

FULBRIGHT CHRONICLES

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WEST AFRICA • AGRICULTURE • SOFT DIPLOMACY •
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• MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING • COLLABORATION • COMMUNITY •
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• YOUTH • ACTIVISM • SOCIOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENT • HISTORY • FOOD
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SOUTHEAST ASIA • HAWKER CENTERS • FOOD STUDIES • FOOD POLICY •
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The journal provides a welcoming space for Fulbrighters to share their work and reflections on global issues with a broad audience. It features thoughtful, accessible articles that reflect on how Fulbright experiences have contributed to knowledge and cross-cultural understanding, or that comment on contemporary issues that affect the Fulbright program or cultural and educational exchange more broadly.

The *Fulbright Chronicles* can only succeed with the engagement of the Fulbright community. The editors strongly encourage Fulbrighters to contribute articles or commentaries on topics related to your research and practice and the critical issues of our times. Author Guidelines are available on our website (www.fulbright-chronicles.com).

The journal is an independent publication, overseen by the Editorial Board members. For further information, visit the *Fulbright Chronicles* site (www.fulbright-chronicles.com).

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FULBRIGHT AT 80: NEEDED NOW MORE THAN EVER

KEVIN F. F. QUIGLEY, HABIBA I. ATTA, MELANIE C. BROOKS,
BRUCE B. SVARE

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

"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."

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.

ARTICLES

FROM DISASTER TO DIPLOMACY: FIELD NOTES FROM THE FIRST FULBRIGHT IN CABO VERDE

KAREN S. BARTON

ABSTRACT

As the first Fulbright Scholar in Cabo Verde, I arrived knowing that my role would be both energizing and uncertain. What began as a maritime geography proposal developed into a broader engagement with agriculture, water harvesting, and emergency coordination after the unprecedented August 11, 2025 flood event. This experience reshaped my mid-career trajectory with a greater focus on peace and diplomacy, demonstrating that Fulbright programs can redirect even established scholars, opening unanticipated directions in teaching, research, and international collaboration.

Keywords: West Africa • Agriculture • Soft diplomacy • Education • Disaster response



INTRODUCTION

When I received word of my Fulbright Scholar award to Cabo Verde, I understood immediately that the assignment carried unusual weight. I would not only conduct research but also inaugurate the program in a country that had never before hosted a U.S. Fulbright Scholar. The U.S. Embassy in Praia played a central role in preparing me for that responsibility, offering practical guidance and contextual insight on how to engage in an academic partnership where none yet existed. Their engagement made the task of being the first feel less solitary and more collaborative. With no predecessors to consult and no existing framework to follow, every decision became part of a larger act of translation between systems of knowledge and expectation. I was ready for the task.

Being the first Fulbrighter in any country carries a certain dual responsibility: to represent a program's ideals while helping to define its local shape. In Cabo Verde, this meant serving not only as a researcher but also as a bridge between institutions, a facilitator of mutual understanding, and at times an informal cultural ambassador. Every exchange, whether with faculty, administrators, or community leaders, was part of a broader introduction, not only to me as an individual but to the Fulbright mission itself. This sense of responsibility gave the experience both gravity and creative freedom. With no established template, there was room to imagine what an exchange could look like in a small island nation navigating globalization, climate change, and educational reform. When the opportunity in Cabo Verde appeared, a newly opened

program in a country that had never hosted a Fulbright U.S. Scholar, I felt an immediate sense of possibility. What had once seemed a professional detour soon became a chance to contribute to something foundational, to help shape what Fulbright could mean in a new national context.

Before my departure and in preparation for the grant, I studied the marine geography, renewable energy initiatives, and political ecology of the islands, drawing on prior work in nearby Senegal. That earlier regional experience, supported through both a Fulbright-Hays award and a National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship, had deepened my understanding of the Atlantic and Sahelian interface and provided a useful comparative framework for Cabo Verde. Yet even with that foundation, the daily realities of island life required a new kind of adaptation. Cabo Verde lies roughly 350 miles west of Senegal and comprises ten volcanic islands, each with its own dialect, rhythm, and microclimate. Santiago hosts the capital, Praia; São Vicente, where I was based, is known for its maritime history; neighboring islands range from the green terraces of Santo Antão to the flat, arid landscapes of Sal and Boa Vista. Historically an Atlantic crossroads for Portuguese navigation and a hub of migration connecting Europe, Africa, and the Americas, the archipelago's daily life is defined by the ocean—and its survival by the absence of rain. Geography demands adaptation, an idea that would come to shape every dimension of my Fulbright work.

My project was anchored at the Atlantic Technical University (UTA) under the leadership of my host, President João do Monte Duarte, where I planned to study marine ecosystems and renewable energy. I anticipated spending most of my time at sea. However, within weeks my attention shifted to the arid interior landscapes and the people striving to sustain them. In addition to my academic research for a book project, I taught English at the Mindelo “American Space,” a U.S. government-supported initiative that fostered dialogue and cross-cultural exchange.

FROM THE SEA TO LAND

In the early weeks, the gap between my original proposal and local priorities quickly became clear. Water dominated nearly every conversation with community leaders, given the way it shapes both everyday livelihoods and outlooks. On São Vicente, residents spoke more about the absence of water than the abundance of ocean. I began to reconsider how my Fulbright could respond to this reality, drawing on support from colleagues at UTA to explore low-cost, decentralized technologies for capturing water and energy.

My initial focus was on fog-collection systems, simple mesh installations that harvest moisture from passing clouds at altitude. Already used in parts of North Africa and South America as well as on the island of Santiago, these systems offered promise for Cabo Verde's highland microclimates. Working with local mechanical engineer Dr. Marco Cruz, we assessed optimal placement, material availability, and maintenance feasibility on the island of Santo Antão. Our goal was not to import solutions but to identify what could

be adapted, scaled, and sustained locally. With the same UTA colleague, I also studied small-scale biodigesters and other decentralized energy systems, finding parallels between rural Cabo Verde and rural Colorado and identifying ways biodigesters could complement local waste-management and agricultural practices. Dr. Cruz's technical insight and collaborative spirit strengthened our research and later became central to several joint grant proposals. It led to detailed field notes and new project ideas connecting water harvesting, soil restoration, and renewable energy.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND WRITING

The American Space in Mindelo, where I taught English, quickly became more than a workspace; it evolved into a center for discussion and coordination. Here I collaborated with graduate students from across disciplines (including elementary education, environmental studies, and poetry) and one of them would later join a writing project with me. At the same time, I coached several members of the local dive crew and neighborhood youth in long-distance ocean swimming. What began as a casual request turned into regular lessons that combined technical training with ocean safety, communication, and teamwork.

These interpersonal relationships expanded my understanding of community resilience and informal education, illustrating how learning often takes place beyond classrooms or formal institutions. I also dedicated much of my Fulbright period to writing, developing chapters for a forthcoming book and producing numerous grant applications for National Geographic, the US Embassy, and the University of Northern Colorado (UNC). Most of these proposals focused on linking water and energy security to sustainable livelihoods which would, in turn, prevent outmigration. Other proposals explored ways to connect Cabo Verde to regional research networks across West Africa. Writing became both a form of analysis and a way to build institutional capacity for local partners.

THE FLOOD OF AUGUST 11

On August 11, the arc of my Fulbright would shift dramatically as the island of São Vicente experienced an unprecedented storm. Torrential rains transformed streets into rivers, eroded roads, and flooded low-lying neighborhoods. The system that later intensified into Hurricane Erin had reached us in its formative stage. Because of prior work in disaster management in Nepal with the Institute for Crisis Management Studies, I was drawn into local coordination efforts for disaster recovery. Students, divers, and neighborhood volunteers organized cleanup and response teams. We cleared debris, assisted older residents, and relayed information to the US Embassy in Praia, which became a crucial communication hub across islands. After the waters receded, colleagues and I created our own community impact network, bringing together collaborators from Cabo Verde and around the world using WhatsApp. The network grew from informal exchanges into a

global coalition of faculty, students, and NGOs dedicated to preparedness and recovery. Though entirely unfunded, it functioned through shared commitment and open communication. I believe this collaboration, more than any planned research activity, embodied the Fulbright mission: intercultural understanding, service, and partnership in the face of uncertainty. What began as fieldwork became an exercise in diplomacy under pressure, teaching me that crisis management is central—not peripheral—to understanding how communities' function amid unpredictability.

BUILDING A WEST AFRICAN NETWORK

Following the storm, the US Embassy supported my plan to create broader regional engagement and build bridges. While many Cape Verdeans maintain cultural ties to Portugal and the United States, contact with mainland Africa remains limited because of transport constraints and historical orientations. Working with the Embassy and UTA, I organized a delegation from Mindelo to Dakar, Senegal, where I had previously completed a Fulbright-Hays program. The visit was designed to bring together institutions confronting similar challenges in renewable energy and dryland agriculture. For some, it was their first journey to the African mainland, carrying deep emotional significance. Back in Cabo Verde, we collaborated on multiple grant proposals to sustain these partnerships. Through this process, UTA established an enduring relationship with my home institution, the University of Northern Colorado. Although our geographic contexts differ (an island nation and a landlocked rural region) both communities face analogous concerns related to aridity, soil degradation, and migration. The collaboration showed that exchange can occur horizontally, between peers confronting similar ecological challenges, rather than only vertically through donor frameworks.

“What began as fieldwork became an exercise in diplomacy under pressure.”

WORKING IN AN ARCHIPELAGO

Conducting research and coordination across an archipelago required enormous patience and flexibility. Inter-island travel was often disrupted, cargo shipments delayed, and meetings dependent on the unpredictable schedules of ferries and flights. I learned to see these interruptions not as problems but as intrinsic to island life, shifting from in-person meetings to phone calls, or from formal lectures to outdoor discussions under shade trees. Isolation was a more personal challenge, but over time, reliance on colleagues, neighbors, and students created a new form of community, and collaboration came to feel like both a technical and a social skill.

FROM FIELDWORK TO DIPLOMACY

The flood response and the resulting collaboration with the US Embassy has also profoundly influenced my professional goals. Watching diplomats manage crises and weigh logistical constraints against human needs showed me that diplomacy is less a distant profession than a practical tool grounded in strong communication and empathy. Upon returning to the United States, I decided to pursue formal study in peace and diplomacy. I was accepted into the Rotary Peace Fellowship at Makerere University in Uganda, a competitive program culminating in a social-change initiative. My project builds directly on the Cabo Verde experience, linking my Colorado campus with West African partners to foster training in mediation and environmental dialogue. I also enrolled in the University for Peace and UNITAR Graduate Certificate in Diplomacy and Development, a United Nations–affiliated program that emphasizes negotiation, conflict prevention, and sustainable development. Together, these programs let me integrate environmental geography with peace studies, extending my focus from analysis to application. My long-term objective is to establish a Center for Citizen Science, Peace, and Diplomacy connecting Colorado and West Africa through research, teaching, and community engagement. The center would use geographic analysis, mapping, and participatory dialogue to support constructive exchanges across cultural and environmental boundaries. The inspiration for this effort traces directly to the Fulbright experience in Cabo Verde, where diplomacy emerged not as an abstract skill but as a grounded practice of listening, translating, and coordinating amid uncertainty.

REFLECTIONS ON IMPACT AND CONTINUITY

Cabo Verde revealed that adaptation is both environmental and human. Projects such as fog nets and decentralized systems reflected physical resilience, but the deeper experiment was social learning to collaborate across unfamiliar institutions and cultures. Each challenge, from resource scarcity to isolation, required improvisation and humility. Working with the Embassy reshaped my understanding of education and leadership. Diplomacy, I realized, extends beyond government practice; it occurs whenever people bridge differences to pursue shared goals. The move from disaster management to diplomacy was not a career shift but a natural evolution. Geography, I learned, includes the spaces between people as much as the land itself.

These lessons now shape how I teach and mentor. Geography for me has become inseparable from empathy and negotiation, informed by the realities of limited infrastructure and diverse perspectives. Collaboration often meant adapting to context—teaching outdoors when power failed, finding bilingual ways to share science, and learning how students linked environmental change to family history. These experiences showed that global learning begins with the realities of place, and that resilience and diplomacy share a common root in care, built through listening, trust, and sustained relationships.

CONCLUSION

Serving as the first Fulbrighter in Cabo Verde was both a privilege and a challenge. It meant representing a global program while constructing its foundation locally. What began as a study of maritime systems gradually became an inquiry into human networks, the ways knowledge circulates between sea and soil, laboratory and community, island and world. The experience reaffirmed that international exchange succeeds not through rigid adherence to plans but through openness to adaptation. From the fog-collection ridges to the flood-recovery brigades, my community-engaged work underscored that collaboration and empathy form the social infrastructure of global engagement. Fulbright did more than extend my professional path; it transformed it. It reminded me that reinvention remains possible at any career stage and that the spirit of exchange is as relevant in midlife as it is at the beginning of an academic journey. The transition from disaster to diplomacy began on a small Atlantic island, yet its lessons will continue to shape how I teach, conduct research, and build partnerships across communities today.

FURTHER READING

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BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Karen S. Barton is a geographer and educator advancing community-based climate solutions. A Senior Faculty Member at the University of Northern Colorado, she teaches climate change, sustainability, and geographic literacy. Her research explores community adaptation and disaster resilience in Cabo Verde, including fog harvesting and local coordination. Author of two books on natural disasters and human impacts, she blends geography, storytelling, and participatory research to amplify underrepresented voices. A Rotary Peace Fellow and Fellow of The Explorers Club and Royal Geographical Society, she is funded by Fulbright, the Swiss Red Cross, and the National Endowment for the Humanities. She can be reached at Karen.Barton@unco.edu.

TEACHING ACROSS TRADITIONS: LESSONS FROM VIETNAM

NATHAN C. GEHLERT

ABSTRACT

Teaching counseling skills in Vietnam required me to re-think assumptions about pedagogy. My experience began at Fulbright University Vietnam, where interactive methods translated seamlessly. That success bred confidence, but in the fall, the same course at Vietnam National University met silence and hesitation, revealing how deeply culture shapes learning. Infusing practice with cultural humility, I adapted my approach and deepened mutual understanding, an enduring lesson that continues to shape my work and advance Fulbright's mission.



Keywords: Vietnam • Pedagogy • Counseling • Motivational interviewing

INTRODUCTION

I still remember the silence. It was my first day teaching a counseling techniques course in the new master's program in clinical psychology at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (USSH), Vietnam National University Ho Chi Minh City. I explained a counseling skill and asked students to practice in small groups. Instead of movement and conversation, there were blank stares and hesitant glances; on one face, I recognized the shine of tears. The room was long and narrow. Ceiling fans droned, circulating the hot air. The microphone crackled. A space that should have invited dialogue felt heavy and still.

In that moment, I realized that my years of teaching in the United States, and even my earlier experience at Fulbright University Vietnam, had not prepared me for this classroom. I had entered the semester confident in my preparation and hopeful about my contribution as a Fulbrighter. I was also, if I am honest, carrying an assumption that what had worked well in one Vietnamese university would work as well in another. The silence unsettled that assumption. It asked me to consider whether my teaching practices presumed a set of norms about participation, risk, and authority that did not match the tradition my students had inherited.

That moment became the starting point for a different approach. If counseling and psychology education aim to cultivate the capacity to create safety for others, I needed to begin by creating it in my own classroom. To do that, I would have to adapt my methods, learn from my students, and allow the experience to reshape my understanding of how people learn.

CONTEXT: MENTAL HEALTH IN VIETNAM

To understand my teaching experiences in context, it is important to situate them within the broader history of psychology and mental health in Vietnam. For much of the twentieth century, psychology was not recognized as a distinct discipline. Psychiatry, often limited to hospital-based care for severe mental illness, dominated the landscape, while counseling and psychotherapy were scarcely available. Only in recent decades have universities begun to develop formal programs in clinical psychology, and these remain few.

Even as awareness has grown, access remains limited. Vietnam has fewer than 1,000 psychiatrists serving a population of nearly 100 million, and trained counselors and psychologists are far fewer still. Outside of major cities, most people have little or no access to professional care. Stigma compounds this scarcity. Mental illness is often hidden, managed quietly within families, and counseling is sometimes viewed as unnecessary or even suspicious. For students in emerging university programs, this means they carry not only the responsibility of mastering clinical skills but also that of helping to shape a new field in the face of cultural hesitation.

My own involvement in this context predates my Fulbright. Beginning in 2015, I traveled to Vietnam regularly for short-term teaching and consulting, first at USSH. Over the course of six visits, I taught courses, observed local classrooms, and began to understand the resilience of Vietnamese students as well as the systemic challenges they faced. These visits gradually developed into an institutional exchange between USSH and my home university, John Carroll University in Cleveland, Ohio. What began as a short-term visiting lecturer role expanded into a recurring program that brought students and faculty from the two institutions into collaboration.

This five-year history meant that when I returned as a Fulbrighter in 2022–2023, I was stepping into an ongoing relationship rather than beginning a new one. The Fulbright year did not introduce me to Vietnam; it deepened and transformed a connection that had already been unfolding for years, giving me the chance to engage more fully in the teaching challenges and opportunities I had only glimpsed before.

TEACHING IN A GLOBALIZED UNIVERSITY

My Fulbright year began in the summer of 2022 at Fulbright University Vietnam (FUV), a young institution modeled on the American liberal arts tradition. There, I designed and introduced a counseling skills course into the undergraduate psychology curriculum, providing students with their first sustained opportunity to practice counseling skills in a structured setting. FUV students are admitted not only for academic excellence but also for qualities such as initiative, creativity, and community engagement. Their English proficiency was high. The classrooms were modern, designed for interaction, and equipped with technology that supported dialogue.

From the first day, students entered the room ready to ask questions, discuss, and experiment. Group work required no explanation. At times, they even offered direct feedback about what was and was not working in the course, which created opportunities for adjustment and dialogue. The same assessments I had used in the United States, including reflective writing, knowledge checks, and video demonstrations, yielded strong performance. In several instances, the results from these undergraduate students exceeded the benchmarks I had observed among the American graduate students I was used to teaching.

