

THE
News
FULBRIGHT FINLAND

VISITING COLUMNIST: PERMANENT SECRETARY OF THE MINISTRY OF
EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND CULTURE

ISSUE 73 VOL. 31
SPRING 2021

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University Graduate
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**Solving the
Plastic Pollution
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Science Driving Exchanges



In this issue of the *Fulbright Finland News* we focus on science and research, and how international scientific collaboration leads to increased innovation and creative problem-solving.

Current and former Fulbright scholars share their efforts in search of solutions to pressing global challenges, from decarbonizing the built environment (p. 10), and forecasting disease emergence (p. 17), to solving the plastic pollution crisis (p. 9).

We also explore the role that scientists can play in diplomacy and international relations, and how integrating science and diplomacy can help address universal problems (p. 8). And we are pleased to be able to announce the inaugural recipients of the Foundation’s new strategic Seeking Solutions for Global Challenges Award (p. 6).

It has been a year unlike any other. Under the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic, our grantees and alumni reflect on the transformational nature of international exchanges. Their honest and insightful accounts talk about the transition from “comfort zones” to “courage

zones” (p. 18), discuss the holistic ways in which exchange experiences affect personal and professional trajectories (p. 13), and describe the new paths, whether in pursuing research in biomedicine (p. 17), building accessible journalism (p. 14), or removing societal barriers to the success of people with disabilities (p. 11).

We are honored to have as our visiting columnist the Permanent Secretary of the Finnish Ministry of Education, Science, and Culture, **Anita Lehikoinen** (p. 3).

As the current academic year draws to a close, we convey our gratitude to all our partners, grantees, and alumni, and welcome the new academic year by announcing our newest partnership award with Aalto University (p. 4), and a record number of Finnish and American grantees for the next year (p. 6).

Terhi Mölsä
Chief Executive Officer
Fulbright Finland Foundation

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Cover photo: James Evans, University of Alaska Anchorage

Finnish-U.S. Science Cooperation

Finland and the United States are on solid, value-based, collaborative ground regarding technology and science. The importance of producing knowledge through research, and the multifaceted ways knowledge is utilized, are key building blocks of our societies. Both countries have recently addressed the need explicitly, and on a long term basis, to increase research and development spending in order to support ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable growth and global impact.

SCIENCE IS GLOBAL BY NATURE. Science has shown its strength in the global COVID-19 crisis. It was possible to produce solutions for blocking the virus only because of the determined work of the scientific community, and public and private investments made in blue skies research, before we were hit by the pandemic. The virus brought together not only scientists, but also research funders, administrative branches, as well as public and private research organizations. Pressure to develop vaccines paved a short track to open innovation processes. The importance of science and technology will only increase in the coming years, not least because of the need to be better prepared for the next crisis.

The United States emphasizes the importance of emerging technologies and strategic areas of science: artificial intelligence, quantum computing, next-generation mobile technology and information networks, robotics, autonomous vehicles, biotechnology, as well as medical, climate, and environmental research. With these choices science is embedded in all sectors of life.

These priority areas coincide with the research fields Finland accentuates. They are research areas where we have high-quality research groups and expertise, industries, infrastructures, and valuable data. Finland and the United States have a common agenda in these areas, and cooperation between



PHOTO: KATARINA KOCH

research funders has already begun. The research topics of the Academy of Finland's flagship ecosystems fit well with the research areas prioritized by President Biden's administration.

When looking at the development of the Finnish science community over the decades and the outputs of scientific activities, it is fair to state that the United States is Finland's most important partner country. For Finnish researchers, cooperation is broadest and scientifically most influential with U.S. researchers. This is particularly evident in joint scientific publications, and in post-doc training of many generations of young Finnish researchers.

THE FINNISH-U.S. FULBRIGHT PROGRAM has played a significant role in fostering internationalization and a rise in research quality by funding and reforming science in Finland. The program as a platform has safeguarded continuity of research collaboration between individuals and organizations throughout the decades. Its key strength is its constant strategic renewal and innovation.

Through Fulbright scholarships, there are strong networks that extend deeply and broadly across the economy, society, culture, and politics. Altogether, over 5,900 Finns and Americans have participated in these exchanges since their inception in 1949.

These networks are of key importance as we continue to strengthen and build new Finnish-U.S. collaboration. Fulbright alumni are an invaluable resource not only for universities but for cooperation between our two countries. Research funding organizations and Finnish Ministries have it on the agenda to support these connections – and to facilitate establishing new collaborative ties between researcher communities of our countries.

Anita Lehtikainen

Permanent Secretary
Ministry of Education, Science and Culture



New Fulbright-Aalto University Graduate Award

Fulbright Finland Foundation is pleased to announce the launch of its second partnership award with Aalto University.

Signed in February 2021, the partnership agreement establishes a dedicated award for U.S. students for graduate studies at Aalto University. The Fulbright-Aalto University Graduate Award provides students an opportunity to enroll in any of the international master's degree programs at Aalto University as a degree seeking student. Talented doctoral students and master's level non-degree students can also be considered for the award.

In addition to the wide range of personal support and networking services provided by the Foundation, the award includes grants for living, travel, and residence permit expenses as well as a full two-year tuition scholarship. The awardee also has an option to participate in a summer school in Finland on Finnish language and culture before beginning studies at Aalto University.

"The new form of collaboration between Aalto University and Fulbright Finland Foundation presents a unique opportunity to advance intercultural

competence, global diversity, and cultural diplomacy that are key components to the success of future graduates from higher education," says the Aalto University Vice President in Education **Petri Suomala**.

"We are excited to expand our collaboration with Aalto University, and look forward to welcoming U.S. Fulbright students to Finland and to Aalto's innovative and forward-looking programs with this new

award," says **Terhi Mölsä**, CEO of the Fulbright Finland Foundation.

Text: Karoliina Kokko

Find out more and apply for the academic year 2022-23:

www.fulbright.fi/scholarships-to-study-finland/fulbright-aalto-university-graduate-award

Since 2010, the Fulbright Finland Foundation and Aalto University have had a U.S. Distinguished Chair Award in Business Studies and Engineering: www.fulbright.fi/aalto-distinguished-chair

Aalto University

By merging three leading Finnish universities in 2010, Aalto was founded to work as a societally embedded research university. The research at Aalto is concentrated around seven key areas combining four core competencies in the fields of ICT, materials, arts, design, and business together with three grand challenges related to energy, living environment, and health.

