

Fulbright Conversations: Global Challenges - Climate Change and Climate Action with Sammie Buzzard and Staci Strobl: Transcript

00:00:01 Sam Thompson

Hello and welcome to the Fulbright Conversations Podcast the show that brings together Fulbright alumni from both sides of the Atlantic to share their unique perspectives on some of the most pressing global challenges of our time. I'm your host, Sam Thompson, Senior Programme Manager at the US UK Fulbright Commission, and today I'm excited to be speaking with Sammie Buzzard and Staci Strobl as we take a transatlantic approach to discussing climate change and climate action.

00:00:32 Sam Thompson

Dr. Sammie Buzzard is a glaciologist at Northumbria University. After completing her undergraduate maths degree, she applied her mathematical skills to first gain a PhD in Atmospheres, oceans and climate and now continues to use them to create simulations of how Antarctica will change as our climate changes.

00:00:50 Sam Thompson

Sammie's research focuses on the surface melting of Antarctica's ice shelves, simulating how and where ice shelves may become vulnerable to sudden collapse, and how Antarctica might contribute to sea level rise.

00:01:02 Sam Thompson

She also has interest in Greenland melting and Arctic Sea ice. As a lecturer, she has taught a variety of topics to university students, including climate change, computer modelling for Earth scientists and international field work.

00:01:16 Sam Thompson

Staci Strobl, PhD, is a professor in criminal justice and criminology at Shenandoah University. Last year, she earned the Fulbright Global Challenges Teaching Award for a virtual exchange on Climate Change. She has also partnered with professors in Jordan and Palestine to engage her students in collaborative online international learning as a part of the SU's COIL program as well as the harnessing innovation through virtual exchange for enhanced results program with the Institute of International Education.

00:01:45 Sam Thompson

Dr. Strobl researches criminal justice in the Arabian Gulf, sectarian order in Bahrain, the social and colonial origins of criminal justice 2018 and won the Radzinowicz Memorial Prize in 2009 for a British Journal of Criminology article about the criminalization of domestic workers in Bahrain. She has over 30 peer reviewed publications and journals, including the review of Faith and International Affairs and the International Journal for Criminal Justice and Social Democracy.

00:02:14 Sam Thompson

Sammie, Staci, how are you both doing today?

00:02:16 Sammie Buzzard

Yeah, great. Thank you. Happy to be here.

00:02:18 Staci Strobl

Happy to be here. Thanks so much.

00:02:20 Sam Thompson

Excellent. So Sammie and Staci, you were both paired up as part of our inaugural Fulbright Global Challenges Teaching awards last year, and you've now finished your collaborative online teaching awards within that year.

00:02:32

Can you tell us a little bit about what your experiences during Fulbright, and what elements of your experience have been the most interesting and impactful to you?

00:02:39 Sammie Buzzard

Yeah. So I think this was quite unique, or I've certainly never seen anything like it advertised before. So that kind of piqued my interest, but it also seemed very fitting that it was a global challenge because I obviously work in climate change. And that's something that goes across discipline, so having the chance to work with someone from a different discipline, it felt like that could really add to my teaching.

In terms of what's been the most interesting or impactful: it's definitely been the chance to work with Staci and her class, not just because they have a different perspective from a different discipline, also from a different country as well. I think we realized very early on even though we thought that this virtual exchange would be quite straightforward, cause we all speak the same language, so we don't have as many hurdles as other potential exchanges could, there are still just huge differences between our students, between the university systems, about how they're all thinking about climate change that I think I personally learned a lot. And I feel like my students did as well.

00:03:33 Sam Thompson

Does that match with your experience Staci?

00:03:35 Staci Strobl

Yeah, I think Sammie and I were our excellent partners because we think alike in many ways. And I also came at it from very, very similar motivations. I really wanted my students to gain a different perspective on a topic that I was already teaching in my environmental and wildlife crime course, which was the impact of climate change on crime patterns, but also the burgeoning sort of international civil society movement, which is questioning whether the fact that climate change has occurred as in itself a type of crime, perhaps even a crime against humanity. To the extent that governments and private industry may have raised us in this reality, I really wanted my students to have a better understanding of the physical realities that Sammie's students are specifically studying. You know, it's important to get the message out that climate change is occurring. Beyond that, the nuances was not something I was able to present to my students, not being a climate scientist but a social scientist. So it has been a great

learning experience for me and my students to really look at some of the different manifestations on the planet.

00:04:46 Staci Strobl

To understand a little bit more about local impacts, some places will experience certain natural disasters, for example, or certain climate patterns that other regions won't, at least initially, and so that was really important for us to refine our understanding before we got to thinking about the social, political and legal ramifications that are the subject of the course I was teaching. And I'm going to echo Sammie's thought about how we also learned about some differences between the academic cultures between our two countries.