This experience affirmed what becomes possible when classrooms are designed for dialogue. From day one, we could build the course around deliberate practice that develops early professional identity through both mastering techniques and reflecting on their ethical and cultural use. I left the summer confident that these methods would transfer easily. That confidence, I later learned, needed recalibration.

TEACHING IN A CONFUCIAN TRADITION

In the fall of 2022, I moved across town to USSH to adapt and teach the same course, this time in a new master's program in clinical psychology. I had helped shape the course's introduction into the curriculum, ensuring that students in this pioneering graduate program could engage with counseling skills training alongside their study of theory. The students were older, some pursuing psychology as a second career. Their admission reflected strong academic achievement on competitive exams, and they brought discipline and seriousness to their studies. Their classroom behavior, however, reflected a tradition of learning in which knowledge is transmitted by the teacher and received by the student. Questioning the instructor was uncommon. Volunteering, especially in front of peers, carried social risk. When participation was framed as a test of competence rather than a path to it, silence could function as protection.

The physical environment reinforced those dynamics. The classroom was long and narrow, designed for lectures, not for movement. The microphone, with a short cord, anchored conversation at the front of the room. Language added another layer. I had been told that I could teach in English, yet comprehension varied widely. We brought in an interpreter, which helped but slowed the rhythm of exchange. Pauses that would have been brief in a first-language setting became elongated, and momentum was difficult to sustain.

It was in this setting that my first group activity fell flat. The silence that followed was not resistance but a rational response within a particular cultural frame. For me, however, the contrast with FUV was jarring. Methods that had succeeded so naturally in the summer now failed, and the setback forced me to see what I had overlooked. My U.S. teaching experience—and even my early Fulbright semester at FUV—had not prepared me for this environment.

The recognition was humbling and useful. Rather than lowering expectations, I chose to anchor the course in mutual respect and to build in scaffolding that made participation possible. The goal remained unchanged; what needed to change was the path, one that had to align with the traditions my students carried into the classroom.

LESSONS IN HUMILITY AND CHANGE

My adjustments had several parts. The pace slowed, and activities were broken into smaller steps. I came to see that explanation was not enough. I began modeling the skills directly so students could see and hear them in practice. Whole-class exercises shifted to pairs or trios, which reduced the social risk of practice. Brief lectures alternated with structured, time-limited exercises, balancing the comfort of receiving information with the gains of experiential learning. Awkwardness was named as a predictable feature of trying new skills in public, not a marker of failure.

Helpful alignment also emerged between these pedagogical shifts and the counseling approach at the center of the course. I was teaching the course using the framework of Motivational Interviewing, a counseling method grounded in empathy and partnership rather than persuasion. The philosophy behind Motivational Interviewing reminded me that teaching, like counseling, is most effective when both parties bring essential expertise. I held specialized knowledge; students held cultural expertise. Learning would require us to meet as partners.

“Teaching, like counseling, is most effective when both parties bring essential expertise. I held specialized knowledge; students held cultural expertise.”

Over time, evidence accumulated that the approach was working. In one assignment, students submitted short videos in which one student served as counselor and another as client, sharing a real concern appropriate for class. The first set of videos surprised me. Techniques were applied with care, and core skills were visible. As expected in early training, interpersonal style still needed time to develop naturalness and flow. The classroom’s quiet had obscured a more faithful story: students were practicing diligently.

Not every plan succeeded. A hoped-for co-teaching arrangement, intended to build local capacity to sustain the course in the curriculum, did not materialize; the role shifted toward interpretation rather than joint pedagogy. Looking back, I also wonder if more bilingual resources or culturally grounded examples might have eased participation further. The lesson was familiar and exacting: durable programs require time, consistent investment, and faculty who can carry the work forward within their institutional cultures.

Most importantly, my internal stance recalibrated. Moments of discomfort became data. When an activity stalled, it signaled a need for additional scaffolding; when students hesitated, it pointed to the need for more psychological safety. The guiding question shifted from “Why are students not moving toward my plan?” to “How can the plan move toward the students?” That shift continues to guide my teaching today.

ENDURING IMPACT

The impact of these experiences has been personal, pedagogical, and institutional. Personally, my posture in the classroom is more deliberate. I assume that struggle often signals effort, not apathy. I design for safety and challenge in tandem, and I build courses around structured practice that links technique to humane care. This stance reflects a lifelong commitment to Fulbright’s mission: building mutual understanding through sustained, people-to-people work.

Pedagogically, the experience clarified the importance of explicit skills training in counseling and psychology education. In many Vietnamese programs, theory still receives more time and attention than practice. By embedding structured role-plays, video assignments, and supervised feedback into my courses, I saw students not only grasp techniques but also begin to imagine themselves as counselors. Some of my former USSH students, now working as psychologists or educators, have told me years later that they continue to draw on the lessons of that first course. One explained that when she sits with a client, she often recalls the structure of the practice dialogues we used in class.

At Fulbright University Vietnam, the Counseling Techniques course, renamed Person-Centered Counseling, has become a permanent fixture of the psychology curriculum. Students who take it now enter internships and professional settings with tools that give them a head start in a field that is still being built. One undergraduate recently completed an internship placement at an international school, where she used Motivational Interviewing strategies to support adolescents navigating academic stress. Her supervisor noted that she brought a level of professionalism unusual for someone so early in training. Stories like hers illustrate how early skills-based preparation is beginning to ripple outward into the institutions where students work.

Institutionally, FUV participates in a broader national effort to strengthen psychology education. The continuity of this course within a liberal arts framework represents one modest contribution, but the intention is larger: to prepare graduates who can connect evidence-based methods with Vietnam’s cultural realities. For me, that is citizen diplomacy. Fulbright made it possible to share a set of practices while receiving perspectives that refined them. The year was not an ending but a beginning. By accepting a full-time appointment at FUV, I committed to continuing this work beyond the grant period and to supporting the first generation of psychologists being trained in Vietnam.

LOOKING AHEAD

I return often to the memory of that day at USSH, to the silence that felt so heavy. At the time, it read like failure. Now I understand it as an invitation. It asked me to listen more closely to the room, to attend to the effort and vulnerability that participation requires in different contexts, and to find ways to make that risk feel possible. It also reminded me that growth in teaching, as in counseling, proceeds by small, deliberate steps that are repeated and refined.

The future of psychology in Vietnam will be built by students who are learning today to combine sound theory with compassionate practice. Their success will depend on many factors. Among them will be the willingness of educators to adapt methods to local realities and to treat cultural differences not as an obstacle but as a guide. My Fulbright year did not resolve those questions. It gave me better ones to ask and a clearer path to follow.

I am grateful for the colleagues and students who have allowed me to learn alongside them. The work continues, and so does the commitment: to infuse teaching with cultural humility, to pair practical skill with reflective purpose, and to advance Fulbright's mission of mutual understanding in the everyday discipline of the classroom.

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Dr. Nathan Gehlert with psychology students at
Fulbright University Vietnam.

BIOGRAPHY

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EXTENDING ENGAGEMENT BEYOND FAMILIAR FULBRIGHTS

NELLY M. ROBLES GARCÍA AND JACK CORBETT



ABSTRACT

Many ex-Fulbrighters interested in maintaining engagement abroad overlook opportunities such as the Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund, supporting applied projects encouraging cross-national collaboration. A binational team worked with a multicultural mix of small communities in Mexico's Cuicatlán Valley toward developing a framework for cooperation by staging a cultural fair. The fair shared knowledge, contributed to an awareness of common interests, and promoted interaction with outside supporters, thereby nurturing the Ruta del Río Grande.



Keywords: Collaboration • Community • Cuicatlán Valley • Cultural fair • Innovation

INTRODUCTION

Presumably most readers are familiar with traditional Fulbright Scholar Awards, i.e., those supporting study/teaching/research abroad or, for non-Americans, in the United States. And many will recognize awards targeted to specific activities or publics, such as Fulbright Specialist Awards, Fulbright Arctic Initiative, or Fulbright-Fogarty Awards in Public Health. Beyond these lie awards open only to alumni of the multiple programs of the State Department's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA), including ex-Fulbrighters. Less well known, the Citizen Diplomacy Action Fund (CDAF) and the Alumni Engagement Innovation Fund (AEIF) are competitive awards open to teams of two or more ECA alumni focusing on a specific topic or initiative designed to enhance community capacity, support organizational problem-solving, or extend the impact of a Fulbright or other ECA-sponsored experience. They encourage engagement in an applied fashion, fostering multiple forms of collaboration. Here we discuss how one such effort drew upon Fulbright experience to propose, develop, shepherd, and ultimately expand an AEIF project.

CONTEXT

In 2018, twenty years after Mexico established the Tehuacán-Cuicatlán Biosphere Reserve, UNESCO declared it a World Heritage Site. Spanning approximately 490,000 semi-arid hectares along the Puebla-Oaxaca border, the reserve was recognized not only for its biological diversity but also for human achievements in domesticating food plants, managing scarce water resources, and establishing complex cultural systems under demanding conditions. Despite these accomplishments, the scattered communities supporting much of the regional population lived a near-subsistence existence,

with marginality and out-migration as continuing challenges. Fragmented by linguistic and cultural differences and with limited support from state and national governments, these communities had few opportunities to identify or pursue initiatives to improve their circumstances. The World Heritage designation by itself proved insufficient to mobilize resources or encourage innovation.

Nevertheless, scattered efforts suggested developmental potential. The National Commission for Natural Protected Areas (CONANP), charged with managing the Biosphere Reserve, occasionally worked with some communities on specific projects, and the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) undertook limited attempts to address archaeological remains. The Foundation for the Cuicatlán Biosphere Reserve, a small foundation in the Cuicatlán Valley, also created modest initiatives. Unfortunately, a lack of resources and coordination thwarted any serious regional impact. Only in 2021 did a small grant from American Express finance a preliminary assessment of possible collaboration for the creation of the Ruta del Río Grande, an ecotourism proposal linking communities along the Río Grande, the principal watercourse in the valley.

ENTER THE AEIF

In early 2024, a binational team of ex-Fulbrighters submitted a proposal to that year's AEIF competition (besides the authors, the team included Anabel Lopez Salinas, International Funders for Indigenous Peoples; Verónica Pérez Rodríguez, SUNY-Albany; and Marcia Medrano Serrano, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura). The proposal sought to address the challenge of cross-community collaboration by bringing the communities together around a joint project. While the seven prospective participants in the Ruta del Río Grande did not have antagonistic relationships, their insular natures meant there was little history of cooperation—at best a superficial awareness. Some identified as Mixtec or Cuicatec, one was traditionally Mazatec, and another was an Afro-mestizo community descended from slaves imported to work a colonial sugar plantation. Some communities were best known for craft or gastronomic traditions, others for biological or archaeological resources. No single community could attract many visitors based on its specific assets but taken together they could offer a rich experience in a region little known to outsiders. How to encourage such innovation?

After some thought and discussion with residents, the team proposed staging a regional cultural fair. One advantage would be drawing on known resources, such as recognized archaeological resources in three communities or crafts in others. A second advantage was that it was specific and finite; it would take place in a given location at a defined moment, with clear tasks, expectations, and outcomes. And third, it would enable people to learn about each other, establishing some basis for interaction and a broader awareness. This was particularly important because one purpose of the fair was to promote linkages among communities, not with team members. Thus, from

the beginning there needed to be a sense of joint purpose and commonality, a perspective more easily articulated than cultivated. While promoting a fair received broad support, making it happen required a major investment of energy and continuing adaptation. This became more pressing with notification in spring 2024 that the proposal had been accepted.

CREATING A FRAMEWORK

The first critical matter was creating a viable organizational framework to do the basic lifting. Cuicatlán villages have internal committees for managing their resources, so it made sense to turn to them to select their respective cultural fair committees. Yet communities have very specific processes for committee selection, and individuals selected were not necessarily people prepared for or interested in serving on such a body. In two cases, no local committee ever materialized, but fortunately *ad hoc* substitutes stepped forward out of personal interest. In some cases, the resource committees themselves assumed the role. Some fair committees understood their tasks, while others did not or sidestepped them.

A second key step was to organize a series of training workshops around the broader topic of the Ruta del Río Grande, linking the purposes of the fair with the more general concept. At first each committee sat together, but deliberate mixing, though received warily, gradually led to more open and informal exchange. As committee members recognized commonalities or distinctive features, discussion flowed more smoothly, with participants interacting with each other instead of with the AEIF team. In contrast, attempts to form advisory committees of state and federal officials went nowhere. The intent was to help link communities with agencies at higher levels, but their personnel were either busy or uninterested. With the federal government channeling its funding to major infrastructure projects, and the Oaxaca state government following the federal lead, there was little incentive to attend to a minor project from a low-priority region.

By fall 2024, the cultural fair had begun to take shape. The date would tentatively be July 5, 2025, in Cuicatlán, the largest of the valley communities. Early indications suggested twelve to fifteen exhibitors, roughly half from the communities, the rest from CONANP, INAH, and a few other organizations. Local committees encouraged participation, addressed logistics, and joined occasional training sessions. Plans moved forward slowly but steadily.

Then disaster struck. At the end of January 2025, the U.S. Embassy notified the AEIF team that all financial support had been frozen by the incoming administration, with no indication of when or if it would be released. Community reactions ranged from distressed to a sense of betrayal. As weeks dragged by, village committees began to lose hope, seeing this as one more case of outsiders making promises, then walking away. It was difficult to explain why a government seeking to reduce migration would

torpedo a project that could help accomplish it. Suddenly, in mid-April, the funds reappeared, but the fair had lost momentum and there was no way to hold a July event. After much consultation, it was rescheduled for September 6, in the desperate hope that the time and energy invested could be recovered.

BREAKTHROUGHS

But luck had changed. First, committees collaborated on a video addressing the Ruta del Río Grande and dimensions of community life. Successful completion would include a world premiere at the fair. Second, the Oaxaca state Secretary of Culture became interested in the project. Ultimately, he provided access to state facilities, a series of arts workshops, and a contingent of state police to ensure public safety. He also provided pre-fair publicity on the state television channel and statewide broadcast of the video on September 7. Third, the delay increased regional discussion regarding the fair and its potential significance. Opportunities to engage other publics emerged, from non-Ruta communities, educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, and even media from Mexico City. In the process, the cultural fair transmuted from a modest community effort to an expression of regional aspirations.

The substantial, unexpected expansion of interest in the fair put considerable strain on the time and energy of the AEIF team and a number of local volunteers, and at midnight on September 5 they were still putting final arrangements in place. But the fair went off without a hitch except for a rather substantial traffic jam in the immediate vicinity. Vendors arrived from fifty miles away, carloads of curious visitors made the two-hour drive from the city of Oaxaca, and the U.S. Embassy, underscoring its AEIF seed money, sent a delegation and presided over the video premiere. The twelve to fifteen exhibitors originally anticipated mushroomed to forty-five officially registered, plus a fluctuating number of food vendors who simply occupied spaces on the periphery. Craft producers and organization representatives shared experiences and invitations. The video impressed the audience, with Minister Counselor Silvio I. Gonzalez of the Embassy distributing copies to all the communities, and the film's director announcing that it would be entered in several international festivals.

RIPPLE EFFECTS

Community committee members expressed surprise, satisfaction, and occasionally awe at what they had accomplished. And in fact, they accomplished more than these numbers suggest, as the buzz of activity in the months prior to the fair encouraged others to take positive steps. Rotary Clubs from Mexico City initiated water retention and irrigation projects in several communities. The Banamex Cultural Foundation conducted an assessment of possible artisanry workshops in various communities. The Mellon Foundation financed a visitor center for an important cave painting site in the community of Dominguillo, while INAH announced funding of archaeological restoration in Quotepec. And other possibilities are under

consideration, including a community museum in Jaltepetongo. In 2024, the cultural fair was seen as a stand-alone project. Now people refer to the Ruta del Río Grande Initiative, reflecting a sense that these and other efforts should be understood as a coordinated vision for the Cuicatlán Valley.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Just as scholarly Fulbrights anticipate periods of reflection after a period abroad, so too do AEIF and CDAF awards. Careful planning and performance expectations confront unanticipated circumstances, and a team's adaptive capacity may be tested outside the boundaries of proposal design. Although the AEIF team totaled more than one hundred years of field experience in rural communities, we still encountered complex challenges. While we brought different professional backgrounds to the project, the commonality of Fulbright participation, i.e., an appreciation of the centrality of addressing personal relationships, gave us a bond and pathway for moving forward. This awareness is crucial for citizen vis-à-vis institutional diplomacy.

First, *allow for human complexity*. Assumptions regarding the uniformity of social categories, e.g., Indigenous communities or levels of education, can lead to a flattening of descriptions concealing critical variations, in effect producing stereotypes obscuring much more than they reveal. Even small villages may include contending factions, strong leaders, shifting coalitions, pervasive apathy, self-interested cliques, and external alliances. Much of our time was devoted to sorting through, courting, neutralizing, and otherwise managing relationships with subpopulations bringing to the project concerns secondary to us but central to them.

Second, *explanation and exhortation are insufficient*. Groups and communities often have been bombarded by outsiders telling them what to do; they want allies making investments in them, not vice versa. When direct participation counts, there are no substitutes for sweat equity and blisters. What kind of investment are you willing to make to gain legitimacy for your position?

Third, *look for allies*. The AEIF project was well-framed and promised local payoffs. Nevertheless, its success was far from certain without collaboration from allies lacking formal credentials but well versed in community dynamics. They may possess local knowledge, clarify ambiguities, assess options, provide access and warnings, and otherwise smooth the way. Some allies may be predictable; others appear suddenly or must be corralled.