In addition to Bachelor's and Doctoral degrees, Aalto University offers more than 90 international Master's Programs taught in English. Students can mix and match creatively, and create their own combination from the fields of art, science, technology, and business.

The architecturally distinctive campus is one of Europe's most international academic communities, making Aalto the 35th most international university in the world in 2021.

www.aalto.fi/en

Interdisciplinary Approach Attracted Jade Roberts to Aalto University



Jade Roberts is a Cognitive Science graduate from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and the first recipient of the award. She will begin her master’s studies in the Computer, Communication and Information Sciences – Acoustics and Audio Technology at Aalto University in August 2021.

“Aalto University’s program successfully combines my love of speech and music with my love of science and math by taking an interdisciplinary approach to engineering, art, and business. When looking for universities to study acoustics and human computer interaction, Aalto was one of the only universities that had a whole department dedicated to Acoustics and has a very good Human Computer Interaction program,” Jade explains.

“Additionally, my high school interests in Nordic culture and the hard language to learn, Finnish, drew me toward Aalto,” she adds.

Jade’s final university selection decision was based on thorough and comprehensive research. “The social environment in which I’ll be studying fosters the kind of inclusive, forward-thinking, and creative student body I want to be a member of, the startup culture is one that I just recently started learning about and would like to participate in as I pursue my own business one day. I also wanted a place where arts were part of the program options because I want to learn about Finnish film, do more in the documentary sphere and be around students with similar interests,” Jade concludes.

Quick Figures

For academic year 2021–22

The Fulbright Finland Foundation received a record number of applications for the U.S. Fulbright Student program.

109

U.S. students applied for a Fulbright grant to Finland

51%

increase in application numbers compared to the academic year 2020–21

20

U.S. students selected
14 for degree studies
6 for research

30 Years of Roth-Thomson Collaboration

For the past 30 years the Fulbright Finland Foundation has collaborated closely with the Lois Roth Endowment, based in Washington D.C., to grant supplemental awards to U.S. Fulbright student grantees in Finland.

The Roth-Thomson Award provides U.S. Fulbrighters the opportunity to enhance or expand their original Fulbright project. The award is granted for projects in the fields of humanities, visual and performing arts, and social sciences.

“The partnership with the Lois Roth Endowment is crucially important for our U.S. student program. Our unique collaboration has created significant impact and we look forward to further developing opportunities to work together with the Endowment in the future,” says **Terhi Mölsä**, CEO of the Fulbright Finland Foundation.

The 2021 Roth-Thomson awardee is **Alexandra Lobdell**. She plans to use the award to fund her stay in Finland over the summer, dedicating her time to conducting research and completing her thesis. Timely with the COVID-19 landscape, her research focuses on novel collaborations between different stakeholders in the pharmaceutical industry that make drug development more cost and time efficient.

“The Lois Roth Endowment greatly enjoys and values its productive partnership with the Fulbright Finland Foundation. Over 30 years, our collaboration has helped enrich and expand the work of well over 50 innovative U.S. Fulbright researchers and artists in Finland,” says **Skyler J. Arndt-Briggs**, Chair of the Lois Roth Endowment.

“Lois Roth herself had close ties to Finland, having created a groundbreak-



Alexandra Lobdell
 2020-21 Fulbright-LUT University Graduate Award

ing Ford Foundation program for Finnish intellectual leaders in the 1960s. She would have loved to see how the projects we fund flourish—projects ranging from installations of photo and sculpture exhibits, to research on Finnish refugee assistance and the lifeways of indigenous Sámi populations. We look forward to continuing this exciting collaboration that promotes dialogue across national, linguistic, disciplinary, and cultural boundaries,” Arndt-Briggs says.

www.fulbright.fi/scholarships-to-study-finland/roth-endowment-awards-us-student-fulbrighters



Peter Friedrich



Lora Harris



Steven Livingston

Seeking Solutions for Global Challenges

Three U.S. Scholars Win the New Strategic Award

Three U.S. scholars have been awarded the Fulbright Finland Foundation's new strategic grant, the Seeking Solutions for Global Challenges Award, for the academic year 2021-22. The inaugural recipients of the award are Associate Professor **Peter Friedrich** from Berry College, Associate Professor **Lora Harris** from the University of Maryland, and Professor **Steven Livingston** from George Washington University.

On this first application round the new award immediately became one of the most viewed awards in the global Fulbright U.S. Scholar Catalog listing over 400 Fulbright scholar awards around the world. Due to the very high quality of applications, the Board of Directors of the Foundation decided to fund three inaugural awards.

Peter Friedrich will be hosted by Åbo Akademi University in Turku, and his project will use theatre to broker partnerships between college students and members of migrant communities.

"When we seek solutions to the world's toughest challenges, Theatre doesn't immediately come to mind. That's what makes this award from the Fulbright Finland Foundation such a special honor and responsibility. It's also a welcoming sign that many Finns see potential in my art to make a real and lasting difference. I cannot wait for the work for them to begin at Åbo Akademi," he says.

Lora Harris will be hosted at the Tvärminne Zoological Station, a laboratory of the University of Helsinki. "My generation of coastal ecologists were trained by those who spent their careers documenting and communicating the causes and mechanisms of ecosystem decline over the past century. The Seeking Solutions for Global Challenges award provides me with the space to think deeply about the trajectories we seek around restoring these systems, using a comparative framework between the Baltic and Chesapeake Bay. How do we find a

path forward towards improved water quality when the baseline conditions of climate or food web dynamics have changed? This award gives me the time to combine understanding from our basic research discoveries with practical and pragmatic problem solving," Harris explains.

Steven Livingston's project, "The Sustainability of Liberal Democracy in the Digital Era", brings him to the Centre of Excellence in Law, Identity and the European Narratives at the University of Helsinki. His aim is to create connections between European and American scholars who share an interest in finding solutions to the growing global threat of far-right extremist groups and ideologies.

