

FULBRIGHT AT 80: NEEDED NOW MORE THAN EVER

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The Fulbright Program recently celebrated its 80th anniversary at a moment when its future cannot be taken for granted. Its record is extraordinary, and its mission—promoting understanding and building international partnerships—is increasingly urgent. Those of us who value the Fulbright Program must act now to protect and strengthen it.

Senator Fulbright created the program that bears his name in the immediate aftermath of World War II. He had a simple but powerful idea: to use the proceeds from the sale of war surplus materials to finance international education and exchange programs, thereby promoting the fundamental understandings and partnerships necessary to build a more peaceful world.

Since the Fulbright Program's inception, the world has changed in ways its founders could not have imagined. Humanity is healthier, wealthier, and longer-lived, with global life expectancy increasing from 46 years to 74 years. The world is also more interconnected and interdependent.

WHAT THE FULBRIGHT PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHED

The Fulbright Program's major accomplishment is the creation of an unrivaled international leadership network that contributed to significant advances in knowledge and global understanding. More than 450,000 individuals from the United States and 160 other countries have participated in this program. Alumni include 44 current or former Heads of State or government and countless leaders of public, private, and civil society organizations. This international network of professional and personal relationships creates dialogue among people with shared experiences and aspirations for the future even when their governments disagree.

In a record unparalleled by other international exchange programs, Fulbright alumni have earned 62 Nobel Prizes, 98 Pulitzer Prizes, and 82 MacArthur Fellowships. These awards reflect exceptional contributions in Science, Economics, Peacebuilding, Literature, and the Arts. Prominent examples include discoveries in DNA, theoretical Physics, Economics, and Public-health innovations. Harrison "Jack" Schmitt may have the most dramatic accomplishment for a Fulbrighter: he is the only scientist to walk on the

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Moon. Together, these achievements demonstrate that international exchange can facilitate research breakthroughs and encourage meaningful creative work by exposing participants to new institutions, innovative collaborations, and diverse perspectives.

A GLOBAL CELEBRATION

On August 1, the global Fulbright community marked the Program's 80th anniversary not only with reflection but also with service. Led by board member Patrice Mouton, the Fulbright Association organized a Global Day of Service to demonstrate a core Fulbright principle: people across countries and cultures can work together to strengthen communities at home and abroad.

In just a few months, with the aid of internet technology, social media, and the global Fulbright community, 119 projects took place in 36 countries. These events were motivated by the goal of making this milestone anniversary a demonstration of the core values of working together to promote understanding across cultures and communities. You can read more about the projects and their results here: [Fulbright Day of Service](#). Our hope is that this will become an annual celebration that demonstrates the enduring impact of the Fulbright Program.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE

In a world increasingly nationalistic, xenophobic, skeptical of higher education, and dubious about research, the Fulbright Program is at risk. One recent example is the July 15, 2026, vote by the U.S. House of Representatives on an amendment to eliminate funding for the Fulbright Program. Fortunately, the proposal, which mirrored the Trump Administration's proposal from the previous year, was defeated by a vote of 348 to 79. This vote reveals that there is considerable bipartisan support in the U.S. Congress for the Fulbright Program, although that support is neither vocal nor visible in this highly charged ideological and political environment.

The next funding challenge to the Program's existence may succeed. Alumni must make their support more visible now and persist in expressing it. Without that, the Fulbright's future will remain vulnerable. Two important steps can help ensure the Program's sustainability: (1) diversifying its funding beyond governments and (2) documenting not only participation and activities but also the short- and long-term effects of individual Fulbright experiences.

A CALL TO ACTION

Fulbright's next 80 years are not guaranteed. Start now by sharing evidence-rich stories with the people who affect Fulbright's present and can shape its future. These include government partners, legislators, university leaders, journalists, foundation officials, and executives from international corporations. Each of our stories should show not merely what a Fulbrighter did but what changed because of that experience and why it mattered.