Fourth, *be careful of allies*. Conversely, allies may be allies but with their own agendas. Indeed, a willingness to serve as an ally may have less to do with their engagement with your proposal and more to do with your potential value for their agenda. We found one ally was willing to support us precisely because we could serve as a resource for someone that ally was courting in turn. An uncritical search for allies might produce a counterproductive alliance.

"They want allies making investments in them, not vice versa. When direct participation counts, there are no substitutes for sweat equity and blisters."

Fifth, *weigh potential multiplier effects*. Attempting to mount a viable, coherent project is a challenge in itself without flights of fancy or wandering by chance into additional commitments. Nevertheless, it pays to be attentive to ways in which a project with one focus leads to potential further opportunities. Most of those mentioned under **Ripple Effects** have at some point called, or will call, on this AEIF team for advice and assistance. What can we reasonably do?

Sixth, *beware of time commitments*. Project participation offers a solid alternative to longer, more extensive projects pursued under a traditional Fulbright application. Again, definition and design presumably impose constraints. Yet the complexity and institutional considerations bounding full-scale Fulbrights are less evident in projects, making it easier to stray into arenas that consume time without yielding the returns hoped for under the cover of a Fulbright award.

Seventh, *always have a Plan B*. Recognize that projects rarely have smooth sailing, and it is common to confront an unexpected dilemma; the cultural fair confronted three.

One was the suspension of funds and associated uncertainty. Cancellation might have ended the Ruta del Río Grande, but drift was almost as bad. Patchwork held the project together at the cost of great stress. Another was the overt disappearance of two fair committees. Networks cultivated in anticipation of the situation created acceptable *ad hoc* workarounds. A third was the difficulty outside collaborators had in understanding communities banding together for voluntary action and unpaid service. They repeatedly complained that the locals were “investing nothing,” failing to recognize the enormous contribution such participation provided. This required constant reminders of the long-term benefits of collective effort for regional integration.

The emerging initiative requires far more effort, resources, and commitment than envisioned, but the Ruta del Río Grande is alive and moving forward. A regional visitor facility and a fair celebrating the valley’s heritage and potential as a fruit-production center are currently on our future projects list. And it all started with an AEIF award.

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Community committees planning cultural fair logistics.

BIOGRAPHY

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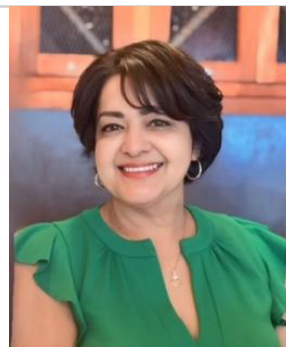
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RESILIENCE IN HANOI: LESSONS IN LEADERSHIP, CULTURE, AND CONNECTION

MONICA LAKHWANI

ABSTRACT

This Fulbright reshaped my understanding of leadership through cultural immersion, indirect communication, and flexible planning. A Hanoi typhoon became a symbol of resilience, revealing communal strength and quiet determination, while work with the Vietnam National Institute of Educational Sciences (VNIES) deepened my appreciation for community and empathy. The experience underscored the value of presence over perfection and connection over control. It revealed leadership as a human-centered practice grounded in adaptability, shared experience, and mutual respect.



Keywords: Leadership • Policy and child rights • Culture

INTRODUCTION

In 2022, I received my first Fulbright award, a Fulbright-Hays Scholar grant to the Philippines. That experience was transformative. As an educator, I had the opportunity to collaborate with and visit sixteen institutions across Manila and the greater Metro Manila region. The trip deepened my understanding of Southeast Asian education systems and left a lasting impression on my professional path. At the time, I never imagined I would have the privilege of engaging with a Fulbright award a second time.

After returning home from the Philippines, I decided to apply for the Fulbright Specialist roster with a sense of excitement about the possibilities ahead. The VNIES project's blend of educational and governmental partnerships aligned perfectly with my interests. Over my tenure on the roster, I explored a range of projects, some familiar and others outside my experience; this one was well suited to my expertise.

Ultimately, I chose this project in Vietnam for several meaningful reasons. First, I currently serve as the Language Access and Community Impact Manager for city government, and this project provided me with an opportunity to merge my passion for education and research with my policy experience in the government sector. Second, my own city is home to a small but vibrant Vietnamese community whose members were willing to offer valuable cultural and contextual insight. Third, I had previously traveled within Southeast Asia and felt connected to the region's shared histories and cultural values. Hence, Vietnam represented both a new challenge and

a natural extension of my prior work. This second Fulbright opportunity allowed me to bring my knowledge, skills, and cross-cultural experience to a new setting, one that felt both unfamiliar and deeply connected to the communities I serve at home.

Vietnam has long demonstrated its commitment to children's rights, becoming the second country in the world and the first in Asia to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Despite this strong policy foundation, challenges such as child abuse, child labor, limited child participation, and low awareness of rights among both adults and children persist, especially within schools. In response to these gaps, my work with VNIES focused on strengthening children's rights education by helping design and deliver training that equipped researchers and educators with a solid understanding of the Convention's principles and methods for teaching rights in primary, secondary, and high schools.

This project was important because educators play a crucial role in translating national commitments into meaningful classroom practice, supporting safer, more participatory learning environments for children. In this project, I contributed to strengthening children's rights education in Vietnam by supporting the development and delivery of training for VNIES researchers and educators. My work focused on helping participants understand the core principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and equipping them with practical pedagogical methods. This was important because, despite Vietnam's strong legal framework, many children and adults still lack awareness of children's rights, and schools play a critical role in closing this gap. Through this effort, we worked together to review global case studies, identify strengths, collaborate with international experts, embrace ways of being inclusive, and contribute to the development of a more effective, child-centered education system in Vietnam.

My educational background allowed me to connect theoretical principles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child with real, everyday practice, ensuring that training discussions remained grounded, relevant, and responsive to the needs of both educators and researchers. In addition, my work as a civil servant strengthened the project by bringing expertise in equity, inclusion, and communication across linguistic and cultural barriers. This experience enabled me to highlight the importance of ensuring that all children, including multilingual learners, Indigenous families, and those from marginalized communities, can understand and exercise their rights. Together, these two areas of expertise allowed me to contribute insights on how institutions can create inclusive environments, how educators can communicate rights in accessible ways, and how systems can be designed to ensure that no child is left out of rights-based education. My combined background helped reinforce the project's focus on practical implementation, equitable access, and culturally responsive approaches to children's rights in Vietnam's evolving educational landscape.

The experience significantly enhanced my current role in government by deepening my understanding of how language, culture, and communication shape access to information and participation, especially in educational and childrights contexts. For example, many cities have launched early childhood initiatives and can learn from one another, but even studying how other nations uphold child rights from the earliest years can strengthen our own city services. The United States has not ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which makes this type of international engagement particularly valuable; it exposed me to legal and rights-based frameworks that differ from those used domestically and highlighted the complexities, gaps, and opportunities that arise when national systems do not formally adopt global standards.

I must add, throughout my time in Vietnam, VNIES provided an interpreter who worked closely with me during all meetings, and this collaboration gave me valuable insight into the dynamics of cross-linguistic communication in real time. Working side-by-side with an interpreter allowed me to observe how meaning is negotiated across languages, how cultural nuances influence understanding, and how to adjust my communication to ensure clarity and inclusivity. These experiences strengthened my ability to design and support language-accessible services, improved my sensitivity to the needs of multilingual communities, and reinforced the importance of ensuring that all individuals can fully engage in programs, training, and public services. The project ultimately broadened my professional perspective and enriched the skills I bring to language access.

SHARED MEALS AND SPREADSHEETS

Two days into my Fulbright assignment in Vietnam, I found myself unlearning and relearning everything I thought I knew about leadership, communication, and community. For someone who thrives on structure and clarity, and admittedly leans toward being meticulous with systems and organization, the shift was immediate and humbling.

During my time in Hanoi, I had the privilege of working with researchers from the Vietnam National Institute of Educational Sciences (VNIES). At the initial seminar, I presented objectives around the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) while departments shared their work around policy, child and human development, and equity. These objectives included reviewing core ideas and frameworks aligned with the UNCRC, including key standards, exploring domains and indicators, and designing a customized matrix tailored to support VNIES. The room was filled with thirty to forty researchers and directors. The setup was simple but thoughtful: laptops, projectors, fruit, and a cake decorated with the Vietnamese flag, topped with a white chocolate yellow star. It was a small gesture, but it spoke volumes about the warmth and intentionality of the team.

From the Institute, directors escorted me to a vegetarian restaurant known for its architecture, designed by a famous Vietnamese artist. The food was exquisite—fried mushrooms, Pad Thai tofu, dumplings, spring rolls—and the conversation even better. I learned that September 22 marked the first day of autumn, a time when many Vietnamese choose to eat vegetarian in honor of the season. We connected, shared stories, toasted with pandan and coconut drinks, and took a few photos. I told them, half-joking, that I might never return home if this was what lunch in Vietnam looked like.

It was in these initial days that I noticed a difference in communication styles. Vietnamese administrators were courteous and warm, but often indirect. Responses were layered with nuance, and agendas were fluid, sometimes finalized just a day before a session. In such a context, given the hierarchical nature of organizational communication, scheduling decisions, for instance, required a degree of flexibility and responsiveness. For someone used to precision, this was disorienting. But it was also a powerful lesson: leadership doesn't always come dressed in bullet points and spreadsheets. Sometimes, it arrives in the form of quiet adaptability and trust in the moment.

PLANNING IN REAL TIME

As I spent more hours with my host institution and partners, a second difference emerged around organizational planning. In my experience, planning is often a carefully laid-out process, with timelines, logistics, and contingency plans. In Hanoi, however, I encountered a more spontaneous rhythm. Sessions were scheduled with short notice, itineraries evolved in real time, and flexibility was not just appreciated but expected. Initially, this unsettled me; I had grown accustomed to predictable structures and clearly defined timelines. Yet as I adjusted, I began to recognize the value of this approach. The fluidity of arrangements created space for attentiveness to emerging needs, relationship-centered adjustments, and a form of cultural grace that does not always conform to predefined schedules or spreadsheet logic.

These differences challenged my assumptions about leadership. They reminded me that effective leadership is not about control, but about connection. It's about being present, listening deeply, and responding with empathy. It created an opportunity for us to determine how to move forward and allowed VNIES colleagues to introduce me to several cultural centers in Hanoi, deepening my understanding of the local context beyond the formal sessions.

THE TYPHOON THAT TAUGHT ME MORE

Nowhere was this *flow* more evident than during one unforgettable day in Hanoi, when the city was hit by a typhoon. The electricity held, but the streets were flooded within minutes. Water rose to knee level as I waded from the institute back to my hotel. The city came to a standstill. Traffic halted,

shops closed, and the usual hum of Hanoi quieted into a kind of suspended stillness. Yet amid the chaos, there was care. A VNIES colleague insisted on escorting me back, ensuring I arrived safely. Throughout the day and into the night, friends and colleagues checked in to ask if I was alright, if I had food, and shared tips on how to stay safe during the storm.

What struck me most wasn't the storm; it was the recovery. Within twenty-four hours, the floodwaters vanished. Shops reopened. Life resumed. Vietnam's infrastructure may be limited, but its people are limitless in spirit. They didn't wait for ideal conditions. They adapted. Rain jackets came out, work continued virtually, and there was an unspoken rhythm to how everyone moved forward. More than the storm itself, what stayed with me was the resilience. People looked out for one another. Strangers helped strangers. There was no panic, just quiet determination: a community weathering hardship together and moving on without complaint.

This Fulbright experience reframed my understanding of leadership. It wasn't just about systems and schedules. It was about people. It was about how we show up for each other, whether in meetings offering tea, in moments of crisis offering food, or in everyday interactions learning more about one another's culture. It was about the questions asked, the care offered, and the space created for others to thrive in.

LESSONS THAT LINGER

The project highlighted several cultural differences between Vietnam and the United States that shaped my learning experience and deepened my professional growth. Vietnam's education system is rooted in strong collectivist values, respect for hierarchy, and a national commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, contrasting with the more individualistic, decentralized, and legally complex landscape in the United States. These differences created both challenges and opportunities: navigating varying expectations around authority, communication styles, and child participation required cultural sensitivity, while exposure to Vietnam's rights-based educational approach helped me see how legal frameworks, social norms, and national priorities influence how children's rights are understood and implemented. Working closely with the VNIES interpreter further helped me bridge these cultural gaps, offering insight into how language, culture, and meaning interact in cross-national collaboration. Altogether, these cultural contrasts enriched my understanding of global approaches to children's rights and strengthened my ability to support inclusive, culturally responsive services in my own community.

As I reflect on my time in Hanoi, I carry with me not just memories, but lessons. Lessons in flexibility, in empathy, in resilience. Lessons that remind me that leadership is not a fixed formula, but a living practice. And sometimes, the most profound growth comes not from what we plan, but from what

we allow ourselves to experience. Whether over meals, in flooded streets, or during sessions, I found something greater than professional exchange. I found connection. I found community. I found a culture that values presence over perfection, and people who lead with heart.

Vietnam's rich history, vibrant traditions, and resilient spirit offer profound lessons. Engaging with its people and culture gave me a nuanced appreciation for perspectives beyond my own, which is one of the most valuable outcomes of cultural exchange. I continue to collaborate with my colleagues at VNIES by supporting their research, offering guidance on structure and language, and sharing resources that strengthen our ongoing academic exchange. We have maintained open communication since the project, and these relationships have grown into meaningful professional partnerships. For the future and in partnership, I plan to work on research related to translation justice and the global circulation of educational policy. Through language, we aim to examine how policies and programs, often produced and disseminated in English, can create inequities in interpretation, understanding, and implementation across different linguistic and cultural contexts. This continued collaboration reflects my commitment to advancing more equitable, accessible, and culturally responsive approaches to education both locally and globally. Traveling with purpose, especially through programs like Fulbright, often leads to deeper introspection. Being in a new environment challenges your assumptions, stretches your comfort zone, and reveals parts of yourself you might not have known were there!

"Sometimes, the most profound growth comes not from what we plan, but from what we allow ourselves to experience."

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Dr. Lakhwani with a group of researchers from the Vietnam National Institute of Educational Sciences in Hanoi, Vietnam, focusing on policy, curriculum development, and training.

BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Monica Lakhwani is a Language Access and Community Impact Manager for Louisville Metro Government's Office for Immigrant Affairs and an adjunct instructor at Jefferson Community and Technical College in the Humanities/English as a Second Language department. She received two Fulbright Awards (Fulbright-Hays in 2022 and Fulbright Specialist in 2025), first to the Philippines and more recently to Vietnam. Her interests lie in language and accessibility, cultural and educational practices, and cross-cultural studies. Email: monica.lakhwani@yahoo.com

CYBERSECURITY AND AI ETHICS ACROSS BORDERS: A FULBRIGHT CASE STUDY IN EDUCATIONAL TRANSFORMATION

GEORGE ANTONIOU

ABSTRACT

This article reflects on my experience as a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Tirana, where I worked with faculty, administrators, government agencies, and international partners to develop a university-wide AI and Ethics course and design a proposed Master's program in Cybersecurity. The residency took place during a period of rapid technological change in Albania, creating a shared space for collaboration and dialogue about responsible AI, cybersecurity capacity, and the expectations of modern higher education.



Keywords: Artificial intelligence • Artificial intelligence ethics • Cybersecurity education • Curriculum development • International academic collaboration

INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of my Fulbright Scholar residency (February 10–June 10, 2025) at the University of Tirana in Albania, I was eager to contribute but unsure of what I would encounter. Albania is in the midst of strengthening its digital infrastructure and bringing its academic programs into closer alignment with European Union (EU) standards. I hoped the work I would do there would fit into that national push. At the same time, I felt the weight of representing both my home institution, Lynn University, and the Fulbright Program as I entered a large public university environment with an academic culture I did not yet fully understand.

Before arriving, I was unsure how I would handle the size of the University of Tirana and its academic bureaucracy while still meeting my Fulbright goals. I didn't yet understand how faculty, students, and administrators worked together, and I was not sure how quickly I would adjust or find my place. Those early uncertainties ultimately shaped my willingness to listen more deeply, observe more carefully, and approach each task with humility.

The size of the university became clear right away: thousands of students, many faculty members, and several levels of administration. Moving through this environment, I gained a strong appreciation for how hard the faculty worked to support their students, even with limited resources and heavy teaching loads.

From my first days there, I was struck by the energy and openness of the Department of Informatics. Our work quickly moved beyond the classroom and grew into curriculum planning, faculty workshops, and broader discussions about cybersecurity and artificial intelligence (AI) ethics at the national level. What developed was a genuine academic partnership, one that now continues through a formal Memorandum of Agreement between Lynn University and the University of Tirana.

FOUNDATIONS IN THE DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATICS

The Department of Informatics became the place where all of our major initiatives took shape. The faculty showed a genuine eagerness to expand their work in AI, data governance, cybersecurity, and other fast-moving technologies. Early meetings with the Vice Rector, the Dean, and Informatics leadership revealed a clear institutional desire to build a shared understanding of ethical AI and to embed these principles across the university. Our conversations in the department eventually grew into the idea that sparked the university-wide AI and Ethics initiative.

One moment of self-doubt came early, when I was introduced to the expectations around Bologna accreditation. The structure of syllabi, contact hours, lab requirements, assessment types, and even the timing of exams differed significantly from my experience in the United States. Students could sit for exams in later sessions, courses carried specific European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) weighting, and documentation required exact formatting. These unfamiliar elements made me feel briefly in over my head. But rather than slowing progress, they pushed me to learn quickly and to work more closely with my Albanian colleagues to ensure accuracy and alignment.

DEVELOPING AN AI AND ETHICS COURSE FOR ALL STUDENTS

One of the most significant achievements during my Fulbright residency was contributing to the development of a proposed university-wide course on AI and Ethics, a requirement that would eventually serve all first-year students at the University of Tirana. This initiative emerged from repeated conversations about the accelerating use of AI tools by students and faculty, and the need for a shared ethical foundation across disciplines.

