

Global Leadership and Artificial Intelligence (AI) Literacies: A Fulbright Perspective

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Abstract

This article is based on an invited dinner presentation delivered at the 2025 Annual Convention of the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) in San Juan, Puerto Rico. As a Fulbright Alumni Ambassador, appointed by the U.S. Department of State, which oversees the Fulbright Program, Ariza examines how the Fulbright Program can serve as a leadership framework for educational administrators navigating artificial intelligence (AI), digital literacies, and multilingual communication opportunities abroad. Using qualitative narrative analysis grounded in Ariza's Fulbright appointments in Mexico, Costa Rica, and Malta, as well as her role as Fulbright Alumni Ambassador and reviewer of hundreds of Fulbright proposals, the paper integrates firsthand reflections with peer-reviewed research and international policy guidance. We argue that immersive global experiences cultivate intercultural competence, strategic vision, and ethical reflexivity, capacities essential for AI-inflected decision-making and digital equity work. Drawing on guidance from UNESCO and the U.S. Department of Education, as well as established scholarship in digital literacy, we propose design principles, mentoring practices, and programmatic recommendations for administrator preparation programs. We further illustrate how country-level policies (e.g., Estonia's AI Leap) offer concrete models for preplanned human-centered implementation. The article concludes with tools that administrators can adapt, suggestions for proposal design, readiness checklists, and evaluation indicators, to ensure that AI and digital initiatives are inclusive, sustainable, and linguistically responsive.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, digital literacies, educational administration, Fulbright Program, global leadership, intercultural competence, multilingual education

Introduction

Artificial intelligence is not just reshaping educational administration; it's fundamentally altering how leaders allocate resources, communicate, evaluate programs, and support teaching and learning. In this context, effective administrators require three interdependent literacies: digital literacy (access, analysis, creation), AI literacy (understanding, use, evaluation, and ethics), and intercultural-linguistic literacy (working across languages and cultures with humility). (Digital Promise, 2024; UNESCO, 2023; Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). (Digital Promise, 2024; UNESCO, 2023; Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). Research bodies increasingly call for human-centered, transparent, and equitable approaches to AI in education, providing reassurance that the ethical considerations in AI integration are at the forefront. At the same time, digital access and infrastructure remain uneven across regions, requiring context-sensitive planning and phased implementation.

By placing educators and administrators in different national systems, the Fulbright Program offers a practical and invaluable pathway for developing these literacies. Through Ariza's Fulbright experiences in Mexico (2009), Costa Rica (2016), and Malta (2018), we consider how global immersion strengthens leaders' ability to design inclusive, feasible, and culturally aware technology strategies.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Our framework draws from three strands. First, the digital literacy tradition emphasizes critical engagement and production in multimodal environments (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010). Second, emerging AI-literacy frameworks highlight the need for explainability, fairness, data protection, and human oversight (UNESCO, 2021, 2023; U.S. Department of Education, 2023). Third, scholarship on internationalization suggests that immersive cross-cultural experiences develop the adaptive expertise needed to implement technology responsibly. Together, these strands suggest that leadership for AI and digital initiatives must be ethical and intercultural in addition to being technical.

Methodological Note

In a narrative synthesis, Ariza's firsthand reflections from three Fulbright appointments are interwoven with policy documents, official information from the Fulbright site, and her experience as a panelist reviewer for hundreds of Fulbright applicants. These narrative episodes not only illustrate how context and culture influence decisions but also provide practical guidance for administrators, mentors, applicants, and reviewers. This guidance equips them with the necessary tools to navigate the challenges of AI integration, ensuring they are well-prepared and confident in their roles.