Sharing stories of impact is why we started the *Fulbright Chronicles*. Contribute an article that documents impact. Ask fellow Fulbrighters to do the same. Contact legislators, government and commission officials, university leaders, and potential funding partners. Show them how Fulbright advances national interests, strengthens competitiveness, builds international partnerships, and sustains a global network committed to understanding across differences.

IN THIS ISSUE

This issue brings together a diverse array of perspectives from Fulbright scholars and global researchers, each examining how local realities intersect with broader systemic forces—whether in food systems, education, diplomacy, or technology.

Feryaz Ocakli analyzes food security staples in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, while Monica Lakhwani reflects on leadership and community communication during her 2025 work in Vietnam. Nathan C. Gehlert compares undergraduate psychology curricula across Vietnamese institutions, focusing on counseling skills development. Nelly M. Robles García and Jack Corbett draw lessons in citizen diplomacy from their Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund project in Mexico's Cuicatlán Valley, emphasizing adaptability and genuine local investment. Jesica Siham Fernández turns to archival research on the Young European Federalists movement in Italy, distilling strategies of transnational solidarity and democratic advocacy for today's youth activism.

Jenny Dorsey, chef and researcher, critiques Singapore's UNESCO-recognized hawker centres, exposing policy contradictions that undermine hawkers' economic viability despite official cultural celebration. Karen Barton, the first Fulbrighter in Cabo Verde, describes how her marine energy research evolved into community-driven water security and disaster response work after a catastrophic flood, reshaping her understanding of diplomacy as grounded listening and relationship-building. George Antoniou details his collaboration at the University of Tirana on an AI and Ethics curriculum and a proposed Cybersecurity Master's program, aligned with EU standards and national priorities.

In book reviews, Erika Waters explores Julia Phillips' *Bear* as a dark retelling of a Grimm fairy tale, probing familial bonds and delusion. Vijay Prakash Singh praises Betsy Bolton's *In the Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon* for its rigorous research while critiquing its unexpectedly sharp examination of Bhutan's democracy, Gross National Happiness, and ethnic tensions. David

Taylor reviews Russell Fielding's book *Breadfruit: Three Global Journeys of a Bountiful Tree* and explores the tree's fascinating global history and its varied present-day uses. Finally, Swayam Sampurna Panigrahi's review of *What We Eat: A Global History of Food* highlights how everyday ingredients carry stories of empire, resistance, labor, migration, and social change—framing food as a living historical archive.

The interview in this issue was conducted by Erika Mariana Almenara and it featured Stephanie Ricker Schulte. It showed her Fulbright English Teaching Assistant experience in Berlin profoundly transformed her worldview, teaching her to embrace compassionate disagreement and build meaningful cross-cultural connections.

Together, these contributions remind us that scholarship is never purely abstract; it is shaped by place, policy, and people. Whether reimagining curricula, preserving culinary heritage, or building transnational networks, the work featured here reflects a shared commitment to listening across difference, adapting to on-the-ground realities, and connecting local struggles to global conversations. We hope these insights inspire continued dialogue and action among our readers. Please take a look at the Call for Contributions that invites our community members to share their concerns and ideas for ensuring the viability of the Fulbright Program.

Fulbright Chronicles invites submissions for an upcoming themed issue titled, "*Changes in the International Order: How best should the Fulbright Community respond?*", which explores how the Fulbright community should respond to a changing international order. We welcome articles and commentaries from Fulbright alumni written for a broad, educated audience. The announcement and its call for contributions can be found at the end of this issue.

As always, we welcome your financial support to cover production costs, web hosting, professional copy editing and other services. Do visit our website to make your kind donations through the available contribution plans. Also, Fulbright alumni interested in serving as book reviewers for FC, should please contact Erika J. Waters (books@fulbright-chronicles.com), the Book Review Editor and join our directory of reviewers.

We thank every contributor, reviewer, and editorial board member for helping *Fulbright Chronicles* become a valued voice both within the Fulbright network and in the wider academic world.