"You never forget when you move to another place" is what my mother used to tell me. I find this adage to remain true. As with selecting any place to which relocate, one must learn everything about your new home. I can recall the extensive research I did when I began to decide which school to attend for my undergraduate degree. I analyzed every school appropriate for my major based on its US location, admissions requirements, size (overall student body and class), cost, application deadline, comparison of applications versus acceptance rates, setting (rural or urban), type of institution (public or private), predicted graduation rate versus actual graduation rate, etc. As you might guess, I did not forget the experience of researching where I would be moving when I finally selected my undergraduate university.

Years later, when it came to completing my Fulbright application, I experienced déjà vu; only this time it was not quite as overwhelming. With the possibility of undertaking a Fulbright program in one of at least 130 countries, it was inspiring to consider my options! With my enthusiasm under control, I began focusing on where I would see myself living for the next year, and conducting research on my interests.

Based on my experience of selecting which undergraduate university would be best for me, I put my skills to work. For some time, I had been following the accession of ten new countries into the European Union (EU) in May 2004. The European Union (EU) had grown from six countries to fifteen since 1951 and was preparing for its fifth, largest round of expansion with the addition of ten countries from Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean. It was argued that the prospect of Poland’s membership to the EU would allow the country to play a role of regional leader again by taking important political and economic initiatives. Poland had arguably demonstrated the importance of its strategic geographic location, with the examples of the expedited, democratic changes within Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall and perestroika in Russia. These democratic changes first appeared in Poland and had a domino effect across the rest of the continent. With my passionate interest in Poland, I began concentrating my efforts on establishing a host affiliation there.

Since organized crime is my specific area of interest, I searched which professors throughout Poland had published on this topic. Then, as luck would have it, I met one of the professors who is a guru on organized crime -- particularly drug smuggling -- at my US university during a special guest lecture. I was able to track him down via the Internet, and send him an email about my proposed research. Later, I called him and we had a detailed conversation. After several phone conversations, email and fax exchanges, he sent me a formal letter agreeing to: sponsor my research, provide me with office space, arrange for dorm housing, and attend some classes. I was also able to obtain another letter of support from a Polish National Police officer, who was on leave.