The Vice Rector, the Dean, and the Informatics faculty recognized that responsible AI education could not be limited to computer science or engineering students. The course was designed to bridge technical, social, philosophical, and regulatory perspectives while remaining accessible to students from economics, humanities, law, social sciences, and health sciences.

During the drafting process, I spent many hours working with faculty on learning outcomes, Bloom's Taxonomy alignment, and open-access literature choices. Meetings often took place over strong coffee in nearby cafés, a hallmark of Albanian academic culture, where we discussed content, academic integrity concerns, AI-driven learning tools, and how to prepare students for a future shaped by automation and digital decision-making.

By the time my Fulbright term ended, we had completed the full curriculum and sent it into the University of Tirana's review process. Conversations with the Vice Rector, the Dean, and department leaders continued even after I returned home, and those discussions helped set the stage for something larger: the effort to create a university-wide AI ethics policy. This ongoing collaboration reflects a shared understanding that responsible AI requires both academic preparation and institutional guidance. Working together, we continue to refine these frameworks so that they can support students, faculty, and the wider academic community in the years ahead.

BUILDING A CYBERSECURITY MASTER'S PROGRAM

My residency also focused on developing a proposed Master's program in Cybersecurity for the Department of Informatics. Albania's national priorities in digital security, EU integration, and cyber readiness became central themes in our design work. Faculty and administrators emphasized the urgent need for a graduate program that would prepare professionals to protect critical infrastructure, support public institutions, and contribute to the nation's growing digital economy.

A pivotal moment occurred during a meeting with the Head of the Department of Informatics and officials from the Ministry of Defense's Security Operations Center (SOC). They highlighted the importance of aligning higher education with EU digital security frameworks, including recommendations from the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA), and we discussed recent cyberattacks that had temporarily disrupted Albania's e-government services. The discussion eventually touched on North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) readiness, Albania's regional responsibilities, and the expectations placed on cybersecurity professionals who must understand both technical issues and policy. These conversations influenced my decision to incorporate governance, regulatory standards, and national cyber policy into the curriculum.

Creating the program pushed me to adapt quickly. The Bologna Framework had very specific expectations for credits, syllabi, lab requirements, and assessments, and it took steady effort to understand how all of it worked together. There were times when I wasn't sure I had interpreted a step correctly. With the Head of the Department of Informatics and the Master's program coordinator helping me work through each step, we prepared all of the required components, including course outlines, syllabi, lab plans, assignments, reading lists, and the documents needed for review by the university and the ministry.

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT AND CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION

Supporting faculty development became an important part of my Fulbright work. The workshops I led on AI tools for teaching, ethical considerations around students' use of AI, and the basics of cybersecurity brought together faculty from a range of disciplines. Their interest and curiosity stood out. They raised difficult questions, voiced real concerns, and showed genuine commitment to bringing responsible AI practices into their own classrooms.

Collaboration outside the university also added depth to the experience. I met with the U.S. Embassy's Public Affairs team, whose support aligned closely with the project's educational goals, and I continued my work with MITRE Corporation, whose insight shaped many of the cybersecurity discussions. One moment that remains vivid was attending the opening of the NATO Regional SOC for the Balkans. Leaders from the Ministry of Defense, NATO, and the U.S. spoke openly about Albania's expanding role in regional cyber defense. Hearing those perspectives made it clear that students must be prepared not only for technical skills but also for policy and governance.

Collaboration was not limited to the university setting. My landlord often offered homemade food, and faculty members frequently asked me to meet for coffee to talk through ideas or concerns, something that became a regular and enjoyable part of my routine. One weekend stands out clearly. The Head of the Department of Informatics and her family took me to their cottage in the countryside outside Tirana, where we shared fresh produce and had lunch on a hillside while discussing landownership issues that still bear the traces of the communist period. Experiences like that helped me see deeper layers of Albanian society and the lived experiences behind ongoing reforms.

CROSS-CULTURAL IMPACT AND ONGOING PARTNERSHIPS

The cultural setting influenced academic work far more than I expected. Albania's public education system functions at a different pace than the one I'm used to in the United States, with its own structure and levels of oversight. New academic programs go through multiple rounds of review, first at the university and later at the Ministry of Education. I visited classrooms where blackboards and chalk were still being used, and faculty often worked with older tools while trying to integrate more modern methods. What impressed me most was how receptive people were. Faculty and students were eager to share ideas and work together, and that spirit had a strong influence on my time there.

A challenge came when I realized the new master's program would not complete the approval process before my Fulbright term ended. That was disappointing at first. Once I understood the rhythm and procedures of Albania's public education system, I was able to adjust my expectations and focus on what could be accomplished within the timeframe. With support

from the Head of the Department of Informatics and the master's program coordinator in the Faculty of Natural Sciences, I concentrated on completing a curriculum package that met all requirements and could continue moving through the approval process after I left.

The connections built during my residency have remained strong. Lynn University and the University of Tirana formalized a Memorandum of Agreement, and we are now discussing study abroad options, faculty exchanges, and shared research. I stay closely connected with my colleagues in Tirana and continue offering support virtually. My time in Albania reshaped my understanding of global education, deepened my commitment to cross-border academic collaboration, and enriched my teaching in the United States.

REFLECTION ON SCHOLARSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

My time in Albania reshaped the way I think about teaching cybersecurity and AI ethics. Working inside a public university system that balances emerging digital demands with limited resources pushed me to reconsider what effective instruction looks like in diverse settings. I returned to Lynn University with a deeper appreciation for how cultural context influences student learning, classroom expectations, and institutional priorities. The collaboration also reminded me that innovation does not always come from advanced tools or large budgets; in Tirana, it often came from persistence, creativity, and genuine curiosity. Those months broadened my sense of what academic partnership can accomplish and continue to influence how I design courses, mentor students, and engage with international colleagues today.

“Innovation does not always come from advanced tools or large budgets; in Tirana, it often came from persistence, creativity, and genuine curiosity.”

CONNECTING TO THE FULBRIGHT MISSION

Throughout the residency, I was reminded of how central the Fulbright mission is to building bridges between institutions and cultures. Much of the work in the University of Tirana's Department of Informatics involved translating ideas, between languages, between academic systems, and between different expectations for technology's role in society. These exchanges went far beyond curriculum design; they became moments of mutual understanding that revealed both shared challenges and different ways of addressing them. The collaboration between Lynn University and the University of Tirana continues because the relationships formed were built on trust, respect, and a willingness to learn from one another. In that sense, the Fulbright program served not only as the catalyst for this project but also as the framework that made long-term partnership possible.

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Dr. Antoniou, delivering an AI and Ethics workshop to faculty at the University of Tirana during his Fulbright Scholar residency

BIOGRAPHY

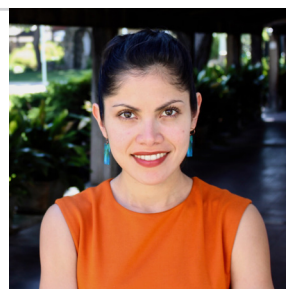
George Antoniou is an Associate Professor of Cybersecurity Management at Lynn University in Florida. As a 2024–2025 Fulbright Scholar (Grant from February 10, 2025, to June 10, 2025) at the University of Tirana's Department of Informatics, he collaborated with faculty and national partners to develop a proposed university-wide course in AI and Ethics, design a Master's program in Cybersecurity, and support broader efforts in responsible technology and digital readiness. His work continues through a formal partnership between the two institutions. His teaching and research focus on ethical artificial intelligence, cybersecurity education, and global collaboration. He can be reached at gantoniou@lynn.edu.

UNEARTHING THE HISTORY OF THE YOUNG EUROPEAN FEDERALIST MOVEMENT: A FULBRIGHT RESEARCH EXPERIENCE IN FLORENCE

JESICA SIHAM FERNÁNDEZ

ABSTRACT

As a Fulbright-Schuman Scholar at the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, Italy, I pursued research at the Historical Archives of the European Union (HAEU). I examined the Young European Federalists (YEF) movement's archival records to historicize and contextualize its sociopolitical discourses and actions in the formation of the European Union. The records reveal the relationship between past and contemporary social movements, which can help societies better understand and support youth sociopolitical development.



Keywords: Youth • Activism • Sociopolitical development • History

AN UNEXPECTED SURPRISE, A DREAM COME TRUE

When I applied for the Fulbright-Schuman Fellowship, I did not expect to be the recipient of such a prestigious award. I submitted my Fulbright application while preparing my dossier for tenure and promotion review. With hope and nervous excitement, I completed both applications. I was overjoyed and grateful when I received news that I was selected—a dream had come true!

From April to August 2025, I pursued research in Florence, Italy, as a Fulbright-Schuman Fellow at the European University Institute (EUI), specifically at the Historical Archives of the European Union (HAEU). I engaged in archival research to contextualize and understand the history of the Young European Federalists (YEF) movement, formerly the *Jeunes Européens Fédéralistes* (JEF). I studied the development of YEF from the 1950s—when it formed shortly after the signing of the Schuman Declaration—to the late 1980s. The Schuman Declaration marked an important turning point in the history of Europe. With its origins as a treaty agreement between France and Germany, the Schuman Declaration evolved into a foundational document in establishing cooperation between nation-states that constituted the European Union before it became a union. My research at the HAEU made evident the sociohistorical contextualization of the treaty, as well as the role of youth, specifically the YEF, in garnering support for European integration and collaboration. The Schuman Declaration served to restore justice, peace, solidarity, and sustainability—the pursuit of goals that are still relevant today.

Community psychology is the study of people's relationships to one another and their environments—to the communities they belong to or long for, and how these are formed. The sense of community and relationality within the YEF movement was visible in the archives I examined. YEF firmly believed that global peace could only come through the formation of a unified Europe. In reviewing multiple historical artifacts, I unearthed documents affiliated with the formation of the European Union and the role of youth in shaping it. Included in the archives were YEF members' letters to nation-state leaders, the European Parliament, and EU officials, as well as other transnational affiliates, foundations, and organizations. Also among the documents were flyers, memos, photographs, and political cartoons produced by YEF. As emerging adults, youth activists expressed an unwavering radical hope. YEF archives demonstrate this and serve as a context for understanding what motivated them in forging solidarities for global peace and transnational collaboration. My research offered insights into the passing of time through the experiences of youth calling for the formation of the European Union at a critical moment when political conflict, economic insecurity, and social tensions were surfacing in the context of the Cold War. Reviewing the archives helped me engage with the following question: *What can we learn from YEF to help support youth activists today?* Furthermore, it led me to draw important connections between the organizing and activism of YEF and today's youth-led movements.

HISTORICIZING THE YEF MOVEMENT—YOUTH ACTIVISM IN EUROPE

Historically and at present, youth activists have played a critical role in shaping political discourses. YEF made explicit their demands for global cooperation, nuclear disarmament, and international harmony. Seeing themselves as protagonists, they organized seminars, teach-ins, conferences, and direct actions across Europe to educate youth on the principles of federalism, democracy, and transnational cooperation, as well as the links between social injustices and economic inequities. Calls for a united Europe toward a more integrated world characterized YEF actions and the ideas they shared, promoted, and applied. The archives showed how their concerns for their future were rooted in their political struggles and economic uncertainties.

To bring visibility to their concerns and build their movement, YEF drew insights from the 1941 *Ventotene Manifesto*, which challenged fascism, capitalism, and war. As a movement, YEF was committed to promoting and instituting federalism as a viable solution to address political conflict, economic inequities, and discord among European nation-states brought about by the reemergence of authoritarianism. Values of democratic freedom were essential to the vision of a united Europe and YEF strongly promoted this, as evidenced in their writings:

To give people control over their own lives and to give the word “democracy” a meaning, fundamental changes are needed There needs to be created institutions capable of solving European-wide problems that have escaped the control of nation-states. There needs to be a fundamental shift of power down to the lower levels, closer to the people and to the problems. There needs to be an introduction of democracy at the place of work in order to transform the labor/capital conflict, and in the local community.

Versions of the *Manifesto*, with the goal of reaching other youth organizations, were published and disseminated widely. Fearing the rise of armed conflict, a rebirth of fascism, and divisions among nation-states competing economically and politically for power, YEF built support for transnational collaborations. By increasing their membership via the formation of chapters across cities in Europe, YEF sought to organize themselves toward the creation of a European Union.

The types of political actions, strategies, and campaigns that characterized the YEF movement were marked by collaboration, creativity, and innovation. These strategies sought to bring youth together to achieve their vision of a unified Europe. From print media to public forums, YEF leveraged a range of modalities to sustain and expand youth engagement. *Youth Forum*, a newsletter produced by YEF, featured letters, statements, petitions, and open calls for applications to annual gatherings, such as peace camps, teach-ins, rallies, and demonstrations across Europe. Creative artistic pieces, from poetry to sketches, and photographs of YEF events were included. *Youth Forum* was a powerful medium of communication, and it helped circulate YEF statements or demands given at events where European leaders were present.

The 1979 meeting in Bergisch Gladbach, for example, brought together YEF and the European Commission to discuss political development in Europe. At the gathering, YEF made several demands to end racial segregation in South Africa, among them the following:

South Africa's Apartheid regime is based on a system of racial segregation and institutional discrimination against the majority population. The relationship maintained between the members of the E.C. (European Commission) and S.A. (South Africa) plays a vital role in sustaining the Apartheid regime. ... The YEF demands the following of the European Commission. 1) Discourage all trade missions to South Africa. 2) End all forms of military and nuclear collaboration in South Africa. 3) Institute a campaign to end all investments in South Africa in the goal of instituting policies of disengagement that maintain an apartheid state.

YEF lobbied against the apartheid regime and helped build momentum to support youth leadership, participation, and solidarity with liberation movements globally. The urgency of taking concrete action to end apartheid, prevent a rise in fascism, and work together for global peace within and beyond Europe was often expressed in the *Youth Forum*.

Archival documents also offer evidence of YEF's actions in helping set the foundation for the European Commission, a committee that represented the voices of European youth. YEF featured articles of direct concern to European youth, such as the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child. Noting the challenges of youth employment, access to quality education and literacy, as well as professional training opportunities, amid shifting demographics, migration, and environmental concerns, YEF advocated for the UN's Declaration of the Rights of the Child. Specifically, YEF underscored the responsibilities of nation-states to uphold youth rights, freedoms, and well-being in accordance with Article 10:

The child shall be protected from practices which may foster racial, religious, and other forms of discrimination. He shall be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship, peace and universal brotherhood, and in full consciousness that his energy and talents should be devoted to the service of his fellow men.

YEF's advocacy on migrant integration, environmental sustainability, and nuclear disarmament reflected an urgency for concrete actions toward peace—demands being made by youth today.

Intergenerational solidarity and the fostering of transnational cooperation across European states were also defining features of YEF's organizing strategies. Building their movement across contexts, as well as among diverse age groups, was key to addressing economic and political tensions across the EU. Embracing a future of uncertainty yet striving to visualize possibilities, youth activists then and now have found that intergenerational and transnational solidarities pass the test of time in fostering youth sociopolitical action for rights, freedom, and global peace. Such an observation is not mine alone, as several YEF documents stated that “the absence of war does not mean peace.” Indeed, more is needed to ensure that all people can be and live well.

EMBRACING THE PRESENT—VISUALIZING FUTURE POSSIBILITIES

As I continued my archival research, with heartache I observed threats to freedom of speech and political divisions unfold in the United States, along with wars in Gaza and Ukraine. These circumstances often made me feel helpless. Yet, at the center of my research was a desire to better understand histories of youth sociopolitical development and their relevance to contemporary activism. Taking stock of the sociopolitical context, I was encouraged by the YEF movement's sociopolitical actions, discourses, and ways of supporting one another, as evidenced in the archives. Returning to my question—*What can we learn from YEF to help support youth activists today?*—I offer two concrete strategies.

“The absence of war does not mean peace. Indeed, more is needed to ensure that all people can be and live well.”

Critical compassion and relational solidarity can help sustain transnational cooperation, pluralism, and democratic citizen participation. Critical compassion is defined as practices or behaviors that are humanizing and caring. Within settings, such as the classroom, a critically compassionate learning community is one where safety and the bravery to challenge ideas can coexist. Complementarily, relational solidarity is characterized by relationships of mutuality and collective accountability among activists and allies, for example. Together, these skills are essential for global peace—and a foundation for collective action oriented toward liberation.

Critical compassion, when paired with relational solidarity, involves fostering a sense of community and relationality. In the classroom, for example, I have fostered critical compassion among students by having them interview their families about their migration histories. Students then present their family stories to the class, and in this way they come to acknowledge similar and differing challenges, along with shared dreams. Supporting students' development of critical compassion as a sociopolitical skill requires guiding them in learning to be reflexive and open-minded, as well as comfortable engaging in dialogue with others who have differing points of view. Fostering relational solidarity through community, connectivity, and sociopolitical action centered on care for one another has become my mission since returning to the United States.

The lessons I carry with me from the YEF archives—their optimism, their tenacity, and the power of youth coming together to share, connect, and learn from one another—have been an antidote to these precarious times. One notable moment I reflect upon was being invited to give the keynote at the *XV Convegno Nazionale della Società Italiana di Psicologia di Comunità* (SIPCO), organized by Italian community psychologists Dr. Alessia Rochira and Dr. Terri Mannarini at the Università del Salento. The conference explored themes of liberation, emancipation, well-being, and solidarity with marginalized peoples. Offering a keynote on the limits and possibilities of community psychology, especially in relation to shifting sociocultural, political, and economic contexts, allowed me to draw upon archival evidence from the YEF movement.

