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Professor headed to Finland as Fulbright scholar

Sacramento State Communication Studies Professor David Zuckerman is very pleased to have been awarded a Fulbright Specialist Program grant to teach international communication for five weeks at the University of Jyvaskyla in Finland. This prestigious graduate teaching assignment adds to his far-flung academic travel itinerary, which includes Canada, China, France, Germany, Ireland and Israel.

Not bad for the multilingual professor who didn’t plan on a career in higher education. To the contrary, he was working in corporate America during the mid-1990s, having earned a bachelor’s degree in psychology at California Polytechnic State University, Pomona.

“I was working for Nestlé’s foreign trade division, and the company financed my master’s degree in intercultural communication and marketing communication,” Zuckerman says. He excelled in the graduate program at CSU Los Angeles and became a teaching assistant. “From the moment I taught that first class, I was hooked,” he says. For the next eight years, he was a freeway flier, teaching at several Southern California universities and community colleges.

Weary of the vagabond life of a part-timer, Zuckerman earned his doctorate in 2003 at the University of Oklahoma, which boasts one of the nation’s top intercultural communication programs. He has been at Sacramento State ever since and is smitten with the University’s teaching mission. The first in his family to get a college degree, he identifies with his students who are working to pay for their education.

“I came from a small town in Pennsylvania, and it was quite a cultural shock moving to Los Angeles when I was 13,” Zuckerman says. He’s grateful, however, for the career change that has given him the chance to travel and interact with various cultures. “I’m honored to receive these opportunities,” he adds, “but what I gain is put back into the classroom for my students.”

He videotapes highlights from his foreign journeys and uses them in his classes to underscore the importance of intercultural communication. “While I’m in Finland,” he says, “I’ll be communicating with my Sac State students online.” The class assignments are detailed on the campus website, and he will deliver a couple of lectures despite the 10-hour time difference. “It will mean my getting up at 3 a.m.,” he chuckles, “but I want
“to stay in touch with them.” He’s determined to make his Sac State classes as seamless as possible during his absence.

Zuckerman’s passion for teaching is palpable. “I have never looked back,” he says of his former life in the corporate world. The author of several books – he currently is co-writing one in Chinese – the peripatetic professor would rather make his mark in the classroom. As for his students, he thrives on “bringing them along” his educational journey. “What we are doing in our department,” he says, “really matters.”

For media assistance, contact Sacramento State’s Public Affairs office at (916) 278-6156. – Alan Miller

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