00:05:15 Staci Strobl

That was really fun to sort of explore the systems and how the curriculum operates, and sort of the student experiences are slightly different. And so that was really illuminating.

00:05:27 Sammie Buzzard

On paper, Staci and I essentially have the same job, but what we do is very, very different. The way we teach is different. The time we have, how we do assessment.

00:05:35 Sammie Buzzard

There were so many variations that it was quite surprising actually.

00:05:39 Staci Strobl

Yeah. And another thing I want to mention on the actual climate change topic that we found early on was that there are these structural differences between our two countries in terms of what our individual contributions are to climate change. So we did an ecological footprint and a carbon footprint with the students. And on average, the Americans had a bigger footprint than the students in the UK, and in looking deeper it really had to do with some stuff that has to do with the sort of national realities, there's more public transportation in the UK.

00:06:11 Staci Strobl

People tend to tolerate a shorter commute than perhaps in the United States, so we're very car centric in the rural space that is Winchester, where my university is. And I think that really showed up in that exercise, which was fascinating. And that's not to take away from what we can all do to impact climate change and bring down the total footprint, but there are political and social realities that kind of lock us into a certain amount of carbon emission, and that was fascinating.

00:06:42 Sammie Buzzard

Yeah. And we had to be very careful to like, tell our students about this in advance because we did this kind of warm up activity where we thought it be really fun for everyone to do their carbon footprints. And Staci and I did ours in advance. And obviously we noticed there were big differences just because of, like Staci said, she drives to work. I can cycle to work, but that wouldn't be possible for many of Staci's students. Whereas most of mine live around the corner just because of the way that we're in a big city. And the way that it's set up most of them walk into university.

00:07:07 Sammie Buzzard

So we had to say before we did this activity: look, we know there are going to be differences and we don't want any individual to feel bad if your carbon footprint is really high.

Because that may just be as a result of where you live, where your food comes from, and things that are totally out of your control. But yeah, we thought that could potentially have the collaboration starting out on the wrong foot if suddenly we realized half the students had massive carbon footprints and half of them didn't.

So really trying to put that into context and make it into more of a discussion about why and how individuals can change things within their power, but some things just aren't within their power. I think it worked quite well for our students that we didn't see anyone getting too upset about their footprint. They just had productive discussions around what that meant.

00:07:47 Sam Thompson

I suppose that's almost the ideal way of opening an exchange like this one. We're thinking about the interdisciplinary nature of it, and for science students, it's very easy to get stuck into the science and the physical geography of climate change.

And if you're looking at it from a social sciences perspective, you're getting a much better understanding, perhaps of the policy and the social political aspects of climate change to bring your classes together. You're able to actually provide that lens from both separate angles and bring people together in a space where they can have those conversations that involve both of those perspectives, and I imagine an exercise like this, really helps show why you can't really do one side of the work without the other.

00:08:22 Sammie Buzzard

Exactly. And I think my students really enjoyed that aspect because the class existed before we had the virtual exchange and in the previous iteration of it, I found that she really wanted to discuss these kind of differences between different cultures, different countries. Who is to blame for climate change? What does this mean? And all the kind of questions that as physical climate scientists, I can't necessarily answer.

00:08:42 Sammie Buzzard

Because their degrees have been very focused on the science of geography and how are rivers the way they are, how glaciers the way they are, numbers, data. So to have a class where they had a chance to actually talk about these things was great.

00:08:54 Sammie Buzzard

But then as an individual, I wasn't all that qualified to talk about it in a lot of detail. So that's one of the big things about this exchange is that we did have two people who are experts in very different disciplines, but between us I think we had a lot of the puzzle pieces that our students were missing to get the complete picture.

00:09:12 Staci Strobl

I had the same problem. My students were really curious to understand the phenomenon beyond just that it is happening and you know, I really had a middle school presentation for them about what climate change is scientifically. And they would have more questions. I just wasn't qualified and I think that that was a huge, huge part of why this exchange was so fruitful.

00:09:35 Sam Thompson

I think building on that more so than just the interdisciplinary exchange we're talking about the cultural environments of both the UK and the US and how they, in the instance of this exercise inform what an individual's climate or carbon footprint will look like. And climate change is a global challenge. And as you've already expressed, they see effects, different people differently in terms of both the climate they live in politically and socially, but also the climate patterns that will happen in different geographic areas of the world. Do you think there's potential in exchanges like this sharing different cultural experiences and ideas being increasingly impactful for tackling challenges like climate change?