CONCLUSION

Coming full circle, the relationships I formed with scholars in my discipline, as well as colleagues at EUI, HAEU, and in the local communities of Florence, have helped me understand activism and community organizing from a relational and global perspective. In particular, they have helped me see how youth are leading liberatory movements for peace and justice alongside communities most impacted by inequities in Italy and beyond. At the scholarly and professional level, it has helped me form relationships, research projects, and writing collaborations with colleagues in Italy, in particular with scholars who are similarly situated within my main disciplines—community psychology and youth studies. Some of the activities that I engaged in during my fellowship have bloomed into collaborations, such as coauthoring a manuscript with

Dr. Francesca Esposito of the Università di Bologna, where I facilitated a workshop on community-engaged research. The scholarly, professional, and personal impact that Fulbright had on me was deeply meaningful. Equally meaningful was situating the past in relation to the present as a means to visualize future possibilities anchored in fostering cross-cultural awareness, appreciation for diverse worldviews, and sociohistorical understanding of global relations toward peace and liberation.

Reflecting on my anchoring question—*What can we learn from YEF to help support youth activists today?*—I draw a few important lessons. First, the Italian and United Statesian youth who are organizing community events, similar to how YEF did, are calling for solidarity, global peace, and liberation. Then and today, youth activists are leading movements that bridge political divides toward unified peace. Second, while some media sources may frame these moments as the worst of times, I am idealistic and radically hopeful—much like YEF—that the time is ripe for harvesting unity and peace. The historical archive of youth movements can offer a blueprint from which we can build. Lastly, we can act with critical compassion to lead a more sustainable future. Together we can till a soil optimal for systemic change, innovation, connection, and care, building communities on common ground by listening, learning, and reflecting. I am looking forward to continuing my research, growing seeds of collaboration, and linking—like a vine—intergenerational activists and transnational scholars on a path for global peace.

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Dr. Jesica Siham Fernández at the European University Institute (EUI) entrance overlooking Villa Salviati, where the Historical Archives of the European Union (HAEU) are housed.

BIOGRAPHY

Jesica Siham Fernández is an associate professor of Ethnic Studies at Santa Clara University. From April to August 2025 she held a Fulbright-Schuman Fellowship, pursuing research at the European University Institute (EUI) in Florence, Italy. Jesica is the author of the award-winning book [*Growing Up Latinx: Coming of Age in a Time of Contested Citizenship*](#) (New York University Press, 2021), and co-editor of the [*Handbook of Decolonial Community Psychology*](#) (Springer, 2024). She can be contacted at jsfernandez@scu.edu.

FROM SUNFLOWER FIELDS TO HAWKER CENTERS: REIMAGINING MIDDLE-POWER FOOD SECURITY

FERYAZ OCAKLI

ABSTRACT

Middle-power states face a dilemma amid global food volatility. Will they trust markets or build costly state-led buffers? Drawing on fieldwork in Singapore, Indonesia, and Turkey, this essay examines different strategies for managing food security. While Singapore and Indonesia have invested in import diversification and state-managed logistics, Turkey's neoliberal retreat has left its population vulnerable to supply shocks. These cases suggest that state capacity provides essential resilience in an increasingly unstable world.



Keywords: Food security • Middle powers • State capacity • Political economy • Southeast Asia

INTRODUCTION

When I applied for a Fulbright award in 2023, I took a gamble on my ability to reinvent my research agenda in real time. After years as a comparative political scientist focusing on party politics in the Middle East, I was ready for a post-tenure transition back to my roots in political economy. I wanted to understand the intersection of politics and staples, the bread of the Middle East and the rice bowl of Asia. I was interested in how “middle power” states navigate the increasingly volatile international trade and politics of food. To do this, I had to leave my comfort zone. I had never been to Southeast Asia, yet I was convinced that the future of global food security was being designed in the ports and markets of Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia as much as anywhere else in the world.

THE ENGINEERING OF SINGAPORE

Singapore is a fascinating case in food politics. It is a tiny city-state with a big appetite – famous for its hawker centers, a delicious fusion of Chinese and Malay flavors, and affordable eats in an otherwise eye-wateringly expensive city. Watching Anthony Bourdain eat his way through the city's main offerings was my first introduction to the city's food culture, but what I discovered behind the scenes of its famous malls and food stalls was even more intriguing. A meticulous policy landscape upholds the Singaporean food ecosystem. Its plentiful and diverse offerings are enabled by a system of deliberate import

diversification, strategic national food reserves, and land lease agreements abroad for agriculture, aquaculture, and livestock production. These measures allow the city-state to maintain its food supplies even under conditions of severe import dependence and a complete lack of self-sufficiency.

Singaporean policymakers are fully aware of their import dependence and have been seeking to boost domestic production. In 2019, they adopted the “30 by 30” farming goal, aiming to produce 30% of the country’s nutritional needs domestically by 2030. The initial focus was on eggs, vegetables, and fish, an ambitious target for a state where only one percent of the land is devoted to agriculture. My interviews in Singapore in 2024 already suggested that this agenda might not meet its targets. The COVID-19 pandemic had wreaked havoc on supply lines, and overblown expectations for agricultural technology had not yet paid dividends. Not surprisingly, policymakers dropped this goal in 2025, replacing it with more modest domestic production goals by 2035.

Import diversification remains Singapore’s most potent tool to limit its vulnerability to single-source disruptions. If a natural disaster or a political crisis halts exports from one state, other sources can be mobilized as substitutes. This strategy rejects the logic of “just-in-time” efficiency; Singapore is willing to pay more for its food imports to avoid dependence on any one source. The prudence of this policy was clear when India banned non-basmati rice exports during the pandemic to protect its own domestic supply. While rice prices in Singapore rose as a result, the city-state avoided a significant shortage of the staple crop.

Singapore’s strategy has enabled it to withstand supply shocks in the international food market, yet recent studies suggest that up to 10 percent of its population remains food insecure. This is a striking finding for a state that consistently ranks among the most food-secure nations in the world. It suggests that food vulnerability is likely more pervasive globally than standard metrics capture.

THE LOGISTICS OF INDONESIA

Indonesia confronts a different set of challenges. Unlike tiny, wealthy Singapore, it cannot simply purchase its way out of food scarcity. It’s the quintessential middle power: it possesses a large population and a growing economy, yet struggles with massive wealth inequality and rural poverty. Its food security is tied as much to income distribution as to the geography of its more than 900 inhabited islands. Distributing culturally acceptable food at affordable prices across this vast archipelago is a Herculean task at the heart of Jakarta’s struggles.

When I visited ID Food Group in Jakarta, I observed firsthand the work of coordinating wholesale food prices across hundreds of islands. A state-owned holding company formed in 2022, ID Food is responsible for stabilizing prices for essential products like sugar, meat, fish, and cooking oil. While the state giant BULOG focuses on rice, the country’s most politically sensitive staple crop, ID Food represents a new effort to centralize control over the rest of

the Indonesian food space. It was created by merging multiple state-owned enterprises. ID Food's mandate is to increase the professionalization and efficiency of the supply chains of sugar, meat, and poultry, ensuring that price volatility doesn't lead to shortages or unrest in the outer islands.

In my interviews with ID Food managers, I saw a bureaucracy wrestling with a continent-scale logistics network that challenges price stability every day. Their primary concern was securing a reliable "cold chain" – the infrastructure for refrigerated storage and transportation of heat-sensitive food across the archipelago. It became clear through our conversations that the cold chain can be viewed as a matter of both national development and sovereignty. The ability of the state to ensure the movement of perishable foodstuffs across thousands of miles of ocean is a project of both logistical precision and of national integration. Without this integration, Indonesia remains a fragmented market, and its population remains vulnerable to local monopolies and price volatility. The Indonesian state's direct role in managing logistics and setting wholesale prices is a calculated rejection of the market-reliant models prevalent in other middle-power states like Turkey.

THE MIDDLE POWER DILEMMA

These two Southeast Asian cases – Singapore's ability to shape its markets and Indonesia's state-control over vast areas of the food sector – exemplify a broader dilemma facing middle powers today. In the era of "polycrisis," where geopolitical conflicts, climate events, and health emergencies occur simultaneously, the old Washington Consensus advice to trust the global market has become a dangerous gamble. Middle powers lack the hegemon's ability to dictate the rules of trade, yet they are too large and too integrated into global exchanges to ignore the social consequences of food price volatility. They face a difficult choice: build a resilient bureaucratic state capable of intervention, sometimes at the cost of market efficiency, or outsource food security to the global market at the cost of strategic vulnerability, as the Turkish case so vividly illustrates.

THE NULL HYPOTHESIS: TURKEY

The strongest contrast to Indonesia's direct intervention and Singapore's active diversification is Turkey. My work on Turkey's food security strategy has been an effort to identify the null hypothesis: whether the absence of a strategy is itself a strategy. Despite lip service to food security on official websites, the state notably lacks a clearly articulated long-term strategy in this area. There are no discernible food reserves and no agency to coordinate trade with an eye toward crisis management. Ankara seems to have unmitigated confidence in the market's ability to provide. State intervention in agriculture is intended more to maintain rural livelihoods at tolerable income levels than to guarantee stable food supplies during a crisis.

The dismantling of Turkey's state support for agriculture was a gradual, decades-long process. The shift began with the "January 24 decisions" of 1980, preceding the military coup. Following the return to civilian rule, Prime Minister Turgut Özal became the primary architect of a transition toward a neoliberal regime, which included the privatization of state-owned enterprises and the erosion of agricultural subsidies. The deep economic crisis of 2001 paved the way for an IMF-supported austerity program, which entrenched a market fundamentalist regime. This market-led trajectory continued during the early AKP period under Erdoğan (2002-2011) during a decade defined by rising commodity prices. Economic growth was fueled by a burst of construction and global integration rather than domestic agricultural resilience. Consequently, Ankara's unmitigated confidence in the market is not accidental. It is the culmination of a systematic retreat from the state's role as a guarantor of economic development and, ultimately, food security.

A stark reminder of the absence of state preparedness emerged after Russia invaded Ukraine. Unbeknownst to most Turkish citizens, the society had become dangerously dependent on Black Sea grain and seed oils. My own grandfather was a sunflower and wheat farmer in Edirne, in Eastern Thrace. I have vivid memories of endless sunflower fields from childhood travels to our village. Yet those fields no longer supply enough to ensure self-sufficiency. When Ukrainian imports halted in 2022, cooking oil prices skyrocketed, rising fourfold from 2019 levels as overall food inflation hit 85%. While market efficiency enables cheap consumption in good times, boosting food security, moments of crisis expose the high cost of the absence of coordinated state action.

RESEARCHING THE TRANSITION

The Fulbright U.S.-ASEAN Visiting Scholar Program also provided me with new opportunities for professional collaboration. At our orientation in Jakarta, I met Dr. Ngo Minh Hai, an agricultural economist from the Vietnam National University of Agriculture. We made an instant connection over our mutual interest in the food policies of middle powers. This led to a joint proposal for the Citizen Diplomacy Action Fund (CDAF): a "summer school" designed to bring together Vietnamese farmers, civil society organizers, officials, students, and academics to explore the promises and limitations of organic farming. Although the project was ultimately not funded, it sparked a lasting collaboration. I am writing this essay while flying back from Hanoi to Saratoga Springs, having just visited Dr. Hai's department to discuss our new joint research on the intersection of smallholder farmers, their resilience in the face of climate change and the challenges of industrial farming, and national food security. This intersection represents a critical and politically charged area for middle powers that are attempting to decouple from chemical-intensive practices in conventional farms and aquaculture.

In Vietnam, the push toward organic farming and improved conventional agricultural practices is a strategic necessity born from the limitations of the Green Revolution. For decades, conventional farming on small plots has relied on heavy chemical inputs to maintain yields. However, this model has reached an ecological and economic ceiling. Vietnamese agriculture is now characterized by soil exhaustion and the inability of smallholders to meet strict food safety standards of high-value export markets. Our research explores whether an organic transition can serve multiple purposes, restoring domestic ecological sustainability, improving farmers' health by reducing chemical exposure, expanding Vietnam's export capacity in high-value agricultural markets, and boosting domestic food security.

My semester in Southeast Asia deepened my appreciation for the vast variation in how middle-power states formulate and implement coordinated action. The responses of Singapore, Indonesia, and Turkey are very different from each other, yet they face similar fundamental pressures. Middle-power states do not set the rules of the international order, but they are not mere rule-takers either. They possess a significant degree of agency. While they don't have the ability to overhaul global trade rules, they have the capacity to build state-led buffers against them. Whether through Singapore's resilience premium for food security, Indonesia's logistical market-building practices, or even Turkey's market-first approach, these states are calculating how much of their domestic stability will be defined by market exigencies versus state-led intervention. These state and corporate capacities make the definitive difference in how their populations weather a crisis. This agency is what makes middle powers so fascinating; understanding their disparate responses to similar challenges reaffirms the necessity of comparative analysis in making sense of a volatile world.

"Middle powers do not set the rules of the international order, but they are not mere rule-takers either. They possess a significant degree of agency."

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Dr. Ocakli presenting his research to colleagues at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU Singapore).

BIOGRAPHY

Feryaz Ocakli is Associate Professor of Political Science and International Affairs at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York. He earned his PhD in political science from Brown University and teaches and researches comparative politics, political economy, and food security. His work examines state-business relations, Islamist parties, authoritarianism in Turkey, and the relationship between oil and insurgency. He received a Fulbright U.S.-ASEAN Visiting Scholar Award for January–May 2024. Email: focakli@skidmore.edu

PRESERVING WHAT? LESSONS FROM SINGAPORE'S HAWKER CENTERS ON POLICY DESIGN AND HERITAGE PRESERVATION

JENNY DORSEY

ABSTRACT

During my 2023–2024 Fulbright-National Geographic Fellowship in Singapore, I investigated how UNESCO heritage designation intersects with economic sustainability in hawker centres (government-run prepared-food markets). While existing policies appeared to prioritize the preservation of hawker centres' form, hawkers desired the preservation of their function and utility. Through 21 interviews with a diverse set of hawker vendors, my research revealed how gaps between policy intentions and implementation shape hawkers' sense of self-worth and professional identity.



Keywords: Hawker centers • Food studies • Food policy • Singapore • UNESCO intangible heritage

INTRODUCTION

Singapore's hawker centers arose as a practical solution to public health needs. Throughout the 1960s, itinerant street food vendors operated across the island, serving affordable meals to working-class residents but also raising concerns about hygiene and traffic congestion. Starting in the 1920s, the colonial government began constructing temporary shelters to house these vendors; after independence in 1965, the new Singaporean government invested heavily in permanent hawker centers. The last roving street vendors were resettled by the end of the 1980s.

Today, over 100 hawker centers operate across Singapore, each housing anywhere from 20 to over 100 individual stalls. Hawkers offer diverse cuisines reflecting Singapore's multicultural makeup; these typically feature Chinese, Malay, and Indian dishes such as *bak chor mee* (pork noodles), *nasi lemak* (coconut rice with chicken), and *roti prata* (a type of flatbread), although newer entrants have pushed into more global offerings such as Korean, Japanese, Turkish, Thai, and Vietnamese. Critically, hawker centers function as more than dining venues; they are vital community third spaces where people gather without obligation to purchase, and locals can converge across social and economic lines.

From their inception, hawker centers have balanced two distinct purposes: form and function. Their form includes the physical characteristics that define these spaces, such as open-air without air conditioning, communal seating arrangements, compact stalls, and affordable price points. The function encompasses their social roles: providing accessible meals for all income levels, offering entrepreneurship pathways for everyday Singaporeans, and serving as community gathering spaces.

In recent years, this balance has grown increasingly precarious. Hawkers (vendors working in hawker centres) face rising costs for ingredients, utilities, and labor, while meal prices have remained relatively stagnant. The median age of hawkers has reached 59, and despite government training programs, insufficient numbers of new entrants are joining the trade. The central tension hawkers navigate is whether their work can remain economically viable while maintaining affordability, which defines hawker culture.

In 2020, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) designated Singapore's hawker culture as Intangible Cultural Heritage, intensifying these tensions. The designation celebrated hawker centres as expressions of multicultural community life, recognizing how hawking has provided livelihoods for generations and how these spaces embody Singapore's social fabric. This international recognition brought pride to many hawkers, yet it also made existing contradictions more visible. If hawker culture is an essential heritage worth preserving, why do its practitioners struggle to survive economically? What does it mean when official policies appear to sustain hawker culture's **form** while its **functions** – and the people who make them possible – face mounting sustainability challenges?

“What does it mean when official policies appear to sustain hawker culture’s form while its functions—and the people who make them possible—face mounting sustainability challenges?”

ARRIVING AT THE QUESTION

Existing research on Singapore's hawker centers has thoroughly examined the transition from street hawking to permanent centers, the role of hawkers in Singapore's nation-building narrative, and their function as symbols of multiculturalism and social cohesion. Food studies scholars have analyzed hawker cuisine as expressions of ethnic identity and cultural preservation, while urban planning literature has explored hawker centers as examples of successful informal sector integration into formal city planning. Tourism and heritage studies have increasingly studied hawker centers as sites of cultural commodification and place-making, particularly following the 2020 UNESCO designation. Yet, despite this scholarly attention, hawkers' own perspectives on the policies that affect their daily lives and the long-term sustainability of their trade remain largely absent from the academic literature.

As I spent more time in these centers, persistent tensions emerged in both formal interviews and informal conversations with hawkers. More so than any celebration of international recognition, concerns about sustainability dominated these exchanges: aging operators with few successors, rising operational and labor costs affecting *hawkers' ability to maintain* food standards, price controls and other official mandates squeezing profits. A central tension emerged: these spaces are celebrated as essential cultural heritage while simultaneously facing fundamental sustainability challenges. What does preservation of hawker culture mean when the hawkers themselves struggle to survive?

To investigate these tensions systematically, I turned to the hawkers themselves. Policy documents and official narratives could describe the framework of preservation, but only those living and working within it could determine whether it was serving them. Structured interviews became the essential tool for understanding whether what I was observing anecdotally reflected a broader, more consistent pattern across the hawker landscape. Drawing on my background in community-engaged research developed through years of organizing with food workers, I wanted my research process to reflect a core conviction: that sound policy requires listening to those it affects and treating them as experts on their own experiences.

