

OVERVIEW

HANDBOOK

TIPS

USEFUL LINKS

ABOUT THE EDITOR

LONDON COURSE

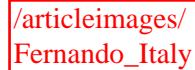
LOGIN

FEATURES

31 Aug 2006 09:21:00 BST

A break to become more expert when questioning the experts

Roger Jeal



Fernando investigates the drink market in Italy

In Reuters Foundation training sessions we stress that **quoting authoritative sources makes news stories stronger and adds credibility** compared with just expressing our own opinions, well thought out though these may be. Sometimes not being an expert can help you ask experts the questions that your readers will need to have explained.

But just like doing homework on a story thoroughly, **further study can help give a reporter more authority and confidence when asking the questions. Brazilian journalist Fernando Scheller Santos, who attended a Reuters Foundation writing business news workshop in London in 2002, did just that.**

Now Fernando has returned to Brazil to work in São Paulo as online editor for the financial desk at Globo.com, a new website that the largest news organization in the country, Rede Globo, is set to launch. Here below is his account of what he gained by returning to the classroom and library. **If you want to share your thoughts on further education and journalism, or comment on what Fernando has written, please do so in the [Forums](#) section of this website.**

How a learning experience abroad can help a journalist become a better professional, investing in "intellectual inheritance"

By Fernando Scheller Santos

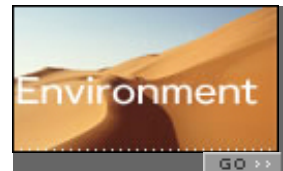
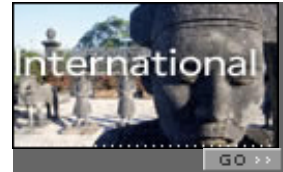
I have just completed a two-year Master of Arts programme in Global Political Economy in Kassel, Germany (the birthplace of the founder of Reuters). It allowed me to know more about key authors in the political sciences and the functioning of governments and global institutions like the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization.

The feeling that something was missing had led me to search for some kind of complement to my professional development. When I won places on short-term programmes by the German Goethe Institute and Reuters Foundation I quickly knew I wanted more. After seven years working for daily newspapers, I felt I needed to take a step back and go back to school to study something different yet useful to journalism. I also wanted to combine theory and practice in a focused programme.

After searching all over Europe, I settled for the Kassel programme. It was only in its second year when I entered it but the subjects it covered were interesting for me. Another important point was the learning structure, generally through discussions in seminars attended by no more than 20 people. The two-year programme also seemed better than one-year ones, common in several countries because of their cost-effective structure.

As a social communications graduate, I felt my knowledge of subjects I used to cover – mainly business, financial markets and the politics involved in them – was superficial. **I knew enough to ask informed questions but was, nonetheless, too dependent on what my sources would say.** Sources, as Reuters Foundation alumni know, are not always reliable. **A well-informed journalist will be more selective and careful in writing what sources say,** weeding out comments that are obvious, unnecessary or, even worse, wrong.

Although I now feel more prepared to question what sources say, that doesn't mean that they will become less important to my work. On the contrary. As my knowledge has become broader, **my relationship with sources will be enriched as I will be able to get much more from them.** They should also be more willing to talk to me, since good sources tend to prefer talking to well-informed journalists. Another important point is that, now I am better informed about economics and politics, I will be able to select my sources of information more carefully, providing my readers with only reliable and well-researched information and avoiding unnecessary mistakes that can damage a story's credibility.



I feel much better prepared to work as a journalist than before, not only because of the subjects we discussed – global governance, international commerce, political agreements, environment, gender, finances etc. – but also because I managed to combine my academic studies with some quality freelance work while I studied. I worked as a correspondent for one of the main Brazilian newspapers (O Estado de S. Paulo) for the last two years. I also researched and wrote articles for Deutsche Welle, the German international news organization that works in a similar fashion to the BBC.

I believe studying abroad is a sort of a package. For me it definitely wasn't just about what I learned in classrooms and extensive hours of reading about theoretical and practical aspects of the global political economy. It was about knowing new people, being open to different ideas and being ready to put my own thoughts forward. A journalist friend of mine who visited me in Germany defined my experience in a way that appealed to me and which I will use in future: "You have now acquired intellectual inheritance."

"Intellectual inheritance" – I had never thought of that before! But knowledge is the best inheritance a journalist can have. So I would say that I have invested my time and money well. Although German education was free for foreigners – I say 'was' because a new law has introduced tuition fees in German universities from next year – it was quite an investment, especially when one takes into consideration the exchange rate of a developing country like Brazil in comparison to the euro.

My "intellectual inheritance" is more important than inheritance of other kinds (apartment, car, money in the bank etc.) That's why I invested all my savings – and also my car – on an adventure that started in September 2004 and has only just come to an end.

As nervous as I was about resuming my professional life in a full-time job in Brazil, I was also certain that going abroad had made me much more prepared to deal with the economic, political, and international subjects that I deal with. I am certain that the "intellectual inheritance" my friend referred to is the best that anyone can have. That's because this kind of inheritance can never be taken away from you, no matter what happens.

Click [here](#) for an earlier article about Fernando on this alumni website. Send your own stories related to change and development in your professional life to reuterslinkeditors@reuters.com or start a discussion in the [Forums](#) section of this website.

[Disclaimers](#) | [Copyright](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Feedback](#)