifth, alumni who live in their home countries may also be more likely than those who live abroad to stay connected to others in the FLEX alumni community and to want to receive

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<sup>31</sup> See Chapter 4 for a discussion of data from the 2012-2013 web survey, which suggests that FLEX students almost universally attend universities or pursue higher education of some kind.

and read alumni email lists. Although some alumni who currently live outside of their home country were interviewed as part of this study, they are likely underrepresented relative to the population of all FLEX alumni.

Sixth, the use of telephone and Skype interviews may also have had an effect compared to other data collection modes (e.g. face-to-face interviews), although there has been very little research conducted on the effects of using telephone interviews in qualitative research (Novick 2008). While there were a number of advantages to conducting interviews with FLEX alumni by telephone – such as the ability to more-easily access geographically-distant alumni – there were other disadvantages as they relate to the FLEX alumni population (see Sturges and Hanrahan 2004; Sweet 2002; Tausig and Freeman 1988, for example). These include that some alumni may have had concerns about being interviewed on the telephone. For example, given the strong role that security services play in various countries of the FSU in monitoring the local population, some alumni may have been deterred from being interviewed because of concerns over third-party monitoring. Even among alumni who agreed to be interviewed, these telephone interviews may not have yielded the same depth and richness of data that might have been obtained from face-to-face interviews, despite research showing that qualitative data obtained by telephone interviews has been found to be rich and of high quality (Novick 2008). This is also possible because rapport with research subjects is established in a very different way with on the telephone than it is in person.

Finally, among the 36 FLEX alumni who were interviewed as part of this study, six had older relatives who had participated in the FLEX program. Of these six alumni, four had immediate family members – in other words, brothers or sisters – who had participated on the FLEX program. Even without having access to population-level data on FLEX alumni – the

assertion that 17% of all FLEX alumni have relatives who went on the program is implausibly high given the nature of program selection. This indicates a further bias in the sample of students interviewed: that is, these FLEX alumni interviewed were perhaps those more likely to have come from families, communities, or schools that would embody the ideal-type FLEX participant.

### Period and cohort effects

The issue of the suitability of the FLEX program as an appropriate case for studying socialization and public diplomacy exchange program outcomes was discussed in Chapter 2, and we know that Eurasian youth participate on the program at roughly the same age. However, a few points should be mentioned about period and cohort effects. Period effects are those factors that affect all age groups of individuals at the same time (e.g. the global financial crisis of 2007-2008), and cohort effects are those factors that result from the unique experiences of a group of individuals as they live their lives – for example, being a participant on the FLEX program during the 2007-2008 academic year (Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health 2017; Glenn 2007). Since the inception of the FLEX program, there have been two dozen FLEX program cohorts, each of which has experienced life in the United States during a unique period. Thus, a few points should be mentioned about these effects as they relate to the data that were collected.

First, this dissertation largely relies on data taken from the 2007-2008 FLEX cohort of participants. This cohort had a unique experience even relative to those FLEX cohorts that participated in the program just before or after them, not to mention the cohort that participated on the program a decade or more earlier. During the 2007-08 academic year, for example, the global financial crisis began to unfold, and primary campaigning for the 2008 U.S. presidential



election was underway. These two events alone likely had very unique impacts on the day-to-day lives of FLEX participants, as many host families likely were worried about their financial security and future, faced job losses, discussed politics, or even campaigned for particular political candidates. This suggests that we should be cautious about making too broad of claims about the generalizability of findings from the 2007-08 data in terms of being representative of all FLEX program cohorts.

Within each FLEX program cohort, we know that there are also differences across participating countries: FLEX participants come from countries with different political and educational systems and speak different languages, just to name a few. Thus, with regard to the in-depth interviews conducted in 2012, age, period, and cohort effects need to be considered when interpreting the findings, since these interviews took place with alumni from different cohorts, all of whom lived in the U.S. during different periods of time and who are all now different ages and at different periods in their life. This suggests that narrow or overly-specific inferences should not be drawn from these qualitative data given that the small numbers of interviews prevent any meaningful way of controlling for any of these effects.

## CHAPTER 4

### **Political Attitudes of a Cohort of Public Diplomacy Youth Exchange Program Participants**

This chapter gets to the heart of one of the most important questions about public diplomacy exchange programs: whether participation in a public diplomacy exchange program influences individuals' political attitudes. Specifically, this chapter will examine whether participation in the FLEX program influences Eurasian adolescents' attitudes about the United States, social values and rights, and democratic values in the near term. Similarly, it will examine alumni attitudes about the United States' system of governance and foreign policy and how they see the United States' role in the world (particularly as a partner for their home country).

The question of whether public diplomacy exchange program alumni have a favorable view of the host country or its government – in this case, the United States – after their time on the program is of profound importance to public diplomacy programs because these soft power instruments are designed to influence the attitudes and behaviors of foreign publics. Governments continue to fund public diplomacy exchanges and other soft power programs in part because they are seen to be successful instruments for winning hearts and minds. In the case of the U.S., several internal reports and external, funder-commissioned evaluations purport this to be the case.

However, for reasons that were outlined in the discussion of biases and limitations in the preceding chapter, there is reason to believe that internal or funder-commissioned evaluations may not always paint an entirely accurate picture of public diplomacy exchange outcomes,

particularly in terms of outcomes over the long term. Many of these publicly-available evaluations suggest that public diplomacy programs are generally successful in achieving their objectives in influencing attitudes and behaviors (Aguirre International 2003a, 2003b; United States Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs 2008). There is some research on study abroad populations, however, showing that some portion of exchange program participants develop unfavorable attitudes towards the host country or towards the government of the host country (see, for example, Carlson and Widaman 1988; Church 1982; Selltitz and Cook 1962). For example, Heath (1970) found that European students at the University of California, Berkeley generally had a less favorable view of the United States and Americans than non-European international students, and they were more likely to regard Americans as superficial and materialistic. Riegel (1953), in comparing a cohort of Belgian exchange fellows in the U.S. to a non-participant cohort, found those who had been to the U.S. were more critical of U.S. foreign policy than the non-exchange group. Litvin's study (2003) on Singaporean exchange students in Egypt and Israel found that attitudes of those exchange students towards Egypt and Egyptians changed negatively, while their attitudes towards Israel and Israelis' changed positively. Nyaupane and colleagues found that attitudes of American study abroad participants towards Dutch and Austrians were positive after their experience, but students' attitudes towards Australians were negative. In general, these cases provide various levels of specificity as to why some participants have negative attitudes towards the host country and its population, but as with some other attitudinal research on educational exchange attitudes, these are generally seen to be context-specific (Nyaupane, Teye, and Paris 2008).

In the social sciences, there has been a great deal of work done on intercultural adjustment and attitude change among study abroad participants. Some of the most widely

influential hypotheses and research agendas in this area have been surrounding the U-curve hypothesis' (Lysgaard 1955) and related literature. Later elaborated into a W-curve (Gullahorn and Gullahorn 1963; Murphy-Lejeune 2001), the U-curve hypothesis posits that exchange students' attitudes towards a host country tend to change in a predictable pattern, beginning first with an initial euphoric honeymoon phase. This is followed by a deep trough, in other words, a period of disillusionment and dissatisfaction with the host country and culture. With time, individuals' attitudes become increasingly more positive again until a new steady state is reached. If represented graphically, the degree of adjustment would appear on the y-axis and time on the x-axis, hence the U-shaped model. This "U" becomes shaped like a "W", since when the students return home, they generally experience a similar, but smaller, trough. In other words, they experience difficulties in readjusting to their home country and culture, very similar to that which they experienced at the beginning of their time on their exchange program, albeit to a lesser extent (Gullahorn and Gullahorn 1963).

Some of the adjustment research has found varying degrees of support for the favorability of sojourners' political attitudes towards the United States (e.g. Davis 1971; Greenblat 1971; Heath 1970). However, other research (e.g. Chang 1973; Coelho 1958) suggests that attitudes towards the host country do not fully recover from the dissatisfaction trough to levels seen at the initial honeymoon period (Church 1982). Furthermore, there is little research on if and how participation in international exchange programs affects the attitudes of exchange program alumni in the near-to-long term. The research that does exist suggests that alumni attitudes towards the host country remain favorable, although the extent to which these attitudes compare to those from before and immediately after the exchange program is unclear since these studies generally rely on single panel, retrospective surveys (Bachner and Zeutschel 2009; Dwyer

2004a). In short, this research is inconclusive in demonstrating that study abroad and exchange program participants and alumni will uniformly have positive attitudes of the host country both immediately after the program and in the near term.

Thus, using data specific to the 2007-2008 FLEX program cohort, this chapter will assess the extent to which public diplomacy exchange program alumni political attitudes are different before and after their participation on the program and five years later. In doing so, the research questions and analyses will be broken up into four sections: alumni attitudes about the United States and the United States government, democratic values, social values and rights, and finally, U.S. foreign policy and whether the United States is seen as a trustworthy partner in a comparative perspective.

### **Attitudes about the United States and the U.S. government**

Evaluations of public diplomacy exchange programs generally report that participants' attitudes about the host country – in this case, the United States – become, on average, more positive after their time on the exchange program (e.g. Aguirre International 2003b; University of Iowa Social Science Institute 2002; U.S. Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs 2007). While some research (e.g. Wilson 2011) suggests that this is not universally the case, summary data from FLEX program assessments indicate that this remains to be so with regard to the FLEX program.<sup>32</sup>

Based on the adjustment and political attitudes research discussed previously, as well as the literature dealing with the long-term effects of educational exchange programs, we would

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<sup>32</sup> Thus, I will not use the FLEX program as a case to test whether or not public diplomacy exchange alumni will have more positive attitudes of the host country immediately after their time on the program.

expect alumni attitudes in the near term to be as positive as, or slightly less positive than, those opinions about the host country that alumni held at the end of their exchange program. While their positive attitudes might be slightly dampened over the intervening five years, we would not expect them to be at the point the effects of program participation would have been completely negated, thus the attitudes should be still significantly more positive than the baseline assessment.

Furthermore, we know that the FLEX program is slightly different than a typical high school exchange program. Because it is fully-funded by the United States government – and more importantly, because participants are chosen through a multi-stage, non-random selection process rather than just random selection or elites’ ability to pay for their children to participate – individuals would almost have to have positive attitudes towards the United States in the broadest sense to even want to go on, or to be selected to participate in, the program.

Baseline data from the 2007-2008 cohort of FLEX participants provides support for the statement that FLEX finalists would have positive attitudes towards the United States in the broadest sense (Table 3). Prior to having gone on the program (2007), FLEX finalists as a cohort had slightly favorable attitudes towards the United States government, with a mean score of 0.66 on a range from -2 (strongly unfavorable) to 2 (strongly favorable).

**Table 3: 2007-2008 FLEX Alumni Views of the United States Government in 2008 and 2013 Relative to the 2007 Pre-program Survey**

	2007	2008	2013
How do you view the U.S. government? <sup>1</sup>	0.66	0.81*** (.029)	0.71 (.055)

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1 relative to 2007 pre-program survey data

<sup>1</sup> Response codes: -2 =Strongly Unfavorable, -1=Generally Unfavorable, 0=Neither Favorable nor Unfavorable, 1=Generally Favorable, 2=Strongly Favorable

Data from post-program surveys (in 2008) also show that, as a cohort, alumni have significantly more favorable opinions of the United States after their time on the program than

before their time on the program. On average, alumni have a somewhat favorable opinion of the United States with a mean score of 0.81. Both numerically and practically, this increase in 0.15 points across one year is not substantively a large increase; however, it is a positive increase on already-favorable attitudes, and it provides support for funders' claims that public diplomacy exchange programs have positive effects on individual-level attitudes.

Of broader concern, however, is in understanding the extent to which public diplomacy alumni have favorable attitudes of United States in the near term, since public diplomacy programs seek to bring about durable and permanent changes in individuals' attitudes and behaviors. Based on results from the 2013 web survey (as illustrated in Table 3), alumni, on average, have positive attitudes towards the United States government that are more favorable than in 2007 but which are slightly less favorable than in 2008. However, these data are inconclusive in definitively saying as much because this 2013 estimate is statistically insignificant from both that in 2007 or in 2008. What we can state conclusively is that, five years after their participation on the exchange program, FLEX alumni have positive attitudes towards the United States government; however, the large margin of error prevents us from definitively saying for certain how these attitudes compare to those immediately before (2007) or immediately after (2008) the program.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to draw any conclusions regarding how FLEX alumni attitudes about the United States government compare with those of their compatriots. It is difficult to find nationally representative attitudinal measures from Eurasia; however, we can find some insight by looking at data from the Pew Global Attitudes Project (PGAP) surveys. The PGAP is a project of the Pew Research Center, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank. Since 2001, the PGAP has regularly "conduct[ed] opinion surveys around the world on a broad array of

subjects ranging from people’s assessments of their own lives to their views about the current state of the world and important issues of the day.”

Across several different years, the PGAP surveyed representative samples of Russians (2007 through 2013 surveys) and Ukrainians (2007, 2011 surveys) on their opinions about the United States (note that PGAP surveys do not ask about views of the United States government) using a four-point Likert scale ranging from “very favorable” to “somewhat unfavorable” (Table 4). If we consider the young adult cohort (ages 18-25)<sup>33</sup> of Russians and Ukrainians, we find that, on average, young adult Russians and Ukrainians had, in 2007 and 2008, statistically neutral attitudes towards the United States. By comparison, we know that FLEX finalists had slightly favorable attitudes towards the United States in 2007, and increasingly so after their return in 2008. This holds with expectations by virtue of the nature of this public diplomacy exchange program.

**Table 4: Young Adult Russians’ and Ukrainians’ Opinions of the United States (2007-2012) Compared to Russian and Ukrainian FLEX Alumni Attitudes about the United States Government (2013)**

	2007 <sup>1</sup>	2008 <sup>1</sup>	2011 <sup>1</sup>	2012 <sup>1</sup>	2013 <sup>2</sup>
Sample (ages)	PGAP (18-25)	PGAP (18-25)	PGAP (18-25)	PGAP (18-25)	FLEX Survey
Russia	0.11 (0.14)	0.10 (0.14)	0.59*** (0.10)	0.54*** (0.10)	0.56*** (0.09)
Ukraine	0.31 (0.27)	— —	0.60*** (0.10)	— —	0.98*** (0.07)

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1 relative to a neutral position (neither favorable nor unfavorable)

<sup>1</sup> Survey question: “Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable or very unfavorable opinion of the United States”; Response codes: 2=Very Favorable, 1=Somewhat Favorable, -1=Somewhat Unfavorable, -2=Very Unfavorable

<sup>2</sup> Survey question: “How do you view the U.S. government?”; Response codes: -2=Strongly Unfavorable, -1=Generally Unfavorable, 0=Neither Favorable nor Unfavorable, 1=Generally Favorable, 2=Strongly Favorable

<sup>33</sup> There are no universal social, psychological, or even biological ranges that constitute phases of life such as “adolescence” or “young adulthood”, and the ways these cohorts have been constituted has varied greatly across research. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will consider young adulthood as the period ranging from age 18 to 25 years of age (Massachusetts Institute of Technology 2015).



Russian (n=88) and Ukrainian (n=87) FLEX alumni comprise over half of the respondents to the FLEX 2013 alumni survey. Breaking down attitudes by FLEX country-of-origin, we see that, on average, Russian alumni in 2013 had significantly less favorable attitudes towards the U.S. government than Ukrainians. Unfortunately, we only have indicators that allow us to compare these figures to the 2012 PGAP data for Russians and the 2011 figures for Ukrainians. Russian FLEX alumni in 2013 have roughly the same slightly positive attitudes towards the United States government as their young-adult compatriots did towards the United States in 2012. Ukrainian young adults had favorable view of the United States in 2011, but FLEX alumni had significantly more favorable attitudes towards the United States government in 2013.

While we do not have country-level data for FLEX alumni from 2007 and 2008 with which to compare the corresponding PGAP figures, we can surmise from previous research and from logic that Russian FLEX participants' attitudes towards the U.S. and the U.S. government were positive in both 2007 and 2008, something that was not the case among their compatriots at large at the time. We also observe that Russian FLEX alumni attitudes in 2013 were statistically non-different from their compatriots in the 2012 PGAP.

We would like to look in more detail at FLEX alumni attitudes towards the functioning of the United States. I have opted to use the general term "functioning" of the United States in the sense that I am attempting to aggregate a broad set of somewhat unrelated indicators about U.S. institutions and outcomes into a single category (outlined in Table 5 below). We find that the 2007 cohort of FLEX finalists, on average, somewhat agrees with several assertions about the functioning of the United States, with the strongest support in 2007 being for the idea that the

United States economy provides a good living for its citizens and the weakest support (although still positive) being for the idea that the United States is a democracy that works well.

**Table 5: 2007-2008 FLEX Alumni Attitudes about the Functioning of the United States in 2008 and 2013 Relative to the 2007 Pre-program Survey**

	2007	2008	2013
The United States has laws and regulations that protect the individual	1.34	1.53 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)	1.40 (0.05)
The United States economy provides a good living for its citizens	1.43	1.27 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)	1.03 <sup>***</sup> (0.05)
The United States provides equal opportunities for all	1.13	1.13 (0.03)	1.01 <sup>*</sup> (0.06)
The United States is a democracy that works well	1.12	1.12 (0.03)	0.83 <sup>***</sup> (0.06)
Russian Federation FLEX alumni only (n=88)	—	—	0.56 (0.11)

Standard errors in parentheses

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> p<0.01, <sup>\*\*</sup> p<0.05, <sup>\*</sup> p<0.1 relative to 2007 pre-program survey data

Response codes: -2=Strongly Disagree, -1=Somewhat Disagree, 0=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 1=Somewhat Agree, 2=Strongly Agree

Post-program survey findings in 2008 show that while there is increased support among FLEX alumni, on average, for the assertion that the United States has laws and regulations that protect the individual, there is only the same level of agreement for the statements that the United States provides equal opportunities for all and that the United States is a democracy that works well in 2008 and in 2007. Although still positive, there is also less support for the assertion that the United States economy provides a good living for its citizens in 2008 than in 2007.

While FLEX alumni attitudes towards these indicators remain slightly positive in 2013, support for them has either decreased to pre-program (2007) levels of support (e.g. “The United States has laws and regulations that protect the individual”) or they have significantly decreased even relative to the 2007 baseline. The largest average point decrease between 2007 and 2013 was observed for the question “The United States economy provides a good living for its citizens,” which could have been affected by both FLEX students’ first-hand perspectives of the

U.S. economy while on the program as well as the overall malaise of the U.S. economy since the late 2000s.

When taken together, we do not have clear evidence that FLEX alumni espouse attitudes towards the United States government and the functioning of the United States that are more positive in 2013 – five years after they completed their exchange program – than when they were as program finalists in 2007. While we cannot conclusively provide evidence as to the ways in which FLEX alumni attitudes compare to those of their Eurasian compatriots, the research findings in this section do suggest is that there is heterogeneity in attitudes across Eurasian countries and that, at least in some instances, FLEX alumni attitudes may not actually be more positive than those of their non-alumni compatriots. Altogether, this raises doubts about the near-term durability of any attitude change that may be ascribed to participation in a public diplomacy exchange.

## Democratic Values

This second section of the chapter examines FLEX alumni attitudes about democratic values statements. Research, particularly in political science, on the individual-level development of democratic values and attitudes about democracy and democratic institutions is vast and voluminous. Many studies test the relationship of specific variables – for example, educational attainment levels (Inglehart and Welzel 2005), social capital and membership in voluntary associations (Dowley and Silver 2002), as well a number of other economic and political factors (e.g. Evans and Whitefield 1995) – and support for democracy. This dissertation will contribute in some small way to that body of work by examining the relationship between public diplomacy exchange programs and support for democratic values.

At their core, public diplomacy programs seek to identify and invest in those participants who, at least at some level, espouse or support the values that the funding government wishes to promote. This is particularly true in the areas of governance and civil society. Public diplomacy programs funded by the U.S. government, therefore, inherently attempt to promote democracy and democratic institutions – and in particular, *American* institutions – by investing in foreign individuals (i.e. providing them with an exchange experience). The goal, then, is that favorable attitudes of these democratic values would translate into the enhanced development of democratic institution across Eurasia mirrored after those in the United States or increased or improved political ties between the United States and Eurasia in the near term.

All Eurasian countries that participate in the FLEX program are nominally democracies. The lived reality of these countries' citizenry, however, is not what one might expect of life in a democracy in that many of these countries are governed by quasi-authoritarian regimes (Economist Intelligence Unit 2012). Thus, favorable support for democracy or democratic

institutions among Eurasians does not mean that these citizens, practically speaking, have the ability or the willingness to act on any favorable attitudes they may espouse (Bahry, Boaz, and Gordon 1997). In other words, attitudinal support for democracy or democratic institutions or behavior does not necessarily equate to individual-level changes in behaviors such as increased civic or political participation or changes in voting behavior (for example, see Glasman and Albarracín 2006; Kim and Hunter 1993; Silver, Anderson, and Abramson 1986). Nevertheless, we know that governments like the United States invest in an array of public diplomacy exchange programs in order to support attitude change in the current and future generation of public and private sector Eurasian leaders.

There is empirical work to support the claim that Russians, for example, generally espouse broad support for democratic institutions (Gibson 2001; Gibson, Duch, and Tedin 1992; Miller, Hesli, and Reisinger 1994). We might expect the same thing of majority-Muslim post-Soviet republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia, as well (Inglehart and Welzel 2005). It is important to note, however, that individuals can also have support for democratic values, but not support a country that espouses, or claims to espouse, those values. For example, Tessler's research on attitudes in North Africa and the Middle East found that the post-9/11 anti-Americanism prevalent in these countries was primarily "a reflection of antipathy to U.S. foreign policy, as it is or at least as it is perceived, rather than a rejection of Western norms and values" (Tessler 2007).

As it relates to this dissertation, we can reasonably assume that the multi-stage FLEX program selection process would, by its nature, self-select those applicants whose attitudes towards American democracy and values are at least somewhat positive. High school students who are more likely to espouse favorable democratic attitudes and values would probably be

more likely to participate in the FLEX selection process, and students who espouse these ideas would also probably more likely to be selected to be program finalists, as well. Conversely, those individuals espousing negative attitudes about democracy or democratic values would likely not be selected into the program.

Therefore, assuming that FLEX finalists have a positive opinion of democracy and democratic values upon their selection into the program, we would like to assess the extent to which these presupposed positive attitudes become stronger (more positive) after their participation in the FLEX program. Similarly, we would like to assess the extent to which any post-program attitudes – presumably, which have remained positive or have even become more positive over the course of the program – have remained durable five years after these individuals returned from the exchange program.

In order to achieve this, the values listed in Table 6 represent the population (2007) and sample (2008, 2013) means of FLEX responses to various questions about their individual democratic attitudes both before (2007) and immediately after their time on the FLEX program (2008) and then five years later (2013). Generally speaking, the reported democratic attitudes of FLEX alumni are positive at a population level in 2007, with the strongest support among the alumni being for the belief in equal rights and protections for all citizens. As was mentioned above, the fact that these pre-program attitudes are strongly positive, on average, is unsurprising given the non-random, heterogeneous nature of selection into the program.

**Table 6: Reported Democratic Attitudes of 2007-2008 FLEX Alumni in 2008 and 2013  
Relative to the 2007 Pre-program Survey**

	2007	2008	2013
Voting is important because real decisions are made in elections	1.12	1.42*** (0.03)	1.16 (0.05)
Free and fair elections are the cornerstone of democracy	1.25	1.67*** (0.02)	1.57*** (0.04)
All citizens in a country should have equal rights and protections under the law	1.65	1.85*** (0.02)	1.88*** (0.02)
The Rule of Law is fundamental to a functioning democracy	1.23	1.54*** (0.02)	1.56*** (0.04)
Individuals and Organizations have the right to free speech and to voice opposition	1.28	1.66*** (0.02)	1.62*** (0.03)
An independent media is important to the free flow of information	1.22	1.49*** (0.03)	1.62*** (0.04)

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1 relative to 2007 pre-program survey data

Response codes: -2=Strongly Disagree, -1=Somewhat Disagree, 0=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 1=Somewhat Agree, 2=Strongly Agree

Across the board, reported democratic attitudes in 2008 were significantly more positive than those in 2007. As was the case in 2007, there was extremely high support expressed for the belief that all citizens of a country should have equal rights and protections under the law. In the eyes of public diplomacy exchange funders, these positive changes fall in line with program objectives (that individuals will have more positive attitudes about democracy and democratic values because of the program experience).

The results of the 2013 survey, however, show mixed results five years after FLEX alumni completed the program. The values on questions about attitudes regarding free and fair elections, the rights of all citizens to equal rights and protections, and the rights of individuals and organizations to free speech and opposition hold with expectations. However, attitudes about the importance of voting in 2013 are lower than 2008 reported values; while still positive, they are statistically indistinguishable from 2007 (pre-program) values. This may be a result of the fact that FLEX participants are still high school students. While they report to have familiarity

with the electoral process in the United States<sup>34</sup> – and presumably in their home countries as well – these students have not yet voted in any elections or become fully participatory in the electoral process (for more on this, see Hooghe and Wilkenfeld 2008). Part of the reason may also be that elections in many of the participating FLEX countries are only nominally free and fair.<sup>35</sup> Finally, reported attitudes on the belief that independent media is important to the free flow of information are significantly stronger (more positive) in in 2013 than in 2008.

Regardless of these mixed findings – while we cannot attribute these positive attitudes (or attitude change, in general) to individuals’ participation in the FLEX program, we can say that these FLEX alumni, on average, generally agree or strongly agree with statements about core democratic values such as voting and elections, individuals’ rights, and the importance of the rule of law after the completion of their year abroad five years after the completion of the program.

### **Attitudes about Social Values and Rights**

This third section of this chapter examines FLEX alumni views on social values and individual rights, particularly the opportunities that should be available to – and the rights that should be afforded to – individuals. Although this dissertation will not frame this section in sociological theory on civil society, values, or ideology in the Soviet and post-Soviet sphere, we know from research conducted in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet Eurasia that there has been found to be some degree of support for free elections, multiple political parties, and expanded

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<sup>34</sup> This is discussed elsewhere in the *Key Findings Report* (2008).

<sup>35</sup> A lack of access to individual-level data for the 2007 population and 2008 sample precludes the possibility of testing the belief in the importance of voting across variables such as country of origin.



civil rights (Bahry 1993; Bahry et al. 1997; Finifter and Mickiewicz 1992; Gibson and Duch 1993).<sup>36</sup>

Looking at the FLEX data, we know from the 2007 baseline census that FLEX alumni, on average, have positive attitudes about the rights and opportunities that should be afforded to individuals. Thus, we might expect that, after having spent a year in the United States – a country whose population, on average, espouses a higher overall ranking of self-expressive values than Eurasian countries (Inglehart and Welzel 2010) – that FLEX alumni would have more positive opinions of social values and individualism than before they went on the program. We would like to assess the extent to which these presupposed positive attitudes become stronger (more positive) after their participation in the FLEX program as well as the durability of these attitudes five years after these individuals returned from the exchange program – in other words, if they have remained as positive, or have become slightly less positive.

The values listed in Table 7 represent the population (2007) and sample (2008, 2013) means of FLEX responses to various questions about equal opportunities and individual rights both before (2007) and immediately after their time on the FLEX program (2008) and then five years later (2013). Overall, we find positive responses among FLEX participants to these two sets of attitudinal questions about social values questions in 2007.<sup>37</sup> In the 2007 census, the most positive responses among future FLEX participants are related to questions about an individual having the right to healthcare, education, freedom of speech, and employment. Among the 13 questions, religious pluralism (“Individuals should have the right to practice any religion”)

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<sup>36</sup> Note that support for expanded civil liberties does not imply, however, that Eurasians are willing to have these rights applied in practice universally (Gibson and Duch 1993).