Fulbright as an International Pathway for Educational Administrators

Currently, the most ubiquitous topic for investigation abroad pertains to the international uses and policies of Artificial Intelligence (AI). The Fulbright network offers multiple entry points for educational administrators to travel abroad. International Education Administrators (IEA) seminars provide short, cohort-based visits to understand host systems and explore collaborative opportunities with administrators in other countries. Several types of awards are available for administrators, which can be beneficial for participants who wish to gain international experience, especially in the short term. Teaching and research awards foster sustained engagement within host institutions. Specialist awards facilitate short, project-based consultancies tailored to the specific needs of institutions. These formats expose leaders to infrastructure, policy, and language constraints that shape digital innovation in other countries. Such experiences are critical for all educational administrators, given the challenges related to AI implementation and policy formation at each district level. Artificial intelligence is increasingly being integrated into education through adaptive learning platforms, administrative automation, generative tools, analytics dashboards, and other applications. Developments like these promise to transform instructional practice, administrative efficiency, and decision-making. However, for educational administrators in Fulbright programs, integrating AI involves more than simply selecting a new tool. It requires

navigating complex systemic, ethical, and policy-oriented challenges. **Ariza's Fulbright Reflections**

In Mexico (2009), Ariza taught graduate Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) courses at the Universidad de las Americas in Puebla, in an environment with inconsistent electricity and classroom connectivity. The access to technology was unpredictable, at best. She resorted to focusing on offline pedagogy in the classroom and on access to the language lab. This experience reshaped her thoughts on evaluating technology plans within Fulbright applications being reviewed, as reliability and feasibility often outweigh the reality of available technology. These experiences with proposal reviews allow insight into bridging the gap between educational administrators who seek to apply for the dedicated Fulbright awards and encourages them to suggest more realistic components of the Fulbright proposals for this specific community.

In Costa Rica (2016), at the Universidad de San Jose, Ariza developed and led multilingual literacy workshops, conference style, for Costa Rican English teachers and professors of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). She invited 10 colleagues from the United States to present strategies in their specialized content areas for English learners, teachers, and professors in a coordinated, cross-institutional collaboration with the Ministry of Education. She learned that successful digital projects require explicit agreements about platforms, data handling, and language access. Digital partnerships are most effective when they complement existing networks and cultural practices. Technology in the classroom was also quite limited, as only certain rooms offered Internet connections. The students who had smartphones used them for language practice and shared them with students who did not have phones. Coupled with poor acoustics, access to rooms and technology was severely restricted.

In Malta (2018), Ariza presented on multilingual/multicultural teaching in migration-affected classrooms. Translation technologies were helpful but limited, and often the language to be translated was not available or accessible. Pedagogical design and teacher preparation remained central to the process. Digital tools served the goals of linguistic inclusion as defined by educators and communities.

Comparative Policy Illustrations in Other Countries

Each country has its own policies and beliefs regarding the use of technology and AI. For example, Estonia's AI Leap 2025 emphasizes phased student access and teacher training within a national strategy (Education Estonia, 2025). China's Strategic Action Plan integrates AI across schooling with a focus on critical thinking and talent development (Ministry of Education of China, 2025). The U.S. Department of Education calls for human-centered design, transparency, and inclusive engagement (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). Finland's AI Guidelines prioritize ethical innovation and digital competence (Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland, 2023). Brazil is drafting national AI guidelines with public consultation and risk-based rules (Valor International, 2025). Successful implementations pair policy clarity with staged pilots, professional learning, and multilingual sensitivity (Education Estonia, 2025; UNESCO, 2023; U.S. Department of Education, 2023). School leaders must be aware of the various AI policies globally, including their similarities

and differences, as well as effective AI policies. Showing awareness about this type of knowledge suggests that the candidate will make an easier transition into a new culture.

Digital and AI Literacies for Leadership

Digital literacy involves multimodal authorship, critical evaluation, and collaborative problem-solving (Erwin & Mohammed, 2022). AI literacy extends this stance, and leaders should understand how AI systems work, set guardrails and parameters, evaluate output, and anticipate bias. Policy bodies recommend transparency, explainability, and human oversight (UNESCO, 2023). Administrators should implement staff development, auditability, and channels for stakeholder feedback within educational settings.

This implementation guide outlines a staged approach for Fulbright-informed AI/digital initiatives, particularly those emerging from international education, cultural exchange, or capacity-building contexts. It is designed to help institutions, ministries, and educators integrate AI and digital tools responsibly in ways that respect local values, promote equity, and ensure sustainability. These aspects are crucial to writing a successful proposal because they demonstrate an understanding of multicultural viewpoints.

