

Goh Si Rong Michelle

2024 Fulbright Distinguished Award in Teaching for International Teachers

From Singapore to Rochester: A Fulbright Journey

“Why are you here?” – the 4 ‘P’s

When you represent one of the world’s top-performing education systems, with students consistently ranking at or near the top in international assessments like PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), the question “Why are you here?” becomes both a challenge and an opportunity.

At the beginning of the Fulbright program, both coordinators and fellow participants frequently asked us “So, why are you here? What is there for you to learn?” These questions prompted me to reflect deeply on my Purpose in the U.S., and what I hoped to gain from my semester at the University of Rochester (UoR). While Singapore’s education system is undeniably robust and developed in terms of academic rigour, assessment literacy, pedagogy, professional learning and the use of educational technology, I found profound value in exchanging insights about common challenges faced across different education systems, and exploring innovative ideas to tackle these challenges. Interestingly, many educators were curious to know how much we were earning as teachers in Singapore. This brought awareness to the extent of Privilege that I enjoyed as a Singaporean. It opened my eyes to how teachers in other countries live their lives. There were many participants who were travelling internationally for the first time, their participation made possible only through program allowances. This led to a perpetual conclusion that “Singaporeans are rich”— particularly because Singapore was the only country paying for participants’ allowances (instead of U.S. IREX) and because we were the only ones who paid for expenses upfront before reimbursement. Such Perceptions of Singapore were deeply entrenched and initially created an invisible distance between us and some of the participants, until personal interactions and other commonalities bridged those differences and brought us closer to each other.

Throughout the program, there were multiple opportunities for us to share about Singapore— our cultures and our education system— which we did so with so much **P**ride! It was gratifying to share about our multicultural and multiracial society, our rich heritage and our diverse cuisine that made us miss Singapore even more. Our hearts swelled with joy every time people expressed awe and went on to place Singapore on their travel list. Through learning about different countries and cultures, I have learnt to appreciate Singapore's strengths at a deeper level, and I can truly say that I am proud to be a Singaporean, and that Singapore will always be my home.



Working on being the best version of myself

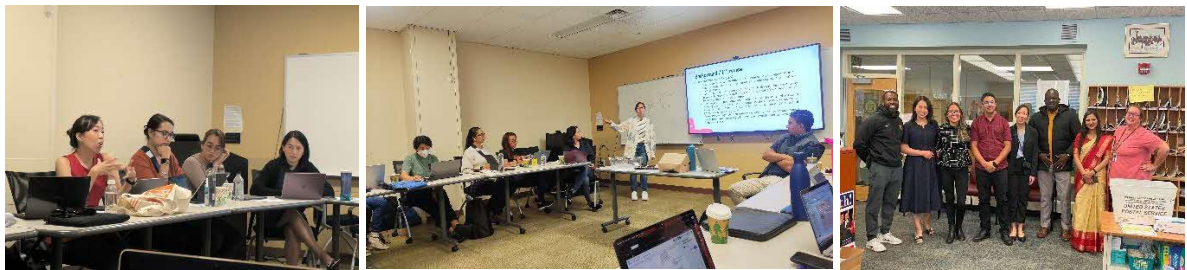
Being a student again was refreshing. The program provided valuable time to rest and breathe. I took charge of my learning— setting the pace for my research project, planning my timetable and engaging in meaningful activities. After all, we spent considerable time in our residences, in Whipple Park in UoR.

Notably, the Fulbright and Tech Seminars allowed us participants to share good practices and challenges faced in our home countries and exchange opinions surrounding various education concepts like differentiated instruction, inclusiveness in education and universal design for learning. On top of that, I audited two courses in UoR: “Master’s Research Methods” with Dr Joyce Duckles and “Introduction to School Counselling” with Dr Bonnie Rubenstein. I benefitted greatly learning about research ethics, methodology considerations (like quantitative and qualitative), aspects of measurement, sampling, research design, and

data analysis. I also connected with graduate students who were in training to be School Counsellors in the US schools, and they renewed and fuelled my passion and belief in student development. I learnt about the power of peace circles and encountered many powerful resources that allowed for deep conversations. Another unforgettable experience was when Dr Joyce brought origami paper to class and reminded us about the importance of play in learning. It was a timely reminder for us as educators to engage the mind before effective learning can take place.

"Play is the highest form of research."

— Albert Einstein



Every week, we were attached to a public school for a day. I was at Rush–Henrietta Senior High School, and it was an eye-opening experience observing a variety of classes, from Economics, to Government, Civics and English as a New Language (taken by non-English speaking foreign students).

Naturally, I also had to prioritise time for self-care, and that included going more often for runs before it started turning too cold and snowed, and cooking meals to share with friends. There was immense joy in gaining fitness, and the endorphins helped to lift my spirits when homesickness kicked in.

A whole new world

The program also organised numerous bonding activities to help us experience Rochester and beyond. While it took more initiative and budget to plan and travel out of

Rochester, these adventures led to many memorable firsts: my first baseball game, National Basketball Association (NBA) match, ice hockey competition, kayaking overseas and seeing snow on Thanksgiving Day. I visited Ontario Beach, Niagara Falls, Watkin Glens, Letchworth State Park New York City, Washington D.C., Cleveland, and even took a road trip from Rochester to Boston through Albany and Providence over Thanksgiving Break. The beautiful experiences and friendships forged during the program are what I will cherish and miss dearly.



Niagara Falls



Ontario Beach



New York City



Letchworth State Park



Washington D.C.



Boston

Circle of Support

Finally, there were remarkable people I met, who made the semester truly meaningful— the program coordinators, my partner teacher, my friendship family, my faculty advisor and audit course lecturers, and my fellow Fulbright DAI friends. They were the ones who taught me things beyond the professional realm— about patience, kindness to self, generosity, keeping an open mind, humility and love. These four months would not be the same without these kind souls, who touched my life in such profound ways. I return home to

Singapore carrying their spirit, committed to continuing their legacy of impact and do good work here in whatever capacity I have.



*Programme Coordinator
Dr Hairong Shang-Butler*



*Programme Coordinator
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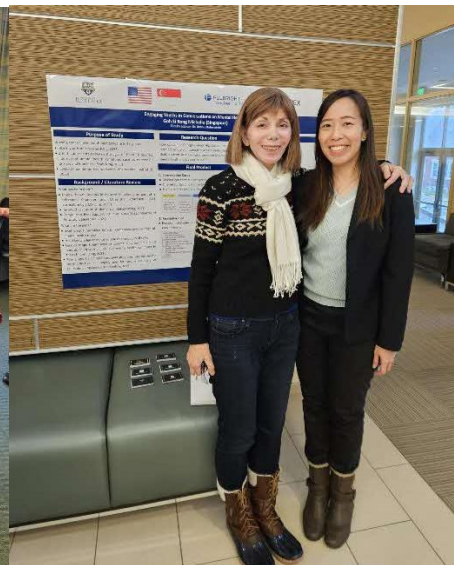
*Partner Teacher
Mr Bill Rasmussen*



*Friendship Family
Dr Amy Shema*



*Audit Course Lecturer
Dr Joyce Duckles*



*Faculty Advisor
Dr Bonnie Rubenstein*



My Fulbright Family
Motto of UoR – Meliora; Ever Better