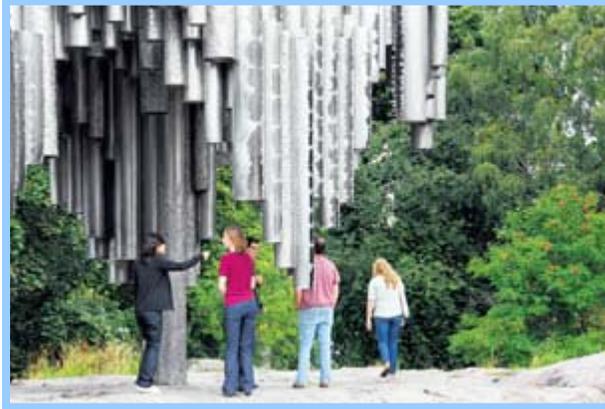


Academic opportunities forge Finnish-US links



Some of this year's Fulbright beneficiaries admiring the monument to Finnish composer Jean Sibelius, in Töölö.

The Finnish Fulbright Center celebrates 60 years of cultural exchange.

This year twenty-one Americans have so far received a Fulbright grant to lecture, conduct research, study or teach in Finland during 2009-2010. Seven universities across the country will host the scholars, covering a range of fields including art education, health, engineering, music, law, political science and history. Further grants are expected to be awarded over the coming months.

The Finnish Fulbright Center, which celebrates its 60th anniversary this year, was set up to increase mutual understanding between Finland and the US through educational and cultural exchange.

Each year, the centre awards approximately 800,000 euros worth of grants to around 80 Finnish

and American students and professionals, who also receive continuing advisory and administrative support.

Finland's reputation for world-class education is what attracts many of the American scholars but some have more personal reasons for wanting to come here.

"My paternal grandfather was from Karelia, so Finland has special associations for me," says Melanie Lahti, a Yale-educated clarinetist studying at the Sibelius Academy in Helsinki. "And professionally, Finland is an excellent place to study the clarinet," she continues. "I heard about the Sibelius Academy and my clarinet teacher Harri Mäki when I was studying in the States. There are a lot of world-class clarinet players in Finland, like Kari Kirkku, who is giving a masterclass here in a few weeks."

While in Finland, Fulbright students can carry out a research project in addition to their timetabled studies. Lahti's project focuses on the production and public reception of new classical music. Again, she says, Finland offers unique opportunities for her research. "I have been overwhelmed by the sheer number of concerts you can go to. I've also noticed that many have at least one piece by a living Finnish composer. In the US, new music is presented as a separate category, but here it is much more integrated, more accessible to the public."

Scholarship and diplomacy

Based at the Helsinki Theatre Academy, Julia Stein is another Fulbright beneficiary who has come to Finland to develop her chosen art form, combining comic books, performance and video art. "I knew of Finnish artists working with experimental narratives like me and I thought I could learn a lot by being here," she explains. "The Theatre Academy is pretty unique for having a programme for live art and performance. There aren't many programmes like that in the world."

In addition to their formal studies, both students are also taking Finnish lessons and say that they enjoy the social opportunities that studying in

American Voices Seminar
University of Turku
16-17 October 2009
Free admission.

Fulbright grants are available to Finnish and US students, researchers and institutions. Full details are available from the Finnish Fulbright Center

www.fulbright.fi

Helsinki offers. "There are so many cultural events and festivals here, and it is easy to get to know people," says Stein. "I'm considering staying in Finland after my Fulbright year is up."

While the Fulbright scheme offers clear benefits for individual scholars, it also has an important role to play in diplomacy, says Fulbright director Terhi Mölsä.

"The US and Finnish governments recognise the important role the Finnish Fulbright has had in developing the relations between our two countries, and have recently renewed their firm commitment to the future development of the programme," Mölsä states.

Participants in this year's scheme will be making their own contribution to cultural exchange at the American Voices seminar in October. Taking place at the University of Turku, the seminar covers both serious and light-hearted aspects of US society and culture through the experiences of the Fulbright beneficiaries and is open to the public.

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