OECD (2023) and Digital Promise (2024) provide guidance on how to refine current approaches for Fulbright-informed AI/digital initiatives. Johnson (2020) and MAEC (2021) also include the following objectives for equity implementation:

Readiness and Equity Audit: Evaluations include policies and practices that recognize inequities and readiness for change.

Purpose and Fit: The initiative must align with the institution's mission and needs.

Co-Design and Consent: All stakeholders should be involved in shaping the initiatives.

Phased Pilots: Changes are made gradually.

Professional Learning: Ongoing training and support are offered to all participants.

Monitoring and Recourse: Tracking and evaluation procedures are incorporated into the program.

Sustainability and Handover: The program's viability is maintained through ongoing impact beyond the initial stages.

Each phase ensures that initiatives are inclusive, feasible, and responsive to local conditions (OECD, 2023; Digital Promise, 2024).

Mentoring Administrators for Fulbright Success

The dedicated Fulbright programs designed for administrators are called International Education Administrators Program (IEA) seminars. Fulbright program assistants provide support for administrators planning to submit proposals in cross-border collaboration. Upcoming opportunities for IEA programs include Japan and South Korea (June 2026), as well as France, Germany, and India (February 2026), along with the HBCU IEA Seminar in France and Senegal. These two-week programs promote diversity, equity, and global leadership. Mentors from the

Fulbright program and previous participants can guide applicants during proposal development by suggesting approaches that have worked, utilizing knowledge gained from their own successful applications, or by providing tips learned from their involvement in the proposal review process.

Points and Key Features about the Fulbright IEA Seminar Programs

Audience:

U.S. university administrators, deans, directors of international programs, and senior staff involved in global education strategy are participants in these seminars.

Duration:

Each seminar lasts 2 weeks in the selected country.

Purpose:

- Learn about the host country's higher education system
- Exchange best practices with international colleagues
- Explore potential partnerships and collaborations
- Raise the profile of the home institution abroad

Activities in the IEA Seminar Programs:

- American administrators make campus visits across a range of institutions in the host country.
- American participants are involved in briefings with government officials, faculty, and education experts.
- Cultural site visits and networking events promote interactions between Americans and host participants.

Funding: Fulbright covers round-trip airfare, in-country travel, lodging, and a stipend for incidentals. Candidates can find individual information for each host country at <https://fulbrightscholars.org/us-scholar-awards/IEA>

Application Strategies

IEA Fulbright programs are particularly competitive and are geared towards selecting administrators who have little to no previous experience abroad. To be sure the proposal aligns with the needs of the country, successful Fulbright applications should include:

Institutional Fit: Ensure the proposal aligns with the institution's needs.

- **Strategic Relevance:** Ensure the proposal is appropriate for the program.
- **Cultural Humility:** Focus on what you can offer the country and host institutions.
- **Digital and AI Dimension:** Understand and comply with the country's policies.
- **Narrative Clarity:** Ensure your narrative has objectives that can be achieved.

Applicants should consult the Fulbright U.S. Scholar Awards Catalog for current deadlines and program details, including information about current awards, deadlines, eligibility criteria, and country-specific opportunities. Here is the official URL for the Fulbright U.S. Scholar Awards Catalog: <https://fulbrightscholars.org/awards/search>

Expanding Opportunities Beyond IEA

Administrators may also explore the Fulbright Specialist Program, Fulbright Scholar Awards, Fulbright Distinguished Scholar Awards, Fulbright Alumni Initiatives, and Global Scholar Awards. Each category supports leadership and internationalization. The administrator program is the shortest and seeks candidates with limited or no international experience. The Specialist Program is a short-term program, ranging from a few weeks to a few months, and prefers candidates who have some international experience, allowing them to make a quick adaptation to the country. The Fulbright Scholar awards are for one semester or the full academic year. Since the time spent overseas is longer, reviewers also try to select candidates who have limited experience abroad.