"In some ways, my selection for the Seeking Solutions for Global Challenges Award is the culmination of the last several years of my professional life," Livingston says. "In that time, I've led prestigious research groups in the investigation of the threats to democracy and I founded a research institute in Washington, D.C. that seeks to understand the nature of disinformation. Now I will bring my work to Finland as I benefit from the enormous intellectual talent at the University of Helsinki. I'm grateful for the opportunity and eager to get started."

The award was created by the Board of Directors of the Fulbright Finland Foundation in 2019 to support the Foundation's vision to "empower the minds that will find global solutions to tomorrow's challenges." The focus of the award is broadly aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Selected scholars can represent a wide range of academic disciplines. The award is also available for Finnish professionals and post-doctoral researchers from any field for visits at U.S. institutions or organizations.

Text: Maija Kettunen, Emmi Jelekäinen

For U.S. candidates

www.fulbright.fi/seeking-solutions-global-challenges-award

For Finnish candidates

www.fulbright.fi/grants-research-postdoc-and-scholar/seeking-solutions-global-challenges-award

Record Number of Grantees

Over 130 Finnish and American grantees have been selected to participate in the Fulbright Finland Foundation exchange programs for the academic year 2021-22. This includes 57 Finnish and 75 American scholars, teachers, students, and professionals.

Additional selections will be made later in the year primarily for the short-term programs, likely bringing the total number of grantees close to 140.

Fulbright Finland Foundation Grantees

www.fulbright.fi/about-us/grantees

Navigating the New Normal

Text LEASA WEIMER



Foundation board member **Itonde Kakoma** moderating discussion on diversity and equity.

Over 1 400 attendees from 67 countries joined the monthly webinars hosted by the Fulbright Finland Foundation to discuss topics such as comprehensive internationalization; health, safety, and security; the virtual student experience; and partnership building.

The global webinar series, “Internationalization of Higher Education in the COVID-19 Era,” showcased valuable insights from thought-leaders in the field of international education. Guest speakers offered multiple perspectives on how the field has been impacted and shaped by the pandemic and shared practical tips on how to navigate the ‘new normal.’

The series began with a deep dive into what’s next for international education and study abroad. **Robin Matross Helms**

introduced the term ‘scrappy creativity’ to explain the approach taken by many institutions and international educators during the corona-pivot as international mobility was interrupted. **GianMario Besana** explained, “Lack of co-location does not mean lack of collaboration” and encouraged participants to consider online collaborations with their partners. On the topic of comprehensive internationalization, **Meredith McQuaid** emphasized the importance of ‘getting a seat at the table’ with university leaders to advocate and gain support for internationalization efforts that align with the mission and strategic goals of your institution: “If you don’t have a seat at the table, you might be on the menu.” **Tonija Hope Navas** explained “You cannot have diversity, equity, and inclusion, without justice,” and

encouraged all participants to “be a JEDI international educator.”

Two of the webinars offered a unique ‘partnership speed dating’ component that matched participants with one another to explore potential areas for future collaborations. The series wrapped up in June with the final discussion focusing on Sustainable Partnerships in the Arctic.

The series was jointly organized by the Department of State’s USA Study Abroad branch, the Fulbright Finland Foundation, and the Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA).

www.fulbright.fi/internationalization-higher-education-covid-19-era

Gaining Work Experience with a Virtual Internship

Sarah Lin, from Taiwan, joined the Fulbright Finland Foundation team as the first virtual intern in January 2021.

Despite never meeting Sarah face-to-face, the virtual experience was a success. “It was a truly rewarding journey for me. Although we were not able to meet each other in person, the Fulbright Finland family never failed to make me feel a part of the team,” Sarah says.

Sarah was studying in the Research and Innovation in Higher Education (MARIHE) Erasmus Mundus Master’s program at Tampere University. The eight-week internship was part of her studies where she accumulated credits for the master’s degree.

During the internship, Sarah created a “Guide to Virtual Internships at Fulbright

Finland Foundation” and conducted a comparative analysis of funding programs available for Finns for study and research abroad.

The Foundation has collaborated with the MARIHE program for several years, offering students in the master’s program the opportunity to gain real-world experience working with Foundation team members on projects.

“Internships are an important part of our students’ overall study experience and at the same time an internship offers unique and valuable opportunities for our students to build up their professional networks while studying,” says **Jussi Kivistö**, Professor at the Faculty of Management and Business at Tampere



Sarah Lin

University and 2009-10 ASLA-Fulbright Research Grant for a Junior Scholar grantee. “The Fulbright Finland Foundation has been an important partner for us for years, and we are so grateful that they have been able to offer excellent real-world working experiences for our students. For our students, Fulbright Finland Foundation is, year after year, one of the most wanted places for an internship,” he says.

Interested in interning at the Foundation?
www.fulbright.fi/about-us/interning-foundation

Text: Leasa Weimer

Citizens and Science Diplomacy

Science diplomacy is a relatively new term. But it is an old practice – and integrally connected with the Fulbright Finland Foundation programs.

Text TERHI MÖLSÄ

Early in their orientation training, newly selected Fulbright Finland Foundation grantees begin discussing the Foundation’s programs and their multiple and complementary roles.

Academic and professional exchanges enable the flow of knowledge and ideas across borders, and contribute to the internationalization of higher education and research. Moreover, they are cultural and public diplomacy programs, with grantees serving as citizen-diplomats, sharing their diverse backgrounds and cultures. Many of the programs have characteristics of science diplomacy or knowledge diplomacy, with a distinct focus on helping solve global challenges. The largest of the programs that the Foundation works with, the global Fulbright Program, was founded after World War II as a peace program, to help promote international understanding following the war. And ultimately, all of the Foundation’s programs are leadership programs, where leadership is understood not as a position or title but as a personal choice that anyone can make – leading by taking responsibility and creating meaningful change.

Cultural and educational exchange has been recognized as a pillar of international diplomacy for decades. Science diplomacy, in comparison, is less known. Generally speaking, science diplomacy refers to international operations and actions that combine science and foreign relations, but the definitions of the term vary considerably depending on perspective and emphasis. “New Frontiers in Science Diplomacy,” a report published by the Royal Society in 2010, outlines three dimensions of science diplomacy. Science *in* diplomacy refers to science advising and informing diplomacy, and science-informed decision-making. Science *for* diplomacy refers to science

cooperation improving international relations, or the capacity of science and scientists to create and sustain contacts, collaboration, and confidence-building even in cases where diplomatic relations between countries may be difficult or do not exist. And diplomacy *for* science refers to the potential of diplomacy to enable and facilitate scientific work that requires large-scale international collaboration, for instance through large international infrastructures, multinational funding, or joint legal or governance solutions.