LISTENING TO HAWKERS

Over nine months between 2023 and 2024, I conducted 22 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with hawkers across Singapore. I employed snowball sampling – a method of recruiting participants through personal referrals – given the tight-knit nature of the hawker community and the need to build trust when discussing sensitive policy topics. Fortunately, the resulting participant pool still reflected considerable diversity across the hawker landscape despite the method's common drawback of sample bias. I spoke with hawkers operating a variety of stalls, from multi-generational businesses featuring traditional Chinese, Malay, and Indian dishes to popular new entrants offering grilled steak and *shio pan* (a Japanese salt bun). They ranged in age and experience, from young “hawkerpreneurs” in their twenties to veteran operators in their sixties, and operated across different types of hawker centers, from those managed by the National Environment Agency (NEA) to newer privately-operated ones (Socially Conscious Enterprise Hawker Centers or SEHCs).

This methodological approach returned much more than the (already substantive) findings about costs, regulations, and policy gaps. I learned how much impact seemingly small relational moments can have on how hawkers understand themselves and their work. In one instance, an interviewee described requesting some needed storage space from a government official, only to be rudely dismissed: “Do you want me to open a restaurant for you?” This response was not only unhelpful but implied that the request for basic operational support from the state was unreasonable and that hawkers should

be grateful for what they had. The vendor recounted this interaction months later, the sting still evident. It showed me that policy gaps aren't just a matter of logistics but of dignity. Between the lines of rules and regulations lie moments when hawkers feel their work devalued and their struggles minimized by the very institutions meant to support and celebrate them.

RETHINKING POLICY DESIGN

My research revealed that even well-intentioned policies can contradict one another, undermining both the form of hawker centers they aim to preserve and the functions of the culture they claim to support.

Consider the original intention of the hawker trade: offering accessible entrepreneurship for ordinary Singaporeans. Today, however, government-controlled rental structures actively exclude newcomers and squeeze existing hawkers. While certain multi-generational hawkers are privy to extremely subsidized rent in the low hundreds, new entrants face market rates of \$2,000–5,000+ for comparable stalls – sometimes in the same center. One hawker interviewed recounted that monthly rental bids rose from \$800 in 2023 to \$2,000–3,000 by 2025, while the *Straits Times* reported an August 2024 bid of \$10,000. When asked if their business would remain viable at current market rates, one multi-generational hawker simply answered, “No.”

Another core aspect of hawker culture is affordability for the masses. While there are no official mandates on pricing at older, NEA-managed hawker centers, newer SEHCs impose a mandatory \$3.50 budget meal on all vendors. However, these price mandates do not come with corresponding cost support. Hawkers I interviewed recounted ingredient costs climbing steeply over the past decade: eggs increasing by 66% for a fried carrot cake vendor, and pig intestines doubling for a pig-organ soup seller. Utility bills also surged, with water costs rising dramatically for vendors whose dishes or drinks require substantial amounts of water. As a result, many hawkers reported losing money on every budget meal but being forced to continue selling them to retain their stalls. In effect, this policy maintains an artificially low price for hawker food at the expense of hawkers' livelihoods.

Long-standing labor restrictions present similar contradictions. Official regulations limit stall operations to citizens and permanent residents, with strict owner-presence requirements, to preserve the “local identity of hawker centers.” However, the National Environment Agency has reported that the median age of hawkers has risen to 59, with many retiring or exiting the trade. A key driver of this is the lack of manpower. Many hawkers I interviewed recounted difficulties hiring local Singaporeans and expressed a need to hire workers from other nationalities to sustain operations. In lieu of such a policy change, however, the government has tried a slew of other programs, such as the Hawkers Succession Scheme (to help retiring hawkers find successors), the Hawkers Development Programme (to prepare new hawkers to join the trade), and the Hawkers Productivity Grant (that subsidizes technological upgrades to lessen operational burdens). Unfortunately, these programs

have consistently failed to produce a steady stream of new hawkers willing to enter and remain in the trade or to significantly lighten the operational load on existing hawkers. All the while, more hawker centers are being built, increasing competition for already-struggling operators.

These contradictions stem from fundamental ambiguity: policymakers have yet to clearly define the “hawker culture” they aim to preserve. As a result, policies oscillate between these goals without acknowledging that they often conflict. Simply put, heritage alone doesn’t pay the bills.

LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE OF HAWKERS, FROM HAWKERS

This research fundamentally shaped how I think about knowledge production and whose voices matter in research. What I understood going into this project versus what emerged from listening to hawkers proved remarkably different. While current setups bring in hawkers as consultants, they do not have decision-making power or veto ability. As a result, problems that could have been preemptively addressed or avoided persist due to a lack of operationally experienced stakeholders. For example, in the case of the unsuccessful Hawkers Succession Scheme, which provided a nominal stipend for retiring hawkers to train new recruits, but no money for their decades of culinary knowledge, one hawker questioned: “You want to let a hawker who build [sic] up the recipe, the branding for 30 and 40 years and for nothing, they give it to you? That doesn’t make sense.”

For my final research findings, I focus on the hawkers’ own recommendations. For example, multiple hawkers had clear ideas about infrastructure updates, such as expanding stall sizes to accommodate larger kitchen equipment, reducing physical strain during grueling 12-plus-hour shifts, and adding storage capacity to enable bulk purchasing for volume discounts. Renovating hawker centers to include air conditioning was also repeatedly mentioned, as hawkers currently work in such extreme heat that one interviewee likened cooking while wearing the mandatory face mask to “waterboarding.” However, so far, officials have remained firm in their opposition, citing concerns about altering the traditional open-air character of hawker centers.

Hawkers also showcased a range of creative suggestions for adapting hawker centers to the modern era to attract new vendors and customers alike. One proposed a flexible entry model, such as stall-sharing arrangements in which existing operators could “rent out their shops for dinner” to let curious newcomers “try out the platform and see if it’s viable,” or allowing part-time operations for those with other jobs to cook on evenings and weekends. Another suggestion was to transform underutilized parts of the hawker center into evening food streets, maximizing stall usage during different time periods. As one hawker noted, the centers are “natural event spaces, but

you can't hold an event here...unless it's a government event." Relaxing such restrictions could enable regular programming such as hawker showcases, cooking demonstrations, and cultural festivals that position hawkers as skilled artisans and successful business owners.

All these recommendations share a common thread: they emerge from the practical wisdom of hawkers who have on-the-ground experience of what policies implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) encourage or discourage. Rather than prescriptive solutions imposed from outside, they represent practitioners' sophisticated understanding of how best to adapt for long-term sustainability while maintaining what matters about hawker culture: the function of providing accessible entrepreneurship, affordable meals, and spaces for community gathering.

FULBRIGHT'S LASTING IMPACT

My time in Singapore has had lasting implications for how I approach my future food research. Before this fellowship, I followed what I had long been taught: to enter the field with hypotheses already formed, shaped by existing literature and my own positionality as a chef and food advocate. The Fulbright experience fundamentally reoriented this by immersing me in a context where the gap between policy intentions and lived experience was so stark, it demanded I generate hypotheses *from* the field. Equally, the iterative process of building trust with hawkers over nine months – adjusting my interview approach, following unexpected threads, sitting with contradictions rather than resolving them prematurely – gave me a much more rigorous foundation for future experiment design.

While Singapore's approach to hawker centers reflects a particular governance model and context, its underlying consequences and insights have broader relevance. Fulbright is premised on the idea that immersion in another country's cultural and political landscape doesn't just produce knowledge about that place but sharpens our ability to recognize similar dynamics elsewhere. Spending a year embedded in Singapore's hawker centers gave me not only insights into food policy but also a framework for asking better questions about how communities everywhere negotiate between official narratives of preservation and the lived realities of the people those narratives claim to serve. As one hawker asked pointedly, "What exactly is Singapore trying to preserve?" This is not a rhetorical question. Whenever there is talk about preserving culture, supporting communities, or designing policies for people's benefit, it behooves us as researchers to ask: have we asked them what they need? Are we preserving the forms we find meaningful, or the functions that enable communities to thrive? Are we creating the conditions for what we purport to value? Diplomacy, at its best, makes these translations possible: using international experience not as an end, but as a lens to expand our worldview.

Perhaps most significantly, this research confirmed something I understood theoretically but hadn't been able to put into practice in the field: that treating participants as experts whose knowledge shapes research questions, rather than as subjects to be extracted from, produces both more ethical and more insightful scholarship. That research is deeply relational, and it can only be done well when we treat participants and their experiences with trust and care. The Fulbright fellowship gave me the time and space to further define my approach to critical theory that will manifest in my scholarship for years to come.

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Jenny (left) pictured with Debbie (middle), head chef of Tang Kay Kee hawker stall at Hong Lim Hawker Centre, after volunteering as front of house for a busy lunch shift

BIOGRAPHY

Jenny Dorsey is a professional chef and food researcher who studies food as the foundation for human meaning-making and identity formation. She holds a Master of Education from Harvard University and was a Fulbright-National Geographic Fellow in Singapore for the 2023-24 academic year. Jenny is an IACP-winning photographer, James Beard Awards-nominated writer, and has been named an industry Game Changer by Food & Wine and a Trailblazing Activist by the World's 50 Best. In 2020, she also gave a TEDx titled, *How Food Can Be a Source of Identity, Intimacy, and Vulnerability*. Her full biography can be found at www.jennydorsey.co and she can be reached at hello@jennydorsey.co.

INTERVIEW

FULBRIGHT CHRONICLES INTERVIEWS

STEPHANIE RICKER SCHULTE:

ASSOCIATE DEAN OF FULBRIGHT

COLLEGE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF

ARKANSAS

ERIKA MARIANA ALMENARA

ABSTRACT

Stephanie Ricker Schulte is an Associate Dean of Fulbright College at the University of Arkansas. In 1998, she won a Fulbright award as an English Teaching Assistant (ETA) to teach English in Berlin. The Fulbright experience for Schulte was more than transformative; it was a lesson in disagreeing with compassion while dancing and creating with the hands of many. In this interview, Schulte reminds us of the power of connecting with others, especially those who are different from us, and the opportunity to build peaceful connections through exchange.



Keywords: Berlin • International exchange • Compassion • Global change • Communication

INTRODUCTION

Stephanie Ricker Schulte is an Associate Dean of Fulbright College at the University of Arkansas. Schulte joined the Department of Communication at the University of Arkansas in 2008, where she also served as a faculty member, vice chair, and chair. Her research explores communication technologies, popular culture, and transnational media policy and examines the multidirectional relationships between technological design, American culture, and policymaking. In 1998, she received a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant award (ETA) to teach English in Berlin. The ETA program places Fulbrighters in classrooms abroad to assist local English teachers and serve as cultural ambassadors for the United States.

In this interview, Schulte discussed her Fulbright experience not only as a transformative experience but also as a lesson in disagreeing with compassion. She believes this translates into global change. Schulte reminds us of the power of connecting with others, especially those who are different from us, and of the opportunity to build peaceful connections through exchange. An openness that reminds us that when we get to know people, we see them as humans. Schulte invites us to remember that below every idea, every disagreement, is another complex human trying to communicate and express their own culture, ideology, and perspective.

INTERVIEW, AUGUST 1, 2025**1. Why did you choose Fulbright rather than another programme or award?**

I was in a unique position because I knew people who knew Fulbright personally. I also knew about his complex history, about his impact, about his program because I was a student in Fulbright College. I was attending classes in the building where he studied in the town where he is buried. I really agreed with the idea of peace through education, peace through international contact, and the idea that bringing people together at individual levels could eventually translate into global change.

I was already a believer in the program before I applied, in part because I was raised with an awareness of him. But, I did a teaching Fulbright because I believed my most significant impact would likely be through working with young people. As a teaching Fulbright, I knew I would be able to interact with many students at a school, learn from them and their perspectives, and offer whatever cultural perspectives I could bring.

2. Could you elaborate on your belief, and Senator Fulbright's belief, in peace through education? How did that central idea shape your experience?

I believe, as Senator Fulbright believed, that when you get to know individuals from other places, you see them as human and “turn nations into people;” you learn their complexities, you come to better understand their cultures, meaning, ideologies, perspectives, politics through human interaction. I know that is a slow, one-to-one process, but it is the way real, lasting change happens. I wanted to be a part of that bigger project. I also had language abilities in German and knew the German Fulbright was one of the oldest and most established. I was lucky enough to go to Berlin, which is an interesting place with a rich history. I was on the former East Side when I was teaching, which was its own unique experience in the late nineties. It was an incredible opportunity, it was life-changing.

3. How did the experience transform you? What lasting influence did Fulbright have on your life and work?

It feels like it changed my DNA in that it changed the way that I think, the way that I see people and the world. It changed my value system. I learned so much about America by being in Germany. I came back with a different perspective on the environment in which I was raised, which allowed me to approach my view of myself, my role as a citizen and community member, and my career in new ways.

I ended up studying transnational American studies, studying the role of America in the world historically and culturally. I moved to Washington, D.C. and while I finished my degrees, I worked in several organizations, including Radio Free Asia and the Washington Post.

When I came to the University of Arkansas, every class I taught in my home department of communication integrated international perspectives. I also taught in cultural studies, a discipline that has a highly cross-national history itself and an area at the University of Arkansas that always had a very internationally diverse student population. It is one of the things I love about that program: it features people from around the world connecting about ideas, something that closely resembles the Fulbright Program. I ended up working for Fulbright College, where I am now. Our college's motto is "peace through education," so in my service to this mission, I try to think about how to fuse global studies and global awareness into our curriculum and into our state. As my colleague Laurence Hare often says, our college's goal is to connect Arkansans to the world and the world to Arkansas.

4. Was this your first experience teaching a group?

I had taught individual classes and given individual lectures, speeches, or similar presentations, but I had never been responsible for a classroom for a long period of time before. I ran multi-week workshops, gave lectures, led exercises and activities, and I also organized many outside events, led groups, and did individual tutoring.

I was doing a lot of teaching but I was also doing a lot of learning and skill building. Because communities teach differently in different places, I learned many new teaching strategies, pedagogies, different type of instructional tactics. Those are all things that I learned there and brought back, many of which I employed when I became a teacher in the U.S.

5. Did you spend time with other Americans, or did you focus on meeting people from other countries?

I did not engage much with the American population while I was there. Some other Fulbrights were in different places in Germany, and we connected, we visited each other, and I had some people stay with me who were traveling Europe. But for the most part, I had a pretty immersive experience in Germany. I did that on purpose, to really embrace the opportunity of being abroad. I tried to travel as much as I could while I was there, either with people I met, with my roommates' friends, or I would travel on my own just to see things.

I went to Greece with some students who were studying; they had a school break, and they asked me to go with them. We were all traveling on super tight budgets, so we slept outside, at campgrounds, and on trains. It was great, and you know I'm still connected with some of them on social media. I'm also still associated with one of the teachers that I taught with, and I'm definitely connected with friends that I met there. I go back and see them sometimes and one of them came to my wedding.

6. So, it was truly an exchange for both you and your students?

Yes, it was. I taught English, but I also taught culture classes, about Indigenous populations in North America, and about American history. I conducted cooking classes, we held a hip hop dance party, we worked through short story and newspaper article translations, watched films, advertisements, and TV shows, and listened to music together. They brought their favorite items to me, and we talked about them. They shared their cultural experiences and took me into their homes. It was very much an exchange, and it was challenging. One of the students I was supposed to tutor was a neo-Nazi affiliated student, which posed unique challenges.

7. How did you manage that relationship?

It was very interesting to hear his perspectives and his positions. It was challenging to connect with him, to find ways to communicate with him, in particular because I disagreed so fundamentally with him. That said, there are ways to disagree with people and still connect meaningfully, and that is what I tried to do. On my last day at the school, he brought me flowers. We were able to disagree, debate, and think about our differences in ways I thought were constructive. He learned English in the process. Hopefully, we both left with a bit more understanding about each other. It was very challenging and also very rewarding. I think the school was confused when he brought me flowers at the end because we had debated so much (laughing).

It's hard to develop compassion for people with whom you disagree. But until you sit across the table from that person, you express what you think and listen to what they think, you cannot really connect and move forward. I believe interaction is key to compassion and that is something that's part of what felt like a DNA change in Germany. This experience gave me the opportunity to become comfortable with disagreement. It was a moment where I saw its value and began to seek divergent opinions in a new way. That is a practice I still do and encourage my students to do. In this political moment, I wish we were all doing a little bit more of that.

How can we hope to change each other's lives if we are not listening to each other? Without communication, connection is impossible. I think you can disagree with someone, listen to them, and say, "I absolutely disagree with that," and still respect the person. You can respect their agency to believe what they think, and you can absolutely disagree with what they're saying. I think we'd be better off as a nation in the United States, if we did that more, if we were willing to really listen and confront disagreement, but retain basic respect and compassion. Those conversations are the only way we move forward.

"Without communication, connection is impossible."

8. How did you care for yourself while navigating the challenges of living away from family in a new environment?

I do think that any long-term study abroad is a resilience opportunity. You are tested, you are on your own, you are independent, and this was in the pre-Internet age. There were no cell phones or the internet in the way that we think about them now. There were many support networks in place at the school. I had a family that I lived with for a while until I moved out on my own. I had roommates, an East German and a Turkish immigrant. The three of us lived together in an apartment building in downtown Berlin. That was amazing because I learned about the Turkish community in Berlin and what their experiences were like. I learned about what the former East German experience was like from my roommate. He took me back to see his family for Christmas one year, and so I got to learn about their experiences as well. But it can be very challenging, isolating, and lonely. Any person who lives in a country that is not their own knows how difficult that can be.

9. Is there something from the Fulbright experience that influenced the traits of your personality? Did doing the Fulbright program awaken some of your talents, some of your gifts that you did not know, or think you did not know about yourself, took you to where you are and where you want to go?