<sup>37</sup> Note that, in this bank of questions, values of -1 and 1 refer to “*somewhat disagree*” and “*somewhat agree*”. In the Democratic Values section, -1 refers to “disagree” and 1 refers to “agree”.

received the weakest support, although on average, the future FLEX participants somewhat agreed with the assertion.

Between 2007 and the FLEX participants return in 2008, in the Individual Rights subsection we observe significantly positive increases in the reported agreement on each of these value statements. Again, in 2008, the strongest support was for the belief that individuals should have the right to a job, healthcare, and education, even though those rights already garnered very strong support in 2007. We also see that support for religious pluralism increased the most between 2007 and 2008, with reported values in 2008 falling roughly on par with those of other values.

**Table 7: 2007-2008 FLEX Alumni Attitudes about Opportunities and Individual Rights in 2008 and 2013 Relative to the 2007 Pre-program Survey**

	2007	2008	2013
<b>Individual Rights</b>			
Individuals should have the right to travel freely to other countries	1.38	1.54 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)	1.73 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)
Individuals should have the right to have acceptable housing	1.44	1.75 <sup>***</sup> (0.02)	1.84 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)
Individuals should have the right to practice any religion	1.09	1.61 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)	1.61 <sup>***</sup> (0.05)
Individuals should have the right to receive an education	1.84	1.91 <sup>***</sup> (0.02)	1.92 <sup>***</sup> (0.02)
Individuals have the right to have a job	1.75	1.84 <sup>***</sup> (0.02)	1.87 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)
Individuals have the right to have acceptable healthcare	1.85	1.89 <sup>***</sup> (0.02)	1.89 (0.03)
Individuals have the right to have freedom of speech	1.74	1.80 <sup>***</sup> (0.02)	1.81 <sup>**</sup> (0.03)
Individuals have the right to have access to information	1.64	1.77 <sup>***</sup> (0.02)	1.82 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)
<b>Equal Opportunities</b>			
Men and women should have equal opportunities	1.62	1.75 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)	1.73 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)
Ethnic minorities should have equal opportunities	1.41	1.80 <sup>***</sup> (0.02)	1.67 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)
People with disabilities should have equal opportunities	1.48	1.62 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)	1.70 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)
Religious minorities should have equal opportunities	1.33	1.69 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)	1.45 <sup>**</sup> (0.05)
Individuals should be considered equal under law regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or religion	1.47	1.68 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)	1.81 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)

Standard errors in parentheses

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> p<0.01, <sup>\*\*</sup> p<0.05, <sup>\*</sup> p<0.1 relative to 2007 pre-program survey data

Response codes: -2=Strongly Disagree, -1=Somewhat Disagree, 0=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 1=Somewhat Agree, 2=Strongly Agree

Like the previous section on democratic values, we see that five years after FLEX alumni completed their program (2013), reported attitudes are almost uniformly significantly positive compared to the 2007 values, with the only exception being for the statement that individuals should have the right to acceptable healthcare, which in 2013 is indistinguishable from the 2007 responses. However, in comparing 2008 values to those in 2013, things appear to be a bit more mixed in the Individual Rights subsection. The reported attitudes in 2013 are all statistically

indistinguishable from the 2008 values (except for the first question about the right to travel). These attitudes have remained relatively stable, and strongly positive, five years since alumni completed their exchange programs.

In 2007, we find slightly less attitudinal support for equal opportunities than we do for individual rights, although FLEX finalists do, on average, support equal opportunities. FLEX finalists reported the strongest support for equal opportunities across genders and the least (although still positive) support for the equal opportunities for religious minorities. Across the board, FLEX alumni have significantly more support for the equal opportunity of different groups in 2008 than they did as finalists in 2007. We find statistically stronger support, on average, for the question dealing with equality under the law in 2013 compared to 2008 values, but we see significantly less support in 2013, compared to 2008, for whether religious or ethnic minorities should have equal opportunities. In both cases, however, support was still more favorable than before students started their FLEX program exchanges in 2007.

In general, we can conclude that on almost every indicator, FLEX program alumni report to have more positive opinions of social values and individual rights after the program (in 2008) than before they participated on the program (in 2007). Similarly, alumni, on average, have the same level of positive opinion of social values and individual rights five years after they completed the program than immediately after they completed the exchange program.

### **Attitudes about U.S. Foreign Policy and the U.S. as a Trustworthy Partner in Comparative Perspective**

While the previous three sections dealt with FLEX alumni attitudes towards the United States, democratic and social values, and attitudes about individual rights and equal opportunities, this final section examines the attitudes of FLEX alumni respondents towards

United States' foreign policy and the trustworthiness of the United States as a partner. This section also looks at this perception of trustworthiness in a comparative perspective alongside other global powers such as the European Union (EU) and the People's Republic of China (PRC), as well as the view of alumni from other former Soviet Republics towards the Russian Federation.

Questions of power and influence in Eurasia have been the focus of a large amount of scholarly research in geopolitics and world systems long before even the origins the Soviet Union. Having a better understanding of FLEX alumni attitudes about these geopolitical forces is important for two main reasons. First, since one of the primary goals of public diplomacy programs is to influence individuals' long-term attitudes about the United States, it is important to understand the favorability of these attitudes among alumni in the near term.

Second, it is important to understand attitudes towards the United States relative to other important players in the region, like the EU and the PRC. While it is not possible in this study to understand the reasons behind these attitudes, knowing the attitudes that FLEX alumni have towards the United States five years after the completion of their exchange program relative to other world powers can help us to understand the relative importance of the United States, given that this select group of alumni have spent an academic year living in the country.

We might expect that, after having spent a year in the United States and having a better understanding of Americans, their beliefs, and their values, that FLEX alumni in 2008 would have a stronger belief that the United States foreign policy reflects the interests and attitudes of the American people. We might also find support for this given the fact that (as in Table 3 above) we know that FLEX alumni views of the United States became more positive between 2007 and 2008 before decreasing slightly to levels in 2013 that were statistically

indistinguishable from 2007 values. Conversely, we might expect less support for the statement that the United States imposes its views on other countries in 2008 compared to 2007, but that attitudes might have become slightly more positive between 2008 and 2013.

Looking at the survey data, we see that the reported support for the statement that the United States foreign policy reflects the interests and attitudes of the American people, while still positive, is not statistically different in 2008 from 2007 (Table 8). On average, alumni more strongly support the statement that the United States imposes its view on other countries in 2008 than in 2007.

In 2013, alumni attitudes about U.S. foreign policy were notably more skeptical in 2013 than in 2007. Compared to 2007, FLEX alumni in 2013 reported a slight increase in agreement with the statement that the United States imposes its view on other countries as well as had a stronger opinion regarding the statement that United States' foreign policy reflects the interests and attitudes of the American people.

**Table 8: 2007-2008 FLEX Alumni Attitudes about U.S. Foreign Policy in 2008 and 2013 Relative to the 2007 Pre-program Survey**

	2007	2008	2013
United States foreign policy reflects the interests and attitudes of the American people	0.80	0.83 (0.04)	0.31*** (0.06)
The United States imposes its view on other countries	0.70	0.86*** (0.03)	0.94*** (0.05)

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1 relative to 2007 pre-program survey data

Response codes: -2=Strongly Disagree, -1=Somewhat Disagree, 0=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 1=Somewhat Agree, 2=Strongly Agree

We know that individuals pursue participation in public diplomacy exchanges for several reasons. Based on pre-program data from this study and our understanding of public diplomacy exchanges, we would expect that FLEX participants and alumni would have a great deal of trust in the institution that sponsors them on this fellowship. As with the way they viewed the United States, FLEX finalists were slightly in agreement with the view that the United States was a

trustworthy partner for their country in 2007, which we know and would expect to be the case. In 2008, these reported opinions, on average, had significantly improved after students had returned from their exchange program (see Table 9). However, just as with the indicators in Table 8, reported attitudes (while still positive) dropped in 2013 to a significantly lower level than that reported in 2007.

**Table 9: 2007-2008 FLEX Alumni Attitudes about the United States Government as a Trustworthy Partner in 2008 and 2013 Relative to the 2007 Pre-program Survey**

	2007	2008	2013
The United States government is a trustworthy partner for my country	0.69	0.79*** (0.03)	0.53*** (0.05)

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1 relative to 2007 pre-program survey data

Response codes: -2=Strongly Disagree, -1=Somewhat Disagree, 0=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 1=Somewhat Agree, 2=Strongly Agree

Thus, in line with funder expectations and outlined in internal assessment documents, we find support for FLEX alumni seeing the U.S. government as a trustworthy partner after the completion of the exchange program in 2008 but also that attitudes were less positive in 2013 than in 2007 attitudes in 2013. In general, these indicators presented in Tables 8 and 9 point to a possible disconnect between the way U.S. foreign policy production is perceived and reflective of the interests of American citizens in the near term. The fact that estimates are almost uniformly less positive in 2007 and 2008 than in 2013 suggests that alumni have a more nuanced and critical perspective of the United States government, more generally, and a less favorable attitude towards the United States government than funders would desire.

This leads us, then, to consider how FLEX attitudes towards United States foreign policy and the United States as a trustworthy partner compare to other major powers. While the causes of these less-positive attitudes in the near-term would very likely also be the result of other, broader social and geopolitical forces, this dissertation can, at the least, look at a temporal

snapshot of these attitudes in a comparative perspective with other major powers that have various degrees of influence in Eurasia.

Because of the Russian Federation's unequivocal geopolitical, cultural, social, and sometimes military, relationship with successor states of the Soviet Union, the 2013 FLEX survey also asked non-Russian alumni about the extent to which they felt like the Russian Federation was a trustworthy partner for their native country. On average, these alumni were neutral as to whether they felt the Russian Federation was a trustworthy partner (see Table 10). There was, however, heterogeneity in responses across FLEX countries: Kazakhstani, Tajikistani, and Turkmenistani alumni felt that the Russian Federation was a trustworthy partner for their country, on average, and Georgian and Ukrainian alumni (particularly non-ethnic-Russian Ukrainians) felt that the Russian Federation was not. This sentiment on the part of Georgian and Ukrainian alumni also reflects broader geopolitical relationships between these countries and the Russian Federation at the time of the 2013 survey.



**Table 10: 2007-2008 FLEX Alumni Attitudes about the Russian Federation as a Trustworthy Partner in 2013**

	<b>2013</b>
All non-Russian Federation respondents (n=218)	-0.09 (0.08)
Georgian respondents <i>only</i> (n=22)	-1.00 <sup>***</sup> (0.19)
Kazakhstani respondents <i>only</i> (n=13)	0.69 <sup>**</sup> (0.29)
Tajikistani respondents <i>only</i> (n=11)	1.00 <sup>***</sup> (0.23)
Turkmenistani respondents <i>only</i> (n=12)	0.50 <sup>*</sup> (0.26)
Ukrainian respondents <i>only</i> (n=87)	-0.33 <sup>**</sup> (-0.13)
ethnic Russian Ukrainians (n=44)	0.07 (0.17)
other ethnicities in Ukraine (n=43)	-0.73 <sup>***</sup> (0.18)

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1 relative to zero (neutral)

<sup>1</sup> Survey question: “The Russian Federation is a trustworthy partner for my country”; Response codes: -2=Strongly Disagree, -1=Somewhat Disagree, 0=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 1=Somewhat Agree, 2=Strongly Agree

The indicators in Table 11 outline the extent to which FLEX alumni viewed the EU and the PRC as trustworthy partners in 2013. Taken together, all alumni, on average, had positive, statistically significant attitudes of the EU as a trustworthy partner for their countries; however, this masks underlying heterogeneity in attitudes by country. Alumni from Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova reported the most positive attitudes towards to the EU, on average, and alumni from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan had statistically neutral attitudes towards the EU. This likely reflects these countries’ geographical proximity to EU member states of countries like Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova and the bilateral political and trade relationships that each has with the EU.

**Table 11: 2007-2008 FLEX Alumni Attitudes about the European Union and People’s Republic of China as Trustworthy Partners in 2013**

	EU <sup>1</sup> 2013	PRC <sup>2</sup> 2013
All non-Russian Federation respondents (n=218)	0.55*** (0.05)	0.04 (0.05)
Russian respondents <i>only</i> (n=88)	0.44*** (0.10)	0.30*** (0.08)

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1 relative to zero (neutral)

<sup>1</sup> Survey question: “The European Union is a trustworthy partner for my country”

<sup>2</sup> Survey question: “The People’s Republic of China is a trustworthy partner for my country”

Response codes: -2=Strongly Disagree, -1=Somewhat Disagree, 0=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 1=Somewhat Agree, 2=Strongly Agree

By comparison, FLEX alumni attitudes towards the PRC were notably less positive.

Alumni from the Russian Federation were the only group of alumni that expressed a significantly positive (favorable) view of the PRC, and Georgian alumni were the only group to have expressed a statistically negative (unfavorable) view of the PRC. The opinions of alumni from the remaining countries were not statistically different from zero, on average.

In general, the attitudes of FLEX alumni about the trustworthiness of foreign powers could be summarized as follows. First, FLEX alumni from nine of the ten participating countries had more positive attitudes towards the EU, on average, than did FLEX alumni from the Russian Federation. Conversely, FLEX alumni from the Russian Federation had positive view of the PRC as a trustworthy partner, on average, whereas alumni from the other nine countries were statistically neutral. Also of note was that attitudes towards the U.S. and the EU as trustworthy partners, while being the most positive, were statistically indistinguishable from one another. This suggests that, despite having spent an academic year in the country, the United States is not necessarily seen by FLEX alumni as being the most trustworthy foreign power.

## Chapter Summary

It is truly a tall order to summarize generalizations about the attitudes of a diverse set of young adults from 10 different countries over time. However, an analysis of survey data on the political attitudes of FLEX program alumni immediately after the completion of their exchange experience – and then again after five years – provides some insights into the near-term attitudinal effects of public diplomacy exchange programs, even while acknowledging that there are many factors that contribute to attitude change, many of which cannot always be attributed to individuals' participation in the program.

First, we find that expressed democratic and social values are, on average, largely positive at the baseline level, holding with what we would expect based on theory. These reported attitudes became more positive, in general, after completion of the exchange program and then leveled off a great deal between 2008 and 2013. The high degree of positivity at the baseline could very easily be, in part, emblematic of non-random selection effects, as previous research would suggest. The increase from 2007 to 2008 and the durability of these attitudes since then, however, suggests a broader treatment effect that would be worth investigating more deeply, perhaps by way of a pre- and post-program study with both a control and treatment group. Nevertheless, the positive change on many of the indicators in question between 2007 and 2008 lends support to the assertion that participants' experiences on the exchange program have had some positive effects on their attitudes.

Second, we can also say that these FLEX alumni attitudes are nuanced. In particular, the attitudes of public diplomacy alumni are not uniformly positive over the near-term, something which runs counter to what funders purport in internal evaluations. It is true that while the attitudes on most indicators were generally positive, in quite a few cases – particularly those

questions about functioning and efficacy of the United States government – we see mixed or weakened support over time (albeit still positive). Sometimes these attitudes in the near-term are weakened to the point where they are statistically non-different from baseline measures. This suggests that there is a lack of evidence to support the claim that any near-term positive changes touted by program-funded evaluations are salient in the near term.

Third, while we lack both the ability to track individual-level responses over the long term or many external measures with which to compare these FLEX alumni responses to their compatriots, this research suggests that part of the near-term effects and success of FLEX, (as well as many other public diplomacy exchanges), in achieving its stated goal of having a cohort of alumni who espouse positive attitudes about the United States and its institutions – may have more to do with the selection of individuals over treatment effects. In other words, the robust selection processes (as outlined in Chapter 2) may not only select those individuals who are the most likely to succeed and thrive on an exchange program, but they are also tailored to identify those individuals who are already likely to espouse those attitudes and values that public diplomacy programs wish to promote.

Finally, even though FLEX alumni expressed decreasing support for the functioning and efficacy of the United States government, FLEX alumni felt that the United States was just as trustworthy a partner for their country as the EU, on average. Similarly, alumni had neutral positions towards the Russian Federation and China as trustworthy partners for their native country. While this could be considered a geopolitical “success” of the public diplomacy exchange program – simply in that political attitudes towards the United States were, on average, stronger than that of the Russian Federation or China, the lack of baseline data leaves one wondering about the extent to which these reported attitudes were a function of selection or

treatment. Similarly, these reported measures indicate that it may be worth comparing FLEX participant attitudes towards the United States (as well as other geopolitically important powers such as the EU, the Russian Federation, and the PRC) as part of both the pre- and post-program surveys.

While this chapter examined the durability of political attitudes in the near-term, the next chapter will look at an equally important FLEX program goal: the social effects of program participation in the near term. Just as important as winning the hearts and minds of foreign populations, person-to-person public diplomacy exchanges like FLEX aim to connect Eurasians with Americans in the hopes that these individuals will build durable relationships that will last long after the public diplomacy exchange program ends.

## CHAPTER 5

### **The Social Effects of Public Diplomacy Youth Exchange Program Participation**

Having discussed the relationship between participation in a public diplomacy exchange and political socialization, this chapter focuses on a second, but equally important, line of inquiry in this dissertation: participants continued ties and relationships with the people they met on the program and their social involvement in groups and organizations as program alumni. In other words, this chapter answers the broad question: *What are the social outcomes of having participated in a public diplomacy exchange program?* Specifically, this chapter examines the extent to which public diplomacy exchange program alumni have positive attitudes towards Americans in the near term and the extent to which they maintain contact with people they met while on the program.

Using data specific to the 2007-2008 FLEX program cohort, this chapter assesses the extent to which participation in a public diplomacy exchange program influences alumni social attitudes. In doing so, the research questions and analyses will be broken up into four sections: alumni attitudes about America, FLEX alumni social involvement, planned versus actual, post-program contact with Americans, and finally, FLEX alumni returning to the United States.

#### **Attitudes about Americans**

The development and maintenance of transnational relationships is an important, long-term goal of public diplomacy exchanges. These programs also endeavor for program alumni –

who have, in principle, developed favorable attitudes towards the United States, its people, and its institutions – to become influential change agents in the organizations, groups, and professional spheres to which they belong later in life. Nevertheless, we would expect that FLEX alumni, on average, would enter the program with positive attitudes about Americans.

The adjustment and political attitudes research, largely discussed in the preceding two chapters, illustrates that, under certain conditions, intercultural contact and interactions can have a positive effect on individuals' attitudes and enhance understanding and acceptance about members of other groups (e.g. Allport 1954; Amir 1969; Bochner 1982; Cook 1962; Pettigrew 1998; Riordan 1978). Similarly, we know that there have been a large number of studies looking at the effects of contact within educational exchange contexts (Carlson and Widaman 1988; Hull 1978; Morris 1960; Selltiz and Cook 1962). Other important work on attitudes has focused on the conditions under which the intercultural contact takes place (Allport 1954; Amir 1969; Pizam, Jafari, and Milman 1991).

Building on this and based on what we would expect from the post-contact adjustment literature (Gullahorn and Gullahorn 1963; Murphy-Lejeune 2001), we would expect FLEX alumni attitudes towards Americans in the near term (i.e. in 2013) to be, on average, as positive as, or slightly less positive than, those opinions about Americans that alumni held at the end of their exchange program in 2008. While their positive attitudes might be slightly dampened over the intervening five years after their return to their home country, we would not expect the effects of program participation to have been completely negated.

Baseline data from the 2007-2008 cohort of FLEX participants (Table 12) provides support for the statement that FLEX finalists would have positive attitudes about the American people. This is unsurprising since we know about the non-random nature of FLEX selection.

Finalists would almost have to have a positive attitude towards Americans to be selected to participate on the program.

**Table 12: 2007-2008 FLEX Alumni Attitudes about Americans in 2008 and 2013 Relative to the 2007 Pre-program Survey**

	2007	2008	2013
How do you view the American people? <sup>1</sup>	1.22	1.30 <sup>***</sup> (0.02)	1.25 (.04)
Most Americans are friendly and open	1.36	1.25 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)	1.42 (0.04)
Most Americans are wealthy	0.47	-0.05 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)	-0.21 <sup>***</sup> (0.05)
Most Americans are well-informed about the world	0.46	-0.56 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)	-0.94 <sup>***</sup> (.06)
Most Americans express their personal opinions even if they contradict authority	0.85	0.88 (0.03)	0.92 (0.06)

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1 relative to 2007 pre-program survey data

Response codes: -2=Strongly Disagree, -1=Somewhat Disagree, 0=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 1=Somewhat Agree, 2=Strongly Agree

<sup>1</sup> Response codes: -2=Strongly Unfavorable, -1=Generally Unfavorable, 0=Neither Favorable nor Unfavorable, 1=Generally Favorable, 2=Strongly Favorable

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In line with what we would expect, FLEX finalists' attitudes about Americans were statistically positively different after – they had participated in the program (i.e. in 2008 versus 2007); however, the reported attitudes of FLEX alumni about the American people in 2013 were, on average, not significantly different from either 2007 or 2008 values.

In spite of the extensive literature on the effects of participation in international exchange on participants' attitudes, in the case of this cohort of FLEX participants, individuals reported attitudes about Americans were relatively constant across all three time periods. This lends credence to the argument that the treatment (i.e. program participation) in and of itself may not have a durable influence on participants, and that the selection of individuals with strongly-positive attitudes about Americans may play a greater role in explaining these positive attitudes.

Other questions that were fielded in 2007, 2008, and 2013 provided more specific perspectives of FLEX alumni about Americans. For example, in 2008, FLEX finalists felt that



Americans were generally friendly and open; however, there was less support for this statement, on average, than in 2007. Values in 2013 were significantly more positive than in 2008, but they were statistically indistinguishable from 2007 values.

Similarly, while FLEX students slightly agreed with the statement that “most Americans are wealthy” before they went on the program, they slightly disagreed with the same statement after having lived in the United States for a year. The same is true with FLEX students’ opinions about how well informed they thought Americans were about the world. Both measures saw large, significant decreases – in other words, greater disagreement – with the statements between 2008 and 2013.

Before their participation on the FLEX program, Eurasian youth likely saw Americans as wealthy – not only from what they knew from popular movies, television shows, news, and the internet – but also in relation to their view of what constitutes developed countries (see, for example, Thornton et al. 2012). After having lived in the United States, it is likely they perceived that, while Americans are, on average, objectively wealthier than the average Eurasian, the relative purchasing power of this money and cost of living do not necessarily make Americans relatively wealthy or well-off. Similarly, FLEX finalists may have assumed that Americans were well-informed about the world in 2007, but once they lived in the United States and interacted with Americans, they felt that Americans were not as well-informed about the world as they previously thought.<sup>38</sup> The average reported values on these two measures decreased even further between 2008 and 2013 relative to 2007.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> See, for example, research illustrating young Americans’ low levels of geographic literacy (Roper Public Affairs 2006).

<sup>39</sup> Between 2008 and 2013, the values on the question “Most Americans are well-informed about the world” were statistically different from one another at the 0.01 level and at the 0.10 level in the question “Most Americans are wealthy”.

Across the three time periods, the only question in which there does not appear to be any statistically significant difference is a question about Americans' expression of their personal opinions even if such opinions would contradict authority. In addition, given that these statement questions were poorly constructed from a survey design standpoint, I would posit that not every FLEX student has had such an experience with Americans either before or during their time on the program. Responses to this question reflect, perhaps, how FLEX alumni think an American would react compared to having an actual conversation where Americans' positions contradicted authority or legislation.

Taken altogether, these five questions about FLEX attitudes towards Americans suggest a more nuanced and mixed picture of FLEX alumni attitudes across the near term than comparisons of the DOS's 2007 and 2008 pre- and post-program evaluations would suggest. In most cases, average attitudes towards Americans remained unchanged between 2007 and 2013, and in one case – regarding how well informed Americans are about the world – attitudes got progressively less positive across that period, suggesting that FLEX participants' positive attitudes about Americans has more to do with the selection of program finalists who already espouse such attitudes about Americans than the effects of program treatment.

### **Social Involvement**

Social and sports activities for youth are generally a much more institutionalized feature of communities and school systems in the United States than in Eurasian countries. While in some Eurasian countries, school systems have clubs or tournaments that compete at the city, regional, or national level, the breadth and scope of such activities is nowhere near as broad as it typically is in the United States. Similarly, the concept and practice of volunteering and

voluntarism are understood differently in different countries (Salamon and Sokolowski 2001). Since one of the social hallmarks of the FLEX program – as well as other exchange programs – is to encourage students to learn about the United States and meet people through social involvement, it stands to reason that students will likely have been involved in organized social activities to a greater extent on the FLEX program than when they were living in their home country. Besides, social involvement is one of the factors considered when selecting FLEX program finalists (see Chapter 2 for more details).

According to the 2008 FLEX post-program survey, such a pattern of social involvement appeared to be the case. The 2008 post-program survey asked alumni about their involvement in different social spheres. FLEX alumni reported that, during their time on the FLEX program, they were the most actively involved in family activities – most or some of the time – compared to all other types of activities. The next most popular level of was in cultural activities or community service, which they reported to be involved in, on average, some of the time. Among the possible areas that students were asked about, religious activities garnered the lowest average participation.

If we were to compare alumni attitudes immediately after the FLEX program (2008) and as alumni five years later, we would expect that alumni would likely continue to be involved socially, but that their levels of organized social involvement would be less than those levels reported in 2008. There may be several reasons to expect such a decrease. First, at the time of the 2013 survey, many of the FLEX alumni would have been university students, working individuals, or both. These kinds of people would clearly be busy studying, working, or otherwise actively engaged in professional pursuits. By comparison, their time on the FLEX program was one in which participants were not allowed to work in any job. Furthermore, many

FLEX finalists would be participating in a U.S. high school curriculum that would include repetitive material to that which they had already covered in their home country (i.e. repeating a grade) or which would not count for academic credit upon their return (American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS 2012a). Many FLEX participants would also have graduated from high school before even going on the program. Thus, FLEX participants were perhaps more likely to have more time to participate in extracurricular activities while in the U.S. than they may have upon their return.

Second, without delving deeply into a theoretical discussion on civic culture, research using World Values Survey and European Values Survey data has shown that civic culture is not as durable as some theorists claim and that it is significantly weaker in the FSU than in the West across a range of indicators (Janmaat 2006). Even in light of this, research in the U.S. suggests that at the cohort level, young adults' (ages 20-29) civic engagement has declined in nearly all areas compared to the 1970s (Flanagan, Levine, and Settersten 2009; see also Putnam 2000).

Third, many alumni might lack the same access to social, recreational, volunteer, and community service clubs and organizations that they enjoyed and had access to in the United States. During the Soviet period, individually-motivated and organized volunteerism (i.e. that which was not mandated by a state entity) did not exist, and non-state, grass-roots organizations were illegal until near the end of the U.S.S.R. (Wathen 2016). Thus, there is no recent historical culture of participation in community groups and association. Despite the growth in the number of formal, registered community service organizations since the breakup of the Soviet Union, however, the scope of work of many of these remains limited as a result of many factors such as a lack of institutional capacity, political regulation, the perpetuity of informal networks, to name a few (see Howard 2002, for example). Similarly, as was discussed earlier in relation to

secondary schools and communities, Eurasian universities in which FLEX alumni would be enrolled would also be likely have few formal institutions and groups in which students and other young people could participate.