There is a growing need to deepen the dialogue between national governments, international actors, and the international scientific community. Science diplomacy can help achieve this goal by providing crucial information for decision-makers, strengthening international collaboration, and helping scientists in their work both as scientists and as science diplomats. Science, like diplomacy, has always been international, and it flourishes through people-to-people collaboration – just like the Foundation’s programs.

Operating under the motto “Together Shaping the Future,” the Foundation strives to awaken an interest in the role that individual citizens can play in creating meaningful change and tackling local and global challenges. Aspects of science diplomacy are evident in, for instance, the Foundation’s strategic award program titled *Seeking Solutions for Global Challenges*, with its focus broadly aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

“Towards An Enabling Science Diplomacy,” a comprehensive report commissioned by the Finnish government and published in May 2021, evaluated the development and state of Finnish science diplomacy. The report made ten recommendations for the strengthening of

There is a growing need to deepen the dialogue between national governments, international actors, and the international scientific community.

Kohti mahdollistavaa tiedediplomatiaa

<https://julkaisut.valtioneuvosto.fi/handle/10024/163144>

Lue raportti tiedediplomatian tilasta Suomessa sekä suositukset suomalaisen tiedediplomatian kehittämiseksi.

Report on Finnish science diplomacy, includes an introductory summary in English.

science diplomacy, and one of its specific recommendations is utilizing existing networks such as Fulbright in the planning and implementation of the science diplomacy efforts in the future.

The Foundation recently convened its current U.S. Fulbright grantees with one of the authors of the report, **Johanna Ketola**, for a conversation on science diplomacy, its history and future directions, and the different ways in which Fulbright students and scholars can contribute to science diplomacy. The insightful conversation concluded with the participants highlighting their responsibility to share their research and the relevance of their findings with audiences outside of their discipline, building awareness and understanding of the research topics among new and broader audiences.

As our global community tackles increasingly complex challenges, the long-standing practice of people-to-people exchanges is more important than ever, and the Fulbright Finland Foundation is proud to play a role in connecting the next generation of science diplomats.



PHOTO: JAMES EVANS, UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA ANCHORAGE

Boreal Forest Inspired Mycelium Materials to Solve the Plastic Pollution Crisis

In our era of disruptive climate change, we need solutions that offer alternatives to environmentally persistent and fossil fuel intensive products such as polystyrene and other plastic packaging. And we need them fast.

Boreal forests of Finland and Alaska are a rich with organisms that provide sustainable alternatives to fossil based materials. This Fulbright project centered on the synthetic biology to develop carbon-neutral forest based materials for the emerging bio-economies across the Circumpolar North.

Every day millions of containers made of plastic foam are filled with fish, vaccines, and other perishable items and shipped around the globe, emptied, and discarded. Their recycling is not cost effective. In the landfill these containers start to break up and eventually end up in our oceans. Floating in the global ocean, they are broken down into smaller and smaller pieces and never fully disappear. They are carried to the deepest oceans, the tallest mountains, and even, through the food we eat, into our bodies. Exposure to microplastics is now part and parcel of our global environmental

crisis. As public health concerns over microplastics grow, health and climate action policies around the world are increasingly banning single-use plastics. However, the COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented increase in use single-use plastic containers to carry with no compostable or carbon neutral alternatives in sight. We must do more through applied research and innovation to solve this global problem.

As a mycologist, I was always fascinated by the biological diversity of fungi in the boreal forests covering large parts of Alaska and Finland. Many of these fungi digest cellulose in trees and create complex structures with mycelium, the root network of fungus. I thought “If we just learn from their behavior and tame these cryptic organisms to help us bio-fabricate materials that perform on par with expanded plastics we can ditch plastic foams!”

I teamed up with engineers to develop a

Philippe Amstislavski
2020-21 Fulbright-VTT
Award in Science,
Technology and Innovation

VTT Technical Research
Centre of Finland, Tampere

Philippe Amstislavski
is Associate Professor
of Public Health at the
University of Alaska
Anchorage, AK.

www.fulbright.fi/vtt-scholar

biotechnology to “grow” a lightweight and strong material at a lab scale. The initial tests were encouraging but to develop this material we needed a strong international collaboration with a forest-based biomaterials expert. When I learned that a team of researchers at VTT has been developing methods to turn cellulose, the food source of many fungi, into a foam a lightbulb went off. I knew that by combining expertise and working side-by-side we could bring a new sustainable, safe, and insulating biomaterial to life. Thanks to the Fulbright-VTT Award in Science, Technology and Innovation, I got to work at the

VTT Technical Research Centre of Finland collaborating with the wonderful group of dedicated researchers and we were able to do just that. We are currently developing bio-based alternative to plastic foams. It can be used to “grow” light and thermally insulating shipping containers and green building insulation. Best of all, mycelium-cellulose foam is safe and can be composted in your garden. Collaboration with VTT offered a tremendous opportunity for co-inventing.

As a society, Finland has invested in strong environmental conservation, great public education, and created a powerful

technological base for developing pioneering biomaterials.

Right now we are developing a new mycelium-cellulose technology that we called Co-Foam. By developing forest based bio-technologies we also create a workforce of skilled professionals that integrate into the emerging circular economy in the North. We are applying Co-Foam initially to creating insulated vaccine and seafood containers because of our familiarity with, and in response to immediate demand from, these markets for a sustainable way to keep the vital medicines fresh, our fish delicious, and our planet healthy.



Decarbonizing the Built Environment

The speed of climate change and environmental deterioration does not give us more time to ponder.

Ming Hu

2020-21 Fulbright-Tampere
University Scholar Award
University of Maryland, College Park, MD

www.fulbright.fi/tuni-scholar

It is hard for people who live with clean water and air to imagine life without them. It is hard for people who have easy access to abundant food, energy, and other resources to imagine life without them. But energy poverty and insecurity are real.