00:10:13 Staci Strobl

Absolutely any kind of global problem is going to need experts to cooperate. Experts from different fields, different professions. We were really giving our students a taste of what they might encounter in a future job, or if they go on to Graduate School and that is this ability to you know, be in your field, but be open to some of the questions perhaps that you can't answer in your field and you need to search out interdisciplinary knowledge, interdisciplinary collaborators. So it really, I think, piqued the students capacity to do something along those lines. In particular, a lot of my students will go on to be in law enforcement.

00:10:55 Staci Strobl

I think one of the reasons that I've come to climate change as a criminologist is to want to explore whether local police forces are prepared for the kind of policing they would have to do around climate change disaster. You know, they need to be able to respond to things that we know are coming. And increasingly, I think that citizens are going to demand of their government agencies that they're ready for things that maybe were not in the imagination 20 years ago. These events, you know, a Maui wildfire or a flood in Louisiana Bayou after a hurricane. These things are now going to happen. And are we ready to deal with the social dislocation? And I think police will be first responders responding in ways that they're not necessarily trained for, but they'll be on deck. And that's just one example.

00:11:46 Sam Thompson

Thinking more in terms of the educational sphere, study abroad and exchange are hugely important for broadening, understanding, and building global citizenship, and we've seen that in the examples you've spoken about already. But virtual exchanges like your coil teaching in the global challenges teaching award can bring these intercultural experiences to groups of people who might not have had access to them before.

00:12:06 Sam Thompson

Can you speak a little bit more to why these exchanges matter to you students?

00:12:10 Sammie Buzzard

Yeah. I think for me this is one of the key reasons I applied for the award, because I've noticed that this cohort of students in particular would have been one of those that were most impacted by the COVID disruption to their university education. So they would have been doing their third and potentially final year of university this last academic year. We've just had, so their first couple of years we've had lockdowns and online teaching and the idea of a year abroad just wasn't possible for anyone.

00:12:37 Sammie Buzzard

Year abroads aren't accessible to everyone. Full stop. Even without a global pandemic, they're expensive. Not everyone can be that far away from home for an entire year. But then having an entire cohort of students where really no one could do this, it seemed like it was even more important to give them a chance to have some of those experiences. I mean doing these things virtually is never going to match being there in person, but actually you can still gain a huge amount for that for a very small fraction of the cost, no financial cost to the students, and obviously minimal carbon cost as well, compared to people flying and studying elsewhere. So I think it's a really great opportunity for the students to pick up on that chance and get to really know some equivalent students from another country.

00:13:16 Staci Strobl

And I know in my field criminal justice, a lot of the students aren't necessarily thinking internationally. Our program tends to focus very much on our own country and so this is really an opportunity for the criminal justice students to globalize their study and to even engage in some informal comparisons in terms of law, policies, law enforcement as well, because inevitably UK students had a lot to say about their social environment as they experience it, and so that was excellent to get my students exposed to more of an international dialogue.

00:13:54 Sammie Buzzard

Yeah. And I think going back to the climate change and global challenges, again, it's not just that we have to work across disciplines, we do have to work internationally to solve these problems. One country can't solve climate change on their own, and certainly, so for example, in my research I focus a lot on Antarctica, so that's not technically owned by anyone. We have an Antarctic treaty, we have lots of countries collaborating on working there cause it's also very difficult to go there and do field work as one country.

00:14:20 Sammie Buzzard

So having to work internationally is just such a big thing for these kind of types of science, and then solving the problems that climate change has given us. So I think that's really important to get those experiences as early as the students possibly can, because if they're going to go and work in these areas, that's exactly what they going to have to be doing. And it's this generation that's going to have to deal with so much of the fallout of climate change that's already happened or has already we've already been locked into.

00:14:44 Staci Strobl

And in my case, I never had a professional reason to really think about Antarctica. It's just not something that comes up in comparative criminal justice, even or International Criminal justice all that often. But

interestingly, there are people there in research stations and so on, and so there's inevitably, when you get people together, social problems and problems of law and order, even there, which was something that was never on my radar. And I've done a, you know, done a little bit of reading on that. So that was exciting for me in terms of professional development.

00:15:14 Sam Thompson

And in terms of the impact that it's had on your students, granted we're only at the end of the year that you were conducting this program, but are there specific impacts that you can point to on how this virtual exchange has helped your students for their?

00:15:27 Sammie Buzzard

I think for my students, they've definitely talked about confidence. I think that's been quite a big thing for them because they didn't have maybe as many social opportunities as you would get during your average undergraduate degree because of COVID. But they definitely enjoyed the challenge, but also the chance to work with someone from a completely different background.

00:15:48 Sammie Buzzard

Different institutions and I know some of them, for example, have now gone on to do things abroad, onto masters programs and they said that they do feel a lot more generally confident in themselves from doing this, which I think is a huge outcome.