Before turning to the analysis, it is important to note that the 2013 version of the survey question that relates to social involvement was asked in a slightly different format than in 2008. While the 2008 version of the questionnaire asked FLEX alumni about their involvement during the past year, the 2013 survey asked about involvement within the past few months.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> There are three glaring problems with the design of this section of the survey instrument. First, the question asked about the frequency of participation in very subjective ways (e.g. ‘Some of the time’ or ‘most of the time’). It is unclear what these designations actually mean or how these units of measurement could be reliably compared among or across individuals. Second, participation in these activities not only relied on individuals’ desire to participate but also their access to the activities themselves. For example, students who lived in rural communities in the United States far from their host high school may have wanted to participate in school clubs or sports teams but may not have had the means to do so. The third major problem with this section of the survey instrument had to do with the question that received the lowest average response: involvement in civic or political activism. While the question gave examples such as “elections” or “volunteering”, it is unclear how foreign minors living in the United States could participate in election-related activities or how volunteering would be considered a form of activism. I suspect that much of the strong response to the question on “community service” was, in fact, a reflection of volunteering in school- or community-related groups. Most, if not all, of the exchange student organizations required FLEX students to complete a minimum amount of community service as part of their participation on the program.

**Table 13: The Frequency of 2007-2008 FLEX Alumni Involvement in Various Activities in 2013 Relative to the 2008 Post-program Survey**

	2008 <sup>1</sup>	2013 <sup>2</sup>
Community service	3.17 (0.02)	2.58 <sup>***</sup> (0.05)
Civic or political activism	2.66 (0.03)	2.39 <sup>***</sup> (0.06)
Cultural activities	3.21 (0.03)	3.27 (0.04)
Family activities	3.69 (0.02)	3.11 <sup>***</sup> (0.05)
Religious activities	2.70 (0.04)	1.85 <sup>***</sup> (0.05)
School clubs or organizations	3.05 (0.03)	2.68 <sup>***</sup> (0.06)
Sports teams	2.91 (0.04)	2.31 <sup>***</sup> (0.06)

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1 relative to 2008 data

1=Never, 2=Seldom, 3=Some of the time, 4=Most of the time

<sup>1</sup> Survey question: “In the past year, how often were you involved in the following activities?” Percent Reporting “Yes” (versus “No” or “I Don’t Know”)

<sup>2</sup> Survey question: “During the past few months, how often were you involved in the following activities?” Percent Reporting “Yes” (versus “No” or “I Don’t Know”)

The 2013 survey results showed that, while still active, FLEX alumni, on average, were demonstrably less involved socially in 2013 than they reported in 2008 (Table 13). This was visible across all areas of involvement except in terms of their reported participation in cultural activities, where there was no statistically significant change observed between the two periods. The most dramatic decrease in social participation between 2008 and 2013 had to do with reported participation in religious activities. In 2013, female alumni were significantly more involved than male alumni in cultural activities, community service, religious activities, and men were significantly more involved than women in sports.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>41</sup> The differences in involvement in religious activities and community activities was significant at the .10 level.

### **Planned versus Actual Post-Program Contact with Americans**

As a person-to-person public diplomacy exchange program, we know that one of the goals of FLEX is to promote communication and interaction between participant youth and Americans. According to program materials, the primary goal of the program is to give Eurasian youth first-hand experiences in America among Americans in order to promote long-term mutual understanding (American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS 2012b; United States Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs 2008). However, based on our understanding of post-program adjustment and that interpersonal and international contact may be difficult to maintain in the long-term, we would anticipate that individuals' actual contact would not live up to their expectations. Thus, when we compare attitudes immediately after the FLEX program to those five years later, we would likely expect that, while alumni would plan to remain in contact with particular groups, their levels of actual contact with these groups would be less than what they expected would be the case (in 2008).

Results of the 2008 and 2013 survey waves suggested that, on average, there was likely a relationship between whether FLEX participants planned to keep in contact with members of different groups of people once they returned home and reporting having done so five years later. In 2008, among all the listed groups, FLEX alumni, on average, said that they were most likely to keep in contact with members of their host family, their American classmates and friends, and other FLEX participants after they returned home (Table 14). On average, FLEX alumni said that they were least likely to keep in contact with staff members from their host organization (e.g. their local program coordinators) or other members in their community once they returned home. This is unsurprising given that FLEX alumni in general, will have spent the most time while on their program with host family members and American classmates and friends.

**Table 14: Percentages of FLEX Alumni Reporting Planned (2008) versus Actual (2013) Contact with Various Groups of People in the United States**

	2008 <sup>1</sup>	2013 <sup>2</sup>
	n=759	n=306
Host family	96.05 (0.71)	83.50 (2.12)
American classmates and friends	94.07 (0.86)	68.98 (2.64)
Other FLEX participants	93.15 (0.92)	67.33 (2.68)
Teachers	62.06 (0.86)	21.78 (2.36)
Other community members	57.97 (1.79)	18.81 (2.23)
Host / placement organization staff	34.91 (1.73)	14.52 (2.01)

Standard errors in parentheses

<sup>1</sup> Survey question: “Of the following people you met during your visit to the United States, whom do you think you will keep in contact with once you return home?” Percent Reporting “Yes” (versus “No” or “I Don’t Know”)

<sup>2</sup> The question on the survey asked alumni to choose with whom (in a list of groups of individuals) they have been in contact during the past few months

The 2013 web survey asked alumni to list the groups of individuals with whom they have been in contact during the past few months. While the term “during the past few months” in the 2013 survey was not very exact, the deliberate vagueness of the question was meant to overcome recall bias that would be present if an exact timeframe were proffered as well as to account for the fact that alumni, five years on, may not be in contact with individuals from their high school exchange experience with a great deal of frequency, if at all. Thus, we must be cautious about making direct comparisons between 2008 and 2013 values in Table 14. For example, we cannot say that because only some of the FLEX alumni who thought they would keep in contact with their American classmates and friends actually did contact them over the past month, that this represented less or weaker contact than expected.

However, the 2013 survey report lends, if not definitive, then strong support to the assertion that actual contact with people alumni met while on the program was less in 2013 than



in 2008. On average, the 2013 survey results suggested that FLEX alumni kept in contact with individuals from nearly three (2.75) of these groups over the past few months. If we were to rank-order these groups of people in terms of those with whom FLEX alumni were most to least likely to keep in contact with – or with whom they reported having contact with over the past few months – we could plausibly make the case, then, that a relationship exists between the strength and intensity of contact while on the program and the sustained contact with these same groups of individuals over the near term.

Just as recent contact does not equate to any and all planned contact, types of contact also vary. For example, visiting someone in person is very different than sending an email or a text message. Survey results in 2013 showed that alumni, on average, kept in contact with individuals from the United States using nearly three different media.<sup>42</sup>

Over nine in ten alumni reported communicating using various social networks such as Facebook. Nearly two-thirds reported using the telephone or other voice communications platforms (e.g. Skype), and over half reported communicating via email.

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<sup>42</sup> Table 15 outlines the media that alumni used to keep in contact with the groups of individuals that they identified (Table 14).

**Table 15: Percentage of 2007-2008 FLEX Alumni Who Reported Using Various Methods for Keeping in Contact with Groups of People in the United States (2013)**

	2013 <sup>1</sup>
Social networks (Facebook, VK, Odnoklassniki, etc.)	91.83 (1.57)
Telephone, Skype, etc.	62.42 (2.77)
Email	55.88 (2.84)
Text messaging, online chat, etc.	28.43 (2.58)
Letters and packages through the mail	27.45 (2.55)
Visiting in person (including host family visiting student)	22.22 (2.38)
Host family visited student (outside of the United States)	9.48 (1.67)
Total average means of contact reportedly used (all respondents) <sup>2</sup>	2.87 (.076)

Standard errors in parentheses

<sup>1</sup> The 2013 survey asked alumni to choose from a list of ways in which they usually keep in contact with the individuals they met while on the FLEX program.

<sup>2</sup> The total average means of contact reported per respondent is the average of all methods of contact reported by each respondent in the 2013 FLEX survey.

### **Returning, or not, to the United States**

One of the tensions that exists within public diplomacy exchange programs is that the spirit of these programs is to promote the development of a cadre of foreigners who have positive attitudes towards the sponsoring country (e.g. the United States) but who will also return to their home countries after the completion of their program. Entire student visa regimes (e.g. “J” visas in the United States) are built around this principle.

Almost all alumni survey respondents in 2013 reported that they either have returned to, or would like to return to, the United States again someday. Understanding the motivation behind this return helps to understand better the actions of a group of people in whom the United States

government has invested and who have largely developed an affinity for the United States and with Americans.

Perhaps most surprising was that the 2013 survey found that over 22% of FLEX alumni respondents reported that they visited their host family in person in the five years since they completed their exchange program (see Table 15). Using data from other survey questions on alumni mobility,<sup>43</sup> I have estimated that over 40% of these visits were ones where the host family visited the student outside the United States (for example, in the student's home country or in another country).<sup>44</sup> Even if we were to assume that this percentage of in-person visits (22%) was a positively-biased estimate of the actual percentage of FLEX alumni from the 2007-2008 cohort who returned to the United States, this results in a high percentage of person-to-person contact and shows the durability of this contact over time.

Overall, ninety-three FLEX alumni respondents (30%) reported having returned to the United States for some reason or another since they completed the program five years ago. The left-hand-side of Table 16 lists the primary reason for returning to the United States among those ninety-three who reported having returned. The right-hand-side columns list the primary reason individuals would return to the United States again among those individuals who have already been. In both cases, the primary reason expressed by over a third of returnees was to visit host family or friends. Of the 34 alumni who returned to the United States primarily to visit their host families, 14 of the 19 said that that would be their primary reason for returning to the United States again.

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<sup>43</sup> Here, alumni mobility refers to whether or not a FLEX alumnus or alumna reported having returned to the United States – at any point and for any reason – after the completion of their exchange program.

<sup>44</sup> This equates to slightly over 9% of respondents to the 2013 survey.

Working part-time in the United States – on programs such as the popular “Work & Travel USA” program<sup>45</sup> – was a popular draw for over a quarter of those who returned to the United States. Of those 24 respondents, over a third (n=9) said that they would like to go back to the United States to attend graduate school, and another few (n=5) said that they would like to return to live and work full-time. In general, though, of those who reported having returned to the United States, well over half said that they would like to return to the United States either to attend graduate school, visit host family or friends, or live and work full-time.

**Table 16: Percentages of 2007-2008 FLEX Alumni Reporting Motivations for Returning or Wanting to Return to the United States (2013)**

	Primary reason for going to the U.S. among those who have returned (%) <sup>1</sup>	Primary reason for <u>returning again</u> to the U.S. among those who have already been (%) <sup>1</sup>
Tourism	4.30	5.37
Attend university	19.35	5.37
Participate in a study abroad or exchange	3.22	4.30
Attend graduate school	2.15	26.88
Attend conference or meeting	4.30	2.15
Visit host family or friends	36.55	20.43
Live and work full-time	4.30	16.13
Work part time (e.g. summer job, Work & Travel USA, etc.)	25.80	2.15
Respondents currently in US	—	16.12 <sup>2</sup>
Do not want to return	—	1.07

<sup>1</sup> n=93

<sup>2</sup> The 16 participants who are currently in the U.S. are attending college (n=12), attending graduate school (n=1), or living full time (n=3).

Over two-thirds of alumni respondents had not returned to the U.S. between the completion of their program and the time of the 2013 survey. Of those who had not returned, the percentage that said that they would return to visit host family or friends (37%) was the same as among those who had already returned to the U.S. A larger percentage of those who had been

<sup>45</sup> See the U.S. Department of State’s J-1 visa page for more information about this program (United States Department of State 2013).

back expressed a desire to return to attend graduate school, live or work full time, or work part-time than those who had not returned.

**Table 17: Primary Reason Reported by 2007-2008 FLEX Alumni for Wanting to Return to the United States Among Those Alumni Who Have Not Returned (2013, % of Alumni)**

	<b>2013<sup>1</sup></b>
Tourism	9.43
Attend university	5.66
Participate in a study abroad or exchange	8.01
Attend graduate school	18.86
Attend conference or meeting	3.77
Visit host family or friends	37.26
Live and work full-time	14.62
Work part time (e.g. summer job, Work & Travel USA, etc.)	1.88
Do not want to return	0.47

<sup>1</sup>n=212

Among all 2008 FLEX alumni (both those who had and had not returned to the United States in the five years after the completion of their program), about a third (n=98) said that they would like to return – or have returned – to the United States primarily to visit their host family and friends (Table 18). Over 20% (n=65) said that they would like to attend graduate school in the United States, and 15% reported that they would like to live and work in the United States on a full-time basis.

**Table 18: Primary Reason Reported By 2007-2008 FLEX Alumni for Going Back to the United States (2013, % of Alumni)**

	<b>2013<sup>1</sup></b>
Tourism	8.19
Attend university	5.57
Participate in a study abroad or exchange	6.88
Attend graduate school	21.31
Attend conference or meeting	3.27
Visit host family or friends	32.13
Live and work full-time	15.08
Work part time (e.g. summer job, Work and Travel, etc.)	1.96
Already in the US	4.91
Do not want to return	0.65

<sup>1</sup>n=305

While it is difficult to extrapolate both about how these expectations of returning to the United States may translate into actual plans – or even how these individuals’ expectations may change in the future – we can probably feel confident in saying that there is both a small number of FLEX alumni who do not want to return to the United States and also a small number of FLEX alumni who wish to live and work there full-time. Based on these self-reported measures, the remainder of FLEX alumni would like to return to the United States for either professional development reasons – for example, to attend a conference or graduate school – or for tourism. Both these data and the in-depth interviews conducted with alumni from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan support this notion and do not support concerns over widespread alumni brain drain to the United States, at least during the five years after program completion. The issue of alumni mobility and the brain drain will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

### **Chapter Summary**

As was also the case with the preceding chapter, it is difficult to generalize about the social behavior of a diverse set of young adults from 10 different countries over time. However, a summary analysis of data collected immediately after the completion of their exchange experience – and then again after five years – provides some insight into near-term social outcomes. Taken altogether, responses to questions asked about Americans suggest that, on average, a more nuanced and mixed picture of FLEX alumni attitudes across the near term than the 2008 Department of State’s pre- and post-program evaluations would suggest. In most cases, average attitudes towards Americans remain statistically unchanged between 2007 and 2013, and in one case – regarding how well informed Americans are about the world – attitudes became

progressively less positive over time. Altogether, we can make the claim that the average attitudes of FLEX alumni of Americans are not simply idealized and positive.

Similarly, results of the 2013 web survey results showed that, while still active, FLEX alumni, on average, were demonstrably less socially involved in 2013 than they reported being upon completion of their exchange year in 2008. This level of social involvement was visible across all areas except in terms of their reported participation in cultural activities, where there was no statistically significant change during the intervening five-year period. The most dramatic decrease in social participation between 2008 and 2013 had to do with reported participation in religious activities.

The survey also lends, if not definitive, then strong support to the claim that contact with people that alumni met while on the program in 2013 was less than what alumni anticipated immediately after completion of their program in 2008. We could also posit that a relationship exists between the strength and intensity of contact while on the exchange program and subsequent contact with the same groups of individuals five years later. Survey results in 2013 showed that over nine in ten alumni reported having communicated with people they met on the program using various social networks such as Facebook. Nearly two-third reported using the telephone or other voice communications platforms (e.g. Skype), and over half reported communicating via email.

Taken together, these findings on public diplomacy exchange program participants' political and social attitudes and involvement that were discussed in the preceding two chapters suggest that some outcomes of public diplomacy exchanges may fall in line with funders' expectations and wishes, particularly in the short term (that is, immediately following the completion of the exchange program). However, in the near term, the picture is more nuanced

and complex. In many cases, changes in indicators between the baseline and post-program surveys do not hold in the near term. On many measures, average attitudes remain positive in the near term, but they are somewhat unaffected by program participation in that they are statistically insignificant from baseline measures.

Thus, we can posit that it is the selection of program participants, rather than participation in the exchange program itself, that plays a very important – if not bigger – role in explaining the positive social and political attitudes of public diplomacy exchange program alumni in the near term, at least in the case of the FLEX program. Simply put, because selection into public diplomacy exchange programs like FLEX is so rigorous in its attempt to identify the “right” individuals – that is, those who already espouse positive attitudes on the kinds of indicators of interest to the United States government and who will be successful on the exchange program – this selection may play a larger role in explaining near-term attitudinal outcomes than the program experience (treatment) itself. All things being equal, this would not negate the importance of participation in public diplomacy exchange programs, but rather suggest that outcomes be measured by different metrics and perhaps on a different time scale than is currently commonplace with many programs. A fuller discussion of recommendations for public diplomacy policy will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.



## CHAPTER 6

### Differences in Funder and Participant Intentions and Outcomes

As I have repeatedly shown, public diplomacy funders like the DOS want to support exchange participants who they believe will develop positive attitudes about, and an affinity towards, the U.S., its institutions, and the American people. They hope that these investments pay off and that participants will someday become influencers in policy, business, and the non-profit sectors within their home countries (see Aguirre International 2003b, for example). Thus, whereas the preceding chapters examined near-term public diplomacy exchanges and socialization outcomes largely from the perspective of funders' objectives, this chapter will focus on near-term outcomes from the perspective of participants.

It is important to consider individual agency in public diplomacy exchange programs like FLEX because most public diplomacy exchange programs are largely unstructured by design.<sup>46</sup> In other words, while funders aim to socialize participants in specific, structural ways, each participant's experience on the program is unique. As a result, the effects and outcomes of program participation are complex, and the official and organizational intentions of the program design diverge from the way these programs are experienced by participants.

In addition to the fact that funders have limited control over both treatment effects and program outcomes, at an individual level, exchange program participants have their own

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<sup>46</sup> Note that this is not the case with all public diplomacy exchange programs (see Atkinson 2010, for example).

motivations for participating in programs, even while they may end up having positive attitudes about or an affinity towards the United States in the near term. For example, FLEX students may want to get a United States high school education – or diploma<sup>47</sup> – because they believe that having that will help them gain entry to a better university upon their return. They may also want to master English for professional reasons or to help them enroll in a university abroad. They may simply want to have a fun and relaxing gap year.

Therefore, this chapter will answer the following overarching question: *How do participants' goals and expectations of their program align or diverge from those of program funders, and what are the consequences of this?* In other words, I will examine how the official organizational structure of the FLEX program compares to the perspectives and experiences of program participants themselves. I will make my case by drawing on data from 2007, 2008, and 2013 FLEX surveys, as well as in-depth interviews conducted with FLEX alumni in 2012.

I will first discuss participants' satisfaction with their exchange program, followed by participants' aspirations and perceived outcomes from the program. Then, I will discuss alumni actions in the near-term, which I will show differ in some ways from the objectives of public diplomacy program funders. Following this, I will discuss alumni mobility over time, since this is also strongly related in various ways to the outcomes that public diplomacy exchange programs wish to achieve. This will also include a discussion of education (e.g. university, choice of major) and occupation choices, because these also relate to the professional outcomes of FLEX alumni and topics of migration and immigration. Finally, I will discuss the ways in

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<sup>47</sup> Prior to their departure, FLEX finalists students are informed that they should not expect to receive a high school diploma and that the awarding of such diplomas is at the discretion of each host school (United States Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs 2014).

which public diplomacy exchange program alumni identities are influenced or strengthened by their participation in such a program and the consequences of this.

### **Expectations and Outcomes**

Overall, both the 2008 post-program survey and in-depth interviews conducted with FLEX alumni from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan suggested that alumni were relatively satisfied with major portions of their exchange experience. On average, the 2007-2008 program alumni reported having been quite satisfied with major aspects of their time in the United States: life with their host family, their relationship with their local coordinator – who is the major point of contact between these students and their host organizations – and their on-program FLEX activities (Table 19).

**Table 19: 2007-2008 FLEX Alumni Satisfaction with their Exchange Program (2008)**

	<b>2008</b>
How satisfied were you with life with your host family?	1.43 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)
How satisfied were you with FLEX program activities (trips, workshops, community, etc.)	1.17 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)
How satisfied were you with local coordinator?	1.14 <sup>***</sup> (0.04)

Standard errors in parentheses  
<sup>\*\*\*</sup> p<0.01, <sup>\*\*</sup> p<0.05, <sup>\*</sup> p<0.1 relative to zero (neutral)  
 Response codes: -2=Very dissatisfied, -1=Dissatisfied 0=Neither Satisfied  
 nor Dissatisfied, 1=Satisfied, 2=Very Satisfied

Variation in student experiences aside, this self-reported overall satisfaction is probably a function of two systemic features of the FLEX program. First, as we know, individuals are selected into the FLEX program in a non-random manner. The fact that finalists are chosen, in part, on their perceived ability to be flexible and adaptable to different social circumstances means that they are probably more likely than their non-participant compatriot peers to successfully navigate various and unfamiliar social situations in another country. Second, part of

this satisfaction may also be the result of FLEX program administrators and placement organizations identifying suitable individuals to serve as local coordinators and host families.<sup>48</sup>

Next, I will present the goals participants stated before they started the program (2007) and then compare these to what they reported as having been their program achievements after the completion of the program in 2008. Table 20 outlines the cumulative percentages of FLEX alumni responses to a series of related questions asked in 2007, 2008, and 2013 about individuals' reasons for participation and subsequent achievements after having participated in the FLEX program.<sup>49</sup>

The grey-shaded columns in Table 20 list row percentages relative to the cumulative total of responses, which include both the write-in response option and the question about community service and volunteerism (where applicable). The columns in white exclude these response options when calculating percentages across all three waves. For purposes of consistency across waves, the discussion in this section will focus on the non-shaded column, that is, the one that excludes write-in options and questions about community service and volunteerism.

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<sup>48</sup> While it likely varies by exchange placement organization, host families and local coordinators have to be vetted and participate in a training process in order to work with FLEX students (AIFS Foundation 2012, 2015).

<sup>49</sup> Unfortunately, from a survey design standpoint, there was nonconformity in question design across the three survey waves. For example, the 2007 pre-program survey allowed students to write-in responses. The 2008 post-program survey, on the other hand, did not allow write-in responses, and it also proffered an additional response item about community service and volunteerism that was not present in the 2007 survey. The 2013 survey allowed both a write-in response and asked both about community service and volunteerism.

**Table 20: Reasons Cited for Participating in the FLEX Program (2007) and Subsequent Achievements Cited among 2007-2008 FLEX Alumni (2008, 2013), as a percentage of all reported responses**

	2007	2007	2008	2008	2013	2013
Population (Sample)	3400 <sup>2</sup>	(3382) <sup>3</sup>	(2339) <sup>4</sup>	(2151) <sup>3,4</sup>	(915) <sup>4</sup>	(803) <sup>3,4</sup>
To increase / Increased my understanding of American society, people, and culture	24.09	24.22	26.93 <sup>***</sup>	29.29 <sup>***</sup>	25.03	28.52 <sup>***</sup>
To improve / Improved my English	16.32	16.41	15.31 <sup>**</sup>	16.64	17.70	20.17 <sup>***</sup>
To share / Shared my culture with others	15.00	15.08	14.19 <sup>**</sup>	15.43	12.24 <sup>***</sup>	13.94 <sup>**</sup>
To make friends with students from other countries	11.76	11.83	07.65 <sup>***</sup>	08.32	04.15 <sup>***</sup>	04.73 <sup>***</sup>
To make / Made friends with American students	10.53	10.59	10.35	11.25	05.57 <sup>***</sup>	06.35 <sup>***</sup>
To promote / Promoted mutual understanding between both our countries	09.18	09.23	04.83 <sup>***</sup>	05.25 <sup>***</sup>	06.23 <sup>***</sup>	07.10 <sup>***</sup>
To acquire / Acquired leadership skills	08.06	08.10	10.73 <sup>***</sup>	11.67 <sup>***</sup>	13.33 <sup>***</sup>	15.19 <sup>***</sup>
To improve / Improved my education	04.53	04.55	1.97 <sup>***</sup>	2.14 <sup>***</sup>	03.50 <sup>**</sup>	03.10
Other (write-in)	00.53	—	Not asked	—	1.53 <sup>***</sup>	—
Learned about community service and volunteerism	Not asked	—	08.04	—	10.71	—

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1 relative to 2007 pre-program survey data for that column

The question formation across the various survey waves was as follows: “There are many different reasons participants wish to go to the United States. Please choose the three most important reasons you have for going to the United States” (2007); “Exchange programs provide participants with many important opportunities for learning and engaging people from other countries. Please identify the three most important accomplishments of your program” (2008, 2013). Percentages listed in Table 20 represent the relative response selecting that statement relative to all reported responses. Respondents had the choice of selecting up to three responses in total; therefore, the total population of responses is roughly three times the total number of FLEX finalists.

<sup>2</sup> Includes the write-in cases (n=18), which were a response option in 2007, but not in 2008. Similarly, questions about community service and volunteerism were asked in 2008, but not 2007.

<sup>3</sup> Excludes write-in cases (n=18) from the analysis.

<sup>4</sup> Statistical significances listed are relative to the 2007 baseline.

In 2007, the distribution of reasons given by students for wanting to go on the program (in other words, their personal aspirations) was much broader than in 2013. In 2007, nearly a quarter of all reasons given related to individuals wanting to increase their understanding of American society, people, and culture. Another third of responses related to students wanting to

improve their English or share their culture with others. These generally fell in line with the stated objectives of the FLEX program (as a person-to-person public diplomacy exchange program rather than a professional development or degree-granting program). Similarly, we might expect that the goals of this cohort of youth – many of whom were selected because of their interest in experiencing a comparative cultural experience – would be more aligned with the cultural and social goals of this program rather than any personal or professional development benefits in 2007.

Relative to the 2007 pre-program survey, the results of the 2008 post-program survey illustrate a trend that continued to the 2013 findings. Across the survey waves, there was an increasing percentage of students who reported to have increased their understanding of American society, people and culture, improved their English, and acquired leadership skills to the point where these three responses alone constituted nearly two-thirds of all responses in 2013. Cumulative responses on all other items (except “Improved my education”) were significantly lower in 2013 than in 2007.

These data illustrated that, five years after the completion of the program (2013), FLEX alumni saw their near-term accomplishments of having participated in the program as being situated in their individual changes and outcomes – for example, the development of skills and capacities – and not necessarily the trans-national relationships they made or the better understanding they had of Americans and the United States. This could be explained on one level because it was the skills and personal development elements (e.g. knowledge of English) that were more durable than contact with Americans in the near term; however, this also suggested that, in the near term, one important public diplomacy program goal – promoting the

strengthening of relationships between Eurasians and Americans – appeared to be a less prominent achievement among program alumni.

This finding was also broadly reinforced by in-depth interviews conducted with Kyrgyzstani and Tajikistani FLEX alumni in the ways that alumni spoke about what they perceived to be outcomes of participation in the program. Nearly all alumni mentioned having observed changes in those FLEX alumni they knew (who had gone on the program before them), or in themselves. Bermet (2007-2008 alumna, Kyrgyzstan) commented on changes she observed in others' character that she later saw in herself, such as confidence and being more open-minded and outgoing:

*Bermet:* “I know that people who went to that program, when they come [back], they become different, I guess. I mean, they change their personality, and they become experienced, more stronger. I guess I was just afraid not to get all the get all of the things that other people had [if I wasn't selected as a program finalist]. I mean, in terms of education, language, and so on.”

*Interviewer:* “So you said that you see these changes in other people, so they became more experienced, or maybe stronger. What do you mean by stronger?”

*Bermet:* “I mean, they're more independent. Uhhh, they're stronger.... maybe also, to say, maybe they become confident, you know? It might sound funny, but for example, if a person from a small town in Kyrgyzstan went to United States, and coming back that person is more confident, maybe because of experiences, also, but because of the prestige. You know, because not many people have that opportunity to go to the United States, and since the person was selected from the pool of hundreds of students, it gives a lot of confidence to the student that, ‘yes, that person, you know, is a selected person.’”

*Interviewer:* “Do you feel like you had some of those changes in yourself?”

*Bermet:* “Yes. Probably yes. I mean, before... I cannot say about myself, but from people who know me, I mean, pretty much – let's say my parents, my siblings, my relatives – after when I came back, they said that I opened up a lot. Before, I was very quiet. I don't know. Maybe I became more open-minded, outgoing, funny.”