In the U.S., about 25% of households face energy insecurity. According to recent European Commission data, across Europe, between 50 and 125 million people are unable to afford proper indoor thermal comfort due to high energy costs. Meanwhile, the compounding effects of climate change and energy shortages are posing increasingly severe risks to human health, economic development, and conservation of the natural ecosystem.

Decarbonizing the built environment by building energy-efficient and low-impact buildings is one of the most effective ways to mitigate and adapt to climate change. The research community needs to work together to come up with the solutions to decarbonize the built environment, and constructing natural energy buildings is the way.

I came to Finland to work with colleagues from Tampere University and Professor **Sofie Pelsmakers** to conduct comparison studies of net-zero energy retrofit projects in Finland and the U.S.

We have been comparing design and construction approaches between the U.S. and Finland. In addition to comparing the techniques and design strategies, we are also expanding and exchanging our knowledge of the regulatory and legislation differences between the two countries.

It is no surprise that there are many differences between the two countries, but the similarities are also strikingly obvious. To name a few, passive design principles provide the most sustainable solutions in both countries, life cycle consideration is the key to achieving a truly low-impact design, and, most importantly, full integration between the natural ecosystem and the man-made built environment is the only way we can mitigate the negative impacts from our buildings, bridges, and factories.

Because of those similarities and differences, working together can give us an opportunity to learn from each other's failures and successes. The speed of climate change and environmental deterioration does not give us more time to ponder; the only way we can take collective and immediate action is to draw on each other's strengths.



On a Path Toward an Inclusive and Accessible World

Johna Wright

2020-21 Fulbright-Tampere University
Graduate Award

They say the sky is the limit, but I have to disagree. In reality, it is only the beginning of things limited by our sight. Growing up as a legally blind person in rural Georgia in the U.S., I wish I would have known from a very early age that things are never truly impossible unless you allow them to be. I did eventually come to understand this, but it definitely was not the ‘easy’ way.

After many long, and often frustrating, years of having society’s misconceptions about what it means to be blind thrust at me through remarks such as “blind people shouldn’t be doing that,” or “no, it’s too difficult for you,” I unfortunately started to internalize what I was hearing, and I accepted that it was true. Thus, I began limiting myself, which – unbeknownst to me – only further perpetuated the stereotype that I, as a blind person, was incapable of becoming a productive and contributing member of a global society.

Making Dreams a Reality

Fast forward to 19-year-old me walking to my Forensic Psychology course on a crisp autumn morning. I suddenly hear the roaring of a jet engine soaring above me, taking off to some exquisite, faraway destination.

After I had come to terms with the fact that I wouldn’t be magically whisked away to Aruba or Amsterdam instead of having to go to class, I began to think deeply about what I wanted for myself. It didn’t take me long to figure out that I knew exactly where I wanted to be, but I was just refusing to accept it because I felt inadequate and somehow undeserving of a chance. “I want to help people”; “I want to make this

world a more inclusive and accessible place for people like me”; “I want to ensure that people with disabilities don’t ever have to place these limits on themselves and that there are no societal barriers to their success,” and a million more thoughts came to me as the sounds of the airplane began to dissipate into silence.

I felt a rush of emotions that came over me like a waterfall, and I still refer to this brief instant as my very own ‘watershed moment.’ I finally had the courage to admit to myself that I had big dreams but wasn’t chasing them. Therefore, I made it up in my mind that I was going to do everything in my power to make my dreams a reality – once my psychology class was over.

I started to seek out every opportunity to blossom as a leader, innovator, researcher, and civil servant. I was led by my university’s scholarships advisor to the Fulbright Grant application. I felt that sense of doubt begin to creep up yet again, but this time I was determined not to let it win.

After much encouragement from my advisor, and many talks with myself, I applied for the grant, and, to my utter shock, I eventually received the email that so many students long to appear in their inbox. I had been awarded the Fulbright grant to study my master’s degree program in Comparative Social Policy and Welfare at Tampere University in Tampere, Finland! I had finally been given a chance in this world to pursue my passion and do what I love. Immediately I was laser focused upon achieving my goals and not letting this opportunity slip through my fingers, as I had regretfully done so many times in the past.

Researching Attitudes Toward Disability and Ableism

My thesis builds upon my previous research in the fields of criminal justice and disability policy and serves to highlight the need for sweeping social policy reforms, allowing for more accessible and unbiased criminal justice systems across the globe.

I am conducting several comparative studies in order to test the effects of attitudes toward disability and ableism upon the legal outcomes of people with disabilities who have been accused of a crime. Utilizing a series of mock court cases and vignettes to describe a non-violent crime in which evidence against the perpetrator is quite ambiguous, I manipulate the variable of disability status in order to examine if legal decision-making processes seem to differ significantly among participants if a perpetrator is physically disabled, intellectually disabled, or non-disabled.

Furthermore, I am interested in screening participants to measure their level of inherent ableism, which is defined as either the subconscious or conscious belief that nondisabled people are superior to disabled people in a fundamental manner. I also plan to conduct an extensive literature review and analysis of the historical and social contexts of disability and crime, as well as the policies that currently exist in a variety of nations which aim to eliminate bias or prejudice within the framework of the legal system.

Upon the completion of my master’s thesis, my research will continue, since much like in the case of the airliner that sparked my watershed moment, the sky

is just the beginning of something revolutionary and life-changing for a group of individuals who have been previously marginalized and limited in myriad areas of society, including education, employment, health, and criminal justice.

Welcomed with Open Arms

Making the transition to Finnish life was much easier than I had expected, despite the challenges of traveling abroad during a global pandemic.

Instead of feeling like a burden due to my blindness, I was welcomed with open arms and greeted with so many helpful services which took away any anxieties I had about completing my grant term independently. The Fulbright Finland Foundation, Tampere University, and even my neighbors offered a helping hand in the adjustment to life in Finland, and I knew immediately that this is the path which was meant for me to follow.

I felt an overwhelming sense of pride to be able to call Finland home for even a short period of time, and the spirit of the Finnish people gave me much hope for a future which is inclusive and accessible for all citizens.

Exemplifying Sisu

Throughout my experience as a Fulbright grantee in Finland, I have faced some obstacles, but have had far more triumphs and victories, both big and small.