00:15:59 Staci Strobl

I agree, and the virtual cooperation that they had to do.

00:16:03 Staci Strobl

So I think put them in the next level in terms of teamwork at a distance. You know the students are after COVID very used to hopping on zoom and being a presence there. But we actually asked them to organize their own meetings with their small groups to produce a podcast which was their final project together. They had to deal with a time change, time zone difference, the daylight savings calendar didn't match up between our two countries, and there was a different time gap during their collaboration.

These things sound like just logistical problems, but they're actually really important for the students. Professional development, as increasingly in their future careers, they're very likely to be working collaboratively with people that they aren't in the same room with, and I think we really stretched them in their ability to organize and problem solve in their environment.

00:16:53 Sam Thompson

I think if we now change tack a little bit, talking not just about the cultural exchange but the for lack of a better word, I guess intellectual exchange between the two fields that you're coming from, Staci is a professor of criminal law and justice and semi is a climate scientist and glaciologist. Were you thinking about working with someone from a different discipline at the time of application? And when you first were paired, what was your initial reaction to having this opportunity to work with someone from such a different discipline than your own?

00:17:24 Staci Strobl

In my case, I put in my application that I was really interested in having a partner from the sciences. I felt like that was the piece that I was missing in teaching my students about climate change.

I also thought that that was the right way of using this particular pedagogy. You know, I already know a lot of people in my own field.

Many of them in different teaching situations as guest lecturers collaborations. I really didn't know a top person like Sammie in climate science and so I was really, really eager and secretly hoping that not only would I get the award. But that I would get somebody exactly like Sammie.

00:18:03 Sammie Buzzard

Oh, that's so nice to hear. I think from my perspective, I was hoping I would get someone more in the social sciences, but I was also kind of concerned cause all the climate science classes that I've ever heard about tend to be on the physical sciences. Maybe just cause that's the people that I know and the people I met at conferences. But I wasn't really convinced that I was going to get someone that was that different to me. So when I got paired with Staci, I was 50% thinking oh, this is amazing. She knows all the stuff I don't know. We're going to have a really cool class.

00:18:31 Sammie Buzzard

And then 50% of oh no, I know how to match together two physical science classes. I don't know how we're going to do this with two different disciplines, which is why we had all the training around COIL and had lots of chances to work things out. But it was yeah 50% quite terrifying that they were going to be so different. I wasn't convinced it would work, but yeah. In the end it was great.

00:18:51 Staci Strobl

Yes, I mean, I had a little bit of terror myself in the be careful what you wish for category because I was really, really nervous that my lack of training in the sciences would make it hard for me to really learn what I needed to learn to help guide my students into an interdisciplinary space, and that the students may not have the science background necessarily to hook in to additional learning there. I think it worked out. I think my students and I grew into that and I know I learned a lot. I sat in on a couple of Sammie's lectures. I took notes.

00:19:26 Staci Strobl

I asked questions when I didn't understand something of her later, so it was really, really great. It was like a mini course in climate science for me and for my students, and it was it was lovely, but it was scary.

00:19:40 Sam Thompson

So I think we've heard a little bit from you, Staci, about what you think your students have learned in terms of some of the ideas that you've articulated about the impact that climate emergencies and disasters will have on law enforcement agents in the future. But what was the impact of approaching and learning about climate change from this interdisciplinary perspective for your students who do come from that physical sciences perspective?

00:20:05 Sammie Buzzard

I think it gave them the chance to think about things in a very different way. And as I said before, this is something I definitely wanted to do because I think compared to the US system, the UK system is much more restrictive in terms of your degree. You choose your three or four A levels at age 16, then you go to university and you'll generally pick one subject and you'll just study that one subject for three or four years, and actually that can be very restrictive, because even if you choose physical or environmental geography that a lot of my students are taking, then they're missing the whole human side of that. But probably they didn't want to necessarily completely give that all up.

So having a chance to ask all those questions and talk about things in a slightly different way.

00:20:42 Sammie Buzzard

I think it's something that they felt that they were missing from their degree programme as a nature of the way that degree programs are structured here. But I think that they got a lot of out of it and I think they enjoyed this way to think a bit differently.

00:20:57 Sam Thompson

And then Staci, were there any other things that you can think of your students really gaining from this class of the some of the things that you talked about earlier?

00:21:06 Staci Strobl

I think they definitely gained an understanding of sort of the working culture in Sammie's institution. It was interesting because my students saw a distant deadline of several weeks and kind of like, oh, get to this a little bit later. And Sammie's students were really structured in wanting to have immediate meetings and really get going and sort of work across the time space. And so there were two different sort of work cultures that were coming together.

