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GENERAL

The Future of Fulbright

Through research, teaching, and host country engagement, Fulbrighters work to empower communities and forge mutual understanding. Throughout 2021, we have shared the impact that

Fulbrighters and alumni have made through the first 75 years of the program's history. As the end of the anniversary year approaches, we are taking a moment to imagine how Fulbright will grow, adapt, and inspire in the years to come.

What will the next 75 years bring? Through Big Talk, a uniquely Fulbright invention by a program alum that "facilitates meaningful connections in life," **Fulbright 75th Legacy Alumni Ambassadors** answer big questions to reflect on their Fulbright experiences and imagine the future of the Program. This group, which includes scientists, teachers, changemakers, and young leaders, discusses how the Fulbright Program will meet a complex and changing world.



Hassane Laouali, 2019 Fulbright Foreign Student from Niger (left), and Momyneath Reth, 2019 Fulbright Foreign Student from Cambodia (right), celebrate their graduation from Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT).

The Future of Fulbright with Big Talk: Q&A

We asked Fulbright Alumni Ambassadors to respond to several Big Talk questions about Fulbright and its future. See their responses below.

Tell us about the one thing that you shared about yourself or your community during your Fulbright experience that added to the host community's understanding of what it means to be "American."

"During my Fulbright year in London, we discussed, in the classroom and in various workshops, how the British and Americans use different vocabularies to talk about racial relationships. As an Asian American woman, I hope my presence enabled British students of color to feel represented, and inspired them both to examine exclusionary practices in our own times and to reevaluate Shakespeare as a gender-inclusive and anti-racist canon."

– **Alexa Alice Joubin**, Fulbright U.S. Scholar to the United Kingdom

“That being an American is not one thing, we come in all colors, faiths and backgrounds. There is no one America, but what unites us is our love for progress and innovation.” – **Syeda Sahar Naqvi**, Fulbright English Teaching Assistant to Kosovo

“There is a lot of misunderstanding in other countries of what the U.S. is really like, largely based on depictions in the media or popular culture. I made it clear that the U.S. is not just full of rich white people- it is a very diverse country, with rich and poor, and people whose origins are from all over the world as well as an indigenous group that has been poorly treated for centuries. I gave insight into American history and why things today are how they are.”- **Jeffrey Withey**, Fulbright U.S. Scholar to India

“I spent lots of time explaining the incredible diversity within the U.S. This was often appreciated and surprising to those I encountered in Malaysia.”- **Courtney Welton-Mitchell**, Fulbright U.S. Scholar to Malaysia

“As a community college administrator, I spent a lot of time talking about the American concept of community colleges. The idea of higher education being available to everyone at any time in their life is quite a novel concept in many countries.” – **Suzanne LaVenture**, Fulbright International Education Administrator (IEA) to Russia

If you could go back, what advice would you give to yourself before beginning your Fulbright?

“Take every opportunity to explore and learn as much as you can in your host country. It’s easy to pass on an opportunity thinking that there’s still time. One year flies by really quickly and before you know it, it’s over.” – **Kristine Lin**, Fulbright English Teaching Assistant to Korea

“My best advice would be to stay flexible! Even when we think we have everything sorted out, things change. To be successful as a Fulbrighter, we need to be open to embracing the changes that crop up. More often than not, these changes turn out to be terrific opportunities. So stay open to the unexpected!” – **Kendall Cotton Bronk**, Fulbright U.S. Scholar to Greece

“Breathe. There are many life decisions that will need to be made, some of which relate to your research and other decisions that may seem to take you further away from your inquiry/scholarship/artistic practices. Don’t worry– even the smallest challenges will enrich your life and perspective as a U.S. Fulbright Scholar working in a non-U.S. context.” – **Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor**, Fulbright U.S. Scholar to Mexico

“Learn as much of the local language as possible, spend as much time among the people as possible, gain as many new experiences as possible, strive for new and different interactions. Try to live like a local!” – **Jeffrey Withey**, Fulbright U.S. Scholar to India