I have learned more than I could have ever imagined, both in the classroom and outside of it. I have come to truly accept and love myself as a person with a disability, I have started to visualize how I fit into this big, confusing world as a changemaker, scholar, and leader, and I have gained a deeper appreciation for the Finnish way of inclusivity and equality for all people, regardless of ability status.

I also learned a few Finnish words, with

my favorite being *sisu*: Finnish concept described as stoic determination, tenacity of purpose, grit, bravery, resilience, and hardiness. Due to the Fulbright Finland Foundation taking a chance on me instead of simply labelling me as incompetent or incapable of achieving anything noteworthy, they took a chance on the small-town blind girl from the deep south, who definitely isn't perfect, but who exemplifies the concept of *sisu* – even though it took her a long time to realize that.

Instead of accepting defeat and proving others right that blindness is what holds you back, I have confidently stepped into the cockpit, sat in the Captain's left-hand seat, and took off on my journey to illustrate to others just like me that this is only the beginning of something much, much bigger.

Disinformation, Social Media, and the Effects on Society

Fulbright Finland grantee Agneetta Moisio received the Buchanan Library Fellowship to explore the role misinformation and disinformation have on society.



Agneetta Moisio

2018-21 Fulbright Finland Partnership Award with Vanderbilt University

Together with the fellowship group, comprised of seven other undergraduates and three librarians, we discuss topics ranging from conspiracy theories to deep fakes and big tech algorithms. As a Fulbright Finland grantee, I have been able to bring diverse perspectives into the discussions. For example, Finland's national public broadcasting company Yle is an interesting media alternative to the commercial media giants that run American news.

I have explored topics such as government surveillance through artificial intelligence. Given the implicit bias of the algorithms engineered by humans, we ask questions such as how do these surveillance methods disproportionately affect minorities? We also research and discuss the consequences of radicalization, fake news, and misinformation, and the ease of spreading it.

In my opinion, this fellowship is at the core of Fulbright Finland Foundation's mission: to facilitate discussion among scholars and students coming from different backgrounds on topics that impact us all independent of origin or nationality.

Many believe we are at a crossroads. What the future looks like in terms of privacy and government surveillance will depend on efforts to regulate (or not regulate) the social media corporations. At the same time, public concerns over government surveillance are just as important, especially when empirical evidence shows that some communities are being surveilled more than others.

The fellowship culminated in producing a podcast, which my two colleagues and I produced on the topic of social media regulation. We hope that the podcast, available to all, could help facilitate discussion on the necessity of government

Vanderbilt Libraries' Buchanan Library Fellows Program connects undergraduate students with university librarians and faculty to build skills in areas related to IT, data visualization and exhibition curation while researching a specific topic.

Listen to the podcast <https://researchguides.library.vanderbilt.edu/buchananfellows/misinformation> under Regulations and Policies.

regulation of the big tech companies, due to the massive power they currently hold over users, and the impact they have on our global society.



PHOTO: PHILIP TIDWELL

Finnish Lessons

Fifteen years after welcoming her to Finland as a Fulbright U.S. Student grantee, the Fulbright Finland Foundation invited Professor Liesl Yamaguchi to reflect on how the Fulbright program has impacted her professional trajectory.

Liesl Yamaguchi
2020-21 U.S. Fulbright
Core Scholar
2006-07 U.S. Fulbright
Fellow
University of Helsinki

Liesl Yamaguchi is Assistant Professor of French at Boston College and the translator of Väinö Linna's classic novel *Tuntematon sotilas* (*Unknown Soldiers*, Penguin Classics, 2015).

www.fulbright.fi/core-scholar

When **Roland Barthes** took up the newly created Chair in Literary Semiology at the Collège de France in 1977, he began his inaugural lecture rather awkwardly, seeming to stumble under the weight of the honor conferred upon him. Then he finds his way to a key distinction (which I quote in **Richard Howard's** translation): “an honor can be undeserved—joy never is.”

The distinction between institutional approval and inalienable emotion, fallible selection process and genuine opportunity, makes it possible for Barthes to continue on despite his unwillingness to affirm, as the occasion quietly demands, that he is exceptionally deserving of the opportunity he is nonetheless eager to accept. So, he turns his gaze to joy: joy at the “enormous, almost [...] unjust privilege” of being able to pursue his research and “to speak—I shall even say to dream his research aloud.”

The Fulbright Finland Foundation has made this privilege mine, twice: in my first, terrifying year after college in 2006–07, and again in this strange and disorienting year of 2020–21. Both years have

felt miraculous, and both have been formative. Even my ability to appreciate Barthes' distinction is inextricable from my experience of Finnish institutions, whose values I have come to recognize, over time, as fundamentally different from those of other institutions I have known.

What I have gained personally and professionally from my two Fulbright grants is so great that accounting for it here would be impossible. It would also run the risk of suggesting that my puzzling zig-zag of a professional trajectory cuts a path that could be followed, which I cannot imagine to be the case. There have been too many wildly inadvisable leaps, close shaves, imprudent decisions, and instances of sheer luck.

But I can say that for students, artists, and scholars who do not deem paths particularly necessary—and who have the vision and confidence to aim for things that might not yet exist—the Fulbright Finland Foundation is a source of extraordinary opportunity. For me, it has certainly been a source of joy.



Journalist and Fulbright Finland alumna Kaarina Huovinen is a passionate advocate for equality in accessing information.

PHOTO: KERTTU ÄVÄLL, MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS

A Lifelong Dream of Accessible Journalism

Text LOUISA GAIRN

Kaarina Huovinen

2011-12 Fulbright Finland Undergraduate Grant
Gallaudet University,
Washington D.C.

[www.fulbright.fi/
undergraduate](http://www.fulbright.fi/undergraduate)

[https://huovinenkaarina.
wordpress.com/](https://huovinenkaarina.wordpress.com/)

With a background in community education, and having worked for the Finnish Deaf Association, Kaarina has a long-standing interest in human rights, accessibility, and civic activism. However, her true calling has always been journalism.

“I always dreamed of being a journalist since I was young. I’ve always been interested in acquiring knowledge, compiling all the information I could gather, and communicating what I discovered. But I felt like society, and the journalism profession in general, isn’t the most accessible for a deaf person.”