00:21:33 Staci Strobl

And I think it was really, really good for my students to be pushed a little and to have to adapt to doing something in a team in a slightly different way than maybe was their personal preference.

00:21:47 Sammie Buzzard

Yeah. And I think this is something we're not really anticipated. We knew they were going to be some cultural differences. And we'd said like, oh, maybe the US students tend to be a bit more active about asking questions in class, whereas quite often my students won't always ask questions in class, but they'll come to me afterwards because I don't wanna ask things in front of the group. So we talked a lot about how we were going to manage those kind of situations.

00:22:07 Sammie Buzzard

But we haven't really thought that actually the way that degrees are structured also means that the students at different stages in their education. So, for example, Staci's students were at various points in their lives, whereas mine rolling there third year of their degree and at that point, the way that UK degrees work, the final year counts a lot more towards your final grade. So they get a lot more motivated as time goes on. So they were very on it thinking about oh, we're going to graduate in a few months. This is a big chunk of our final grade and so we're very motivated for this particular assignment.

00:22:38 Sammie Buzzard

Whereas I guess in the US, system is just one class of many, and they're a bit more balanced, so that we hadn't really anticipated. And also having to do a different class sizes with something that we knew was going to be a challenge. But again, it meant that students had different motivations because the Shenandoah class were much smaller than the Cardiff class. So the way that we ended up working that was we allowed my students to opt in to doing the assignment because we have been making podcasts with the students.

So some of my students made podcasts in joint groups with the Shenandoah students, and some of them just made Cardiff only podcasts, because otherwise the groups would have just been really unbalanced. But then of course, it meant that the students who opted in to do the COIL were probably the more motivated students, the ones who really, really want to get on with the work. And then that was paired with just a normal distribution of students in Staci's class. So naturally, some of them were going to be more motivated and some of them weren't, whereas my students were motivated by other things, didn't choose to do the COIL. So that gave us some challenges as well.

00:23:36 Sam Thompson

Did you find there was particular excitement amongst your students to have an opportunity like this?

00:23:40 Staci Strobl

It was mixed in my class. We had a couple first year, first semester students in the course and so they're new to the college experience and then now they're being thrown into this very intense collaborative international experience. So you know, we had all levels. We also had folks that were going to graduate at the end of that semester as well. So my class was really varied in its approach to its feelings about it. Definitely, I had a student that was really excited. She had been to Wales before where Sammie's institution is located, Cardiff, and was really excited to reconnect with that place. She had enjoyed her time there, so that was a very, very motivated student. Couple others were either environmental studies major criminal justice minor, or the reverse of their major minor. So they were really excited to not just meet students from The UK but to meet other students focused on the environment and to show what they had learned being both in social science and so-called hard science.

So we had some excited students. I did have a couple of students that I think were unexcited were mostly because they were a little bit anxious about how logistically this was going to work. And that's fair. I think that's part of this learning is to stretch the students a little bit.

00:25:01 Staci Strobl

Like yes, I know that this is going to be a challenge. I'm here as your professor to help you succeed. Trust me. Let's go on this journey together. I think that is part of the COIL experience.

00:25:12 Sammie Buzzard

Yeah, I think it was certainly much more challenging for Staci because she did have that range of students. I think if I'd done this in Cardiff for a first year class, they certainly would have been completely overwhelmed cause they're still trying to work out how to survive at university. And they're thinking about things like how often do you wash your bed sheets, how do you eat your fruit and veg and those

kind of things. And just generally like trying to get used to university life. Whereas I was lucky in the sense that I had third year students, they were all very much in the swing of things and very focused on assignments as they naturally do become the longer they're at university.

So I think my life was maybe slightly easier just because my students had the opt in opt out modules, so those that were more anxious about doing this could decide that they didn't want to, which was a shame.

I think it would have been nice to have everyone doing this because maybe some students didn't join in because they were worried, and because it is a risk when you're in your final year of university and we say, hey, we're going to do this totally new assignment. It's going to be really radical. But it's also worth quite a lot of points for your degree. Some of them just said, well, no, thanks. That's too much of a risk and but maybe as Staci said, if I'd been with a smaller class and been able to push more of them into it, they probably would have got a lot out.

00:26:19 Sammie Buzzard

But so yeah. That's just one of the things you have to deal with when you're matching two completely different classes, there always going to be some compromises and some differences. And we had a lot of support in working through those. But yeah, it's always going to be stuff that comes up that we weren't expecting at all.

00:26:34 Sam Thompson

Do you have particular hopes for the way that your students might use their interdisciplinary knowledge and intercultural experiences in the future as a result of this virtual exchange?