“Be bold & proactive! Fulbright is a remarkable opportunity to represent the United States while also furthering your own work and ambitions for a more peaceful and prosperous world. Take advantage of every opportunity because many are once-in-a-lifetime experiences, and you can always sleep or rest more once you return!” – **David Bernstein**, Fulbright U.S. Student to Luxembourg

“Don’t overthink it! Some of my best interactions were just talking about things that are second-nature to me...things I do day-in and day-out that didn’t require a lot of formality or prepping to share with my German counterparts.” – **Leigh Lassiter-Counts**, Fulbright International Education Administrator to Germany

How do you envision Fulbright in 75 years?

“Part of me hopes that in 75 years, we won’t need Fulbright. That all people will be able to, and encouraged to, explore cultures and academies of learning over the world; and that the threat of war between nations – if nations still exist – is non-existent. If we do not live in that kind of world in 75 years, then I envision Fulbright guiding us towards it.” – **Vince Redhouse**, Fulbright U.S. Student to Australia

“I envision Fulbright having a deeper reach. While remaining prestigious, Fulbright will offer more awards designed specifically for HBCUs, community colleges, and other underrepresented groups. There will be more diversity.” – **Suzanne LaVenture**, Fulbright International Education Administrator (IEA) to Russia

“I envision Fulbright to be even more expansive – offering more opportunities to students, artists, etc. around the world for cultural exchange. I really hope that it can continue to grow – the opportunities that Fulbright provides are incredibly invaluable. It is my highest hope that even more people will be able to experience what Fulbright has to offer.” – **Kristine Lin**, Fulbright English Teaching Assistant to Korea

“I envision it to be a platform of diverse voices, where we leverage our position in making better policies and advocating for social causes, while promoting diplomacy. I see Fulbright becoming a flag bearer in finding

solutions for the environment and living with changing climate, where we develop ideas and technology to support us.”- **Syeda Sahar Naqvi**, Fulbright English Teaching Assistant to Kosovo

What life lessons has Fulbright taught you?

“Fulbright has really helped illustrate that people around the globe are more alike than they are different. It has helped me appreciate the nuance between cultures and individuals while providing the opportunity to meet new friends and colleagues.” – **Drew Ippoliti**, Fulbright U.S. Scholar to Korea and Fulbright U.S. Student to China

“Through my time as a Fulbrighter, I’ve learned to take a more critical look at my own culture. Cultural practices that I took for granted before my Fulbright, are now up for constant re-evaluation after.” – **Kendall Cotton Bronk**, Fulbright U.S. Scholar to Greece

“To be humble and uncertain about what I might “naturally” consider “normal” or “appropriate” and to constantly ask myself how I might see very simple to very complex phenomena from different vantage points.” – **Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor**, Fulbright U.S. Scholar to Mexico

“We are all fundamentally the same, despite cultural differences. Everyone wants safety, health, and happiness for themselves and their friends and family members. Differences in perspective and culture can lead to profound advances in knowledge when there is free and open exchange of ideas and experiences.”- **Jeffrey Withey**, Fulbright U.S. Scholar to India

“Fulbright has taught me many lessons; however, three key lessons that have stayed with me and will always find their way into my career as an orthopaedic surgeon include: 1) empathy; 2) drive to be bold and always be better; and 3) compromise for the greater good.”- **David Bernstein**, Fulbright U.S. Student to Luxembourg

How did Fulbright make you brave?