Takhmina, a 2009-2010 alumna from Tajikistan, also discussed similar changes she observed in both her brother – who had also been a FLEX program finalist a few years prior – and in herself after having returned from the program:

*Interviewer:* “Can remember back to when your brother came back home from the FLEX program. How he had changed, if at all, from before he went?”

*Takhmina:* “He changed a lot. He became more, I would say, wise, and more confident, and more, even *more* outgoing than he was before. He was *so* talkative. He would, like, talk all the time. He wouldn’t be quiet a minute. Before States, he was, I would say, more serious. He could communicate easily with people, but he was serious about stuff. But now he is still serious, but he’s more... he likes to joke all the time, so... I think that’s what changed in him.

Before he went to States, we argued a lot because of different small things, but when he got back, I didn’t see him for a year, and we really missed each other, so we got more closer when he got back. And I left basically after a year when he came back, so umm... it was another year for us when we didn’t see each other, so it was one more setback, I guess. And whenever I got back, we grew a lot more closer, and we are like best friends now.”

*Interviewer:* “Did you see some of the same changes in you after you came back from the program, as well?”

*Takhmina:* “Yes. My, um, point of view on all the things, they changed. I was so immature, I would say, before States. I was not serious. I liked to play around all the time. But now I could say I saw the world, and I was in different situation, I was in different family, and background was so different, so I guess I got more mature and older.”

Patriotism and an appreciation for one’s own culture and country were also unprompted changes mentioned by several alumni in individual interviews. For Firuz, a 2005-2006 alumnus from Tajikistan, participation in the FLEX program made him both more patriotic and religious. He noted the following:

“As I said about patriotism, I think that was the major change in my own character. I became really, really patriotic toward my country... maybe if that was the major, the second major thing was I became really sort of religious. Since I am Muslim myself, and I got to know Islam better in the United States rather than here because here, you know, the society is... all we are Muslims, and you don’t



really care. And there, in the United States, when people start asking you questions, and you don't know anything about your religion, that was like, "Okay, I gotta study." And then I studied about the religion, about my country since these were the two major things that people would ask me in States – about my country, where it is, and how it is – and about the religion. So, I think two major things that changed in me are this becoming a patriotic towards my country and becoming a little bit more religious. Like not religious in terms of extremist or anything, but becoming, you know, knowing pretty much things about your religion and practicing it."

Since one of the stated goals of public diplomacy exchanges programs like FLEX is for participants to return to their home country after the completion of the program, indicators like a sense of patriotism are both a selection criteria and a desired outcome in public diplomacy exchange programs.<sup>50</sup>

### **FLEX Alumni Mobility**

Because public diplomacy exchanges want to invest in individuals who will return to their home country, understanding alumni mobility is important in terms of assessing the extent to which the funder's objective is achieved over the near term.<sup>51</sup> Both the academic literature and assessments of U.S. government exchanges suggest that there is, indeed, a relationship between study abroad and subsequent international mobility, both for educational and professional reasons. Examining the extent to which this phenomenon may or may not be occurring within a cohort of older FLEX alumni – as well as the factors related to this movement and destination – can

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<sup>50</sup> It is important to note that a few alumni also felt that some of their FLEX alumni compatriots had become less patriotic towards their home country after having completed the FLEX program. Given the nature of these in-depth interviews, it is likely that the sample of respondents is biased towards those alumni who are more patriotic.

<sup>51</sup> The terms "mobility" and "migration" can have various meanings both in the broader academic literature as well as in literature dealing with international students and educational exchanges. Here, I use the term "mobility" in order to refer to the movement of individuals, either temporarily or permanently, in order to reside in a different place in order to undertake a specified activity (e.g. work, study, etc.).

help our understanding of an important unintended consequence of public diplomacy exchange programs.

In general, the international movement of students for educational purposes is not a new phenomenon; however, the number of students participating in study abroad programs or pursuing degrees abroad has grown substantially since the end of the Second World War and blossomed during the past thirty years. While early academic research on the subject suggested that patriotic conditioning reduced the likelihood of exacerbating out-migration and the brain drain (Patinkin 1968), more recent academic research has found that factors such as the number of months spent studying abroad increases the probability that a former exchange student would now be living abroad and that studying abroad increases an individual's probability of working in a foreign country by about 15 percentage points (Oosterbeek and Webbink 2011; Waldinger and Parey 2011). Soon's work found that a number of factors, including initial return intention, family support, length of stay in New Zealand, work experience, and course and degree of study were all determinants in whether or not foreign students chose to return to their home countries after they had graduated (Soon 2012).

Unfortunately, the general uniformity of public diplomacy exchange program design, compared to other study abroad or international exchange experiences, makes an examination of some of these factors impossible in the context of the FLEX program. However, based on the 2013 FLEX alumni survey data, compared to 2007, FLEX alumni are a highly mobile group of individuals. We know that the nature of FLEX program selection means that program finalists come from all regions of their respective participating countries. Over time, however, the data have shown that FLEX alumni have tended to concentrate in urban centers or, contrary to program intention, move abroad either to attend university or to live on a permanent basis.

Funder-commissioned program assessments already indicate a non-trivial amount of alumni mobility. For example, in a 2003 study of alumni and non-participating FLEX program semi-finalists, about two-thirds of those interviewed (approximately 2000 individuals) stated that they did not want United States citizenship, leaving one-third of each cohort unaccounted for (Aguirre International 2003b).<sup>52</sup> Another DOS-commissioned evaluation of a university-level exchange program also suggested that alumni mobility and emigration may be significantly underreported (Aguirre International 2003a), and a 2002 evaluation of the first five years of the Edmund S. Muskie Graduate Fellowship Program suggested that about a third of the non-response rates was due to alumni living abroad (University of Iowa Social Science Institute 2002). Finally, two graduate theses, using samples of alumni of U.S. government-funded exchange programs from Armenia and Moldova, found that a non-trivial percentage of alumni do not – or are reluctant to – return to their home countries. In the case of alumni from Armenia, fifty-percent of those interviewed were living abroad, and in Moldova, the percentage of those seeking educational or work opportunities abroad was slightly lower, at 39% (Mikayelyan 2006; Turcu 2008).

Table 21 outlines the mobility of the 2007-2008 cohort of FLEX alumni for the period between the time individuals became program finalists (in 2007) and approximately six years later, the point at which they completed the 2013 web survey (n=305). For simplicity's sake, municipal regions in which FLEX alumni lived in 2007 and 2013 were designated as one of three broad categories: the capital or suburbs of a Eurasian capital (labeled as "Capital"), a provincial

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<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, the assessment's authors failed to report students' interest in other possible outcomes, such as moving to the United States without acquiring citizenship or moving to a third country that was not the United States. The study's authors were unclear about the methodology used to track alumni and semi-finalists, suggesting that a convenience sample was used and that many alumni who are currently living and working abroad may have been overlooked, thereby underrepresenting actual figures on migration intention.

capital or another city located in one of the provinces of a Eurasian country (labeled as “Province”), and third, a town, village, or rural area (labeled as “Town”). A fourth designation, “Foreign,” denotes that FLEX alumni reported living in countries in 2013 that were different from their country of origin.

Breaking municipalities into these designations was helpful because many, if not all, former Soviet republics continue to use Soviet-era designations of what constitutes a village, town, or city. There are, of course, several assumptions associated with generalizing administrative areas that must be considered. In some cases, the political capital differs from the most populous city (e.g. Astana versus Almaty in Kazakhstan), or there are provincial cities in a country which are effectively capitals in their own right (e.g. St. Petersburg, Russia). Some Eurasian capital cities – like Ashgabat, Turkmenistan – are much smaller than provincial cities in other countries like Russia or Ukraine. Nonetheless, these designations allow us to generalize about FLEX alumni mobility over time.

**Table 21: Mobility of 2007-2008 FLEX Alumni between 2007 and 2013**

			Destination in 2013			
			Town n=6 ↑	Province n=80 ↑	Capital n=158 ↑	Foreign n=60** ↑
Origin in 2007	Town	n=91* →	6	26	41	17
	Province	n=151 →	—	53	75	23
	Capital	n=63 →	—	1	42	20

NB: In this table, “town” refers to a town, village or other rural area; “province” refers to a provincial capital or another city located in one of the provinces of a Eurasian country; and “capital” refers to a Eurasian capital or its suburbs.

\* Includes n=1 unknown destination

\*\* Foreign destinations include Europe (n=17), the United States (n=17), other countries of the FSU (n=15), and other countries (n=7).

In Table 21, the FLEX sample prior to their participation (2007) is located on the left-hand side of the table and distributed across the rows. Respondents’ locations in 2013 are distributed across the columns. Each cell represents the number of individuals in the sample from

each origin in 2007 (rows) who lived in each destination (column) in 2013. In 2007, about half of the respondent sample was living in a provincial city. Another 20% of respondents were living in a capital or a suburb of their country's capital, and the remaining 30% were living in small towns, villages, or rural areas. Since then, however, FLEX alumni had almost uniformly moved away from both rural areas and provincial cities into larger municipalities, capitals, or to other countries.<sup>53</sup> Nearly half of the alumni surveyed who reported living in a town or provincial city before the start of the FLEX program had moved to the capital of their native country by 2013.

In 2013, slightly over a quarter of FLEX alumni were living in provincial cities, over half were living in the capital cities or suburbs of their native country, and nearly 20% were living outside their native country. Only about two percent of FLEX alumni were living in rural areas, towns or villages. Of particular relevance is that one-fifth of the FLEX alumni respondents were living in a foreign country, and slightly less than a third of those were living in Europe.<sup>54</sup> A quarter of those respondents living in a foreign country were living in another country of the FSU other than their native country, and slightly over a quarter (n=17) were living in the United States. The rest (n=7) were living in other parts of the world.

There are a few notes of caution with this data, however, that should be considered when generalizing about the mobility of the entire FLEX 2007-2008 cohort.<sup>55</sup> First, we can probably assume that responses are positively biased in favor of those alumni living in urban areas or

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<sup>53</sup> Here I am generalizing and treating foreign locations as larger urban areas even though I have no information about the type of community in which these FLEX alumni are living. For example, the case of an alum who moved from Moscow to a small college town in the United States would still be treated as 'upward' mobility because the assumption is that this individual made the move for personal benefits and advancement that he could not obtain in Moscow.

<sup>54</sup> In this case, I have taken a broad definition of Europe to include European Union (EU) and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) member states as well as EU candidate countries (e.g. Turkey). Crudely put, this means every country east of the FSU including the Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

<sup>55</sup> Some of these same considerations are also relevant to the in-depth interviews conducted with FLEX alumni from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

living abroad. Since a web survey was the mode used to reach FLEX alumni, those individuals who live in urban areas with better access to the internet and higher bandwidth speeds are more likely to be reached and participate in this survey. Second, regarding provincial cities and small towns, I cannot necessarily assume that alumni are living in the same town or provincial city as the one that they lived in prior to their participation on the FLEX program. Municipalities of the same classification would be recorded in this study as the same location, and that is not always the case. Finally, it is also likely the case that some of these alumni have moved to more urban areas solely to attend university or graduate school and that some of these individuals will return to their hometowns and cities after finishing their course of study. A longer-term study on FLEX, perhaps using a different survey mode or method of analysis, would help elucidate alumni mobility.

Even given these limitations, this sample suggests that FLEX alumni in their young twenties are a mobile group. Furthermore, the diverse destinations of the 20% of FLEX alumni who were abroad in 2013 suggests that the U.S. is not necessarily a universal draw for FLEX alumni, a point noted in Chapter 5 regarding alumni returning to the U.S.

If we examine the findings of these survey data together with the in-depth interviews conducted in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, a case could be made that an increased understanding of the U.S., paradoxically, seemingly leads some alumni away from the U.S. as a preferred destination. Analyses of survey findings presented previously show that an increasingly large percentage of alumni see their accomplishments from the program as situated in individual skills and capacities. Furthermore, findings from in-depth interviews also illustrate that FLEX alumni feel solidly confident in their understanding of American society, people, and culture. While this

may engage or interest some alumni in wanting to return to the United States, this may also lead alumni to want to travel, study, or work elsewhere, as will be discussed in the next section.

### **Higher Education and University Life**

Nearly every FLEX alumnus or alumna pursues some form of higher education, which is telling about the caliber of students who participate in the program. Over three-quarters of alumni respondents entered a university (or equivalent) in their native country. Fifty-one percent went to university in the capital city, and 28% enrolled in university in another city in their country. However, nearly one in five (18%) alumni enrolled in university in a country other than their native one. Three-quarters of these students studied at a university outside the FSU.

Only the richest Eurasians can self-finance university or graduate work abroad, owing to both the lack of enabling mechanisms – such as state-subsidized, low-interest loans – and the high cost of borrowing from private banks. While undergraduate and graduate fellowships funded by the U.S. government exist, alumni know that it is difficult for an individual to receive a U.S. government-funded fellowship multiple times.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, the fellowship programs that do exist have been facing cutbacks or financial pressure to do more with less (Adams 2013; Alliance for International Educational and Cultural Exchange 2014).<sup>57</sup>

In-depth interviews with FLEX alumni also found that, despite their fluency in American English and familiarity with the U.S. system of education and culture, most alumni wished to

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<sup>56</sup> Note that it is not impossible for FLEX alumni to be named finalists on other U.S. government-funded exchange programs that operate in the FSU, the two most common of which are the Global Undergraduate Exchange Program – aimed at first, second, and third-year university students – and the Edmund S. Muskie Graduate Fellowship program – a one- or two-year graduate fellowship. Like FLEX, both programs were initiated as part of the FREEDOM Support Act.

<sup>57</sup> Compare, for example, FLEX funding appropriations in 2008 (\$16,000,000) with anticipated allocations for 2015 (approximately \$12,000,000; Office of Inspector General 2009; United States Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs 2015).

pursue – or were currently pursuing or applying to at the time of the interview – graduate study in Europe. For alumni, this desire to study in Europe appears to be twofold. First, alumni expressed a desire to study in Europe because they wanted to experience a different part of the world. Alumni reportedly felt like they already “know” the United States after having spent an academic year there. One relevant example came from Firuz, a FLEX 2005-2006 alumnus from Tajikistan, who said:

“Yes, I thought about both [meaning attending graduate school in the United States or in Europe]. My last option was the United States... I wanted to try Europe because I’m not acquainted with European culture. As I said, I mean, to my mind, I studied a lot... enough, I mean, in the United States to know the United States culture, but I’m not really acquainted with the culture of the E.U. So I said, ‘Okay, I need to.’”

Similarly, as Parviz, a university student (FLEX 2006-2007) from Tajikistan, put it:

“I’m thinking of doing my master’s [degree] in Europe somewhere... getting my MBA in Europe... I’ve been in the United States... and I know, like, the system of education and the people and the culture, and pretty much most of the things that I would need to know... but the reason I want to go to Europe is just I want to learn more about a different part of the world and different types of dealing with businesses and the programs that they have.”

Thus, it is perhaps a bit surprising and unexpected, then, that many alumni expressed a desire to pursue graduate work in Europe as opposed to returning to the U.S., which is known globally for the high quality and reputation of its academic institutions. Similarly, this desire to pursue graduate work in Europe as opposed to the U.S. is unexpected in the sense that we might expect alumni to want to return to the U.S. because of their knowledge of American English, familiarity with the U.S. educational system, and personal ties they have created with the American people.

Interviews with FLEX alumni also suggested that the motivation to study in Europe appears largely driven by the presence of fellowship programs specifically targeting students



from countries of the FSU. In the absence of scholarships, the prohibitively high cost of studying in the U.S. is also a factor for alumni. As 2010-2011 FLEX alumna Munara from Kyrgyzstan said:

“I’m [already] looking at [graduate schools] in Europe. It’s great in the U.S., but the tuition is really high over there, you know, with the accommodation and all of these things. So... for now, I’m looking for somewhere closer to Kyrgyzstan.”

Sabina, a 2003-2004 FLEX alumna from Kyrgyzstan, was completing a Master of Science degree in the United Kingdom (UK) when she was interviewed for this research. The portion of her interview in which she discussed how she came to study in the UK went as follows:

*Sabina:* “After I came back from the [FLEX program], I went to study to the American University of Central Asia in Bishkek... after the graduation, I worked, like, for three years in Bishkek, too, international organizations. Then after three years, I applied for the... this program. It’s a scholarship program, and that’s how I ended up here.”

*Interviewer:* “Why were you interested in going to [the UK], in particular?”

*Sabina:* “Well, I think basically it’s because of the availability of university... I mean, because of the scholarships. We have other programs, like to the States, to Germany, or to the UK, but since I already have been in the States, I decided to go to UK. Yeah.”

### University Prestige

Building on themes that emerged from in-depth interviews with FLEX alumni from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, one of the goals of the 2013 web survey was to examine the university experiences of FLEX alumni respondents in more detail. This is because decisions such as which university to choose or which academic major are related to alumni choice of profession, physical and socioeconomic mobility later in life, and many other outcomes of importance to public diplomacy exchange program funders.

In particular, FLEX alumni, as a cohort, felt that they attended, or were perceived to attend, “elite” or “prestigious universities”, and so the 2013 survey fielded a multiple-response question to determine the extent to which this was the case.<sup>58</sup> Unfortunately, because of an error in the survey instrument’s skip logics, an accurate measurement of this indicator could be obtained because the question did not appear to all respondents.<sup>59</sup> Thus, we must keep in mind that the description of the following indicators is positively biased in favor of those older students and those who completed four-year courses of undergraduate study. These four-year courses of study are thus more likely to be Western-modeled private universities, Eurasian branches of Western universities, or even universities outside the FSU since we know from this study that a non-trivial percentage of FLEX alumni completed their undergraduate education abroad. Therefore, we can treat these biased estimates as the upper-bound estimates of what we may see across the cohort. We can also obtain a crude, lower-bound estimate of these university-specific indicators if we assume that none of the respondents for whom data are missing would have answered in the affirmative to any of these questions. This is unlikely, but doing so would provide a negatively biased, lower bound estimate for the cohort that I then used to construct a range.

Between roughly 12% and 38% of alumni in this cohort attended a university where English was the language of instruction (Table 22). For the respondents for whom data is available, those who studied at universities in countries other than their native one were more

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<sup>58</sup> For more information, see the 2013 web survey, which can be found in Appendix II.

<sup>59</sup> The question regarding the perceived prestige of their respective university did appear to a minority subset of alumni, that is, those who, in a preceding question, reported to no longer be currently enrolled as undergraduates or those who stated that they are both enrolled as an undergraduate or graduate student. At first glance, it may seem that being both an undergraduate and graduate student are mutually exclusive. However, I have chosen to include these seven cases as part of the analysis because this may be the result of students participating in joint bachelor’s/master’s programs or the fact that, in some cases, the typical, five-year Soviet and post-Soviet “specialist” degree can be considered the equivalent of both a bachelor’s and master’s degree.

likely to enroll in a university where English was the primary language of instruction than in another language. This is understandable both in the sense that not every FLEX-participating country has institutes of higher education where English is the primary language of instruction and because FLEX alumni likely seek high-quality universities abroad (where English, and not necessarily the titular language, is may likely be the language of instruction).

**Table 22: Indicators of University Prestige and Draw for 2007-2008 FLEX Alumni, Reported as a Percentage of Alumni in 2013**

	<b>Lower- to Upper-bound estimates (%)</b>
Undergraduate instruction in English	12.42 – 38.38
Respondent attended an “elite” university	19.28 – 65.55
Respondent attended the same university as many other FLEX alumni	12.75 – 43.33
Respondent reportedly attended a university that would be expensive for many people in his/her country to afford	3.92 – 13.48

Respondents were not asked directly whether they think their university was elite. This indicator was created as a general measure of a university’s quality in instances where the respondent replied in the affirmative to one of three descriptive questions about the university they attended.<sup>60</sup> Responses to each of these three questions were highly correlated, which is why they were combined to create a dummy measure of “eliteness”. For example, a university that offers an English-language curriculum in the FSU would likely be a private university and also more likely to be more expensive than a publicly-funded university. A prestigious university would also more likely to be more expensive than a non-prestigious one. Given that, we see that a sizeable percentage of alumni in this FLEX cohort – from about 19 to 65% – reportedly attended or completed a university that could be considered elite relative to the universities attended by their non-FLEX compatriots.

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<sup>60</sup> The three descriptive responses were the following: *The primary language of instruction is English, It is one of the most prestigious universities in the country, and It is a very expensive university and difficult for most people to afford.*

A minority (between 13% and 43%) of FLEX respondents reported that they attended the same university as many other FLEX alumni. By in large, these universities also happen to be considered elite. Conversely, only 13% (n=4) of those alumni who did not attend an elite university said that many other FLEX alumni also attended the same university as them. A smaller percentage of alumni respondents – from about four to 13% – attended a university that, in their estimation, would be expensive for many people in their country to afford.

For many FLEX alumni, it is not just the professional advantage that an English-language medium of instruction can offer that leads them to study at relatively elite universities, but more simply, it is the search for high-quality education. As Bermet (2007-2008 alumna, Kyrgyzstan) explained in an interview, which took place shortly before her graduation from a U.S. university:

“Since when I went back, when I was here in the United States as a FLEX student, I knew a lot of... I mean, I experienced a lot. I had a lot of friends in high school who were applying to universities, so I was interested. Maybe I should try, maybe there are some opportunities for international students. I mean, in terms of scholarships and... you know, there is a rule that we cannot apply, we cannot come back in two years,<sup>61</sup> so I decided I went back home and I knew that... I knew people before who also applied to America after completing their FLEX program, and they were successful accepted. So, and it was by desire I think from high school to study in the United States and to receive my degree here, so I went back home and I studied in the American University of Central Asia. And I think after the FLEX program, what happens to many people... I don't know, in terms for me it's like your perspective changes and your level of thinking changes. I think it will not be sufficient for me to study in our national universities because the system is very fragile. The system of education is very different, so I studied two years in American University and after that I applied here, and I got scholarship, and I transferred, and I came two years ago here.”

Aida, a 2007-2008 Kyrgyz alumna, also echoed Bermet's comments about the importance of university quality, even though she was enrolled in a Russian-accredited

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<sup>61</sup> Exchange students who receive a U.S. J-1 visa are subject to a two-year home-country physical presence requirement. This means that the visa holder is required to return to his or her home country for a period of at least two years after the completion of their program or fellowship (see United States Department of State 2012).

university that more closely follows the local system of education. In describing a discussion with her host family regarding her choice of university, she said:

“So my host family [in the United States]... they wanted me to get a very good [university] education here in Kyrgyzstan. So we were looking for two universities: Slavic University and American University here in Central Asia. And there were two ways to go. But I, myself, I’m telling you true... I like more our school [system] here in Kyrgyzstan... and that’s why I told to them, “I don’t like this system [in the United States].” That’s why. In the American University here in Bishkek, almost all of the students are from very rich families because the tuition is very high. And I didn’t like to study among them, so I wanted myself to feel comfortable. That’s why the second good university after American University is Slavic University, and that’s why I entered there.”

### Choice of Major and Profession

In 2013, when FLEX alumni were asked about the highest level of education they expected to complete in life, nearly 87% stated that they expected to achieve a level beyond a bachelor’s degree. Almost half of those respondents (45%) reported that they wished to pursue a doctorate (or equivalent) in their field of study. Of course, expectations do not translate into action, but the extremely high percentage of alumni who reported that they expected to pursue graduate study is another testament to the quality and aspirations of this cohort of young adults.

The majority of FLEX alumni respondents (54%) majored in either business or a social science discipline (Table 23). Slightly more than 11% majored in the humanities, and fewer than ten percent studied to be interpreters or translators or in the sciences, engineering, or law. Only a small handful of alumni chose to study medicine, journalism, pedagogy, or any other major. Among all respondents, 71% reported that they, themselves, chose their major. Another quarter (26%) said that they chose their major together with their parents. Only slightly over two percent said their parents or other relatives chose their major for them.

**Table 23: 2007-2008 FLEX Alumni University Specialization, Reported in 2013 as a Percentage of All Respondents**

	<b>2013<sup>1</sup></b>
Social Sciences	27.12
Business	26.47
Humanities	11.11
Interpretation / Translation	8.50
Science and Engineering	7.52
Law	7.19
Medicine	4.25
Other (various write-in)	3.92
Journalism	1.96
Pedagogy / Teaching	1.96

<sup>1</sup>n=306

As was the case with the questions about universities, a number of other questions were asked of FLEX alumni about their motivations in their choice of a major. Nearly a quarter of alumni (23%) said that, for them, their choice of major had always been a dream of theirs, although there were differences across majors in those individuals who reported agreeing to that statement. Across majors, 38% of those who studied to be interpreters, translators, or doctors felt that their choice of major had always been a dream of theirs. The same was said by 35% (n=8) of science and engineering majors. None of the six journalism majors and only 12% of the business majors (n=10) felt that their major had always been a dream of theirs.

Alumni were also asked about the extent to which they felt that highly qualified individuals in their area of specialization were in demand in their native country or if their country needed more experts in their chosen area of specialization. While I anticipated that responses to these questions would be highly positively correlated, this turned out not to be the case ( $r = 0.25$ ). Over one in five alumni (n=56) reportedly felt that experts in their area of specialization were in demand. Among the strongest to feel this way were over half (57%) of science and engineering majors and nearly a third (31%) of interpreters and translators. Over one quarter (27%) of alumni felt that their country needed more experts in their area of

specialization. Of these, nearly 40 percent (39%) of natural science and engineering majors (n=9) and 31% of social scientists (n=26) responded in the affirmative.

Alumni were asked about the extent to which they felt that experts in their area of specialization received high salaries. Responses to this question were highly correlated with responses to whether or not experts in one's area of specialization were in demand in their country.<sup>62</sup> On its face, this is consistent with standard economic notions of supply and demand in any liberal labor market. Among the 29% of alumni who felt that people in their area of specialization received high salaries, one-half (n=13) of the science and engineering majors responded in the affirmative. Over one-third (37%) of lawyers (n=8) and 31% of business majors (n=25) felt similarly.

### **Occupational Status and Near-Term Outcomes**

Because Eurasian youth participate in the FLEX program at different ages and points in their high school careers, each individual is at a different stage of his or her professional development five years after their return from the program. For example, an individual who went on the FLEX program after the 9<sup>th</sup> grade would most certainly have been enrolled in a university in 2013, whereas a student who went on the FLEX program the year following his or her high school graduation may have already completed university and entered the work force.

There is very limited and weak research on the relationship between international educational exchange and academic course of study or professional outcomes later in life. Part of this dearth of research has to do with the lack of long-term studies and that, as Akande and Slawson suggest, much of the impact of study abroad is not realized by participants until later in

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<sup>62</sup>  $r = 0.56$

life (Akande and Slawson 2000). In their program assessment of 50 years of Institute for the International Education of Students program alumni, Akande and Slawson found that those alumni who earned a doctoral degree were the most likely to report that their study abroad experience made a positive difference in their career. However, those who earned a master's or law degree were the least likely to report that the study abroad experience made a positive difference, relative to other groups. On the basis of this, the authors suggested that study abroad might be causally linked to students pursuing advanced graduate study, a very shaky conclusion with which there are numerous methodological and theoretical flaws.

Other research, such as Good and Campbell's work with exchange students in Jordan, suggests that exchange experience enhanced the employability of the participants, with many potential employers looking favorably at applicants with international experience (Good and Campbell 1997). Dwyer's long-term research on the effects of university exchange suggests that study abroad has a significant impact on students in the areas of continued language use, later academic attainment, intercultural and personal development, and to some extent, later career choices (Dwyer 2004a).

One of the main issues with much of the research on long-term effects of exchange program participation is that of selection bias. Alumni may be more inclined than non-exchange participants to study foreign languages, and their greater interest in international affairs or other cultures may also be influenced by their exchange experience (Bachner and Zeutschel 2009; Van den Broucke 1989). Wilson reports that, while most of the respondents in his study seemed to have vague ideas of what career they would end up pursuing, he concludes that his findings evidence that "internationally-mobile students, including those who were involved in relatively short-term exchanges, were much more likely to find employment that involved either physically



relocating to another country or regularly using intercultural and language skills” (Wilson 2010). Bachner and Zeutschel note, however, that there were subgroups within the exchange student population they studied who attributed their professional and career directions to the exchange experience, thus lending credence to the belief that exchange effects are heterogeneous among subgroups (Bachner and Zeutschel 2009).