00:26:44 Sammie Buzzard

I think for me, it's that they've now seen an example of how people can work together across disciplines and across countries as well, because certainly talking to my students outside of this COIL, they have a lot of climate anxiety and it's something that when we talk about this in class.

00:27:05 Sammie Buzzard

A lot of them will say to me, well, this is just really tough for us because a lot of the damage has been done even before we were born and now we're expected to deal with it. So it's very easy that they can get very negative about. I had one student say to me like, oh, if we go to the pub and have a few beers, I just end up crying about climate change.

Like this is not how it should be, because that's not how we fix things because you can just completely freeze and say, well, things are so bad there's nothing we can do. So I'm hoping that this has given them a little bit of hope to say no, we can actually work together. And even if political leaders or industry don't always give us the best examples of doing that, here is an example that can work, and maybe this generation can do a lot better than previous generations.

00:27:47 Staci Strobl

I'm going to echo that this generation is ready to problem solve and they have imaginative and creative solutions. I think what's unique about this generation than perhaps older generations is, I mean, I didn't

have to convince my students that there was a problem. You know, climate change denialism still exists, although it is coming down in this country.

00:28:09 Staci Strobl

But it's still there and I think that the generation that our students are in, there's less likely to be that denialism present. And so preaching to a choir, you're not trying to convince people that this is a problem to be focused on which frees you up to let them be creative about problems solving that they can envision, and our podcast assignment involved the students picking a particular region on the planet and then bringing to bear their disciplinary knowledge, and also research that they've done jointly to sort of paint the picture both physically and socially and criminological.

And what gave me a lot of hope was initially my student were really clear as to what to look for, what research to bring to bear. So for example, we had a podcast on the Canadian Arctic and one of the students said I'm not sure what I can contribute here, but talking it through with her once I heard what her interest was, just what was piquing her interest about the region, which was the impact on indigenous cultures. She thought that didn't apply like, oh, this is—what does that have to do with crime and justice? But it does. It's a question of indigenous rights if the environment, The Canadian Arctic, is being degraded or changing rapidly. That has a great impact on traditional modes of life.

00:29:32 Staci Strobl

And so that that is very relevant. And so to see the students sort of make the connections that hey, you know, I have something to say about this problem and its potential solutions. I have a lot of hope. They definitely went in directions that I would not have anticipated but were spot on.

00:29:52 Staci Strobl

So it was just delightful to see.

00:29:54 Sam Thompson

That sounds like they're really rewarding experiences you get as a teacher when you see people piecing it together like that in your classes.

00:30:02 Staci Strobl

Absolutely. And the work in climate change, as I understand it, the professional level, we're piecing it together. So many disciplines have information, data, and experiences that describe it and then attempt to confront it. And you know, we really are in this global problem together. And so to have that happening on a microcosm between our two classes, I think it's a model for how we can approach things in bigger, grander places at the international level.

00:30:32 Staci Strobl

What could happen if there were more interdisciplinary teams in international teams working on this, and I think what was really important about what we did in terms of the different regions that we had, the students focused on. So some of the other ones were the Arabian Gulf, Pacific Island nations, WA, various places. I think what we tried to do was say, yes, this is a global phenomenon and yes, there's big cooperation.

00:31:00 Staci Strobl

And you know at the UN level that we could point to in other spaces. But what if we emphasize a little bit more the local and we're not talking micro local but regional local. And in order to sort of make it more real to the students about this is affecting people that we can focus on in a certain place to kind of get at that connection between the global phenomenon and the local or the more local impacts, I think that's going to be more helpful going forward.

00:31:34 Staci Strobl

Not to deemphasize the global but I would really encourage people, all people, really, but in particular, climate activists and climate people working on it professionally to prepare people for what they might experience in their location most likely, and to have them start thinking about, not to catastrophize but in a proactive way, what to do if...so in my neck of the woods, the most likely impact in the short term would be flooding problems. I'm starting to ask questions about what the plans are for a major flood in my area and looking at things along those lines.

00:32:11 Staci Strobl

So I was hoping that the students would take that regional perspective to make it more real to them. And I think this is a model. It's really easy to say this is such a big problem and other people are working on it, but actually there's a proactive piece that I was hoping that we were fostering.

00:32:28 Sam Thompson

Well, that brings me really nicely on to my next question. I wanted to bring in that strand that you were talking about as well, Sammie, about the climate anxiety that a number of your students were feeling. And throughout our conversations there we talked about climate change as a global challenge. But this large scale focus can often be the thing that drives fatigue around the issue and also anxiety around the issue rather than action.

00:32:50 Sam Thompson

And I suppose you you touched that talking about the regionality of it, but from your perspectives, are there ways that we can take these discussions out of academia and put them into a space where they both feel actionable and manageable but also make people care about them rather than fatigued about?