“I learned to sing in languages I could not speak, in a tonal system I did not understand, and in a place I had never been. But slowly and surely, the songs settled on my heart and the field became home. Fulbright taught me that bravery is a daily act, and as we practice, our ability to be courageous grows.” – **Geetha Somayajula**, Fulbright U.S. Student to India

“I have learned that even when my family home runs out of water, is overrun by insects I don’t recognize swarming on the bed; when strikes block transportation and commerce—there’s always a way to be creative, to be in community, to persist, and thrive. I have learned to be brave with being out of control of things in my environment and to embrace precarity.” – **Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor**, Fulbright U.S. Scholar to Mexico

“Fulbright taught me the value of putting myself out there to form new relationships, even when the cultural divide in terms of life experience and world view may seem wide.” – **Courtney Welton-Mitchell**, Fulbright U.S. Scholar to Malaysia

“Fulbright definitely gave me the courage to share and launch some new ideas on my campus, which have turned out to be really meaningful for our students. There’s something about getting a Fulbright that just puts a little wind in your sails – I felt like I had a leg to stand on, and that I had a more receptive audience in the faculty because I’d been selected for such a prestigious academic award. It truly changed my professional trajectory. – **Leigh Lassiter-Counts**, Fulbright International Education Administrator to Germany

“I went to a tiny country, 9,000 miles away from home where I knew nobody...By the end of nine months, I had achieved more than my wildest dreams toward my Fulbright project goals.”- **Annette Jackson**, Fulbright U.S. Scholar to Eswatini

Why does Fulbright matter to you?

“Fulbright programs have not only impacted me personally, but have helped internationalize my campus and bring the world to our students. I believe that if Fulbright had a budget as big as the military’s, we might not need a military!” – **Suzanne LaVenture**, Fulbright International Education Administrator (IEA) to Russia

“It opened my world and gave me the confidence to expect more from myself, and it continues to do those things for others.” – **Vince Redhouse**, Fulbright U.S. Student to Australia

“If there is anything that the pandemic has taught us it is how we are all interconnected on the planet and how only looking out for ourselves cannot work. Isolationism has never been a successful strategy and all the more so today. If we are all interconnected, we desperately need to understand each other...Fulbright is an incredible exchange program, which helps both

Americans and non-Americans bridge the cultural divides.” – **Susan Sharfstein**, Fulbright Global Scholar to Australia and Ireland

“Fulbright is a mechanism to share and learn. The ability to travel to teach, teach, do research and technology transfer may be unavailable through other means for those who are not financially able to fund themselves. Through Fulbright, those who have skills and are willing to share are matched with institutions in need of those skills. This is a definite winner for everyone involved. And clearly, it’s not just the research, the technology transfer, and the teaching. The Fulbrighter and the host country, institution, and people all learn about each other. When the Fulbrighter returns to the U.S. all her future students and colleagues will also be exposed to what she learned as a Fulbrighter. The dividends are endless.”- **Annette Jackson**, Fulbright U.S. Scholar to Eswatini

The Next 75 Years

The Fulbright Program’s impact is far-reaching and diverse. It shapes **health, science, and technology; transforms communities; strengthens education; protects the planet; advances opportunity; strengthens HBCU institutions; celebrates the arts;** highlights **partner organizations** and **Fulbright Commissions; witnesses and builds history; advances public diplomacy, innovates solutions through technology and business,** and **champions international education.**

We look forward to the next generation of Fulbrighters continuing to foster mutual understanding, share knowledge across communities, and improve lives around the world, one connection at a time.



Rachel Murphy (center back), 2020 Fulbright U.S. Student to Spain, on her last day of teaching 4th grade.

What is Big Talk?

Big Talk is a communication approach that facilitates meaningful connections in life—with family, friends, coworkers, classmates, teammates, strangers, and even oneself—by skipping small talk to ask more open-ended and thought-provoking questions. In turn, Big Talk elicits conversations that help people build empathetic relationships and share their life stories.



*Pictured here is Big Talk creator Kalina Silverman, 2017 Fulbright U.S. Student to Singapore and **2019 Alumni Ambassador**.*

Kalina Silverman started Big Talk as a social experiment and video series while studying broadcast journalism at Northwestern University. When she first arrived at Northwestern, she met new

people each day, yet felt a sense of loneliness and disconnection, which inspired her to rethink the way that people communicate with each other. Silverman continued to develop her Big Talk project through her 2017 Fulbright U.S. Student Program award to Singapore, aptly titled: "How to use Big Talk to establish empathy across cultures."