Looking at occupational outcomes among the 2008 FLEX cohort, approximately seventy percent (69%) of the FLEX alumni respondents were enrolled as undergraduate students in 2013, with another 12% reported that they were enrolled as graduate students. Fourteen percent of those enrolled as undergraduates were also working full-time jobs, and over 38% of those enrolled as undergraduates were working part-time jobs. Of the graduate students, 40% reported that they were also working in a full-time capacity, and over 16% were working part-time.

Of those 178 respondents who were working in both full-time and part-time jobs – regardless of whether or not they were enrolled as students, the majority (approximately 57%) were employed in the private sector (Table 24). Twenty-one percent were working for international non-profit or intergovernmental organizations, and 12% were working for the government or other public institutions. About 7% were working in locally based non-profit organizations.

**Table 24: 2007-2008 FLEX Alumni Employment in 2013, By Sector, Compared to the Sector in which Alumni reported They Would Someday Like to Work (%)**

	Among those employed in 2013 (%) <sup>1</sup>	Where alumni want to be employed someday (%) <sup>2</sup>
Private sector	57.30	24.91
Local non-profit organization	7.30	4.26
Government or other public sector	12.35	10.16
International (non-profit or intergovernmental) organization	21.34	60.65

<sup>1</sup> n=178

<sup>2</sup> n=305

Regardless of whether or where an alumnus or alumna was working in 2013, all alumni were asked about the employment sector in which they would ideally like to work someday. Nearly two-thirds – 60% – of alumni respondents reported that they would like to work for an international non-profit or intergovernmental organization someday. Only a quarter of alumni said that they would like to work in the private sector, and 10% reported that they wished to work in the public sector. Less than five percent of alumni expressed an interest in working for a local non-profit organization.

In-depth interviews with FLEX alumni elucidated some of the motivations that many FLEX alumni have for wanting to pursue work in international organizations. As Kyrgyz alumna Sabina (2003-2004), who was living abroad at the time of the interview, explained:

“Well, definitely I want to go back to Kyrgyzstan... and hopefully work... in international organizations, I'd say, or in local non-governmental organizations. But not the government. I think that the most important reasons [are] especially the low salary, but first of all, I guess, it's the way the work is done and the ethics and the mentality and everything. It's difficult to work in that atmosphere.”

Sabina's comment encapsulates the main reasons that alumni generally cited for choosing their sector of employment: high salaries relative to their compatriots, a suitable work environment, and in some cases, prestige.

### **FLEX Identity**

Perhaps one of the most interesting themes that emerged from in-depth interviews conducted with alumni from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan was that some alumni developed a strong identification with the FLEX program, and a number of alumni reported that their social lives increasingly involved other FLEX alumni after their return home. This identification with the FLEX program expressed itself in many different ways. Some alumni recounted their FLEX

experience in ways that would suggest that their personal growth, achievements as a result of their participation on the program, and relationships they developed with people affiliated with the program has positively influenced their ability later in life to navigate difficult situations or solve problems. One particularly poignant example of this was given by Meerim, a 2010-2011 Kyrgyz alumna, who discussed in her interview how drawing on her FLEX experience helped her to overcome a personal tragedy. She explained:

*Meerim:* “FLEX is playing a huge [role], you know, and I don’t really... even if I tell you, it’s hard to explain to you how it did impact us. So, if I will take my own experience, it made me to be more mature and to see the world from different side.

Recently, one really, really, really tragic thing happened for my family. And this was my mom passed away, as well.”

*Interviewer:* “I’m very sorry. That’s awful... that’s terrible for you and your family.”

*Meerim:* “Yes, she was in a car accident, and she wasn’t able to survive, and you know, my mom was really active, and she did have a lot of good relationships, and I do have friends, you know, and after my mother’s death... some people just turned away from me or my family, and I guess this is the life – so what? – but my FLEX friends, and my... so most of my FLEX friends were a bit support[ive] for me, and they were like coming and participating for me, like, to come to life again, and I will always remember... my sister is a big support for me. They are my great motivation to me, further, and my brother—I do have a little brother—so my sister was like joking, ‘You’re FLEX! You’re ready for everything’, and we were telling to each other this,<sup>63</sup> and so this is making us to be stronger. The FLEX [experience], it was – I think it will be more correct if I tell [it] like this – it will be preparation time, maybe, to live through this time for nowadays...

...like, you know, when I went to the U.S., for the first time [during the] first week, it was like awful because everything was different, and... I did have like homesick like for one week, it was like terrible homesick, but then I did, like, have some from time to time.

And at that time when I was in the U.S., I was like, ‘Oh, this is like one of the maybe, like—not really the worst—but bad times for me. That I am living far

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<sup>63</sup> Meerim explained earlier in her interview that her older sister, to whom she is referring in this dialogue, was also a FLEX alumna.

away from my house', but now I see that no matter what happens, that we should be grateful to our life that, maybe, to be ready that it could be worse... another support is that my host family provided me with lots of big love [surrounding my mother's death]. They are calling to me, and like, and they were one of the first that heard about my mother's death, and they were sending note cards to Kyrgyzstan. This is really, really big support and encouragement for me. I guess, the impact of FLEX, is to continue my life even if it's a little bit worse."

For Meerim, the reminder that she was "FLEX" gave her strength. She felt that she could draw on the set of skills that she had learned and strengthened during her time on the program in order to overcome a personal hardship. This, to her, was akin to the difficulties she felt she overcame (e.g. homesickness) during her time on the program.

For other alumni, participation in the FLEX program was a unique experience that changed the way they felt they related to others. A frequent stereotype – or criticism – of FLEX alumni has tended to be that alumni tend to be insular among themselves and prefer to emulate their American lifestyle back in their home country. As Aida, a 2007-2008 alumna from Kyrgyzstan, described:

"For example, FLEX students go to the U.S. at the age of 15. At that age, all of us are teenagers. So, that's a very easy to manipulate, or, you know... All students coming back to Kyrgyzstan, they just *love* American society. And they really like not only American system, but the American style of life. I can say it like that way. Because you know it's different from what we have here in Kyrgyzstan.

I was observing some of the not-so-good. As for the teenagers, I had a chance to see some rude, you know, behavior. For example, [relationships between] children and parents, I think."

Others, however, saw FLEX as an important part of their social life, but in less stark terms. It was their shared experiences and perspectives – and a group of others to whom they could relate – that made FLEX an important part of their social life. For example, Maksat (FLEX 2009-2010) from Kyrgyzstan emphasized the differences in experiences he had with his

compatriots after his return and the common experiences he felt he shared with other FLEX alumni. As he put it:

After my “first month, I was more spending time with the FLEX alumnis because those are the people who share your experience, and it’s more, kind of, they understand you better than those [others], because when you return from the FLEX program, you have, kind of, shock, you know, because these changes... like absolute changes. Everything around you changes just in one day. And kind of you can’t stop talking about this USA experience and all that experience you had. And you don’t really notice that you talk about that all the time. So... but I guess, your old friends get bored or... I don’t know... they just get bored of talking or listening to you all this U.S. experience, probably I know that. But spending time with FLEX alumnis, they talk about that all the time, too, so that kind of shift of the friends, of the friendship, I guess, that was that way.”

Iskander, a 2010-2011 alumnus from Tajikistan, referred to his fellow FLEX alumni as a “family,” in part because of their shared experiences and perspective. He noted:

“You know, our FLEX alumni from our city, from Dushanbe, we actually became very [much] like a family, and we meet up every weekend doing different volunteering and going to, you know, hiking, and to the theatre, just we became like a family, and because we understand each other, like our jokes. And we know we have, like, all been to some country and we understand some... like we’ll be saying sometimes... or jokes we do. And it really, like sometimes people, about 10 FLEX alumni, we meet up practically every weekend. We’re like a family, and they’re very close friends of mine, and I can say that going to America and coming back, I actually earned some great friends in the face of FLEX alumni.”

Takhmina (2009-2010 alumna, Tajikistan) and Aida (2007-2008 alumna, Kyrgyzstan) both echoed these sentiments in terms of groups of FLEX alumni constituting their social groups, although they emphasized the activities that FLEX alumni would participate in together. For Takhmina, the alumni with whom she participated in shared activities were not necessary those with whom she went on the FLEX program. As she put it, “probably I spent most of my time with my FLEX alumni because we do a lot of activities together. We go to orphanages, elderly

houses, we like... yesterday, we painted our alumni room.<sup>64</sup> So, I love to spend time with them. It doesn't matter what year we are, even those who went to States five or six or ten years ago, they still go to alumni room, and we still do stuff together." Aida noted that her FLEX alumni community in Bishkek, of which she considers herself engaged, is very active. She said:

"we are having a lot of activities, especially on holidays, on Christmas. We are going to orphanages, to elderly houses. You know, we give all of these charity concerts, and etc. etc. For example, we won the grant for youth day, and we are having a project on the end of April, and we are going to plant the trees and all of these activities. We are cleaning up the city. And that's why I'm in contact with FLEX alumni who are both younger and older than me. I'm in touch with them."

It should be noted that, while associations and social groups of FLEX alumni such as those that Takhmina and Aida mentioned were important to them, these groups may not necessarily be common throughout Eurasia. As Dushanbe, Tajikistan, and Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, have concentrated FLEX alumni populations relative to the population sizes of these countries as a whole, it stands to reason that FLEX alumni may be more likely to engage in collective activities or consider other FLEX alumni as part of their social groups. This was particularly the case in instances where some universities – like the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) – attract large numbers of FLEX alumni. As Saltanat, a 2004-2005 alumna from Kyrgyzstan, put it:

"There is always [a] feeling that I am different from other people... because the only place where I feel myself totally, completely comfortable is with my FLEX friends. Actually what FLEX program also gave me, it provided me with almost 60 friends. Luckily when FLEX people graduate, well, not *graduate*, but come back to Kyrgyzstan, they mostly apply to the AUCA, so it happens so that about 30 to 40 people in my year of FLEX who came back and apply to AUCA and study together with me, so they are now one of my best friends. So, when I meet with them, I feel so comfortable because we have common jokes, and when I speak with them in English it's not that, you know, being cool, but it's because I

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<sup>64</sup> The "alumni room" to which Takhmina is referring was a room dedicated to alumni activities located at the Dushanbe office of American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS, the organization that implemented the FLEX program on the part of the DOS.

feel comfortable using two or three languages sometimes. And so with other people, I also feel comfortable, but not as much as FLEX people.”

### **Chapter Summary**

FLEX alumni respondents, on average, reported being satisfied with their program experience, and mostly so with their life with their host families, which is important given the important role that host families play in FLEX participants’ adaptation to their host communities. However, what I found was that while students’ achievements generally were in line with funder objectives for public diplomacy exchange programs, alumni saw their achievements as situated within their individual outcomes – that is, in the skills and capacities that they had developed – as opposed to other official objectives that funders would deem of primary importance for public diplomacy exchanges (i.e. long-lasting relationships with Americans or having a better understanding of Americans and the United States).

Alumni were also increasingly mobile in the time since they had returned from the FLEX program. By 2013, FLEX alumni, in general, moved from the places they lived while they were in high school to increasingly larger or more distant locations. Nearly all the surveyed alumni who were raised in small towns or villages left for provincial capitals or the capital of their country, and many who were living in the provincial cities moved to the capital. Nearly one-fifth of the alumni respondents were living outside of their native country five years after having returned from the program. In-depth interviews with FLEX alumni from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan suggested that, as young adults, FLEX alumni saw opportunities such as graduate school or employment in the United States as just one of many viable international opportunities available to them, and many alumni considered opportunities in places such as Canada or Europe.

The 2013 FLEX alumni survey findings reinforced the point that FLEX alumni, at least as represented by the 2007-2008 cohort, were poised to achieve professional successes later in life, if not increased upward socio-economic mobility. In 2013, up to two-thirds of FLEX alumni reported they attended or were currently attending what would be considered an elite university, and a large minority of FLEX alumni was also completing their courses of study in English.

Over half of FLEX alumni studied business or other social science subjects such as international relations or political science. While at university, many of these students were also remarkably engaged, with 14% of undergraduates working full-time jobs and another 38% working part-time jobs concurrently. Many alumni who were working were employed in the private sector, but a majority aspired to work for international non-profit or intergovernmental organizations.



## **CHAPTER 7**

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This concluding chapter will discuss the findings from this dissertation as well as the resulting policy recommendations that are relevant to both the FLEX program and other public diplomacy programs. In the most general sense, this dissertation was motivated by an attempt to understand the micro-level outcomes of the soft power tools that states use to influence attitudes and behaviors of foreign populations. Using the case of the FLEX program, this dissertation examined the near-term outcomes of public diplomacy exchange programs in terms of the political socialization of participants and individuals' personal and professional outcomes in relation to how they aligned with or differed from funders' intentions. This analysis, presented across three chapters, drew largely on data from the pre- and post-program surveys of the 2007-2008 cohort of FLEX program participants, a follow-up survey of those same alumni five years later, and separate, in-depth interviews conducted with 36 FLEX alumni in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan of various program cohorts.

This dissertation was an outcome assessment in the sense that it presented research on the attitudinal and behavioral outcomes of a cohort of FLEX alumni participants in the near term and compared those to what public diplomacy funders would deem ideal outcomes. In other words, alumni attitudes and behavior were examined through the lens of whether, and how, they compared to the kinds of attitudes and behavior that funders would desire FLEX alumni to have in the near term. Underpinning the analyses was the assumption that there are many factors – not

just participation in a public diplomacy exchange program or the influence of socialization agents – that have contributed to attitudes and behaviors observed among this cohort of FLEX program participants.

Findings from this research present a more nuanced picture of public diplomacy exchange program attitudes than is typical of pre- and post-program surveys and program assessments. It suggests that the political attitudes of public diplomacy alumni are not uniformly positive in the near-term, something which runs counter to what funders purport to be the case in internal evaluations. While these attitudes were generally positive on most indicators, in some cases, I found mixed or less-positive support for them over time. In a few cases, attitudes in the near-term were weakened even to levels where they were statistically insignificantly different from baseline measures in 2007, which suggests that there was a lack of evidence to support the claim that any near-term positive changes touted by program-funded evaluations are salient in the near term.

Regarding social attitudes, average alumni attitudes towards Americans remained statistically unchanged between 2007 and 2013, much as was the case with political attitudes. In one case – regarding how well informed Americans are about the world – FLEX alumni attitudes on this indicator became progressively less positive over time. These attitudinal indicators reinforced the point that FLEX alumni, in general, have a nuanced perspective – and not simply an idealized, positive vision – of the United States and Americans.

Regarding alumni behavior in the near term, results from the 2013 web survey suggested that, while FLEX alumni were less involved in 2013 than they were in 2008, alumni were still socially involved. Nearly all alumni reported that they had also been in regular contact with

individuals they met while they were on the FLEX program (albeit less than they anticipated when they finished their program year in 2008).

Taken together, these findings on public diplomacy exchange program participants' political and social attitudes and involvement illustrated that, while some outcomes of public diplomacy exchanges may fall in line with funders' expectations and wishes – particularly in the short term (that is, immediately following the completion of the exchange program) – the picture was more nuanced and complex in the near term. On many measures, average attitudes remained positive in the near term, but they were likely somewhat unaffected by program participation in that they were statistically insignificant from baseline measures.

This lends favor to the argument that rigorous program selection and not treatment (i.e. program participation) may play a larger role in explaining program outcomes with regard to attitudinal measures. Simply put, because selection into public diplomacy exchange programs like FLEX is so rigorous in its attempt to identify the “right” individuals – that is, those who already espouse positive attitudes on the kinds of indicators of interest to the U.S. government and who are perceived would be successful on the exchange program – this selection may play a larger role in explaining near-term attitudinal outcomes than the program experience (treatment) itself. All things being equal, this would not negate the importance of participation in public diplomacy exchange programs, but rather it suggests that outcomes be measured by different metrics or perhaps on a different time scale than is currently commonplace with many public diplomacy programs.

In other ways, however, this dissertation has illustrated that, in the near term, FLEX alumni outcomes align with funder expectations. FLEX alumni respondents, on average, reported being satisfied with their program experience. For example, alumni have created and maintained

relationships over time with individuals they met while on the program in the U.S. and have achieved a great deal of success post-program, regardless of whether or not any of these could be attributed definitively to program participation.

What has also emerged is that there is a misalignment between alumni and funders as to how program outcomes are perceived. This suggests that the official and organizational intentions of the program design diverge from the everyday practice of these exchange programs. In general, alumni see their outcomes of program participation as situated in individual-level changes – that is, in the skills and capacities that they have developed – as opposed to other objectives that funders would deem of primary importance for public diplomacy exchanges, such as the transnational relationships they have maintained with Americans or that they have a better understanding of American society and the U.S. system of governance.

Alumni were also increasingly geographically mobile in the time since they have returned from the FLEX program. By 2013, most FLEX alumni reported having moved from the places they lived when they were in high school to increasingly larger locations or abroad. In-depth interviews with FLEX alumni from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan suggested that, as young adults, FLEX alumni saw opportunities such as graduate school or employment in the U.S. as just one of many viable international opportunities available to them, and many alumni equally (or even preferably) considered opportunities in places like Canada or Europe. Thus, it might come as a surprise for public diplomacy exchange program funders that the U.S. was not a unique draw for FLEX alumni despite these students having spent an academic year living in an American host community.

Nonetheless, the 2013 FLEX alumni survey findings revealed that FLEX alumni, at least as represented by the 2007-2008 cohort, were satisfied with their program experience and that

alumni were poised to achieve professional successes later in life, if not increased upward socio-economic mobility. In 2013, up to two-thirds of FLEX alumni reported that they had attended, or were currently attending, what would be considered an elite university, and a large minority of FLEX alumni were conducting their studies in English. Over half of FLEX alumni respondents have studied business or other social science subjects such as international relations or political science. While at university, many of these students were also remarkably engaged, with a number reportedly working full-time jobs and more than twice as many working part-time jobs at the same time as studying. Many alumni who were working were employed in the private sector; however, a majority of alumni surveyed aspired to work for international non-profit or intergovernmental organizations.

Thus, from an individual perspective, young people's desire to participate in the FLEX program may be connected to their desire to fulfill their sense of the people they would like to become, and thus, their participation in the program becomes part of their identities. Much more work needs to be done in order to understand the particular impact and outcomes of these targeted, long-term, human capital investments as well as what aspects of these are public diplomacy programs are successful in their efforts to promote social, political, and economic changes abroad. What is clear from this dissertation, however, is that at least in terms of the FLEX program, the rigorous selection of participants may hold a great deal more power in explaining attitudinal outcomes than treatment and that the individuals who participate in programs like FLEX have aspirations and motivations that are sometimes misaligned with the long-term objectives of program funders.

## **Policy Recommendations for FLEX and other Public Diplomacy Youth Exchanges**

Since this dissertation relates directly to state-level policy interventions, it is important to present recommendations for the FLEX program and other similar public diplomacy youth exchanges. This final section includes recommendations on ways in which various elements of the FLEX program, such as its structure and administration, could be improved because of these findings in order to help both students and funders achieve their respective aims. These recommendations could also be considered, as appropriate and relevant, for other, similar public diplomacy exchange programs. Recommendations will be organized according to the following three sections: pre-program and on-program recommendations, post-program recommendations, and recommendations for long-term program sustainability.

### Pre-Program and On-Program Recommendations

*Recommendation 1: Consider recruiting more FLEX students interested in STEM fields*

Among the 2007-2008 FLEX alumni who were surveyed in 2013, over half (nearly 54%), had studied or were studying a business or social science discipline at university; however, less than 12% of alumni were studying or had studied a science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM) or medicine. The reasons for this difference are beyond the scope of this study, but there are likely several factors at play. For example, students who are interested in the humanities and social science in secondary school may be more likely to want to study abroad than those interested in STEM field. It may also be that students return from the FLEX program to find they have a newfound interest in living abroad or that their knowledge of English could be a lucrative asset in international affairs or business.

Finally, while STEM disciplines were highly regarded and funded during the Soviet period, the breakup of the Soviet Union resulted in a decrease in state investment as well as the

overall interest among the population in pursuing these professions. Today, salaries in many of the STEM fields throughout the FSU are extremely low, particularly for those who are in state-supported research or teaching positions.

Skilled professionals, teachers, and researchers in STEM and related fields are in demand across Eurasia and the world, and students interested in pursuing these fields would benefit from participating in the FLEX program for several reasons. First of all, these students would benefit from an increased understanding and fluency of English, as much of the research in these fields is conducted and published in English (Hamel 2008). Second, should these students be interested in conducting research later in life – at universities, post-graduate institutions or elsewhere – or even involve themselves in collaborative research or professional projects elsewhere the world, a strong knowledge of English would be important. While many students from across Eurasia may have benefitted from a strong theoretical or textbook training in STEM subjects in high school, students from resource-poor regions of Eurasia who participate in the FLEX program might benefit from better-quality and better-resourced laboratories (e.g. biology, chemistry, physics, etc.) to which they might have access in high schools in the United States.

More can be done to encourage students who are interested in STEM fields to apply for the FLEX program. For example, FLEX program administrators and recruiters could make special attempts to reach out to secondary schools in their countries that specialize in mathematics and science and encourage those students to apply for the FLEX program. Program administrators can also enlist the help of FLEX alumni who are studying or working in STEM fields to assist in advertising and recruiting for the program.

*Recommendation 2: Consider evaluating host family placements more closely*

As the FLEX program is currently administered, the DOS contracts its on-program support to a number of different organizations across the country that typically work in the area of high school exchanges (Peachey 2013). Among other things, these placement organizations arrange school and host-family placements and monitor student success in their host environment throughout the academic year. In-depth interviews with FLEX alumni from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan conducted in 2012 revealed two main issues that the students felt they faced while on the program that are directly related to the work of placement organizations: issues surrounding religion (of both the host family and the exchange student) and the relationships between local coordinators and host families.

One of the issues that some FLEX students reported facing during their time on the program was that their host family and local coordinator – the representative of the placement organization responsible for exchange students in a certain geographic area – were extremely close friends or, in some cases, relatives. Based on data obtained in interviews with FLEX alumni, this appeared to be not wholly uncommon as sometimes, host families would be hard to arrange. For example, small communities in rural areas simply may not have enough families who are able and willing to host exchange students. Thus, it stands to reason that local coordinators may end up placing students with their friends or relatives, as these people may also share the local coordinator's like-mindedness for supporting exchange students, or they may simply want to help a family member in need.

Placing exchange students with close friends or relatives of a local coordinator is not necessarily a problem; in fact, it can have many positive benefits. On the other hand, this relationship could present a conflict of interest. In such instances, some FLEX alumni who were interviewed reported feeling extremely uncomfortable approaching their local coordinators when



they were having problems with their host families. For example, Farida, a 2004-05 FLEX alumna from Tajikistan, recounted some issues she was having regarding religion and how she did not feel that she could reach out to representatives of her placement organization:

*Farida:* “My host family, they were really nice people, but sometimes, you know, when host families pressure you to accept their religion, that kind of sucks a lot...

...it doesn't happen that often, not that I know of. From the kids that I talked to and that I was friends with, probably just two or three of us faced problems like that. One of the host moms was very, she was almost, she had paranoia about people calling her exchange student that was my classmate back in high school. So what happened was her host mom called police and you know, they, I think they even contacted FBI or something. There was a whole big thing... concerning religion. It was just me and probably two more that I knew of that sort of faced also the pressure of, from their host families. But it was the good thing, probably, the thing that made it more or less bearable for me was that, you know, it was only my host father who was pressuring me a lot. My host mother was more chill about it, and that's why I didn't really change my host family. That's why I decided to stay with them.”

*Interviewer:* “I'm sure you that you talked to your [biological] parents during all of this. Did you ever share with them the problems that you were having because of religion with your host parents?”

*Farida:* “No. No one. I just talked about that after I got back because, you know, I didn't want them to freak out and to worry about me. So I just kind of kept it to myself, and the other thing was that my supervisor, my coordinator from my hosting organization, she went to the same church as my host family did, so I couldn't even talk to her about that. So I just had to keep it to myself.”

Farida's case not only exemplifies situations where FLEX alumni feel that they lack local support resources to which they can turn, but it also highlights another situation that FLEX students face regarding host family placements: that of religion. According to data from the 2013 FLEX survey, approximately three-quarters of FLEX 2007-2008 alumni reported that their host families were affiliated with some religious denomination. This roughly compares to nationally-representative research, as interviews conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life in 2007 found that 83% of percent of Americans reported that they were affiliated with some

religious denomination (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life 2008). Furthermore, as with the previous example, having a religious and practicing host family can have its benefits, especially in communities where social and community life revolves around a religious institution.

However, in other cases, the religiosity of a host family can also cause problems, and problems that FLEX alumni discussed in interviews (2012) did not always involve Muslim exchange students living in a Christian host family. Mansoor,<sup>65</sup> a 2008-2009 alumnus from Tajikistan, reported that he had a great deal of problems with his Muslim-American host family, even though he said that he was Muslim. He recounted how, while he was not a practicing Muslim, his family was very devout, and they had a very hard time with him getting close to people in his community who were from other faiths. He said, “the religion of the other person [about whom I was speaking to my host family members] was usually the first question they would ask me”. Mansoor said that he attempted to try and change his host families, but that it was difficult to find other suitable ones in his community. In the end, he said that he talked the issues through with members of his biological family in Tajikistan, and he realized that he needed to do his best and just finish the academic year. At least as far as his interview was concerned, Mansoor did not look back on his year in the U.S. unfavorably or with bitterness; however, it was clear that religious issues were important hurdles for him to overcome during his time on the program.

Aikerim, a 2006-2007 FLEX alumna from Kyrgyzstan, recalled having similar difficulties with her host family during her time on the program. She reported:

“Culturally, it was [a] difficult transition for me. But I guess I went to a family who was a bit religious – I lived with a Mormon family, in fact. That was a little difficult for me. In the beginning of the year, you want to make friends, and you

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<sup>65</sup> Mansoor did not consent to having his interview recorded; however, he consented to the interviewer taking notes during the interview.

start to know more about differences of families, differences of culture, what kind of families your friends have, and I guess living with a Mormon – or a religious family – was a little challenging for me because I, myself, I did not come from a religious family.

Because, I think that because there was much more freedom that I had [at] home [in] Kyrgyzstan... once I went to live with my host family, there were certain things that I had to follow. Just a few examples are like reading the Bible for one hour after dinner. Going to church on Sunday and on Wednesday. Waking up at 6:00 in the morning to go to Bible school. You know, just doing that on a routine basis, every day, Monday through Friday, it was a little challenging for me. Not in the beginning, because in the beginning, I kind of accepted it, but then more towards the middle, because, you know, when I got to know more things, then I wanted to do more things besides church, so that created a little bit of conflict because I chose not to go—I asked if I cannot go church on Wednesday or at least on Sunday, and not go to Bible studies in the mornings. So, and then that kind changed the relationship that I had with my host family. That was a little difficult.”

For the most part, alumni who reported having issues with their religion recalled those situations as being significant obstacles during their time on the program; however, it is important to note that all alumni who were interviewed reported that they were able to navigate and overcome these situations during their time on the program, even though in some cases this meant simply tolerating the situation because they knew that they would only be living in the United States for a finite period of time.

It is unlikely that these issues can be completely avoided and prevented. Communities only have so many possible host families available, and a very religious and practicing host family could have been very a successful host family for years before having any problems with an exchange student in that regard. Nevertheless, issues such as religion and the relationship between local coordinators and host families should be carefully monitored by both American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS and the placement organization, as these seem to represent the largest on-program issues that have emerged from interviews with alumni.