00:33:05 Sammie Buzzard

Yeah, I think that's really important to bring it back to the local when you're talking about these issues, because you're right it can feel overwhelming when you talk about kind of huge displacements of communities and the other side of the world. But also people...

00:33:17 Sammie Buzzard

Inherently, we just are a bit selfish. We care about what's happening on our doorstep. It's really easy to kind of block out the stuff that's far away and so well, this is just such a big issue. Politicians should deal with this. My individual actions here in Cardiff today aren't going to impact someone that lives on the

other side of the world. But actually everything we're doing to change the climate is going to impact all of us.

00:33:38 Sammie Buzzard

And I think working out what those local changes are going to be, it's really important. So like Staci says, they're specific things that are going to impact her community that maybe law enforcement need to think about. So, for example, when I used to live in Atlanta in the US...we're going to schools and talk about climate change and talk about sea level rise, because that's one of the biggest acts, that certainly if I do that in Cardiff, it's really obvious and everyone knows all sea level rise is bad because we can see the sea from our city.

But in Atlanta you're a four or five hour drive from the sea. Talk to students that have never been there and they'd say, well, why should we care? That's really far away. And then we'll talk about people getting displaced. And where do these people move to? And oh, isn't the traffic really bad in Atlanta?

00:34:16 Sammie Buzzard

What's going to happen when all these people try and move to Atlanta? Because they don't want to live on the coast anymore. And it's weird little things like talking about the traffic. Suddenly it started to click and I was like, oh, this is going to change how my day-to-day life is and then start to think about, okay, well, what am I doing? What's my impact? What can we change locally, and those sort of things, so really bring it back to things that matter to people. Even though that, yes, it is a little bit selfish, but also it's just such a big problem that you do have to kind of break it down and just think small scale like what can any individual do?

00:34:49 Staci Strobl

That's right. And that really hits on what criminologists are worried about. If we give that Atlanta example, you know, the conflicts that are going to arise and we saw this with Hurricane Katrina, when people were displaced around the United States. There were conflicts when newcomers, you know, had needs or impacted a community that was preexisting. And that does, you know, you can statistically see an uptick in in crime that is correlated with these social dislocations. And so I think that the local also helps the students to really understand that connection.

00:35:22 Sam Thompson

Building on this, it's clear that you both see this is already critical part of the discussion on global challenges and global solutions. Could you talk more then about the importance of action on this level as well?

00:35:33 Staci Strobl

Well, one of the Sustainability Development goals is climate action, and it's something I've pasted in my syllabus for the course to show that we were a part of this international effort to bring light to what can be done. And so the students in their podcasts had really interesting things that they would suggest for the regions that they focused on and it was really neat to see.

So in the Canadian Arctic example, one of the students brought up and did research on the opening of new shipping corridors with the melting of ice in the Arctic, and so connecting that to white collar crime

and organized crime, when you have more people flowing through those areas, you're going to have all the same crime that you would have in any shipping network.

And so to sort of think about what those places need to do, these expanded ports in cities or towns in the Arctic that become cities, for example, because of this, perhaps what do they need to do to prepare for those potential harms? Who do they need to hire? What training do their police officers need to have? What do their prosecutors need to be able to adjudicate? What do judges need to know?

00:36:48 Sam Thompson

What about you, Sammie? What do you see as potential local community action?

00:36:53 Sammie Buzzard

I think from the perspective of what my students were finding out and Staci kind of mentioned it just then is they really had to put themselves in the shoes of people in the communities that they were studying for their podcasts. And some of them did this in a really creative way.

So for example, I think someone was pretending to be like a local community organiser on a Pacific island nation, and really thinking about what these people were doing locally, but hopefully they can then bring that back to their own communities and think, okay, I thought about what someone's doing in a different continent, but what am I doing day-to-day and how am I impacting my community?

00:37:29 Sammie Buzzard

What could my community be doing differently? Because without that local action, there's never going to be any real persuasion action at kind of higher levels within government or at the tops of industry.

00:37:40 Staci Strobl

Yeah. And I think some of the podcasts really touched on one of the fundamental tensions, which is climate change versus economic development and the Arabian Gulf podcast posed the question of, should I buy this beachfront property in Bahrain? And they went through the paces, the climate scientist side of things about what might happen to this beachfront property given climate change, and then, you know, came to the answer of no don't buy this property.

00:38:08 Staci Strobl

It could disappear in the near future. And I thought that that was really, yes, a way to bring it to the local, but to also sort of bring in through a little bit of the side some of the economic questions. Climate change isn't good for economic development. It just isn't. And there may be short term pains that economies may need to go through in order to achieve a more sustainable level of carbon emissions.