After graduating from high school in Turku, Finland, Kaarina studied community development at Humak University of Applied Sciences, specializing in NGO and youth work. In 2011 she was awarded a Fulbright Finland Undergraduate Grant to Gallaudet University in Washington, D.C., a university for the deaf and hard of hearing, where she took courses in communications, deaf studies, and social work. This experience, she says, laid the groundwork for her decision to change careers and retrain as a journalist.

A New Sense of Freedom and Confidence

“Studying at Gallaudet was an eye-opening experience. The university system in the U.S. was very different from ours. I had the chance to choose a wider variety of courses that I otherwise wouldn’t have been able to include in my degree in Finland. But what I liked the most was that I didn’t have to think about accessibility issues myself. Attending classes and courses in Finland, it’s an everyday thing you have to think about: how is my accessibility going to work out in this course? You’re not completely free to just concentrate on the work you’re doing. You have to be aware all the time of your possibility to have complete access, and arrange all your studies more rigorously. At Gallaudet, I felt free to just be a student, to take courses and learn.”

The courses offered at Gallaudet, Kaarina explains, are taught entirely in American Sign Language. “It’s the only deaf university in the world. People come from all over the States to study there, and there are also a lot of international students, from Asia, Europe, Africa, South America, and Canada, so the environment is very diverse. My

year abroad changed my worldview. It gave me a richer and more international perspective. I was also better networked through everyone I met in the States.”

“Something I found very inspiring was that the students there were braver to say what they think about things. Since then, I’ve gained more courage to express my opinions on different subjects. In the States, there were so many different people, the environment was so culturally diverse. I felt like everyone is allowed to be who they are, everyone is entitled to say what they’re thinking and express themselves. Maybe that aspect of American culture is where the confidence comes from.”

“I started to believe in my dreams more. Before that exchange experience, I was less sure of myself. But when I applied for the scholarship and got it, I felt that yes, I can achieve what I dream of, if I’m ready to put my energy into working on it. Some people have more privileges than others, and some of us need to work harder than others to pursue our dreams, but nothing is impossible. That’s the most important and amazing impact it had on me. You never know, why not apply for a scholarship? Why not try for anything else you dream of or aspire to?”

“The communications courses I took there reawakened my dream of working in journalism. It took many years, but eventually I found my way back. You could say the seed was planted then.”

Growing as a Journalist

Now, as a student of journalism and communications media at Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences in Helsinki, and working as a freelance journalist for different projects, including a vodcast (video podcast) for Yle, Finland’s national broadcasting company, Kaarina continues to champion human rights issues and accessibility for the Deaf community.

“I feel that what I learned from my work in the community educator profession really supports my studies in journalism. Human rights and social injustice questions are always at the forefront for me, as well as environmental issues.”

After her first degree, Kaarina worked in a wide variety of settings, including schools and youth projects, the Finnish Deaf Association, and Aspa, a foundation offering services for people who need support with housing and everyday life. “Through my work and life experiences, I’ve seen things that are not visible in the media. This has given me a perspective I can bring out through my second career.”

In summer 2020, Kaarina worked as a journalist for Yle, Finland’s national broadcasting service, an experience which convinced her of the need for more programs purely in sign language, and from Deaf people’s perspectives. Inspired by this, she started a sign language vodcast, focusing on current affairs.

“Podcasts are a hugely successful phenomenon, but we as deaf people don’t have access to this part of culture. I thought it would be a great idea to create a vodcast for sign language users, where we



can discuss current events and topics. It’s different from a television broadcast, with more of a discus-sional format, more laid back and less official.”

Over the past months, Kaarina’s vodcasts have covered a wide variety of topics, from the #DeafTalent movement in the entertainment industry, deaf sport, and the job situation for recent graduates during the pandemic, to accessibility, racism, and international politics. “We had an episode at the beginning of the year on the presidential election in the U.S. and the attack on congress. I had a contact I was able to interview for that, way back from my time in the States.”

Most recently, Kaarina interviewed **Liisa Kauppinen**, President Emeritus of the World Federation of the Deaf, and the first Finnish and Nordic recipient of the United Nations Human Rights Prize.

Kaarina worked at Finland’s national broadcasting service Yle as a journalist in summer 2020. Currently she produces a sign language vodcast covering a wide variety of topics ranging from the #DeafTalent movement in the entertainment industry, and the job situation for recent graduates during the pandemic, to accessibility, and international politics.

The need for equality in accessing information has been brought into even sharper focus by the COVID-19 pandemic.

“She explained how human rights are related to everyone’s everyday lives. We discussed deaf children’s lack of access to sign language, and the rights of women and girls. We also debated whether the Deaf community prefers to belong to cultural language minorities than to disability groups, or whether both groups are equally important for human rights from deaf people’s perspectives.”

Making Changes for Better Accessibility

The need for equality in accessing information has been brought into even sharper focus by the COVID-19 pandemic, Kaarina reflects.

“Because of the pandemic, government information update broadcasts are interpreted live into sign language, so now they have a more system-ized sign language interpreting system. I think that because of this deaf people have become more equal in how quickly they have access to this

information. Before the pandemic, there was very little live interpretation, even for urgent information. Now I feel like they've started noticing how to make it accessible. It has to be current, it has to be on time."

However, Kaarina says, the situation still needs improving. "There are people who don't know sign language, who perhaps have lost their hearing later in life, or haven't had the opportunity to learn sign language. These people need subtitling. A very important change would be to have really accessible information through both interpreting and good quality subtitling."

So, what needs to be done? "I think most importantly, it has to be in the legislature. If it's not in the law, no one will realize we need to do anything. There are laws on accessibility, but if everyone's in compliance and there are still problems, the law needs to change first and foremost. The other main issue is funding - where to

invest your money, your order of priorities. There needs to be a change in priorities to ensure accessibility and equality in information and communications."

Kaarina notes the contrast between Finland and the U.S. in terms of media accessibility for the deaf. "In the States, now they're almost at 100% subtitling. We're not really there yet for automated subtitling and voice recognition in the Finnish language. So, technology is also something to invest in, as well as human resources - involving the people who know the most about accessibility issues. The basis of everything has to be people's attitudes towards change, and whether they're willing to ask for these changes."