One possible solution might be for national-level program administrators (on the part of American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS or the placement organization), to flag differences in religion or religious observance on the part of both the host family and the exchange students and to ask host families to declare any relationships they may have with placement organization staff. Once a placement is flagged, national-level program administrators could periodically check-in on the student and host family, independent of any formal reporting processes that may exist. Such periodical check-ins would give the exchange student another opportunity to raise issues that he or she may not otherwise feel comfortable in discussing.

### Post-Program Recommendations

*Recommendation 1: Lobby Congress to amend home residency requirement restrictions on certain “J” student visas*

At the time of this writing, public diplomacy exchange program participants (as well as some other types of international students) travel to the United States on a J-1 student visa. J-1 visas, like the more-common F-1 visas, are granted for the purposes of educational study in the United States.<sup>66</sup> Unlike the F-1 visa, the J-1 visa is subject to a two-year home-country physical presence requirement.<sup>67</sup> This means that the visa holder is required to return to his or her home country for a period of at least two years after the completion of their program or fellowship. This includes the FLEX program, participants of which travel to the United States on J-1 visas. In theory, the two-year home-residency rule eliminates the possibility of an individual returning immediately to the U.S. In practice, however, this rule is not as black and white as it may appear

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<sup>66</sup> The most significant difference between the J and F visas are that J-visa holders receive a substantial portion of their educational funding in the form of a fellowship or scholarship, as is the case with FLEX program participants.

<sup>67</sup> This is also known as the foreign residence requirement under the U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act, section 212(e).

in the legislation since it is possible for a student to receive a waiver on this home residency requirement. Similarly, a J-1 visa-holder could also return to the U.S. on an F-1 visas to pursue an undergraduate or graduate degree, but doing so only would only defer the two-year home residency requirement.

Five years after the completion of their exchange program, I estimated that approximately one-fifth of 2007-2008 cohort were living outside of their country of origin. At the time they completed the survey (2013), nearly one-third of those were in the U.S., and a similar proportion were living in other countries of the FSU or in Europe. If one were to assume that all of these students who were living or studying outside of their home countries five years after the completion of the FLEX program would still be doing so regardless of the foreign country in which they were living, then it stands to reason that American universities could have enrolled more FLEX alumni than was the case at that time.

While more research would need to be done to determine if this is the case, based on in-depth interviews with alumni, my hypothesis is that many FLEX alumni who are interested in applying to U.S. colleges and universities are deterred from doing so, in part, because they do not want to postpone their two-year home residency requirement until after they have graduated from university. Students who might want to return to the United States to study or live one day might feel that having to return to their native country post-baccalaureate to fulfill a visa requirement would impede their professional and career development, and thus, they would rather “get it out of the way” sooner rather than later.

Thus, the J-1 visa restrictions create a missed opportunity for both FLEX students – who are poised to benefit from world-class universities – and for U.S. colleges and universities – who would benefit from the talent, curiosity, and diversity that FLEX students could bring to their

classrooms. For both students and universities, the FLEX experience would also serve as a valuable preparatory year in the American educational system that would undoubtedly help alumni better transition to, and thrive in, an American university.

The removal of home residency restrictions on J-1 visa holders who participate in educational exchanges funded by the U.S. government would help those students who want to pursue higher education or employment opportunities in the United States achieve their objectives, and it would also signal to these same talented, high-achieving Eurasians that the U.S. is a welcome destination for them and that they do not have to pursue opportunities in Canada or Europe because they are temporarily prevented from returning.

Some might argue that removing these restrictions would distort interest in the FLEX program in favor of those young people who are interested in emigrating or would want to use the program purely as a stepping-stone to enter U.S. universities. However, I do not believe that this would be the case. Assuming that program selection continues to be a rigorous process such as one that is currently in place, program administrators would be able to screen out those individuals whose primary motivation would be use the FLEX program as simply a stepping-stone to university and later immigration to the United States.

Given the current political climate, it is likely unrealistic to expect that lobbying on the part of one relatively-small non-governmental organization or one public diplomacy program could have any impact on U.S. immigration law, even assuming there were the political will to do so. However, if anything, this dissertation has shown that FLEX and other FREEDOM Support Act programs attract the kind of individuals that that U.S. would be interested in recruiting to attend university as well as to live and work in the country.

*Recommendation 2: Provide more professional development opportunities for FLEX alumni in their countries of origin and throughout Eurasia*

Related to the preceding recommendation, although FLEX is not a professionally- or academically-oriented public diplomacy program, its rigorous selection allows funders to identify cohorts of bright, talented, and highly-engaged students and provide them with an opportunity that they likely would not have otherwise. While programs like FLEX might be considered as just another high-school exchange program or gap year in many high-income countries – one that is eclipsed by more prominent experiences later in life – interviews conducted with alumni in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan evidence that alumni believe this program has profound impacts on the lives and professional development of its participants. As was discussed elsewhere in the dissertation, public diplomacy exchange program budgets are tight, and alumni programming only constitutes a small portion of an ever-diminishing program administration budget. Since so much time and funding is invested in these participants during their time on the program, greater funding and attention should be allocated to these same students to help them become “future leaders”, in the broadest sense, in their home countries.

As I have shown, there is a sizeable minority of FLEX alumni who may want to eventually emigrate to the United States or other countries. Furthermore, in-depth interviews with FLEX alumni found that perhaps some alumni feel that they have limited professional growth opportunities available to them in their home countries. In order to address this gap and help alumni capitalize on their experience, more could be done by FLEX program administrators to create more professional opportunities for FLEX alumni in their home countries, especially since research shows that more-structured public diplomacy programs are more likely to be more effective than unstructured exchanges in achieving their stated objectives (see Atkinson 2010, for example).

As the quality of higher education and access to resources in many parts of Eurasia is poorer than in the United States or even outside of Eurasian capitals, FLEX alumni programming can play a unique role in helping to combat those deficiencies by helping alumni develop and refine skills that they may otherwise not have the opportunity to do. For example, along these lines, alumni programming could include supporting the following kinds of professional development:

- Professional and educational development short-courses and seminars – this may involve providing or facilitating the provision of various short courses (including online and blended learning initiatives) on various topics such as computer software and programs, communication and presentation skills; leadership, management, and decision-making skills; professional and technical skills (e.g. finance and managerial accounting); standardized test-taking strategies (e.g. TOEFL, GRE, etc.), as well as other skills that might help make alumni more competitive in the labor market and to universities.
- Career services – this may involve providing various professional career services, such as conducting mock interviews or reviewing resumes, providing information on graduate programs abroad, advice on job-hunting or even hosting career fairs where there are information or vacancy booths stationed by potential local employers.
- Internships and mentoring programs – this might include supporting, either financially or administratively, FLEX alumni and linking them with suitable professional mentors, either abroad or in their home country, as well as internships or other apprenticeship possibilities in their home countries or in the United States. Given the rich history of the FLEX program and number of alumni around the world, such programs could even be built on a foundation of using older FLEX alumni as mentors or internship supervisors.



At first glance, it may seem that supporting these two post-program recommendations simultaneously would be contradictory in nature: on the one hand, providing opportunities for alumni to emigrate or work abroad, while on the other hand, helping alumni to develop careers in their home country. The reality is that each of these initiatives targets different populations of FLEX alumni, and on their own and jointly, these recommendations would further reinforce and strengthen the overarching objectives of the FLEX program in different ways. The first recommendation would enable interested FLEX alumni to emigrate to the United States as opposed to other countries – as was discussed earlier in this dissertation regarding alumni mobility – and the second recommendation would provide FLEX alumni with professional skills that would make them more competitive in their local labor markets.

Implementing recommendations such as these across Eurasia would, of course, require additional resources or a reallocation of existing resources; however, there are many ways in which such programs could be implemented relatively cheaply, such as by creating an online resource portal or facilitating a robust employment-oriented social networking group (e.g. LinkedIn). FLEX alumni themselves could also be targeted via community philanthropy initiatives to raise the capital necessary to support some of these initiatives.

### Program Sustainability

#### *Recommendation 1: Consider expanding the FLEX program outside of Eurasia*

This study, funder-commissioned evaluations, and other research have all demonstrated that experiences such as the kind that FLEX students have – when experienced at an influential period in one’s lives – can have social and professional impacts that reverberate across the life course. Furthermore, as has been demonstrated and reinforced throughout this dissertation, the FLEX program is unique among public diplomacy programs for several reasons, in addition to

the fact that it is one of the few public diplomacy youth exchanges funded by the U.S. government. While the program can trace its origins back through twentieth century history – and the public diplomacy and diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Soviet Union in particular – it is a unique program with few parallels elsewhere in the world.

It goes without saying, therefore, that youth exchanges like FLEX should neither exist only in those regions that are of geostrategic interest to the U.S. nor be those that emerge out of the historical public diplomacy legacies. Rather, the U.S. should increase its funding of youth exchange programs in order to expand programs like FLEX into other regions of the world, just as has been done in the past few years in Eastern Europe. Talented, eager, curious, and intelligent students exist in all low- and middle-income countries, and few except the children of wealthy elites in those countries could financially afford such an experience. Just as with FLEX, non-wealthy young people from regions outside Eurasia would equally benefit from such a yearlong exchange experience. Similarly, just as with the FLEX program, Americans, particularly host schools and communities, would benefit from the exposure to other non-Eurasian cultures and people.

Despite these many benefits, implementing a worldwide program like FLEX on the same scale is unrealistic for many reasons, least of all because it would likely be difficult to find host family and host school placements for tens of thousands of high school exchange students across the U.S. in addition to the tens of thousands of young people who already participate in existing exchange programs. Nevertheless, given that the FLEX program has demonstrated its importance through both individual-level and impacts, more could be done to build on its successes to expand it to other regions of the world.

*Recommendation 2: Ensure FLEX program sustainability through secured, long-term funding*

The FLEX program is an extremely well-known program throughout Eurasia, as evidenced by the fact that it has existed since 1992 and that tens of thousands of students each year participate in the Round 1 competitions. The 2013 survey and in-depth interviews with alumni suggest that this association as a FLEX alumnus or alumna and with the FLEX “brand” may hold intangible value for those individuals. This program notoriety and the nearly 25 years of alumni could serve as important resources for FLEX participants and alumni in the future, some of which was discussed earlier in this chapter. Thus, at a time when funding for public diplomacy and other foreign assistance programs has either been cut or is under threat, efforts should be made to make sure that funding for youth public diplomacy exchanges is secured. In the long term, this could be achieved in several ways. One of these could be the creation of an endowment that would offset or fully fund the administration of the program. Another could be to redesign the structure of the FLEX program to make it more like a typical high school exchange program. In such a case, students might be accepted into the program on a need-blind basis, but the finances of a student’s family would be taken into consideration once a student has been selected, meaning that students from wealthier families would contribute either fully or partially to the costs of program administration.<sup>68</sup> The DOS would then provide grants or fellowships to help those admitted students who would not otherwise be able to afford participation in the program. Such a model would allow an increased number of students to participate on the program (i.e. FLEX program budgets would be able to stretch farther) or allow the program to operate on a smaller budget. In either case, this latter recommendation could have negative implications for FLEX in terms of fulfilling its objectives as a public diplomacy

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<sup>68</sup> At present, all FLEX finalists are fully-funded, regardless of financial need.

program and the continued identification with the program among FLEX participants and alumni. In other words, if the funding and administration mechanisms for the program changes, this may have unintended consequences for the way participants and alumni perceive the program and their affiliation with it.

These are just some of the major policy recommendations for FLEX program administration, pre- and on-program support, program administration and sustainability – as well as recommendations for public diplomacy programs, in general – that have emerged because of this research. While this is by no means an exhausted list, these recommendations should be considered by FLEX program administrators, funders, and Congressional representatives who oversee public diplomacy exchange programs, as they could go a long way towards strengthening and improving FLEX program outcomes and sustainability as well as providing guidance for the development and administration of other, similar public diplomacy initiatives.

## **APPENDICES**

## APPENDIX I

### The 2007-2008 FLEX Cohort

As was discussed throughout the dissertation, we know that the population of FLEX finalists is unique and not representative of the general population from which it originates. Understanding the population of FLEX alumni is important since these are the actors whose attitudes and behaviors concern this dissertation and in whom the U.S. government is investing. This appendix will begin with a discussion of how the 2008 and 2013 samples of alumni respondents compare to the 2007 population from which they are drawn. Then there will be a brief presentation of, among other things, information about FLEX alumni background characteristics, their countries of origin, their families, and the types of schools they attended when they were high school students. This chapter will also provide some indication of important, on-program factors such as host families, host communities, host schools, and the role of religion on the FLEX program. While some of this material is particularly relevant to the substantive chapters of this dissertation (e.g. background characteristics), other material may be of interest to program funders and administrators, since data in areas like religion and socio-economics are not collected or considered as part of FLEX program selection.

#### Three Waves of the FLEX 2007-2008 Cohort

Obtaining a full picture of the 2007-2008 FLEX cohort is rather difficult. To begin with, the proprietary data on FLEX participants and alumni that exists with American Councils for

International Education: ACTR/ACCELS and ECA are confidential. However, based on data found in publicly-available reports, we can make inferences about the 2007-2008 FLEX cohort and how the sample of respondents to the 2013 web survey reflects the overall population from which it originates. Table A.I.1 contains a description of this cohort and the samples that were used as the basis of analysis in this dissertation.

During the 2007-2008 academic year, 1,135 students – including the 30 finalists from Belarus who participated in the YCO program and alternate finalists from all 12 participating exchange countries – completed the pre-departure survey at their respective program orientations. These pre-program, pencil-and-paper surveys were completed in 2007 at participant orientations that took place between June and July 2007. Between April and June 2008, ECA conducted a post-program web survey among the 2007-2008 FLEX cohort. Seven hundred and seventy-nine FLEX alumni responded to this survey, yielding a 72% response rate. While Uzbekistani FLEX alumni were invited to participate in the post-program survey, Belorussian YCO alumni were not included.

Finally, the third survey was conducted as part of this dissertation. The web survey was fielded in April and May 2013 in all countries except Belarus and Uzbekistan and yielded 306 eligible surveys. According to American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCLES staff, of the 1,072 FLEX finalists from these 10 countries, 64 of these were "Early Returns" (ER), meaning that, for a number of personal and programmatic factors, these students did not finish out their academic year in the United States (Peachey 2013). Generally, FLEX ER students are not considered full-fledged FLEX alumni, and these students generally would not participate in FLEX alumni events or engage with other members of the FLEX community. Thus, I would argue that few or none of the 306 eligible FLEX surveys were completed by ERs. Excluding ERs

from the sample of 2013 survey respondents would result in an effective response rate of 30%,<sup>69</sup> which is only one percent more than what the response rate would be if these ERs were included.

**Table A.I.1 2007-2008 FLEX Respondents, by Country, to the 2007, 2008, and 2013 Surveys**

	<b>2007</b>	<b>2008</b>	<b>2013</b>		
Population	N=1,135 <sup>1</sup>	N=1,089 <sup>2</sup>	N=1,072 <sup>3</sup>		
Sample		n=779	n=306		
	<b>2007 (n)</b>	<b>2008 (n)</b>	<b>2013 (n)</b>	<b>% of 2013 population</b>	<b>% of 2013 sample</b>
Armenia	43	31	19	4.20	6.21
Azerbaijan	45	30	17	4.20	5.56
Belarus	30	—	—	—	—
Georgia	47	33	22	4.48	7.19
Kazakhstan	90	59	13	8.68	4.25
Kyrgyzstan	64	40	27	5.97	8.82
Moldova	39	30	10	3.73	3.27
Russia	325	209	88	30.60	28.76
Tajikistan	36	38	11	4.20	3.59
Turkmenistan	63	51	12	6.06	3.92
Ukraine	319	227	87	27.89	28.43
Uzbekistan	16	11	—	—	—
Unknown <sup>4</sup>		20	—	—	—

<sup>1</sup> The original population that completed the pre-program surveys (2007) includes program finalists and alternate finalists from the 12 FLEX and YCO countries. The Belarus YCO program was included in the original analysis because, according to FLEX program officials at American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS, YCO funding was included with FLEX funding.

<sup>2</sup> The 21 individuals from the Belarus YCO program were not included in the 2008 *Key Findings Report* survey. Reported population data (N=1,089) are the number of 2007-2008 FLEX finalists according to data from American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS. The 2008 *Key Findings Report* lists their 2008 survey population as N=1,094. It is unclear from where the difference arises.

<sup>3</sup> The 2013 FLEX alumni population of N=1,072 is calculated by deducting the 17 Uzbekistan finalists from the original N=1,089 since they were not considered in this research.

<sup>4</sup> Those respondents who completed the 2007 Pre-Program and 2008 Post-Program Survey did not list their country of origin.

The final two columns in Table A.I.1 lists the relative percentage of each participating country's 2008 FLEX alumni sample as a percentage of the cohort population and the percentage that completed a survey in 2013 who came from that country. This allows for a comparison of how the 2013 sample reflects the FLEX cohort at the country-level.<sup>70</sup> In general, responses to the

<sup>69</sup>  $n=306 / N=1,008 = 30.36\%$

<sup>70</sup> Unfortunately, I am unaware of the geographic distribution of these ER students across countries. Therefore, they



2013 survey were relatively evenly distributed across the 10 FLEX countries. Kyrgyzstani 2007-2008 alumni were the most proportionally overrepresented in the 2013 survey – by slightly less than 3% – and Kazakhstani alumni were the most underrepresented (by slightly over 4%).

### FLEX 2007-2008 Alumni Backgrounds: Schooling

In the 2013 web survey, the percentage of FLEX alumni respondents who completed public school was statistically the same as the percentage who, in 2007, reported being enrolled in a public school. Based on the way that questions were designed in this survey, students could describe the high schools that they completed in their native countries by selecting from a list of those attributes that reflected their school or their high school experience. Only 10 respondents (3%) reported that they attended the only school in their town, while slightly over one-third (35%) described their high school as a normal, typical high school. Only one respondent lived in a dormitory while attending a private school and another eight lived with a relative in another town while in high school.

The most interesting statistic regarding high school descriptors had to do with those students who said that their school (in their home country) was either specialized in teaching languages or was one of the best in their town. A full half of all respondents described their school as one of the best in their town. A larger percentage of the students who attended high school in a provincial city reported that their school was one of the best (if not the best) in their town. The opposite was true for students in rural towns and villages, and the percentages were

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cannot be considered in the calculation of country percentages or country weights, and as a result, I must use the FLEX 2008 finalist numbers instead.

about split for those respondents who attended high school in the capital city. Some 43% of respondents stated that their school specialized in foreign languages.<sup>71</sup>

The percentage of students reporting in 2013 that they attended a specialized high school before going on the FLEX program was roughly equally distributed among, capital, provincial, and rural high schools. Even in the absence of descriptive statistics about high schools across the FSU, the fact that such a high percentage of FLEX finalists was enrolled in a specialized high school illustrates the important role of intensive, high-quality English language education in preparing individuals who would become successful finalists on the FLEX program.

Furthermore, the decentralized nature of FLEX finalist selection – discussed in Chapter 2 – that takes into consideration the fact that schools in smaller towns, cities, and rural areas may not be as good as those in capital cities – also illustrates the role that these schools play in preparing successful finalists.

Results of the 2013 web survey illustrated that even the importance of language specialization and quality of the high school does not necessarily guarantee that that certain schools will naturally be feeder schools for the FLEX program year after year. Slightly over a third of respondents said that there was a FLEX finalist from their high school most every year, but some forty percent reported that there were few or no FLEX students from their high school – that they could remember – before they were selected. We can infer that the remaining quarter of respondents fall somewhere in between these two extremes.

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<sup>71</sup> Note that this specialization in foreign languages does not necessarily mean English.

### FLEX 2007-2008 Alumni Backgrounds: Family

In general, the families of FLEX finalists are highly educated. In 38% of families, at least one parent has completed a graduate-level degree or the equivalent. In over half of the families (52%), the highest level of education completed by at least one parent was a university-level education. The level of completed education of respondents' mothers and fathers is highly correlated ( $r = 0.50$ ), but on average, levels were statistically insignificantly different from one another. Only one FLEX respondent comes from a family where neither parent has completed high school or the equivalent level of education.

FLEX respondents' perceptions of their parents' political beliefs were difficult to examine in part because a 10-point Likert scale – ranging from 1 to 10 – was used in the survey design, as has been done in other cross-national studies. Although the median value in the scale was 5.5, there was significant heaping on the “5” value compared to neighboring points on the scale. If we break the 10-point scale down into three broad groups (i.e. political liberals, moderates and conservatives), we could say that approximately 73% of parents could be considered political moderates, 18% liberals, and 9% conservatives. Furthermore, FLEX respondents reported, on average, in 2013 that their parents were slightly more liberal than other families in their community. Based on the results of a similar 10-point Likert question, if we were to divide FLEX respondents' political values into the same three groups as their parents' views, we could say that 43% would be considered liberal, 52% would be considered moderates, and only 5% were conservative.

FLEX 2007-2008 Alumni Backgrounds: Religion and Religiosity

In-depth interviews with FLEX alumni from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan conducted in 2012 suggested that religion and religiosity played a prominent role in the lives of at least some FLEX participants in the United States. Interviews suggested that the host families with which students were placed were overwhelmingly Christian and more religiously observant – meaning that they prayed more often and went to religious services – than average Americans. This dissertation gave serious consideration to this supposition in exploring the interaction of religion with exchange program experiences.

Pre- and post-program surveys suggested that, on average, self-reported religious affiliation among FLEX alumni seemed relatively stable between 2007 and 2008 (Table A.I.2). There were slightly fewer Christians (63% compared to 66%) and those listing “other” religious affiliation (5% compared to 1%) in 2008 than in 2007 as well as slightly more Muslims (26% compared to 23%). The stability of these values in 2008 also suggests that there was less reason for concern for changes in religious identification because of program participation than may have been presupposed. This stability may also be indicative of the fact that there is a fairly representative sample of the 2007-2008 FLEX cohort in the 2013 sample.

**Table A.I.2 FLEX 2007-2008 Alumni Reported Religious Identification in 2008 and 2013, Relative to the 2007 Pre-Program Survey**

	2007	2008	2013
Christianity	66.10	62.93 <sup>***</sup> (1.75)	63.07 (2.76)
Islam	22.78	25.73 <sup>***</sup> (1.59)	18.30 <sup>**</sup> (2.21)
Other (Jewish, Buddhist, etc.)	2.49	6.33 <sup>***</sup> (0.88)	4.90 <sup>*</sup> (1.23)
None	8.63	5.01 <sup>***</sup> (0.79)	13.73 <sup>**</sup> (1.97)

Standard errors in parentheses  
<sup>\*\*\*</sup> p<0.01, <sup>\*\*</sup> p<0.05, <sup>\*</sup> p<0.1 relative to 2007 baseline

In 2013, religious self-identification remained relatively stable compared to the 2007 pre-program survey reports. There was a notable increase in FLEX alumni reporting not reportedly ascribing to any religion, as well as a decrease in the number of students who reported themselves to be Muslim. A decrease in the number of alumni reporting they were Muslim may be less a result of students changing their religious identification and more the result of the under-participation of FLEX alumni in this survey from the majority Muslim countries of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan.

## **APPENDIX II**

### **Web Survey of 2007-2008 FLEX Alumni (2013)**

Building off in-depth interviews conducted in spring and summer 2012, the English-language version of this web survey was developed starting in late 2012 and finalized in early 2013. For the sake of simplicity and to avoid issues of measurement reliability in cross-cultural and cross-language comparisons, I decided to field the survey in only two languages: English and Russian. Fortunately, the independent, cross-national studies from which I have taken questions and measures have also fielded these questions in Russian. To the extent possible, I have used the exact language found in those surveys.

The choice to field the web surveys in only English and Russian, however, is not without its problems. First, Russian is not the native language of all FLEX alumni, nor are all FLEX alumni fluent in the language. This is particularly true among rural, non-ethnically-Russian populations living in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Nonetheless, while everyone in the 2007-2008 FLEX cohort has been exposed to Russian at some point in their lives, they all have a functional proficiency in English because of their year as an exchange student. Because it is likely that there are a few individuals within the cohort who have forgotten some of their knowledge of English because they have not used it much in the past five years, the survey instrument has been constructed so that most alumni should be able to complete this survey in English with ease. For those who could not – or who had difficulty with some parts of the survey – Qualtrics provides users the opportunity to toggle between Russian and English languages at any point in the survey.

In the end, having only English- and Russian-language versions of this survey was not ideal in that it could induce validity and reliability bias into the data for some elements of the population. However, creating versions of the survey in each of the titular languages of the participating countries (e.g. Armenian, Azeri, Georgian, etc.) would have been more problematic. First, it would have added complexity and cost to the overall preparation of the survey instrument. Second, it would become more difficult to create survey questions that are reliable measures cross-nationally and across languages. Arguably, it would also be more difficult to identify any bias that may be inherent in these measures. Because of this, I opted for a middle-of-the-road solution by fielding a two-language survey.

#### Survey Mechanics and Distribution

FLEX alumni from the 2007-2008 cohort were recruited for participation in this research study through various media:

- Direct emails. Because of cooperation with American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS – the organization that administers the FLEX program in the FSU – the FLEX administrative staff sent out targeted, individualized emails to all the 2007-2008 alumni for whom they have contact information listed in their databases over a period of three weeks.
- Announcements on email lists. The FLEX Alumni Coordinators in the respective American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS country offices, as well as the Public Affairs Sections at U.S. embassies, sent announcements and invitations to participate in the survey to all 2007-2008 FLEX participants through their email lists.

- Announcements on social media outlets. Announcements about the study and invitations to participate were posted on Facebook and *V Kontakte* groups that have been formed specifically by and for FLEX alumni across the FSU.

All email announcements, pre-interview consent agreements, and the English- and Russian-language surveys were reviewed and approved by the Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Michigan.<sup>72</sup> All web surveys were prepared using the University of Michigan's institutional license of Qualtrics Research Suite.

Once alumni clicked on the Qualtrics link inviting them to participate in the study, they first received a page containing information about the study and their rights and responsibilities as participants. To proceed to the survey itself, alumni had to click on a "Yes" dial at the end of the document, thereby providing proof that they read and gave their consent to participate in the study. It is important to note that, although the University of Michigan's IRB did not require respondents to provide written consent to participate, I felt that consent was an important element of the study. In many parts of the FSU, native populations have a great deal of skepticism towards surveys such as this, their intent, and the use of the data collected from such surveys. Informed consent forms are one way to provide individuals agency over whether they would like to participate.

Initial announcements to participate were distributed to the aforementioned stakeholders on April 8, 2013. Two reminder emails were disseminated by the American Councils' FLEX Alumni Offices to alumni via the criteria set forth in the survey protocol. Reminder emails were also sent by the American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS country

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<sup>72</sup> HUM00051983 approved and granted exemption on March 6, 2013.



offices, Public Affairs Sections at U.S. embassies, and posted on social media networks. Data collection ended on May 31, 2013.

### Survey Responses

During the survey period, 425 unique surveys were completed. Among them, five individuals did not give consent to participate, 114 were deemed ineligible, and 306 were eligible for analysis. The eligibility of units was determined based on responses to several survey questions. Primarily, information about country of origin, age, and grade in school provided in the 2013 survey was compared against eligibility requirements for each FLEX country during the 2007-2008 application year.

Table A.II.1 lists the breakdown of 2007-2008 FLEX finalists by country and the eligible respondents by country. This data was used in the creation of country weights. In general, response was relatively evenly distributed across FLEX countries. Kyrgyzstani 2007-2008 alumni were the most overrepresented in the 2013 survey sample, while Kazakhstani alumni were the most underrepresented.