When you're teaching at Fulbright, you're put into a leadership position. I was put in front of a classroom, and I had to do my best to rise to the challenge. I was terrified. I was terrified of speaking in a different language. I was terrified of teaching. I tried just to move forward. But I had to move forward through fear. I still do that all the time. I'm terrified a lot (laughing), but I try to keep going. I do not want to be a person who does not do things because I am afraid. Part of what that experience taught me was the value of moving through stressful situations, of not letting fear stop you. It was a terrifying thing to meet a person who is affiliated with national socialism. And it is terrifying to leave home for somewhere where people are different, speak a different language, and believe different things. I want to be a brave person. I'm not always (laughing), but I want to be a person who is.

10. What advice would you give a young person who is considering a Fulbright but remains uncertain about applying?

Oh, absolutely, go! Without question. You learn so much about yourself. It is a challenge but it is also growth. You confront yourself, you learn, and you give. It is a richly textured experience. For the students I was working with in those classes, I was mostly the first American they had ever met. Some of the teachers that I was working with had taught Russian and then became English teachers after the Berlin Wall fell. Many of them had a lot of questions about America, often really difficult questions. It was fantastic to wrestle with those questions, to research them, to learn about America from their perspectives, through the lenses of their experiences in the former East, their family relationships, and their politics. It is just transformative, so yes, go.

FURTHER READING

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Dr. Schulte while serving as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA) in Germany.

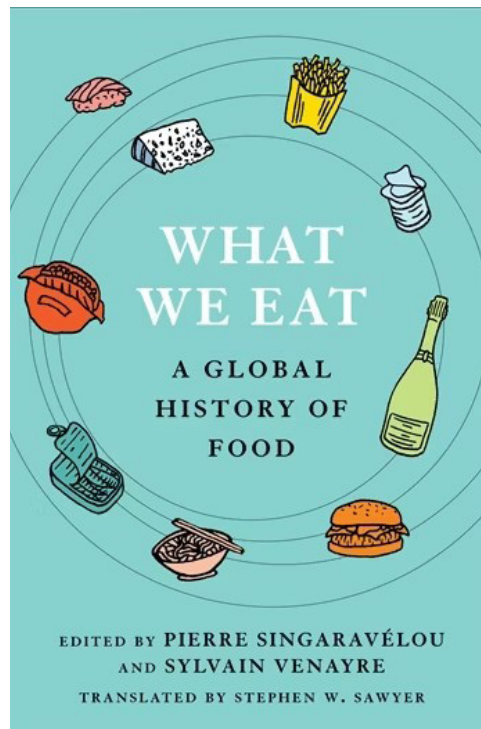
BIOGRAPHY

Stephanie Ricker Schulte is associate dean of Fulbright College at the University of Arkansas. She joined the university's Department of Communication in 2008 and has served as a faculty member, vice chair, and chair. Her research examines communication technologies, popular culture, transnational media policy, technological design, American culture, and policymaking. She received a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant award to Germany in 1998. Interviewer Erika Mariana Almenara is the author of this interview. *This interview, conducted in July 2025, has been edited for clarity and ease of reading.*

REVIEWS

BEYOND THE MENU: FOOD'S PLACE IN HISTORY, POWER, AND BELONGING

BY SWAYAM SAMPURNA PANIGRAHI



What We Eat, A Global History of Food, ed by Pierre Singaravélou and Sylvain Venayre. Translated by Stephen W. Sawyer who was a Fulbright Scholar in Paris from 2000-2001.

Food is more than merely nourishment, and *What We Eat: A Global History of Food* makes that point powerfully. Spanning continents and centuries, this compilation of essays by noted historians explains how everyday foods carry stories of empire, resistance, labor, technology, and social change.

One of the book's early strengths, for example, is its framing of food alongside political resistance. By placing the Boston Tea Party and Gandhi's Salt March within the same opening narrative, the editors remind us that food has long been a medium for protest and sovereignty. They go on to explain that as the world industrialized, food underwent a significant transformation as well. Food production triggered a packaging revolution, reshaping not only how food was stored and transported, but also how it was marketed and perceived. Food was often promoted as "healthy" without thorough scientific verification, and such misleading health claims continue to exist even in modern food marketing.

The global mobility of food is a recurring theme in food history, as the movement of ingredients, practices, and culinary terms has long predated modern globalization. Food has always travelled, and its linguistic traces often reveal these journeys. For instance, words such as “sugar” and “pepper” can be traced back to Sanskrit, reflecting early trade and cultural exchange, according to author Julie Marquet. Similarly, the evolution of dishes like curry illustrates how culinary practices adapt and transform across regions. Its regional parallel, tarkari, a staple in Odia cuisine, has been part of ritual offerings to Lord Jagannath at the Puri Jagannath Temple since the twelfth century.

What We Eat beautifully highlights specific foods to explain broader social and economic dynamics. Pauline Peretz makes the point that bagels, for instance, are not merely baked goods, but symbols of protection due to their circular shape. While discussing baguettes, Christian Grataloup notes that one theory attributes their shape to Napoleon I: an elongated shape “made it easy to carry in soldier’s basques or trousers” (16). While the historical accuracy is unknown, it illustrates how food forms can be shaped by practical considerations like portability and convenience during wartime.

Interestingly, the rise of fast food has been associated with shortened lunch breaks, illustrating how certain food innovations can restructure daily routines and, at times, constrain individual autonomy. However, not all food practices function in the same way. Traditional formats such as dim sum, originally consumed as a leisurely tea accompaniment, reflect a contrasting culture of slow, social dining. This practice has been documented in establishments such as the Pearl Pavilion (dating to 1745) and the Guangzhou Tea House Association, as well as in the renowned Glorious China tea house (founded in 1876), according to Françoise Sabban. Similarly, other food forms illustrate how culinary practices adapt to shifting socio-economic contexts. The rise of the Turkish döner kebab in Germany reflects patterns of migration and urban labor markets, as Özge Samanci, points out. The growing use of freeze-dried food has been linked to increased female workforce participation and the demand for convenience, according to Martin Bruegel.

Caviar’s spread, for instance, guided by the migration of sturgeon fish, illustrates how rarity enhances value even when the product itself remains unchanged. Stephanie Le Bras explains how champagne’s identity as an aristocratic beverage has been embedded into consumption practices.

Pascal Ory writes about the particularly compelling history of coffee ; its growing demand in Europe was historically linked to systems of slavery and exploitation elsewhere. The emergence of substitutes, such as chicory, illustrates how food systems adapt under conditions of scarcity and political control. During Napoleon’s Continental Blockade, for example, coffee imports to Europe were severely restricted, prompting Napoleon to encourage the use of roasted chicory root as an alternative. Over time, this substitute became widely accepted in Europe, to the extent that the French language adopted the German term “ersatz” to describe such replacements.

Equally striking is the discussion of condensed milk, which was initially marketed as a substitute for breastfeeding and later promoted as supporting women- despite the fact it deprived children of adequate nutrition. Canadian historian Laurence Monnais points out that companies like Nestlé positioned their product in Asian women's magazines as "an indispensable aid in infant growth," (82) masking commercial interests as maternal welfare.

Ultimately, *What We Eat* succeeds because it treats food as a living archive of human history. It is about emotion, power, identity and ethics, and it reminds us that every bite we eat carries scrumptious stories. For Fulbright alumni and globally minded readers, this book offers not just knowledge, but a deeper awareness of how interconnected our plates truly are.

"What We Eat beautifully highlights specific foods to explain broader social and economic dynamics."

Singaravélou, Pierre and Sylvain Venayre, eds. *What We Eat, A Global History of Food*. Translated by Stephen W. Sawyer. New York: Columbia University Press, 2025. 360 pp. \$26.00.

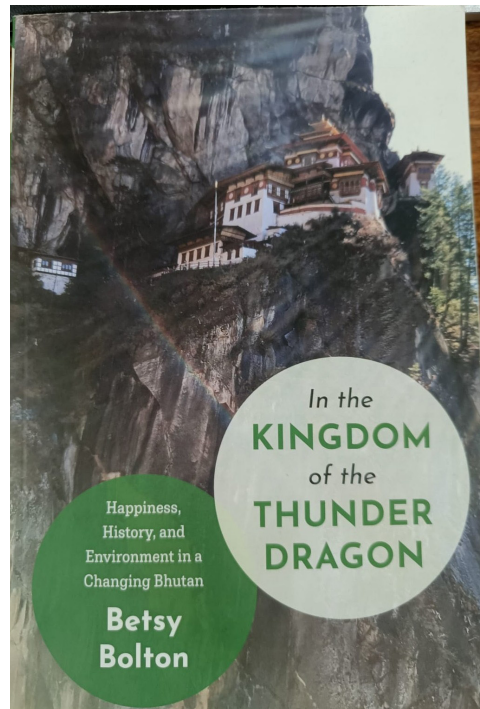
BIOGRAPHY

Swayam Sampurna Panigrahi, is a Fulbright-Nehru Post-doctoral Fellow at the Gladstein Family Human Rights Institute, University of Connecticut, researching human rights issues in the textile and apparel supply chains. She is an Assistant Professor at IFMR GSB, Krea University, India, and earned her Ph.D. in Business Management from XIM University. She has received two Emerald Literati Awards for her research contributions. She brings interdisciplinary expertise combining engineering, policy, and commitment to ethical business practices. Her academic travels have cultivated a deep appreciation for diverse culinary traditions, allowing her to explore the rich food histories of the countries she visits. She can be reached at spm25002@uconn.edu.



BHUTAN: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES BEYOND THE STEREOTYPES

BY VIJAY PRAKASH SINGH



In the Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon: Happiness, History, and Environment in a Changing Bhutan by Betsy Bolton who was a Fulbright Scholar to Morocco in 2013-4 and Bhutan 2017-8.

One picks up a book on Bhutan expecting to find a sort of Shangri-La with gentle Himalayan people, an enchanting mountain landscape with ideally preserved flora and fauna. For me personally, living in India, I envisaged any book on this beautiful neighboring kingdom, especially one written for the general reader, as a delightful experience that will take me to an enchanting country. But, hold on, I tell myself, not all accounts must be idyllic! And in truth, Betsy Bolton delivers little of what I expected. Instead, every aspect of the country is put to the severest litmus test, and nothing is taken for granted—from Bhutan’s democratic monarchy to its sustainable development projects, even to the innovative idea of Gross National Happiness (GNH).

Among the questions she sets out to explore are these: Was Bhutan’s constitutional, democratic monarchy more authoritarian or more democratic? What led to the expulsion of tens of thousands of ethnic Nepalis from Southern Bhutan, the Lhotshampa crisis? Was Bhutan’s framing of GNH just “ideological cover” for ethnic discrimination? Some of these questions leave one with reservations: If a monarch with absolute right to rule introduces a

democratic electoral system, should he be considered authoritarian? Likewise, GNH measures the happiness of the people not in purely economic terms, like the GDP, but in terms of their satisfaction with their livelihoods, education, conscious governance, spiritual opportunities, relationship with the environment, and material comfort. Why should it be a “cover for ethnic discrimination?”

Delineating the profoundly significant role of the monarch, Bolton notes, “The Raven Crown is a symbol of responsibility to create peace and happiness for the people in the kingdom” (77). Yet the King’s legitimate wish to decentralize power, vested in his position through a national Assembly, a council of ministers, has been met in Bhutan with counter arguments. The argument was that electoral power would create a multiplicity of allegiances and divisive politics based on regionalism and communalism, thereby undermining the sovereignty and security of the state. The power vested in members of the Assembly led to a crisis of confidence, so that they felt they were “overburdened by an unbearable load” and that it was like “asking a child to carry a spear before he can even carry an arrow” (96). Many thought that introducing the democratic system was premature and that Bhutan wasn’t ready. So the King’s wish is fraught with contradictions, and this too, is a transitional phase before Bhutan settles down to being a democratic monarchy.

Bolton also questions Bhutan’s innovative concept of Gross National Happiness, taking the ethnic divisiveness in Southern Bhutan, the Lhotshampa expulsions, into account. Yet the ethnic diversities and conflicting interests of South Asia make it difficult to allow for an absolute cultural integration. If there is any middle path that could have been adopted in such a situation, it is hard to say, but many countries, including the United States, have had a history of such ethnic and racial conflicts. The history of the United States is scarred when it comes to the suppression of Native American culture, for example. A different but comparable situation is the discrimination that African Americans face to date in the US. Indeed, Bolton seems to be unduly severe on Bhutan here.

A visit to the College of Zorig Chusum, where the arts of painting, wood carving, weaving, and hand and machine embroidery are taught, allows Bolton to showcase the rich handicrafts that are so vibrant a part of all Buddhist cultures. She also visits the Tiger Nest monastery where Padmasambhava, the Guru Rimpoche, meditated, having flown to this precarious perch atop sharp cliffs on the back of his disciple Yeshe Tshogyel who took the form of a flying tiger to bring him there. Bolton’s trek from Ranjung to Sakteng provides a more personal narrative.

In fact, one wishes there were more such personal accounts in the book, rather than the large section of academic research that forms its crux because, for all the analyses, one doesn’t quite get the answers to the questions that might interest most readers: What is the landscape and terrain like? What are the major species of fauna that have been preserved due to environmentally conscious development? What are the traits of the Bhutanese as a people? What are relationships like between men and women? What about birth,

courtship, marriage and death rituals and what are the major festivals? How does Buddhism impact the collective cultural life of the country? What is the Bhutanese attitude to food, considering that cuisine is important to any culture. What is their most iconic dish, *ema datshi*, like?

Be that as it may, this is an account that goes to the heart of most issues relating to Bhutan with an incisive perception that takes nothing for granted and assumes nothing. It makes for reading which is more analytical if you've assumed that it will be a romanticized Shangri-La image of the Himalayan kingdom— but as a research document, it is remarkable.

“Goes to the heart of most issues relating to Bhutan with an incisive perception.”

Bolton, Betsy. *In the Kingdom of the Thunder Dragon: Happiness, History, and Environment in a Changing Bhutan*. Ann Arbor, Michigan, Lever Press, 402pp. \$32.99

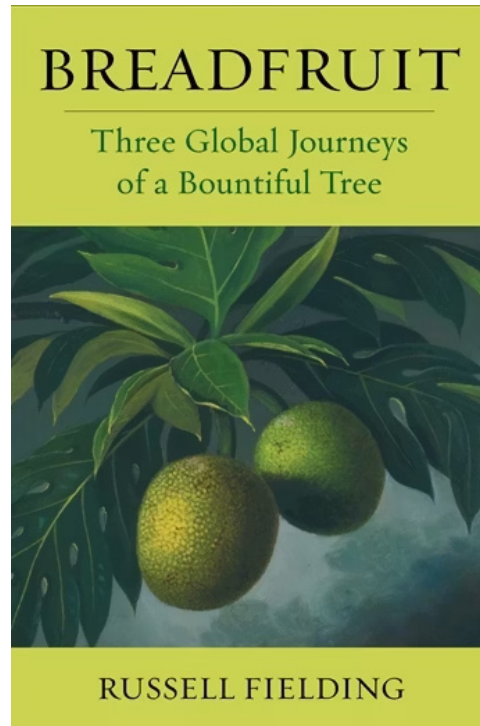
BIOGRAPHY

Vijay Prakash Singh was a Professor in the Department of English & Modern European Languages at the University of Lucknow, India, and held the chair from 2016-2019. From 2019-2020, he was a Fulbright Scholar to Claflin University, a leading HBCU in South Carolina. He has published in Indian and international journals and written travelogues (*Mountain Travelogues on the Himalayas and Tibet*) and two collections of short stories, most recently, *A Secret Life on the Alaknanda* (2023). Singh is an inveterate traveller, and his favorite destination is the Himalayas. He can be reached at vinjayprakash.lu@gmail.com.



TREE OF HUMANITY, TREE OF FOOD

BY DAVID A. TAYLOR



Breadfruit: Three Global Journeys of a Bountiful Tree by Russell Fielding, who was a Fulbright Scholar in Canada, 2005-6.

Thirty years ago, as an editor on a US AID-funded project on tropical deforestation based in Bangkok, I sometimes joined the scientists walking through farmlands, forests, and home-gardens in Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Nepal, and India. One day high in the hills of Sri Lanka, I walked a narrow dirt path shadowed by the big branches and wide, pointed leaves of a magnificent breadfruit tree. I was awed by the huge, globular fruits hanging by their stems.

Russell Fielding's book *Breadfruit* holds many similar surprising moments and, through the use of human stories, he helps us understand why people have such strong feelings about the tree. He introduces us to people around the world, including Hervé Ah-Scha, a cook in Marquesas, who demonstrated his musical technique for preparing breadfruit:

Working with a rhythm that a professional percussionist might envy, Hervé used his right hand to pound the coalescing mixture of breadfruit and manioc with the stone while his left hand alternatively folded the now-forming *popoi* into layers and splashed on more water. (15)

Readers also learn Herman Melville's description of the tree penned in his early seafaring novel *Typee*. He compared the tree's "grand and towering" profile to that of New England's "noble elm" (65).

The subtitle of the book—"Three Global Journeys"—refers to what Fielding identifies as breadfruit's major historical journeys: first, from its home in Asia across the Pacific; second, from the Pacific islands to the Caribbean. The third journey, worldwide, is happening with globalization today.

Breadfruit's bounty in its first home, the Pacific region, goes beyond food, however, entangling culture, social class, and survival. In Fiji, a tradition grew up where new parents immediately buried their baby's placenta and planted a breadfruit seedling. In Hawaii, Fielding discovered that breadfruit wood was a favorite for builders of canoes and surfboards. In the workshop of a surfboard maker named Pōhaku, the author witnessed the craft of making surfboards. Pōhaku said that breadfruit's ability to flex and sit lightly in the water allowed a surfer to feel the ocean through her feet. Pōhaku starts with a rough cut of the wood and drinks a traditional beverage to honor the gods and ancestors and to "awaken the spirit of the wood" (21) which lets him see the surfboard within.

