

Changing the Face of Public Policy: Heike Boeltzig

Like many of our doctoral students, we are first introduced to an applicant through his or her admissions application. Accolades like “an intellectual curiosity and passion for knowledge”, “a commitment to personal and team development” and “a proven scholar with an impressive record of relevant skills, publications and conference presentations” peppered her letters of recommendation. In her statement of interest, we discovered a young woman who was born behind the Berlin Wall, educated in England, Scotland and Japan, who has served as a volunteer at a kindergarten for children with disabilities, and is a self-directed, inquisitive and dedicated advocate/researcher focusing on the areas of disability and employment. When we met her for her admissions interview, behind her contagious smile, friendly demeanor and lively dialogue, we too witnessed her enthusiasm and noted her unwavering commitment to her work and continuous learning.

Heike Boeltzig is a third year student both studying and working at UMass Boston. As a Research Associate at the Institute for Community Inclusion, she was eligible for our part-time doctoral program for state employees. Although her colleagues describe her as a very accomplished professional and her resume boasts dozens of her grant projects, reports, and publications, this thirty-something researcher recognized a gap in her training and wanted “to stretch her mind intellectually, to dive into new challenges, new academic fields, richer experiences in order to develop personally and professionally”.

When asked to reflect on the benefits of the PhD Program in Public Policy at UMass Boston, she quickly replied, “I am 100% fulfilled. It has exceeded my expectations. It has been a very satisfying experience. In this program, students develop a tool box to do with what they want to do. We can now take our instincts and passions to apply these tools outside the classroom.” She continued singing the praises of the part-time program, “Above all, this program was a nice compliment to my work at ICI. Since I was already in the field, I could go back and immediately apply, solidify and build on the skills I learned in class.” She also commends the quality of the teaching, the interdisciplinary nature of our program, and the faculty’s realization that they teach adult students who often need accommodations for family and other issues. Finally, she emphasized her appreciation for the thought process put into recruiting and selecting students for the program. She pays tribute to her terrific cohort and members of advanced cohorts for the diversity of backgrounds, disciplines and life experiences they bring to the classroom. She found her classmates very encouraging. “We shared not only resources, information and class notes with each other, but offered emotional support, too. We studied for the comps together. The group chemistry and support was just amazing.”

Ms. Boeltzig has put great thought already into her dissertation topic, a natural outgrowth of her past and present scholarly activities. Her key interests center on disability and employment issues as well as comparative research methods. Before joining ICI, Ms. Boeltzig conducted cross-national comparative research on disability and employment

policy at the Center for Comparative Research in Social Welfare at the University of Stirling in Scotland. She also participated as a national reporter on German disability employment policy in a thirteen-country research project that was funded by the European Commission. A graduate of the University of Stirling, Heike has a bachelor's degree in sociology and Japanese, and a Master of Science degree in applied social research.

Most recently, she participated in a project funded by the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy that identified effective practices, barriers, successful strategies, and policy recommendations to better serve persons with psychiatric disabilities through the workforce development system. In addition, she is a lead researcher in a multi-year comparative policy study of One-Stop Career Centers and Workforce Investment Boards identified as providing exemplary services to customers, including those with disabilities. The research is part of the National Center on Workforce and Disability/Adult, which is funded by the U.S. DOL/ODEP.

Ms. Boeltzig is also involved in survey research as the project lead on the National Survey of Community Rehabilitation Providers funded by the U.S. Administration on Developmental Disabilities. With a colleague in London, Heike is also examining UK and US initiatives that successfully reach disadvantaged groups and equip them with the skills and motivation to use the internet, particularly government e-services. This study is funded by the IBM Center for the Business of the Government.

We are most fortunate to have a doctoral candidate like Ms. Heike Boeltzig. Faculty, staff and peers admire her strength of character, her work ethic, and the way she pursues her passions and actively engages in the world around her. We all look forward to the day when we can call her “Doctor Boeltzig” and she sets out with her new tool box to change the face of public policy by improving services for individuals with disabilities and their families, promoting more cross-national policy research, and developing new tools and best practices for future policy analysts.