**Table A.II.1 Representativeness of FLEX 2013 Respondents  
Relative to the FLEX 2007-2008 Cohort**

Country	Over (+) / Under (-) representation (%)
Armenia	+2.01
Azerbaijan	+1.36
Georgia	+2.71
Kazakhstan	-4.43
Kyrgyzstan	+2.85
Moldova	-0.46
Russia	-1.84
Tajikistan	-0.60
Turkmenistan	-2.14
Ukraine	+0.54

Copies of the English- and Russian-language versions of the 2013 Qualtrics survey are attached below. The approximate time burden of the survey was estimated to be 20 minutes, and

the actual median time for completing the survey was 19 minutes for both the English and Russian versions. A few relevant points to note regarding the interpretation of the web survey, as it is presented here, are as follows:

- The survey is presented in both English and Russian, although it is important to note that Qualtrics software allows respondents to toggle between English and Russian versions of the survey at any point;
- The symbol “O” denotes responses to questions that require single responses, and multiple responses are denoted by a box symbol: “□”. Write-in responses are labeled by with larger text fields and with the phrase “write-in” or “write-in response”;
- An asterisk (\*) by the response button denotes a required response;
- The formatting of this survey – particularly aspects such as table widths, etc. – varies from that of the actual Qualtrics survey;
- This survey is provided for reference only and does not contain skip logics or other similar structures built into the Qualtrics web survey platform.

## 2013 Web Survey of the FLEX 2007-2008 Cohort

### 1. Introduction

---

#### Choose a language / Выберите язык

- English
- русский язык

Dear FLEX Alum:

My name is Everett Peachey, and I am a PhD student at the University of Michigan, USA. This survey is part of my dissertation research about the attitudes and opinions of FLEX alumni.

This research is independent of American Councils for International Education (ACTR/ACCELS) and of the United States Department of State. While the analysis of this survey will take place at the University of Michigan, results of this research will be presented to American Councils and the United States Department of State to help them evaluate the FLEX Program and make it better for future participants.

This is not a test, and you are not required to take this survey. There are no right or wrong answers. All answers to this survey are kept strictly confidential.

If you will have any questions about this research project or the survey, you may contact me:

Mr. Everett Peachey  
Principal Researcher  
500 South State Street #3001  
Ann Arbor, MI 48109 USA  
epeachey@umich.edu

Because this research project has been reviewed by a University of Michigan committee on research ethics, you may also contact them if

you have any questions:  
IRB / HSBS  
University of Michigan  
540 East Liberty Street - Suite 202  
Ann Arbor, MI 48104 USA  
irbhsbs@umich.edu

This survey shouldn't take more than 20 minutes of your time, and you can stop the survey at any time. However, if you finish the survey, you can choose to enter a lottery in order to win one of ten \$50 cash prizes.

Thank you for your participation!

Sincerely,  
Everett Peachey  
PhD Student in Sociology and Public Policy, University of Michigan

- O\* Yes, I have read this information, and I agree to participate in this research.  
O\* No, I do not agree to participate in this research.

## **2. Background and Pre-FLEX - I**

---

**This survey consists of 5 short sections. The first section will consist of questions about your personal background and your life before the FLEX program.**

**In what class or form were you in high school when you passed on the FLEX program?**

- 8<sup>th</sup>
- 9<sup>th</sup>
- 10<sup>th</sup>
- 11<sup>th</sup>
- 12<sup>th</sup>

**What best describes the location where you were living when you passed on the FLEX program?**

- The capital or the suburbs of the capital
- Provincial capital or another city in the provinces
- A small town, village, or rural area

**Which of the following statements describe your high school and your high school experience before you went on the FLEX program? Choose all that apply.**

- My school was a public school.
- My school was a private school.
- My school was one of the best schools in my region
- I attended the only school in my town.
- My school was a normal, typical high school.
- I lived in a student dormitory or with relatives in another town to attend school.
- Most every year there was a FLEX finalist from my school.
- There were few or no FLEX finalists from my high school before I was selected.
- My school specialized in foreign languages (English or another language).

### 3. FLEX Program

---

Now you are going to see some questions about your experience on the FLEX program. There will be some questions about your host family and community.

If you had more than one host family, host school, or host community during your time on the FLEX program, please answer the questions about the host family and community in which you lived for the greatest length of time.

In which U.S. state did you live while you are on the FLEX program?

\* Dropdown menu containing 50 U.S. states

Each host family is different. Please select the following individuals who regularly lived with you in your household while you were on the FLEX program.

- Host father
- Host mother
- Older host brother(s)
- Older host sister(s)
- Younger host brother(s)
- Younger host sister(s)
- Other exchange student(s)
- Other extended family members (grandparents, cousins, etc.)

Did your host family belong to a religion or religious denomination? If yes, which one?

- No, they did not belong to a religion or religious denomination.
- Yes, Catholic Christian
- Yes, Protestant Christian
- Yes, Jewish
- Yes, Muslim
- Yes, Hindu
- Yes, Buddhist
- Yes, Other (write in)

This question will ask about the importance of religion in the life of your host family.

Describe how often you or your host family did the following things. How often...

	Every day	Several times each week	Once a week	Once a month	Only on special holy days	Once a year	Never or practically never
did members of your host family pray?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
did your host family attend religious services?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
did members of your host family participate in social events affiliated	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

with a religious community (for example, bible study, volunteering, social events, etc.)?

did you attend religious services with members of your host family?                                         

did you participate in social events affiliated with a religious community (for example, Bible study, volunteering, social events, etc.)?                                         

**Financially speaking, would you say that your host family was richer, poorer, or about the same as other families in your host community?**

- Richer than other families
- About the same as other families financially
- Poorer than other families

**In political matters, people sometimes talk of “left” and “right”. Where would you place the views of your host family on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
(Left)									(Right)
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Politically speaking, would you say that your host family was more liberal, more conservative, or about the same as other families in your host community?**

- More liberal than other families
- About the same as other families politically
- More conservative than other families

**What was the name of your host high school in the USA?**

*write-in response*

**Exchange programs provide participants with many important opportunities for learning and engaging people from other countries. Please identify the three (3) most important accomplishments for you for having gone on the FLEX program.**

- Made friends with American students
- Improved my English
- Made friends with students from other countries
- Improved my education
- Increased my understanding of American society, people, and culture
- Promoted mutual understanding between Americans and foreigners
- Learned about community service and volunteerism
- Shared my culture with others

- Improved my leadership skills

**Of the following people you met while on the FLEX program, with whom have you been in contact during the past few months? Choose all that apply.**

- Other community members I met
- American classmates and friends
- Host / placement organization staff
- Members of my host family
- Teachers at my school
- Other FLEX alumni

**How do you usually keep in contact with these individuals you met while on the FLEX program? Choose all that apply.**

- Visiting in person
- Telephone, Skype, etc.
- Social networks (Facebook, VK, Odnoklassniki, etc.)
- E-mail
- Text messaging
- Letters and packages through the mail

#### **4. Key Findings Questions**

---

**Now you are going to be asked some questions about your attitudes about Americans, the United States, politics, and civil society.**

**In general, how favorably do you view the United States government and the American people?**

	Strongly unfavorable	Generally unfavorable	Neither favorable nor unfavorable	Generally favorable	Strongly favorable
What is your view of the United States government?	○	○	○	○	○
What is your view of the American people?	○	○	○	○	○

**Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about the United States and the U.S. government.**

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
The United States has laws and regulations that protect	○	○	○	○	○

the individual.

The United States economy provides a good living for its citizens.

The United States foreign policy reflects the interests and attitudes of the American people.

The United States provides equal opportunities for all.

The United States is a democracy that works well.

The United States imposes its views on other countries.

**Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about America and Americans.**

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Americans are friendly and open.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Americans express their personal opinions, even if they contradict those of authorities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Most Americans are wealthy.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Americans are well informed about the world.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about civil society and politics.**

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
People with disabilities (mentally and physically challenged) should have equal opportunities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Men and women should equally share family responsibilities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Religious minorities should have equal opportunities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Men and women should have equal opportunities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ethnic minorities should have equal opportunities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements.**  
**Individuals should have the right to...**

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
Have acceptable health care	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have a job	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Travel freely to other countries	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Be considered equal under law regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or religion	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have freedom of speech	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have acceptable housing	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Receive an education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Have access to information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statements about civil society and politics.**

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
The Rule of Law is fundamental to a functioning democracy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Voting is important because real decisions are made in elections.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
An independent media is important to the free flow of information.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The People's Republic of China is a trustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

partner for my country.

The European Union is a trustworthy partner for my country.                             

The U.S. government is a trustworthy partner for my country.                             

Free and fair elections are the cornerstone of democracy                             

All citizens in a country should have equal rights and protections under the law                             

Individuals and Organizations have the right to free speech and to voice opposition.                             

## 5. Life After the FLEX Program

---

Next, you are going to be asked some questions about your life after the FLEX program.

**Do you live in your native country now?**

- Yes
- No

**What do you do now? Choose all that apply.**

- Work at a full-time job
- Work at a part-time job
- Study at a university, institute, or college
- Study as a graduate student
- Stay-at-home parent
- Unemployed or looking for work
- Something else: *write-in*

**What best describes the kind of place you work now?**

- Private business
- Local, non-profit, or charitable organization
- Government or another public institution
- International organization

**What best describes the kind of place where you would like to work someday? If you are currently working, choose the kind of place where you prefer to work.**

- Private business
- Local, non-profit, or charitable organization
- Government or another public institution
- International organization

**Where do you live now?**

- Another country of the Former Soviet Union than my native country
- United States
- Europe
- Somewhere else: *write-in*

**Describe the university, institute, or college that you attended after you finished high school. Choose all that apply.**

- I did not attend a university, institute, or college.
- The primary language of instruction was English.
- It is located in the capital city of my native country.
- Many FLEX alumni from my country attend this university.
- It is located in another country outside the FSU (Europe, Asia, America).
- It is located in the same town or city where I went to high school.
- It is one of the most prestigious universities in the country.
- It is a very expensive university and difficult for most people to attend.
- It is located in another country in the FSU than my native country.

**Describe the university, institute, or college that you currently attend. Choose all that apply.**

- The primary language of instruction was English.
- It is located in the capital city of my native country.
- Many FLEX alumni from my country attend this university.
- It is located in another country outside the FSU (Europe, Asia, America).
- It is located in the same town or city where I went to high school.
- It is one of the most prestigious universities in the country.
- It is a very expensive university and difficult for most people to attend.
- It is located in another country in the FSU than my native country.

**What is your area of specialization? Choose the most appropriate response.**

- Social Sciences (economics, political science, international relations, sociology, etc.)
- Medicine (Medical Academy)
- Interpretation and Translation
- Natural of Hard Science (agriculture, chemistry, mathematics, physics, etc.)
- Law or Jurisprudence
- Humanities (history, language, philology, linguistics, philosophy, etc.)
- Business (accounting, finance, international business, marketing, public relations, etc.)
- Teaching or Pedagogy (Pedagogical Academy)
- Other: *write-in*

**Which of the following statements describes your choice of specialization as a student?  
Choose all that apply.**

- I chose my major / specialization myself.
- My country needs more experts in my area of specialization.
- Experts in my area of specialization are in demand in my country.
- My parents and I decided on my major together.
- My parents or other relatives chose my major / specialization for me.
- It was always my dream to study my major/specialization at university.
- Experts in my area of specialization receive high salaries.

**What is the highest level of education you expect to obtain in life?**

- Full secondary education (11th or 12th form)
- Specialized secondary education (*Technikum, PTU*)
- Higher education (bachelor's, specialist degree or equivalent)
- Master's degree (or equivalent)
- PhD (*Kandidat*) or equivalent
- Other: *write-in*

**What best describes the location where you are living now?**

- The capital or the suburbs of the capital
- Provincial capital or another city in the provinces
- A small town, village or rural area

**During the past few months, how often were you involved in the following activities?**

	Never	Seldom	Some of the time	Most of the time
Community service (for example: helping others, environment, health, education)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Civic or political activism (for example, elections, volunteering)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Cultural activities (for example: visiting museums/historical sites, attending concerts, theater)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Religious activities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Sports teams	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Clubs or organizations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Have you been back to the United States at all since you completed your FLEX exchange program?**

- No
- Yes

**Why did you go back to the United States? Choose the most appropriate response. If you have been back to the United States more than once, think about the most recent visit.**

- Tourism

- Attend undergraduate university
- Study abroad program
- Attend graduate school
- Conference or meeting
- Visit FLEX host family or friends
- To live and work full-time
- To work part-time (summer job, Work and Travel)

**If you could go back to the United States, what would best describe your reason for going?**

- I do not want to go back to the United States
- Tourism
- Attend undergraduate university
- Study abroad program
- Attend graduate school
- Conference or meeting
- Visit FLEX host family or friends
- To live and work full-time
- To work part-time (summer job, Work and Travel)

## 6. Background & Pre-FLEX II

---

Finally, in Section 5, you are going to be asked just a few more questions about your background.

What is your current age?

- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

In political matters, people sometimes talk of “left” and “right”. Where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?

- |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     | 6                     | 7                     | 8                     | 9                     | 10                    |
| (Left)                |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       | (Right)               |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Growing up, what language did you normally speak at home with your family?

- Russian

- A different language

**To the best of your knowledge, what is the highest level of education completed by your father?**

- Incomplete secondary education (9th form)
- Full secondary education (11th or 12th form)
- Specialized secondary education (*Technikum, PTU*)
- Higher education (*Institut / University specialization*)
- PhD (*Kandidat*) or equivalent
- Other: *write-in*

**To the best of your knowledge, what is the highest level of education completed by your mother?**

- Incomplete secondary education (9th form)
- Full secondary education (11th or 12th form)
- Specialized secondary education (*Technikum, PTU*)
- Higher education (*Institut / University specialization*)
- PhD (*Kandidat*) or equivalent
- Other: *write-in*

**In political matters, people sometimes talk of “left” and “right”. Where would you place the views of your parents on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?**

- |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1                     | 2                     | 3                     | 4                     | 5                     | 6                     | 7                     | 8                     | 9                     | 10                    |
| (Left)                |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       |                       | (Right)               |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

**Politically speaking, would you say that your family is more liberal, more conservative, or about the same as other families in your host community?**

- More liberal than other families
- About the same as other families politically
- More conservative than other families

**What religion do you most closely identify with?**

- Christianity (for example: Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant)
- Islam
- Other: *write-in*
- None

## **7. Thank You!**

---

Thank you for participating in this survey! Your response is important for this research and also in evaluating the FLEX Program and making it better for future participants.

If you are interested in participating in the lottery to win one of ten \$50 prizes, please write out the full email address at which you would

like to be contacted in the box below.

Prizes will be awarded by random drawing after the completion of the survey. Winners will be contacted by the researcher of the study, Everett Peachey, during the summer of 2013 at the email address listed in the box below.

- Yes, I am interested in participating in the lottery. Please enter your email address in the box below: *write-in*
- No, thank you. I am not interested in participating in the lottery.

The results of this research will be made available once the study is completed. Are you interested in receiving the results of this study by email?

- Yes, I am interested in receiving results of this research. Please enter your email address in the box below: *write-in*
- No, thank you. I am not interested in receiving the results of this research

## 1. Introduction

---

### Choose a language / Выберите язык

- English
- русский язык

Уважаемые выпускники FLEX:

Меня зовут Эверетт Пичи и я являюсь аспирантом в Университете Мичигана (США). Я провожу исследования для моей диссертации на тему отношений и мнений выпускников программы FLEX, и эта анкета является частью этого проекта.

Мои исследования не зависят от Американских Советов по международному образованию (АСПРЯЛ / АКСЕЛС) и госдепартамента Соединенных Штатов. Анализ этих исследований будет проводиться в Университете Мичигана, но я планирую предоставить окончательные результаты этих исследований Американским Советам для того, чтобы помочь им оценить результаты программы FLEX и улучшить программу для ее будущих участников.

Это не тест и вы не обязаны принимать участие в этом опросе. Также здесь нет правильных или неправильных ответов. Все результаты строго конфиденциальны.

Если у Вас возникнут какие-либо вопросы по этому проекту или исследованиям, вы можете связаться со мной по следующему адресу:

Everett Peachey  
500 South State Street # 3001  
Ann Arbor, MI 48109 USA  
epeachey@umich.edu

Этот научно-исследовательский проект был рассмотрен и одобрен комитетом по этике научных исследований. Поэтому, вы также можете связаться с членами этого комитета, если у вас возникнут вопросы:

IRB / HSBS  
University of Michigan  
540 East Liberty Street - Suite 202  
Ann Arbor, MI 48104 USA  
irbhsbs@umich.edu

Заполнение этого исследования не должно занять более 20 минут вашего времени, и вы можете остановиться в любой момент.

Если вы закончите этот опросник, вы можете принять участие в лотерее и выиграть один из десяти \$50 денежных призов. Спасибо заранее за ваше участие!

С уважением,  
Эверетт Пичи



Программа в области социологии и общественной политики  
Университете Мичигана

- О\* | Да, я читал эту информацию, и я согласен принять участие в этом исследовании.  
О\* | Нет, я не согласен участвовать в этом исследовании.

## **2. Личная информация и жизни до участия в программе FLEX - 1 Часть**

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**Эта анкета состоит из 5 коротких разделов. В первом разделе будут вопросы о Вашей биографии и о Вашей жизни до Вашего участия в программе FLEX.**

**В каком классе Вы учились, когда Вы прошли по программе FLEX?**

- в 8-м классе
- в 9-м классе
- в 10-м классе
- в 11-м классе
- в 12-м классе

**Как бы Вы описали то место, где Вы жили, когда Вы прошли по программе FLEX?**

- столица или пригород столицы
- областная столица или другой город в области
- небольшой город, село или сельская местность

**Какие из следующих утверждений описывают Вашу школу и Ваш опыт в школе до того как Вы пошли по программе FLEX? Выберите все подходящие варианты.**

- Моя школа была государственной школой.
- Моя школа была частной школой.
- Я жил(а) в студенческом общежитии или у родственников в другом городе.
- Я учился(ась) в единственной школе в моем городе.
- Моя школа специализировалась на иностранных языках (на английском или другом языке).
- Почти каждый год был финалистом FLEX из моей школы.
- Моя школа была одной из лучших школ в моем регионе.
- Моя школа была нормальной, типичной, средней школой.
- Прежде, чем я был(а) выбран(а), редко или никогда не было финалистов по программе FLEX из моей школы.

## **3. Программа FLEX**

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**В этом разделе Вы увидите несколько вопросов о об опыте на программе FLEX. Будут заданы несколько вопросов о Вашей принимающей семье и общине. Если у Вас было более одной семьи, принимающей школы, или принимающего сообщества**

в течение Вашего времени на программе FLEX, ответьте на вопросы о семье и сообществе с которыми Вы жили наибольшее время.

**В каком штате США Вы жили во время программы FLEX?**

\* *Dropdown menu containing 50 U.S. states*

**Принимающие семьи отличаются друг от друга. Пожалуйста, выберите те лица, которые регулярно жили с Вами в**

**Вашем доме когда Вы были на программе.**

- принимающий отец
- принимающая мать
- старший принимающий брат (один или несколько)
- старшая принимающая сестра (одна или несколько)
- младший принимающий брат (один или несколько)
- младшая принимающая сестра (одна или несколько)
- еще другой студент по обмену (один или несколько)
- другие принимающие родственники (бабушки и дедушки, двоюродные братья, и т.д.)

**Принадлежала ли Ваша принимающая семья к какой-либо религии и вероисповеданию? Если да, то к какой?**

- Нет, они не принадлежали ни к какой религии или вероисповеданию.
- Да, они католики.
- Да, они протестанты. (баптисты, пятидесятники, лютеране, и т.д.)
- Да, они евреи.
- Да, они мусульмане.
- Да, они индуусы.
- Да, они буддисты.
- Да, они принадлежат к другой религии или вероисповеданию. (напишите здесь):  
(*write in*)

Этот вопрос касается важности религии в жизни Вашей принимающей семьи.

**Опишите, как часто Вы или Ваша принимающая семья делали следующие вещи.**

**Как часто...**

	каждый день	несколько раз в неделю	Раз в неделю	Раз в месяц	Только по специальным святым дням	Раз в год	Никогда или практически никогда
... члены Вашей принимающей семьи молились?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... Ваша принимающая семья принимала участие в	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

религиозных  
службах?

... члены вашей  
семьи

принимали

участие в  
общественных  
мероприятиях,

связанных с  
религиозной  
общиной

(например,  
изучение  
Библии,

волонтерство,  
социальные

мероприятия и  
т.д.)?

... Вы посещали  
религиозные

службы с

членами вашей  
принимающей  
семьи?

... Вы

принимали

участие в

общественных  
мероприятиях,

связанных с  
религиозной  
общиной

(например,  
изучение

Библии,  
волонтерство,

социальные  
мероприятия и  
т.д.)?

**В финансовом плане, Вы бы охарактеризовали Вашу принимающую семью как более богатой, бедной, или примерно такой же, как другие семьи в принимающем сообществе?**

- богаче чем другие семьи
- такой же, как другие семьи
- беднее чем другие семьи

**Говоря о политике, люди используют слова "левый" и "правый". Говоря в общем, как бы вы оценили взгляды своих принимающих родителей на этой шкале?**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
(Левый)									(Правый)
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Касаемо политики, Вы бы описали Вашу принимающую семью как более либеральной, более консервативной, или примерно такой же, как другие семьи в принимающем сообществе?**

- более либеральной, чем другие семьи
- такой же, как и другие семьи
- более консервативной, чем другие семьи

**Как называлась Ваша принимающая средняя школа в США?**

*write-in response*

**Программы обмена предоставляют участникам многие важные возможности для знакомства и общения с людьми из других стран. Укажите три наиболее важных достижения, которые Вы достигли на программе FLEX.**

- узнал(а) про общественную работу и волонтерство
- подружился(лась) с американскими учениками
- повысил(а) уровень своего образования
- улучшил (а) лидерские качества
- способствовал(а) продвижению взаимопонимания между американцами и иностранцами
- поделился(лась) своей культурой с другими людьми
- улучшил(а) знания английского языка
- развил(а) более глубокое понимание американского общества, людей и культуры
- подружился(лась) с учениками из других стран

**Из перечисленных ниже людей с которыми Вы познакомились во время программы FLEX с кем Вы были в контакте в течение последних нескольких месяцев? Выберите все подходящие варианты.**

- учителя в моей школе
- члены моей семьи
- другие выпускники FLEX
- Американские одноклассники и друзья
- сотрудники моей принимающей организации
- другие члены сообщества, с которыми я познакомился во время программы

**Как Вы обычно поддерживаете в контакт с теми людьми, с которыми Вы познакомились во время программы FLEX?**

**Выберите все подходящие варианты.**

- по электронной почте
- SMS, онлайн-чат и т.д.
- социальные сети (Facebook, В.К., Одноклассники и т.д.)
- по телефону, Skype, и т.д.
- посещение
- через письма и посылки по почте

**4. Вопросы “Ключевые результаты”**

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**В этом разделе Вы увидите несколько вопросов о Вашем отношении к американцам, США, политика и гражданское общество в целом.**

**В общем, насколько благосклонно Вы относитесь к правительству США и к американскому народу?**

	Совсем неблагосклонно	В целом неблагосклонно	Нейтрально	В целом благосклонно	Очень благосклонно
Каково ваше мнение Правительства Соединенных Штатов?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Каково ваше мнение американского народа?	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Укажите насколько Вы согласны или не согласны со следующими высказываниями о Соединенных Штатах и о правительстве США.**

	Совсем не согласен(на)	Отчасти не согласен(на)	Нейтрален(на)	Отчасти согласен(на)	Полностью согласен(на)
США – это демократия, которая хорошо функционирует.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Соединенные Штаты предоставляют равные возможности для всех.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Соединенные Штаты навязывает свои взгляды к другим странам.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
У Соединенных	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Штатов есть законы и положения, защищающие человека.

Экономика Соединенных Штатов предоставляет хорошую жизнь для своих граждан.

Внешняя политика Соединенных Штатов отражает интересы и взгляды американского народа.

**Укажите насколько Вы согласны или не согласны со следующими высказываниями об Америке и американцах.**

	Совсем не согласен(на)	Отчасти не согласен(на)	Нейтрален(на)	Отчасти согласен(на)	Полностью согласен(на)
Американцы дружелюбны и открыты.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Американцы выражают свои личные мнения, даже если они противоречат власти.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Американцы хорошо осведомлены об окружающем мире.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Большинство американцев богаты.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Укажите насколько Вы согласны или не согласны со следующими высказываниями о гражданском обществе и политике.**

Совсем не      Отчасти не      Нейтрален(на)      Отчасти      Полностью

	согласен(на)	согласен(на)		согласен(на)	согласен(на)
Этнические меньшинства должны иметь равные возможности.	○	○	○	○	○
Мужчины и женщины должны разделять семейные обязанности.	○	○	○	○	○
Люди с ограниченными возможностями (умственными и физическими недостатками) должны иметь равные возможности.	○	○	○	○	○
Мужчины и женщины должны иметь равные возможности.	○	○	○	○	○
Религиозные меньшинства должны иметь равные возможности.	○	○	○	○	○

**Укажите насколько согласны или не согласны со следующими высказываниями.**

**Люди должны иметь право...**

	Совсем не согласен(на)	Отчасти не согласен(на)	Нейтрален(на)	Отчасти согласен(на)	Полностью согласен(на)
...на приемлемое здравоохранение.	○	○	○	○	○
...свободно выезжать в другие страны.	○	○	○	○	○
...на доступ к информации.	○	○	○	○	○
...считаться равными по закону,	○	○	○	○	○

независимо от  
возраста, пола,  
этнической или  
религиозной  
принадлежности.

...на приемлемое жилье.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...на свободу слова.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
... получить образование.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
...иметь работу.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Укажите насколько согласны или не согласны со следующими высказываниями о  
гражданском обществе и политике.**

	Совсем не согласен(на)	Отчасти не согласен(на)	Нейтрален(на)	Отчасти согласен(на)	Полностью согласен(на)
Свободные и справедливые выборы являются основой демократии.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Народная Республика Китай является надежным партнером для моей страны.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Голосование важно, потому что реальные решения принимаются в выборах.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Частные лица и организации имеют право на свободу слова и голоса оппозиции.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Европейский Союз является надежным партнером для моей страны.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Независимые средства массовой информации имеют важное значение для	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



свободного потока информации.

Верховенство закона является основополагающим для функционирования демократии.

Правительство США является надежным партнером для моей страны.

Все граждане страны должны иметь равные права и защиту в соответствии с законом.

## **5. Жизни после окончания программы FLEX.**

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**В этом разделе Вы увидите несколько вопросов о Вашей жизни после окончания программы FLEX.**

**Проживаете ли вы в Вашей родной стране в данное время?**

- да
- нет

**Чем Вы занимаетесь сейчас? Выберите все подходящие варианты.**

- работа на полную ставку
- работа на полставки
- учусь в университете, институте или колледже
- учусь в качестве аспиранта
- домохозяйка или домохозяин
- безработный/ая или ищу работу
- другое (напишите здесь):

**Что лучше всего описывает место вашей работы в данное время?**

- частное предприятие
- местныенекоммерческих или благотворительных организаций
- правительство или другое государственное учреждение
- международные неправительственные или правительственные организации

**Как бы Вы описали то место, где Вы хотели бы работать когда-нибудь? Если вы в**

**настоящее время работаете, выбрать такое место, где бы Вы предпочли работать.**

- частное предприятие
- местные некоммерческих или благотворительных организаций
- правительство или другое государственное учреждение
- международные неправительственные или правительственные организации

**Где Ваше место жительства в данное время?**

- В стране бывшего Советского Союза (не родная страна)
- США
- Европа
- в другой стране (напишите здесь):

**Опишите университет, институт или колледж, где Вы учились после окончания школы. Выберите все подходящие варианты.**

- Я не учился (лась) в университете, институте или колледже.
- Он находится в столице моей родины.
- Обучение в этом университете стоит очень дорого. Поэтому для большинства людей из моей страны позволить себе учиться здесь очень трудно.
- Это один из самых престижных университетов в стране.
- Он находится в другой стране бывшего Советского Союза (не в родной мне стране).
- Многие выпускники FLEX из моей страны учатся в этом университете.
- Он находится в том же городе, где я учился(ась) в школе.
- Она находится в другой стране за пределами бывшего СССР (например, в Европе, Азии, Америке).
- Английский язык был основным языком обучения.