This sensitivity to the tree's place in culture and the world reminded me of research by a colleague, Sri Lankan geographer Dr. Anoja Wickramasinghe. In the 1990s she interviewed scores of people in the central hills about the trees they valued. In home-gardens, they prized food-producing trees, especially breadfruit (*Artocarpus altilis*) and its relative, jackfruit (*Artocarpus heterophyllus*). The farmers she spoke with had ideas for making those trees even more efficient in their space-constrained home-gardens. Among families she interviewed, food came first; timber, poles and fuelwood second. Her research, part of a six-country study, helped reframe goals for tree-breeding programs, and showed me how science could address problems across disciplines.

Breadfruit also played a role in the brutal side of human history, from rapacious European voyages of conquest to later attempts at social engineering. Fielding doesn't flinch from retelling these episodes. The Portuguese navigator who first named the Marquesas in 1595, wrote about a tree that produced food that locals "feed much upon it in all sorts of ways" (57-58). Then, after recording his description, he and his crew cruelly murdered 200 Marquesans and simply continued westward.

In its second global journey to the Caribbean, colonizers associated the natural fecundity of tropical environments and the ease of harvesting breadfruit with the laziness of people who lived there. (It went against the mantra of 'struggle for your food' that fueled northern European survival). A scheme traced oddly enough to the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, set out "to mend the Tahitians by extirpating the breadfruit tree from their island and making them live by the sweat of their brows" (67). Others saw breadfruit's productivity as a chance to wring every ounce of production from the slavery system. There's evidence that Voltaire originated the notion of bringing

breadfruit to European plantations in the Caribbean. The British financed two massive, round-the-world voyages, including the notorious *Bounty* for that purpose. Later generations of Black Caribbean families detested breadfruit for its blandness and its suggestion of slave food.

St. Lucian Nobel laureate Derek Walcott upended associations from the slavery era with his poem *The Bounty*, which envisions a poignant moment in the historic mutiny where the breadfruit cargo, tossed overboard, suffers alongside the people. The seedlings bob in the ship's wake, "their shoots dip and lift..." (129-30), the global tides of botany and humanity visibly entwined.

The author's gusto and travels supported by the Sloan Foundation, make this a wide-ranging assessment with many tangents. Fielding brings a welcome spotlight to an overlooked player in the human cause of survival and the larger story of ties that bind botany and humanity.

"Fielding brings a welcome spotlight to an overlooked player in the human cause of survival and the larger story of ties that bind botany and humanity."

Russell Fielding, *Breadfruit: Three Global Journeys of a Bountiful Tree*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2025. 285 pp. \$28.00

BIOGRAPHY

David A. Taylor was a 2025 Fulbright U.S. Scholar in Portugal, studying and teaching climate journalism at Lisbon Polytechnic. His nonfiction books include *Ginseng*, *the Divine Root*, and *Cork Wars: Intrigue and Industry in World War II*, which received an Independent Publishers Book Award for world history. He received a 2024 Outstanding Feature award from the Society of Environmental Journalists for "Inside the Crime Rings Trafficking Sand." He teaches writing at Johns Hopkins University and produces a history/culture podcast, "The People's Recorder," which was awarded a 2025 Signal Award. He can be reached at david.a.taylor@jhu.edu.



INTERVIEW WITH RUSSELL FIELDING, AUTHOR OF *BREADFRUIT***1. Why did you go to Prince Edward Island for your Fulbright?**

My MA research involved a comparison of three islands off the coast of Florida, my home state. Each was about the same size and home to state park, but they differed in that one was connected to the mainland by a causeway, another was connected by a state-run ferry service, and the third had no connection at all except private boats. During my research, I was heavily reliant upon literature that had come out of UPEI's Institute of Island Studies and was regularly in contact with the Institute's director, Dr. Godfrey Baldacchino. As I was completing the degree, my advisor, Dr. Jeffrey Gritzner, recommended that I apply for a Fulbright, and UPEI was the obvious choice.

2. What were your responsibilities there?

I joined a research collaboration studying the cultural, economic, and environmental changes that take place on an island when a bridge is built to connect it to the mainland. I also started a new research project, focused on the former whaling communities around Trinity Bay, Newfoundland. Finally, I taught two courses, my first university-level teaching experience.

3. Living on Prince Edward Island must have been quite a change for you.

Indeed it was! I quickly fell in with a wonderful group of colleagues at the university and friends, importantly, that had nothing whatsoever to do with the university. It was this campus-community balance that really made my year meaningful. As for changes, the most memorable were the weather (obviously different from Florida but quite a change from Montana as well), the culture (I developed a strong interest in the tradition of "kitchen parties" and the unique folk/maritime music that goes along with them), and the "islandness." I had never lived on an island before, and I came to understand personally a topic that, thus far, I had only known academically. From talking with older Islanders, I also understood what a change the Confederation Bridge had brought when it was built in 1997.

4. Any personal memories that you want to share?

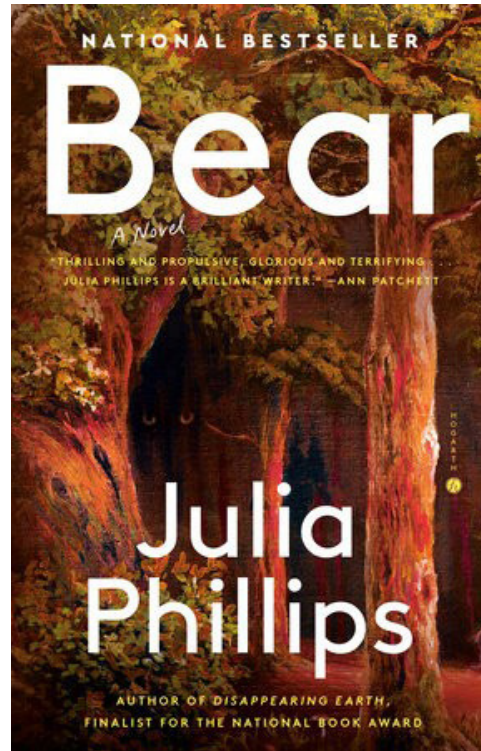
One of my favorite memories was participating in the 13-km Terry Fox Run (a series of nationwide runs to celebrate the legacy of Terry Fox, the young athlete and activist who had set off to run across Canada to raise money for cancer research). Another key memory was experiencing my first (and only, to-date) academic labor strike. While I was at UPEI, the faculty union called a strike to demand better pay and conditions. In solidarity, I cancelled my classes, but I met in cafes and pubs with small groups of students who wanted to continue our discussions.

5. What would you say has been the most lasting outcome of your Fulbright?

The Fulbright has had a real, lasting impact on my entire academic career. In terms of research, it was during my Fulbright that I conceived of the subject that has been my longest-lasting focus area to-date: the environmental, cultural, and public-health implications of small-scale whaling. It's a research area with which I am still engaged today (see, for example, the WhaleAdapt project). More broadly, my Fulbright experience showed me the value of interdisciplinary collaboration. The Institute of Island Studies included faculty and students with a variety of academic backgrounds, all focused on the goal of studying islands "on their own terms." This kind of collaboration has been the mainstay of my academic career ever since. Finally, the Fulbright program, in general, has a special place in my heart. I encourage top-performing students to apply every year and when Federal funding was being cut recently, I wrote to my representatives in Congress to argue for the protection of the Fulbright program. It's a vital part of American academic life.

BEARS LOOM LARGE

BY ERIKA J. WATERS



Bear by Julia Phillips, who was a Fulbright Scholar to Russia, 2011-2012.

While bears appeared in early nineteenth-century European fairytales as enchanted, kindly creatures, it was Teddy Roosevelt who shaped the image of bears in the popular imagination when he refused to shoot an injured, caged bear in 1902. Soon, “teddy bears” became a world-wide phenomenon, and bears were viewed not as wild and dangerous but as cuddly and comforting. Anthropomorphic bears soon appeared in children’s books, among them *The Roosevelt Bears*, *Winnie the Pooh*, and *Paddington Bear* and they were featured in national advertising campaigns, such as the US Forest Service’s famous Smokey the Bear.

Yet, when Chicago named its football team the “Bears,” and Memphis called its basketball team, the “Grizzlies,” their intention was to evoke a very different image, one of brute force and strength, which is certainly more realistic for anyone who’s ever actually seen a bear up-close, whether in captivity or in the wild. This dichotomy—bears as cuddly and comforting vs dangerous and violent—is at the heart of *Bear*, a novel by Julia Phillips.

The bear story which most directly influenced Julia Phillips's novel, however, is the Grimm's fairy tale, *Snow-White and Rose-Red*, reprinted at the back of the book. In that story, two very close sisters—so close they always hold hands—live with their widowed mother. They're saved from an evil dwarf by a bear they had befriended, who it turns out had been bewitched by the dwarf and was, in fact, a wealthy prince.

"This dichotomy—bears as cuddly and comforting vs dangerous and violent—is at the heart of Bear."

Similarly, in *Bear*, there are two, dutiful sisters; in this case, they both have dead-end, low-paying jobs. Home is a "stale" ranch house in the San Juan Islands, once-owned by their grandmother, and they're caregivers to their dying mother, a victim of the toxic chemicals she inhaled as a nail technician.

The sisters are very close—at least they are from younger sister Sam's perspective—and that bond is vital to her existence: "For years, in the midst of the mindless buzz produced by every other person on this island, Sam had believed she had one good, real thing: her sister" (232). She's convinced they share the same dreams of an escape from the islands that so restrict and imprison them. This turns out, though, to be an illusion, shattered when a huge brown bear makes an unlikely appearance.

Elena sees no danger at all and talks about the bear, "the way a person might if an angel touched down in front of them" (36). According to her, "the bear was their one good thing: a specter, a spirit, an extraordinary beast. A visitor from someplace enchanted. A visitor from the mysterious world. . .teaching them what is was to love living, helping them to make it through" (120). The bear is "furred and muscle-bound" (151) and exudes a raw, male power; she's clearly attracted to her "bear-lover" (180). Elena is sure the bear is kind, loving, protective, and insists there is no risk. Despite warnings, she entices the bear with food.

For her part, Sam is horrified and recognizes the danger. The bear is "bigger than a refrigerator" and stinks of "old urine, wet dog" (152). She alternately seeks and rejects the pragmatic advice of a woman from the state Fish and Wildlife Authority and is equally ambivalent when an old high school classmate, a neighbor, offers assistance. She also suspects the motives of her fellow ferry worker/lover who seems to genuinely care about her. In fact, Sam rejects everybody who tries to help her hapless family and trusts no one. All of this leads to the inevitable tragic ending, which while predictable, is nonetheless dramatic and shocking, even heart-breaking.

All of this transpires in the beautiful San Juan islands, an interesting choice for Phillips. Bear sightings are rare there, but the islands offer a metaphor for the family's narrow, contained world where there's no easy escape. Even more to the point, Sam works the concession stand on the ferry; her life plays out in a constantly repeating circle. The ferry moves from island to island, transporting tourists from all over the world, yet she herself never actually goes anywhere. A boat might be a symbol of escape, but in this case, it's static, like a rocking horse, constantly moving but going nowhere.

Although the sisters lead boring, mundane lives—enlivened only by the bear's presence—their story is compelling and suspenseful. Even if you suspect the story can't end well, you're still propelled forward. You'll be fascinated by the hold this enormous, wild beast has on Elena, how she fools herself through desperation and isolation—and obsession. Maybe most of all, you'll be intrigued by the complicated bonds of sisterhood and familial obligations which Phillips so deftly explores.

Julia Phillips, *Bear*. New York: Hogarth, 2024. 302 pages, \$12.00. \$18.00

BIOGRAPHY

Erika J. Waters was a Fulbright Scholar to Turku, Finland in 2005. She is Professor Emeritus from the University of the Virgin Islands and founding editor of the literary magazine, *The Caribbean Writer*. She also edited collections of poetry, fiction, literary criticism, and drama and received grants to study women writers from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Tulsa Center for the Study of Women's Literature. Later, she taught at the University of Southern Maine and wrote books on Maine, the Virgin Islands, and vintage Florida. She's published articles and interviews in magazines and websites, including *Ms. Magazine*, *World Literature Today*, and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and co-hosted a podcast called *Cool Dead Women*. She is currently the Book Review Editor of *Fulbright Chronicles*.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

CALL FOR PAPERS: HOW CAN WE NAVIGATE OUR RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD?

GUEST-EDITED BY AÏCHA LAKHSSASS, RUMU SARKAR, ZHENG-SHENG ZHANG

The upcoming themed issue of *Fulbright Chronicles*, Volume 5, Number 1 (February 2027), is dedicated to exploring how best we can respond to our rapidly changing world. These global changes have implications for the Fulbright Program and its community as they impact technology, travel, immigration, global health, geopolitics, economics, education, culture, and media, among other issues. We encourage Fulbright alumni with STEM, engineering, medicine, mathematics, and other specialized fields of science and technology to contribute an article. We especially invite submissions that place a special emphasis on the impact on the Fulbright program itself, its role in education and educational outreach, and how it may strengthen its relevancy and viability.

WHY NOW?

Following the end of World War II in 1945, a new world order was put in place that shaped our world for the past 80 years. That order is collapsing. Fulbright alumni are uniquely positioned to contribute to this critical discourse about how we best navigate these rapid changes.

Submissions may explore any topic related to how we might navigate our changing world drawing on the author's Fulbright experience and background, with a particular focus on the impact on the Fulbright Program and its sustainability.

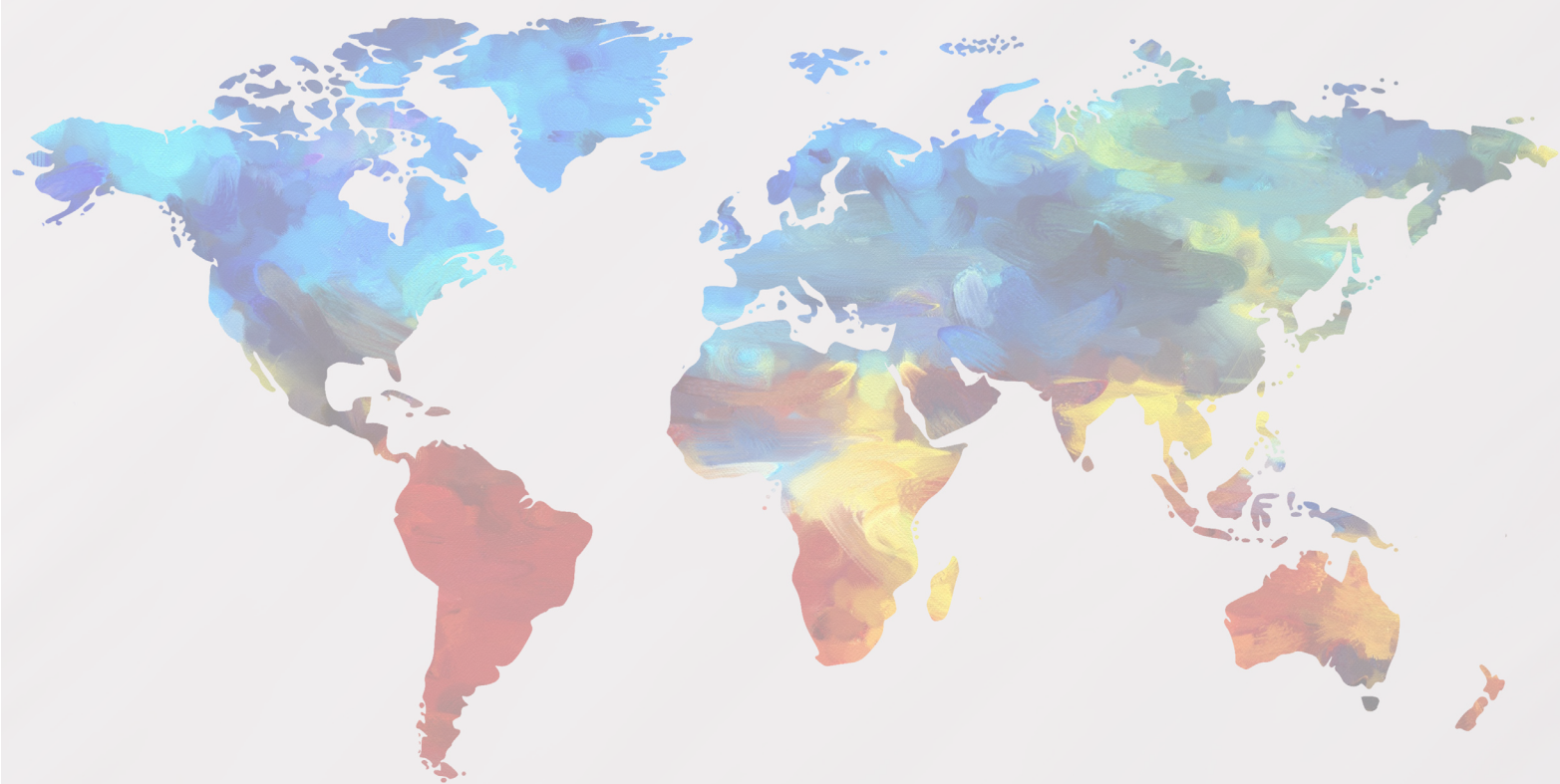
SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

All contributions must conform to the *Fulbright Chronicles'* [Submission Guidelines](#) for Authors. For this special issue, submissions may be up to 2,500 words, with commentaries' usual 1,200-word limit waived. Submissions must be received **NO LATER THAN NOVEMBER 9, 2026**, and should be sent to Aïcha Lakhssass at aicha.lakhssass@gmail.com.

TIMELINE

- *First Manuscript Submission*: Authors must submit their manuscripts consistent with the Guidelines by **November 9, 2026**.

- *Manuscript Revisions:* Manuscripts will be returned to authors for any necessary revisions by **December 8, 2026**, to be resubmitted by the author by **December 15, 2026**, with the final deadline for revised manuscripts by **January 11, 2027**.
- *Publication:* The themed issue will be published in **February 2027**.



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