Ariza's Mentoring Insights

As mentioned, Ariza's role as a Fulbright Scholar, reviewer, and Fulbright Ambassador nominated by the state department to represent Fulbright in national speaking engagements, she has evaluated hundreds of Fulbright proposals. She recommends integrating intercultural reflection during proposal reviews. An important suggestion she gives participants is to first research the country of interest. Determine the country's needs and then align your (the candidate's) strengths with these needs to match the potential opportunity most effectively. During the proposal preparation stage, she encourages the participant to use the preferred language embedded in the Fulbright pages and incorporate ethics that align with the association's goals. Finally, applicants must provide a clear articulation of the cross-cultural collaboration expected to occur as a result of the exchange.

When reading candidates' proposals, Ariza considers digital portfolio development and other technological opportunities during the evaluation process. During proposal preparation, skilled mentoring can help applicants align their proposals, embed ethics, and preview potential cross-cultural collaborations. Researching the host country's needs and aligning them with what the candidate can offer is a winning strategy for proposal selection.

Assessment of the Proposal and Evidence of Potential Impact

Administrators should gather implementation indicators such as training participation, platform adoption, language accommodations, data compliance, and outcome indicators that include engagement, equity, and multilingual responsiveness. Measurement should be fair, locally triangulated, and culturally valid (ETS, 2024; UNESCO, 2021). Consider what impact you and your Fulbright will have on the host country, as well as what impact will be made upon your return to your home country. In addition, consider what long-term impact and implications will be made, as you think about how you can foster greater returns on your Fulbright experience. These impacts could include research collaboration and publication with colleagues in the host country, invitations to your home country institutions, joint grant proposals, cross-campus curriculum development, virtual exchange programs, co-authored conference presentations, institutional

memoranda of understanding (MOUs), and sustained mentoring relationships that influence policy, pedagogy, and leadership practice across borders.

Ethical AI Implementation in Multilingual Educational Contexts

UNESCO (2023) advises that any suggested technology or AI policies must ensure transparency, data protection, bias auditing, and language accommodations. Translation tools must be vetted for appropriate cultural nuance, and leaders must plan for continuity in the face of shifting conditions. These safeguards are especially critical in multilingual and migration-affected contexts, where algorithmic decisions may inadvertently reinforce exclusion or misinterpret cultural nuance. Administrators must ensure that AI tools are not only technically sound but also linguistically inclusive and ethically aligned with community values. These steps include screening translation platforms for dialect sensitivity, ensuring human oversight in automated decision-making, and budgeting for long-term support and retraining (Education Estonia, 2025; UNESCO, 2023; U.S. Department of Education, 2023). Ultimately, UNESCO emphasizes that the development of ethical AI in education necessitates ongoing monitoring, stakeholder engagement, and adaptable governance structures (UNESCO, 2023).

Recommendations for Administrator Preparation Programs

Preparation programs should include the following steps for best practices:

- Embed Fulbright-inspired modules.
- Require coursework in AI literacy and multilingual leadership.
- Build virtual exchange partnerships.
- Provide lab-based pilot experiences.
- Formalize mentoring pipelines.

(UNESCO, 2023; U.S. Department of Education, 2023; Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010).

These steps move beyond access toward equitable sociotechnical systems (Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010).

Limitations and Future Research

This article presents a narrative-conceptual synthesis based on the personal experiences of a Fulbright scholar who has received and evaluated multiple awards. Future research should include comparative case studies of Fulbright alums leading AI/digital initiatives, design-based research on multilingual AI integration, and mixed-methods evaluations of administrator preparation models. Cross-regional studies would clarify how infrastructure and policy mediate adoption trajectories.

Conclusion

Fulbright experiences equip educational administrators with a valuable intercultural perspective, diverse points of view, strategic sensibility, and ethical grounding necessary for leadership in the

AI era. When paired with global policy guidance and digital-literacy scholarship, these experiences yield design principles that prioritize equity, linguistic inclusion, transparency, and sustainability. The result is not a universal blueprint but a way of leading by being attentive to context, rigorous about evidence, and committed to human-centered innovation. As AI continues to shape educational systems worldwide, leaders who combine technical fluency with cultural humility will be best positioned to ensure that digital transformation serves all learners. (UNESCO, 2023; U.S. Department of Education, 2023; Warschauer & Matuchniak, 2010; Fulbright Program, n.d.).

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