

Helsingin Sanomat Foundation

Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism

Final Report on the HSS Fellowship year 2015-2016 at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism in New York

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In 2016 I had the privilege to attend the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism as the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation fellow. Although I had worked past 10 years as a financial Journalist, I chose the business journalism concentration as I had not studied economics or business at the university level before and wanted to gain better theoretical understanding of my field.

The year back at school, after working as a journalist for 20 years, was inspirational and invigorating. I found my faith on the future of our industry restored and my conviction that the high standards of reporting and the meaningful content produced by an experienced professional still have demand.

My experience had much to do with the amazing community of my classmates at the J-school. Half of the class of 2016 were international students from all continents. The school's tenth Masters' class was a lively bunch of extremely talented people pulling through the busy days and long nights of studying together and forming bonds that will last the rest of our lives.

However, the J-school failed to take advantage of the international students' skills. The MA program is solely concentrated on journalistic work in the United States, such as the regulations and ways to access information, most of which aren't applicable to other countries. This was not a problem for me as I knew in advance that the program was U.S.-centric.

But I was unpleasantly surprised by the MA program's weak academic substance. Classes taught by the J-school's staffers were flimsy, uninteresting and heavily focused on the past. Most of the professors seemed to teach from memory, cruising through with routines build up over past decades. Such methods gave a distinct impression of disinterest in their students as well as being completely out of touch with the current challenges in the field, including the realities of the job today.

Therefore, I feel most of the J-school classes were pretty much a waste of time and not even close to the standard that I expected from an Ivy League university.

Naturally there were exceptions, such as the business journalism concentration seminar in the fall semester, taught by professor Sylvia Nasar. She was a demanding teacher who challenged her students to learn and understand the inner workings of economics in every class. Other enjoyable classes were the two outside elective courses in the spring term, which in my case were Terrorism and Counterterrorism by Stuart Gottlieb, and International Reporting and Russia by Thomas Kent. Both

classes were outstanding, challenging, interesting and the teachers were superb. However, both of these classes were offered by the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA) instead of the J-school.

The biggest treat of the MA program was the Masters' thesis. To me this was the most enjoyable project I had ever done. It was the first time I had a chance to do my own long-form, narrative and investigative story. My topic was the crash of Germanwings flight 9525, which I had originally reported at work but had not chance to follow up.

I rose to the challenge, embraced the complicated seven-months long investigation in four languages and countries, digging up the new information and unpublished details, collecting, verifying and organizing them to a timeline, and eventually writing a newsworthy story of 15,000 words.

All in all, the year at Columbia University was an incredible, once-in-a-lifetime experience. Besides meeting wonderful and extraordinarily talented people, I got to live in one of my all-time favorite cities, New York. I learned a lot and was able to hone my professional writing skills in English.

Now I am embarking on the job market, the newly acquired degree of Master of Arts from Columbia Graduate School of Journalism in pocket, eager to see what kind of weight the diploma will have among prospective employers.

I am thankful to the Helsingin Sanomat Foundation for selecting me for the Fellowship program and hope to have represented it and my country with honor.

Yours sincerely,

Nina Brostrom