But ultimately we can't have functioning economies if we don't have functioning societies. If we're in a constant state of severe disaster. That just doesn't bode well if that's your concern is in keeping the engine of capitalism going. It's not good for that either. And so I thought that that was a really important point that the Arabian Gulf team were also hitting on.

00:38:55 Sam Thompson

Finally, I suppose could you share what makes you feel optimistic about the fight against climate change and what's improved and where you see future opportunities as well, whether it was informed by your experiences running this collaborative online international learning exchange or not?

00:39:12 Staci Strobl

I think that the US-UK Fulbright Commission's commitment to educating around this through an award like the one Sammie and I earned is really, really important to sort of bring this conversation into all the corners of our society.

00:39:29 Staci Strobl

These, including higher education, including other spaces, it's just wonderful to see that of the three most pressing challenges of our time that your Commission identified that climate change was one of them, along with pandemics and racial justice. It really shows that there is a commitment to seeking innovation and to do it at a kind of a grassroots level.

00:39:53 Staci Strobl

To identify two professors in two different universities in two different countries, which seems really, really small scale on some level, but we'll have ripple effects. Our students are going to go out and be in different spaces. We're probably going to run this exchange again, Sammie and I, with more students. We're talking about it on this podcast. That's something that has potential.

00:40:16 Staci Strobl

Actually a little bit small, having a lot of support going into this little thing. I mean that's probably how change truly happens, right? That small things start happening, conversations in new ways, in new spaces with new people talking to each other that can grow. And I think that that's really one of the strengths of this project and what the Commission set out to do.

00:40:40 Sammie Buzzard

Yeah, I agree absolutely. I think as I said at the start, one of the things that attracted me to applying for this or was it was so different to anything I'd seen. There's quite often small pots of money if you want to try and do research across disciplines or across countries, that's fairly common. But it's also something that maybe the impacts of that aren't as big because you might study something in particular in one area with a colleague in another country and you'll write a paper on.

00:41:04 Sammie Buzzard

But in terms of the amount of people that actually engage with that and get involved, maybe it's much bigger because we're doing this with students who are still kind of learning about themselves and working out what their careers are going to be so they can go in a whole range of different directions. And I think doing things that this kind of, yeah, it might be small and it's kind of grassroots level, but actually there's potential for this experience to go quite a long way with them.

00:41:28 Sam Thompson

Well, thank you both for joining me today. It's been really interesting getting your insights both on the educational and pedagogical side of this, but also the very real climate side of it too, if people have enjoyed listening to you, is there anywhere that they can go and find more of your work?

00:41:44 Staci Strobl

So I do have an article with colleagues, one that works for the UN Wildlife Crime Research Unit and another who is at the University of Rotterdam. We wrote a paper in the British Journal of Criminology about coastal loss in Louisiana that really encapsulates on a research side what this kind of exchange was hoping to do on the pedagogical side.

00:42:09 Sammie Buzzard

Yeah, I think from my perspective, the most important thing people could do if they want to know more is go listen to the students' podcasts. So we're quite lucky that Shenandoah University have put a couple of those up on YouTube and they're just really interesting to listen to in such high quality. It always absolutely blows my mind when students do this assignment, quite how good they are. I guess that's one of the advantages of a social media generation that they're also used to making TikToks.

00:42:33 Sammie Buzzard

Actually, the technical aspects of making a podcast that Staci and I were worried about, they didn't even bat an eye at those.

00:42:39 Sammie Buzzard

So I would encourage people to do that and also if they want to keep track of if there's collaboration carries on, like Staci said, we really both hope it's going to be actually moving to Northumbria University. So my name is quite unique. So just by Googling that you'll be able to find my new institutional web page where I'll definitely be updating everyone as we get to hopefully repeat these kind of experiences in the future and build on what we've done here.

00:43:03 Sam Thompson

Thank you both for joining me. It's been such a fascinating conversation and really lovely to get to talk to you both. And thank you for also sharing where people can find both the students' podcasts, but more work on this subject if they're interested. I hope you have a great rest of your week and I look forward to next time we get to talk.

00:43:18 Staci Strobl

Thank you so much for having us.

00:43:20 Sammie Buzzard

Yeah, thanks. It was great to have a chance to reflect on what we did and yeah, a good chance to chat about it.

00:43:28 Sam Thompson

That brings us to the end of episode one of our Fulbright conversation series on global challenges. Don't forget to subscribe or follow us on your favorite podcast platform so you don't miss an episode. You can also stay up to date with everything we are up to at the US-UK Fulbright Commission by following us on social media where you can learn more about the global challenges by visiting our website, www.fulbright.org.uk. I'm Sam Thompson and join us next time when we'll be discussing storytelling and racial justice.