**Опишите университет, институт или колледж, где Вы сейчас учитесь. Выберите все подходящие варианты.**

- Английский язык был основным языком обучения.
- Он находится в том же городе, где я учился в школе.
- Это один из самых престижных университетов в стране.
- Обучение в этом университете стоит очень дорого и не доступно для большинства людей страны.
- Он находится в другой стране бывшего Советского Союза, чем мой родной стране.
- Он находится в столице моей родины.
- Она находится в другой стране за пределами бывшего СССР (например, в Европе, Азии, Америке).
- Многие выпускники FLEX из моей страны учатся в этом университете.

**Какая у Вас специальность? Выберите наиболее подходящий ответ.**

- Устный и письменный перевод
- Естественные науки (сельское хозяйство, химия, математика, физика и т.д.)
- Медицина (медицинская академия)
- Право и юриспруденция
- Гуманитарные науки (история, иностранные языки, филология, лингвистика,

- философия и т.д.)
- Преподавание и педагогика (педагогическая академия)
- Общественные науки (экономика, политология, международные отношения, социология и др.)
- Бизнес (бухгалтерский учет, финансы, международный бизнес, маркетинг, связь с общественностью и т.д.)
- другая (напишите здесь):

**Какие из следующих утверждений описывают Ваш выбор специализации. Выберите все подходящие варианты.**

- Эксперты в мвоей области специализации востребованы в мвоей стране.
- Моя страна нуждается в большем количестве специалистов в моей области специализации.
- Я выбрал специализацию сам(а).
- Мои родители или другие родственники выбрали мою специализацию.
- Эксперты в мвоей области специализации получают высокую зарплату.
- Мы с родителями вместе решили насчет моей специализации.
- Это всегда было моей мечтой изучать то, что я изучаю сейчас.

**Какой самый высокий уровень образования Вы планируете получить в жизни?**

- Полное среднее образование (т.е. 11-й или 12-й класс)
- Среднее специальное образование (например, техникум, ПТУ)
- Высшее образование (бакалавр, специалист или эквивалент)
- Магистратура или эквивалент
- Доктор философии (Кандидат) или эквивалент
- другой (напишите здесь):

**Что лучше всего описывает место, где вы живете сейчас?**

- столица или пригород столицы
- областная столица или другой город в области
- небольшой город, село или сельская местность

**В течение последних нескольких месяцев, как часто Вы участвовали в следующих мероприятиях?**

	никогда	редко	иногда	часто
Помощь своему сообществу (например: помощь другим, окружающая среда, здравоохранение, образование)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Гражданская или политическая активность (например: выборы, волонтерство)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Культурные мероприятия (например, посещение музеев / исторических мест, посещение концертов, театров)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
семейные мероприятия	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
религиозные деятельность	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
спортивные команды	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
клубы или организации	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Вы возвращались в Соединенные Штаты после того, как Вы завершили программу FLEX? Почему**

- да
- нет

**Почему Вы вернулись в Соединенные Штаты? Выберите наиболее подходящий ответ. Если Вы вернулись в Соединенные Штаты более чем один раз, подумайте о самых последних визитах.**

- путешествовать (туризм)
- учиться в университете
- учиться за рубежом (на семестр или учебный год)
- учиться в аспирантуре
- участвовать в конференции или встрече
- посетить принимающую семью или друзей из программы FLEX
- жить и работать на полную ставку (на длительный срок)
- работать на неполную ставку (например, работа на лето, Work and Travel)

**Если бы Вы могли вернуться в Соединенные Штаты, что стало бы причиной Вашего возвращения?**

- Я не хочу возвращаться в Соединенные Штаты
- туризм
- учиться в университете
- обучение за рубежом (на семестр или учебный год)
- учиться в аспирантуре
- участие в конференции или встрече
- посещение принимающей семьи или друзей из программы FLEX
- жить и работать на полную ставку
- работать на неполную ставку (например, работа на лето, Work and Travel)

## **6. Личная информация и жизни до участия в программе FLEX - 2 Часть**

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**В последнем разделе Вы увидите еще несколько вопросов о вашей жизни.**

**Сколько Вам лет сейчас?**

- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25

**Ваш пол?**

- мужчина
- женщина

**Говоря о политике, люди используют слова "левый" и "правый". Говоря в общем, как бы Вы описали свои политические взгляды по шкале с 1-10?**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
(Левый)									(Правый)
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**На каком языке, подростая, Вы разговаривали дома с семьей?**

- на русском языке
- на другом языке

**Насколько Вы знаете, каков самый высокий уровень образования Вашего отца?**

- Неполное среднее образование (9 классов приоб.)
- Полное среднее образование (11-й или 12-й класс)
- Среднее специальное образование (например, техникум, ПТУ)
- Высшее образование (институт, университет)  
Магистратура или эквивалент
- Доктор философии (Кандидат) или эквивалент
- другой (напишите здесь):

**Насколько Вы знаете, каков самый высокий уровень образования Вашей матери?**

- Неполное среднее образование (9 классов приоб.)
- Полное среднее образование (11-й или 12-й класс)
- Среднее специальное образование (например, техникум, ПТУ)
- Высшее образование (институт, университет)
- Магистратура или эквивалент
- Доктор философии (Кандидат) или эквивалент
- другой (напишите здесь):

**Говоря о политике, люди используют слова "левый" и "правый". Говоря в общем, как бы Вы описали политические взгляды своих родителей по шкале с 1-10?**

<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>
(Левый)									(Правый)
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

**Касаемо политики, Вы бы описали Вашу семью более либеральной, более консервативной, или примерно такой же, как другие семьи в сообществе?**

- Более либеральной, чем другие семьи
- Такой же, как другие семьи
- Более консервативной, чем другие семьи

**К какой религии Вы себя относите?**

- Христианство (католицизм, православие, протестантизм и т.д.)
- Ислам (сунниты, шииты, и т.д.)
- другая религия (напишите здесь):
- к никакой религии

## **7. Спасибо Вам большое!**

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Спасибо за Ваше участие в этом опросе! Ваш ответ важен для этого исследования и а также для оценки программы FLEX.

Если Вы заинтересованы в лотерее и в выигрыше одного из десяти призов в \$50, пожалуйста, напишите адрес Вашей электронной почты, по которому можно с Вами связаться.

Призы будут вручены после жеребьевки после завершения исследования. Исследователь проекта Эверетт Пичи свяжется с победителями летом/осенью 2013 года по предоставленному Вами электронному адресу.

- Да, я заинтересован (на) в лотерее. Пожалуйста, напишите Ваш адрес электронной почты в поле:
- Нет, я не заинтересован (на) в лотерее.

Результаты исследования будут доступны после его завершения. Вы заинтересованы в получении результатов этого исследования по электронной почте?

- Да, я заинтересован (на) в получении результатов этого исследования. Ваш адрес электронной почты в поле:
- Нет, я не заинтересован (на) в получении результатов этого исследования.

## APPENDIX III

### **In-Depth Interviews with FLEX Alumni from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (2012)**

Between April and August 2012, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured telephone interviews with adult FLEX alumni from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, in part to help elucidate some of the themes and topics that were to be explored in more depth in the 2013 survey.<sup>73</sup> I originally selected Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as cases for a number of reasons. Geographically, both countries are small, mountainous, landlocked countries located in Central Asia. They are the two poorest countries that participate in the FLEX program, where subsistence agriculture, small-scale economic trade, and remittances from migrant workers abroad comprise a large portion of household income. Both countries have witnessed revolutionary political activity since the collapse of the USSR, and each state maintains sizeable populations of non-titular citizens (Central Intelligence Agency 2012a, 2012b). I have also spent significant time living and working in each of the countries, which has helped me to have a more nuanced perspective of alumni experiences as a result.

Demographic characteristics about the alumni who were interviewed can be found in Table A.III.1. FLEX alumni were recruited for participation in this research study through advertisements placed on email lists targeting either alumni of U.S. government-sponsored exchange programs or alumni of the FLEX program specifically. Such email lists are maintained and regularly updated by American Councils for International Education: ACTR/ACCELS and well as by the Public Affairs Sections of the U.S. embassies in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

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<sup>73</sup> Because some of these interviews were conducted using Skype, video connections were also used in situations where the strength of the internet connection did not affect the quality of the discussion.

In total, 47 individuals responded to the advertisements and expressed an interest in participating in the study. In the end, I conducted 36 interviews – 20 with citizens of Kyrgyzstan and 16 with citizens of Tajikistan. Demographic characteristics about the alumni who were interviewed can be found in Table A.III.1. Unfortunately, it is not possible to assess the ways in which the FLEX alumni interviewed in this study are or are not representative of the entire population of FLEX alumni because such a frame does not exist.



**Table A.III.1 Characteristics of Kyrgyzstani and Tajikistani Alumni Interviewed**

	<b>Kyrgyzstan</b>	<b>Tajikistan</b>
Interviews	20	16
Average age on day of interview (in years)	21.5 (2.8)	20.2 (2.1)
Male:female sex ratio	5:15	9:7
Median grade in secondary school when individual was selected for the FLEX program	10	10
Median grade in U.S. high school in which FLEX finalist was placed	12	11
Percentage of alumni interviewed currently living in their country's capital city	75.0	62.5
Percentage of alumni interviewed currently living outside of their home country	20.0	25.0
Percentage of alumni interviewed who had travelled abroad before participation in FLEX	15.0	12.5
Average number of years since the alumna/us returned from the FLEX program	4.2 (2.7)	3.0 (1.8)

Standard errors in parentheses

Overall, the sample of alumni interviewed from Kyrgyzstan was like that of Tajikistan in terms of current age, the grade in school in which they were selected to participate in the FLEX program, and the number of years since they have returned to their home country. The largest difference between the two samples was the sex ratio. The number of female participants on the FLEX program always outweighs the number of male participants annually and from each country. However, the number of men interviewed in Tajikistan was greater than the number of women.

Reasons varied for the impossibility of conducting interviews with these individuals, but generally speaking, alumni expressed a genuine interest in participating in the study. In the end, some alumni felt that they were too busy to find the time to be interviewed (n=4) or were unresponsive to repeated communication attempts (n=6). One individual wished to participate but was only seventeen years old and therefore ineligible. Interestingly, seven of the 11 individuals who expressed an interest in being interviewed but who, in the end, were not interviewed, were female alumni from Tajikistan. There are a number of reasons why we might

expect a higher non-response rate in Tajikistan, but one likely explanation is that internet access is more limited in Tajikistan than it is in Kyrgyzstan (Central Intelligence Agency 2012a, 2012b). Thus, FLEX alumni may also be less likely to check their email as frequently as a result and therefore be less likely to use what limited internet time they have in responding to a request for participation in a research study.

Alumni received detailed information about the study and their rights and responsibilities as participants at least 24 hours before the interviews took place. Interviews were held on a day and at a time that was convenient for each participant. Interviews began with scripted questions about assent to participate and permission to record the interview and were followed by short-answer questions that collected demographic information about participants, their backgrounds, and general information about their FLEX program experience. Among those FLEX alumni who participated in the research study, all but two consented to having their interviews recorded. The two individuals who did not grant consent for having their interviews recorded granted me permission to take notes during the interview.

The semi-structured interviews commenced after collecting demographic information from respondents. Alumni were not compensated for their participation in the study. All email announcements, pre-interview assent scripts, and interview guides were reviewed and approved by the Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences IRB at the University of Michigan.<sup>74</sup> The length of each interview and the kinds of questions that were asked varied depending on several factors, including alumni experience, background, age, and English language proficiency. For example, conversations with older alumni – those who have already graduated from university and who are working – tended to focus on professional topics, whereas conversations with younger

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<sup>74</sup> HUM00053957 approved on January 23, 2012.

alumni – those who are currently in high school or university – tended to focus on academic and extracurricular topics. The actual FLEX program experience also featured more prominently in conversations with younger FLEX alumni since they participated in the exchange more recently in the past, and it played a more prominent role in their life experience.

All interviews were conducted in English. In some cases, an individual would express a word or phrase in Russian that they did not know in English. After the interviews were completed, I sent each alumna or alumnus an email thanking them for their participation and a copy of the advertisement to participate in the study. I asked alumni to pass the announcement along to other FLEX alumni they knew who might be interested in participating in the study. I initially hoped that this snowball sampling among peers might elicit greater participation in the study; however, this did not prove to be the case. Alumni who participated in the study referred only two individuals to me. Although both referrals contacted me, neither contact resulted in an interview.

I transcribed all interviews verbatim and conducted all textual analysis on written transcripts. In order to protect participants' identities, pseudonyms were used in place of individuals' real names in this article. While other biographical information – such as a participant's country of origin and FLEX cohort – was reported, other identifying information – such as an individual's city of origin, age, or current city of residence – was been withheld for confidentiality purposes.

## **APPENDIX IV**

### **2007-2008 FLEX Host Families and Host Communities**

This appendix will provide more detailed background information related to an important on-program component for FLEX participants: information about FLEX host families and host communities. Furthermore, this section will discuss host families' religiosity and religious participation, since this is an aspect of program participation that is often a point of concern by interested FLEX applicants and their family members. This information may be of interest to program funders and administrators, especially with regard to providing the most appropriate and accurate pre-program orientation, on-program support, or even reviewing the criteria of the families and communities that are selected to host FLEX students. To the best of my knowledge, no systematic information is collected on these program-related indicators.

Despite the important role that host families and host schools play in the day-to-day lives of FLEX students, there has been very little academic research conducted on understanding the effects of hosting an exchange student on either the host institution (i.e. school or university) or the host family (in the case of homestays). Stephenson's research on U.S. undergraduate exchange students in Chile found that being a host family gave household members a greater appreciation for being Chilean and the values of their society, as well as a greater understanding of their country. Hosting an exchange student also changed some assumptions that the hosts had about the U.S. and Americans (Stephenson 1999). Another evaluation on nearly one thousand families that hosted youth exchange students in 2006-2007 found that many families wanted to

host an exchange student in order to provide a cross-cultural experience for their own children. As with Stephenson's research, this research found that hosting an exchange student gave host families new perspectives on the United States and American culture (Lee 2007). Finally, Leger's in-depth research (2004) on a small number of host families that participated in a two-way Future Farmers of America exchange program found that one family's participation piqued a younger sibling's interest pursuing a career in agriculture. At a household level, the research found that the family members developed a more international perspective and a deeper understanding and appreciation for cross-cultural differences and the need to build cross-cultural relationships. Family members also expressed being more tolerant of people from other cultures.

Before looking at a description of FLEX host schools, communities, and families, it is important to note that some FLEX students spent time on the program in more than one host family. Adding an additional module to the survey to account for multiple host families would have added significant complexity to the design as well as an added time burden for respondents. Thus, for the purposes of this research project, if the FLEX respondent had more than one host family, host school, or host community during their time on the program, they were instructed to answer program-specific questions as they relate to the family and community in which they lived for the greatest period.

Data on FLEX host communities and host schools were interpolated based on the state that the student listed as having lived in and the name of the school that that the student listed they had attended for the greatest length of time. Using publicly available National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data, school-specific information was obtained for the 2007-2008 academic year, where possible. In a few cases (n=12), students attended private schools during their time on the program. In these cases, school-specific statistics were not available.

Community-specific and school district-specific information was obtained by using five-year (2006-2010) estimates from the American Community Survey contained in the NCES School District Demographics System (SDDS).

### Host States

Among the 306 valid survey responses, FLEX students spent their exchange year in one of 44 states. While many states contained only a handful of FLEX students, those that had the most exchange students were not necessarily the most populous ones. Among those in the sample, Texas had the largest number of FLEX students (n=26), followed by Ohio (n=25), Michigan (n=22), and then Virginia and Washington with 18 students each.

### Host Families

While a general matching process exists, exchange student organizations place FLEX students with their host families largely at random. Placement organizations do, however, try to cluster students within the same town or school district for both practical administrative and logistic reasons. These are an important element to consider in examining effects of an exchange experience, given that host families are the primary actors in the day-to-day life and support system of FLEX students.

Just like the communities vary in which FLEX students are placed vary, so too do host families. Nonetheless, we can generalize about these families to get a sense of what these important parts of FLEX student experiences were like. As is outlined in Table A.IV.1, the average host household contains slightly over four members including the FLEX student. On average, FLEX students have at least one host sibling, but as is noted in the footnote to Table A.IV.1, this and the average host family size are both slightly underestimated figures.

Approximately 16% of host families were single-parent-headed households. A slightly larger percentage of host families – 17% – were double placements, that is, host families that contained more than one exchange student.<sup>75</sup> Finally, about four percent of FLEX students lived in families that contained other extended family members, such as a host-grandparent or host-cousin.

**Table A.IV.1 FLEX 2007-2008 Host Family Descriptors, Reported in 2013**

Average host family size*	4.09 (0.06)
Average number of host siblings (#) <sup>1</sup>	1.05 (0.05)
Single parent host families (%)	0.16 (0.02)
Double placement with other exchange student (%)	0.17 (0.02)
Non-nuclear host families (%)	0.04 (0.01)

Standard errors in parentheses

<sup>1</sup> Note that these figures are likely negatively biased estimates of the true size of host families. Because survey questions were designed in a way to ease burden and simplify responses, FLEX alumni checked multiple-choice boxes that listed individuals who constituted their host families (e.g. older host brother(s), older host sister(s), etc.). Thus, if a FLEX student lived in a family where they had three older host brothers, for example, they would underrepresent the size of their host family by two individuals.

In terms of taking a deeper look at the socioeconomics and political affiliations of host families, we will look at both the families themselves, the families relative to other families in their community, and the communities themselves. In relative terms, respondents were asked about the relative economic wellbeing and political outlook of their host family compared to others in their community, as is described in Table A.IV.2. Economically speaking, we find that from a FLEX alumni perspective, host families are, on average, slightly better off than other

<sup>75</sup> Note that there are instances in which FLEX students are double-placed with other FLEX students. In instances like these, FLEX students are only placed with other FLEX students who do not come from their same country or speak the same language, thereby making interaction more likely to take place in English (Peachey 2013).

households in their communities.<sup>76</sup> However, FLEX students, on average, saw their host families as neither no more liberal nor no more conservative than other families in their community. The same can be said about the politics of families themselves. Although there was slight heaping on the “5” value of this 10-point Likert scale, FLEX alumni saw their families as being politically moderate, on average.<sup>77</sup>

**Table A.IV.2 Political and Socioeconomic Descriptors of FLEX 2007-2008 Host Families, Reported in 2013**

FLEX host family finances, relative to others in community <sup>1</sup>	0.09 (0.03)
FLEX host family political tendencies <sup>2</sup>	5.46 (0.03)
FLEX host family political position, relative to others in community <sup>3</sup>	0.03 (0.04)

Standard errors in parentheses

<sup>1</sup> “Financially speaking, would you say that your host family was richer, poorer, or about the same as other families in your host community?” Response codes: -1=Poorer than other families; 0=About the same as other families financially; 1=Richer than other families

<sup>2</sup> “In political matters, people sometimes talk of “left” (liberal) and “right” (conservative). Where would you place the views of your host family on this scale, where 1 means the left and 10 means the right?”

<sup>3</sup> “Politically speaking, would you say that your host family was more liberal, more conservative, or about the same as other families in your host community?” Response codes: -1=More conservative than other families; 0=About the same as other families politically; 1=More liberal than other families

<sup>76</sup> This statistic is significant at the .01 level.

<sup>77</sup> The average value of 5.46 on the 10-point Likert was not statistically different from the midpoint of the scale (5.50).



### Host Communities and Schools

Table A.IV.3 provides a set of indicators comparing FLEX host communities (i.e. school districts) with the U.S. as a whole. The most common area for FLEX students to reside – nearly 40% – was in Census-defined rural school districts. Over a quarter of FLEX students lived in Census-defined suburban school districts, which here means a territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area. One in five FLEX alumni lived in a city school district, where a city is considered territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city. By comparison, FLEX students were less likely to live in an urban (city or suburban) school district than the average population of the U.S., and they were more likely to live in a rural school district.

On average, FLEX students lived in school districts where over 80% of the over-25 population had a high school diploma (or equivalent), which was about the same as the national average, and where one in five individuals had a bachelor's degree or higher (slightly higher than for the country, on average). FLEX students lived in families which were, on average, half an individual larger than other host families in their host school district and the country.

**Table A.IV.3 FLEX 2007-2008 Host School Districts (SD) compared to U.S. National Figures**

	<b>FLEX SD<sup>1</sup> 2007-2008</b>	<b>NCES CCD<sup>2</sup> 2007-2008</b>
FLEX host communities, by type <sup>3</sup> (%)		
City	19.9	29.0
Suburb	26.3	35.1
Town	14.5	12.7
Rural	39.4	23.2
	<b>FLEX SD 2007-2008</b>	<b>ACS<sup>4</sup> 2006-2010</b>
Average percentage over age 25 with at least high school diploma or equivalent	82.75 (2.22)	85.03 (0.26)
Average percentage of college graduates (bachelor's degree) over age 25	20.91 <sup>**</sup> (1.52)	17.60 (0.06)
Average household size of owner-occupied units	2.52 <sup>***</sup> (0.03)	2.67 (0.01)
Average host family household size (excluding FLEX student)	3.09 (0.06)	
Median household income in the past 12 month (in 2010 inflation-adjusted dollars)	\$45,390 (\$5,439)	\$50,046 (\$64)
Median household value in host school districts (in 2010 inflation-adjusted dollars) of owner-occupied units	\$133,201 <sup>***</sup> (\$16,569)	\$188,400 (\$184)
Average percentage in poverty in host school districts (poverty status in past 12 months)	13.44 (0.73)	13.82 (0.10)

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1 relative to ACS estimates

<sup>1</sup> Figures on FLEX school districts (SD) are averages of figures from all public school districts attended by 2007-2008 FLEX students.

<sup>2</sup> n=297 Source: U.S. Department of Education International Center for Education Statistics 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Community types are defined using U.S. Census designations

<sup>4</sup> Source: United States Census Bureau 2015. Figures listed are for the entire United States.

As Table A.IV.4 illustrates, FLEX students attended local public schools in their host communities almost exclusively. A small minority of FLEX 2007-2008 students (n=12) surveyed attended private schools while on the program, and even fewer (n=10) reported that they attended public schools that were either a magnet or charter school. The schools that FLEX students attended ranged both in size and the number of grades of instruction, but on average, FLEX high schools had slightly larger than twelve hundred students enrolled during the 2007-2008 academic year. Nearly a quarter of these students were non-white, and nearly a third of the

students were eligible for free or reduced lunches. As we might expect based on the relationship between race and poverty in the U.S., there was a high degree of correlation ( $r = 0.44$ ) between the percentage of students of color in a host school and the percentage of students who were eligible for free or reduced lunches (National Poverty Center 2015).

**Table A.IV.4 FLEX 2007-2008 Host School Descriptors, Reported in 2013**

FLEX host schools, by type <sup>1</sup> (%)	
Public, local	92.61
Public, magnet or charter	3.45
Private	4.02
Average host school size (# of students)	1,234
Average student-teacher ratio in host school	17:1
Average percentage of non-white host school population	23.44
Average percentage of host school students eligible for free or reduced lunch	29.84

<sup>1</sup>n=298; community types are defined using NCES designations

### Host Family Religiosity and Religious Participation

Issues of religious identification in America and Americans' perceived religious participation are ones that prospective FLEX applicants and FLEX finalists frequently raised when thinking about or preparing for their time in the U.S. Through popular media and shared experiences from previous cohorts of FLEX alumni, applicants and finalists think about, at a minimum, what expectations their host family and host community may have of them in the U.S. regarding participation in religious life. At the other end of the spectrum are those applicants and finalists who fear that strongly religious Americans may attempt to convert them to their religion, which was discussed in the concluding chapter.

According to results obtained from the 2013 survey of the FLEX 2008 cohort, nearly half of alumni (47%) stated that the primary religious affiliation<sup>78</sup> of their host family was some form

<sup>78</sup> Figures listed here are the primary religious affiliation of alumni host families, given that some host families may be comprised of individuals who self-identify with different religious faiths or denominations. The primary affiliation, therefore, is meant to be the one most pronounced in the family or the one that the family might regularly

of Protestantism (Table A.IV.5). Another 19% reported that their host family was Catholic, while a full quarter said that their host family had no religious affiliation at all.

**Table A.IV.5 Primary Religious Affiliation of FLEX 2007-2008 Host Families, Reported by FLEX alumni in 2013 (%)**

Protestant	46.88
Catholic	18.68
Mormon	3.60
Jewish	2.62
Orthodox	1.63
Muslim	0.98
Other	0.65
None given	24.91

NB: n=305

### Prayer, Participation, and Community

In the 2013 survey, FLEX alumni were also asked several questions related to how their host families expressed their religiosity, namely, how often they prayed, how often they attended religious services, or how often they participated in social events affiliated with their religious community. Across religions, host families that were Mormons prayed the most (on average, daily). They prayed statistically more often than Protestant families (who prayed, on average, once a week), and the Protestant families in the sample prayed significantly more often than the Catholics (who prayed, on average, about once a month). While the FLEX alumni who were housed with Orthodox Christian families in this study said that their host families prayed nearly as much as the Mormons (on average, several times each week), the sample was too small to make inferences for the cohort. The same was true with Jewish and Muslim families.

The Mormons and the Orthodox Christians were also the most religiously observant, attending religious services slightly more than once a week, on average. Protestants in the study

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practice. This obviously biases religious identification in favor of majority religious groups (e.g. Protestantism and Catholicism) because even though a host family member may identify with another religion (e.g. Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.), they may live in a community that lacks a large enough concentration of like members to allow for regular participation in religious services and events.

were also statistically more observant than Catholics. Protestants attended services, on average, slightly less than once a week – thus, perhaps a few times a month – and the Catholics, on average, attended religious services less than once a month.

Mormon host families were also the most likely to participate in religious social events, attending an event a week, on average. Orthodox Christians participated in slightly fewer events than the Mormons, although the difference was not statistically significant. As with the attendance of religious services, Protestants were also less active than the Mormons in social events – although not significantly so – but they were significantly more active than Catholics. Average Protestant host families attended religious social events at a rate of slightly more than once a month, whereas Catholics attended events only a few times a year.

While in this study, Orthodox, Mormon, and Protestant host families prayed more, were generally more religiously observant, and more socially active in their respective communities than other religious groups, we must approach these findings with caution. Limitations in this study design did not allow us to delve into the nuances of this religiosity. For example, a FLEX alumnus or alumni might interpret daily prayer as prayer before a meal. Religious social events might be conducted and attended in conjunction with a religious service, thereby making the delineation between these as discrete events difficult to report accurately.

FLEX alumni were also asked about the degree to which they attended religious services and participated in religious social events with members of their host family because in-depth interviews conducted with FLEX alumni in 2012 suggested that this may be a common occurrence. Interviews suggested that part of the reason for this was the fact that many host families lived in small towns and cities where social life centered around the religious community.

Survey results from 2013 strengthen this assertion. While there does not seem to be any relationship in the data between the size of the community in which the FLEX alumni lived and their participation in the religious life of their host family, we do find that both FLEX church attendance and FLEX attendance in religious social events were very highly positively correlated with their host families' attendance and social participation ( $r = 0.80$  and  $r = 0.77$  respectively). This suggests that it is perhaps the religiosity and social life of the host family – and not the size of the community in which the family lives – that plays a greater explanatory role in FLEX participation in religious activities.

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