The Importance of Diverse Role Models

One way of changing people's attitudes, Kaarina argues, is ensuring more accurate representations of Deaf people and other minority groups in the media. "There was

a recent study by Metropolia University of Applied Sciences, looking at the casting of roles in the Finnish TV and movie industry. They found that a little over 90% of actors are white, cis gendered, straight, and non-disabled. So, even though the real statistics in Finland show that there are a lot more people who are disabled, our television and movie industry are not representative of these facts. It's a question of representation versus what our community is really made out of."

"I don't really have a lot of role models in the media industry, as someone aspiring to be a journalist and working in the media as a Deaf person. In the U.S., I saw Deaf people with many different professions. I was able to realize, 'OK, that's not an obstacle, it's not impossible to do something I'm interested in.' It's very important to have role models in society representing all kinds of people. I think that the true representation of diversity is something we need to work on."



Elizabeth Rink, PhD, MSW
2018-19 Fulbright Arctic Initiative Scholar to Finland

2021-22 Fulbright Arctic Initiative Co-Lead Scholar

This article is a shortened version of Elizabeth Rink's presentation at an event of the Alumni Open Mic series in February 2021.

Fulbright Arctic Initiative Policy Brief

<https://cies.org/sites/default/files/fulbright-arctic-policy-brief.pdf>

Future Directions in Arctic Research

Previous western or colonial scientific research approaches with Indigenous communities in the Arctic have not shown effective results with sustainable impact to address current challenges facing these communities - such as climate change, changes in subsistence living pathways, increasingly complex geopolitical dynamics, increases in extractive industry, and poor health outcomes.

As a result, there is growing concern within Indigenous communities regarding the *types* of research studies conducted in their communities as well as *how* this research is created, conducted, and interpreted.

In order to address methodological and epistemological challenges and differences between communities and scientists in the Arctic, the second Fulbright Arctic Initiative in 2018-19 brought together scholars from the eight Arctic nations to develop policy recommendations to support the future directions of research and practice for health and well-being in the Arctic. These recommendations have been published in a policy brief produced by the Fulbright Arctic Initiative.

In summary, the recommendations include four primary areas for future areas of focus in research and practice in Arctic health and well-being. These include: 1) acknowledge and integrate Indigenous rights and knowledges; 2) take meaningful action

to address Indigenous determinants of health; 3) expand monitoring and assessment programs; and 4) implement community-led, critical research approaches.

To accomplish these recommendations innovative strategies in the intersection between community engagement and science are warranted.

Communities and scientists would benefit from investigating and identifying deeper contextual factors and strengthening operations at the individual, family, social, cultural, environmental, and structural levels in the Arctic that can support health and well-being as opposed to a primary focus on epidemiological indicators and monitoring and assessing. There is also a need to integrate Indigenous and local knowledge with diverse academic disciplines, such as making it a standard of research practice to incorporate Indigenous and local knowledge into the physical, natural, social, and health sciences.

Furthermore, the use of Indigenous Research Methods with quantitative and qualitative research methods is a nuanced and holistic approach to data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Finally, creating and supporting multi-national community-scientist research teams across the Arctic region provides the diverse expertise necessary to tackle the layered challenges facing Arctic peoples and the Arctic environment today.



We will use our published predictive model to project future disease spread dynamics as a way to forecast disease emergence.”

Researching Bats

Fulbright Finland alumna **Melissa Meierhofer** received the Academy of Finland’s Postdoctoral Researcher funding for her research project on how bats can carry several potentially harmful zoonotic pathogens.

“Bats are important to public health as they can act as vectors to several potentially harmful zoonotic pathogens. My project is designed to understand prevalence and dynamics of pathogens in three European bat species with different migratory behaviors. Part of this work will be conducted in collaboration with my colleagues from my Fulbright Finland year; we will use our published predictive model to project future disease spread dynamics as a way to forecast disease emergence,” Melissa explains.

U.S. Fulbright grantees are eligible to apply for Academy of Finland grants to continue their research in Finland. Melissa was a 2019–20 Fulbright-EDUFI Fellow at the Finnish Museum of Natural History LUOMUS.

“My Fulbright experience afforded me the opportunity to work collaboratively with researchers in Finland to understand and develop a model for disease dynamics of a fungal pathogen of North American bats. Through a continued collaborative effort, the knowledge and experience gained from my research will now be applied to understanding pathogens that bats carry in Europe. I believe my Fulbright year was integral in forwarding my career and pursuing new avenues of research,” Melissa concludes.

Read more: www.aka.fi/en/about-us/whats-new/press-releases/2021/academy-of-finland-funds-topical-high-impact-and-innovative-postdoctoral-researchers-in-biosciences-health-and-environment/

www.aka.fi/en

www.fulbright.fi/studies-and-research-finland/funding-opportunities-finland

www.fulbright.fi/edufi-fellowship

Fulbright as a Launching Pad

“From my experience during my Fulbright in Finland, I have grown in my ability to communicate with people from very different backgrounds than my own. I have learned how to find common ground and start building a foundation from there.

As someone who is underrepresented in science and medicine, I aim to make an impact in my field but also feel a responsibility to reach back and support other underrepresented youth who follow me to be able to succeed in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and medicine.

I believe, as I witnessed firsthand in my Fulbright, that through inclusion of a diverse group of people and with improved communication, including translating complex science jargon to the general public, we can face any challenge that is presented unto us.”

Following his Fulbright, Jude was selected for the NIH Oxford–Cambridge Scholars Program in biomedical research to pursue his PhD.

The interview was originally published by the International Biomedical Research Alliance. Read the whole article: <https://bit.ly/3wH4SON>



Jude Tunyi
2019-20 Fulbright-Tampere
University Graduate Award



PHOTO: MICHAEL T. BELLO / MITBELLO.COM

Leaving Home Stressed to Become a Better Version of Yourself

I grew up hearing that being born in Finland was like winning the lottery. I never really questioned it, nor did I truly feel grateful for it. How could I have? I had never lived anywhere else.

Hameed Ahmed

2007-08 Fulbright Finland Undergraduate Grantee, 2009-11 Fulbright Finland Renewal Grantee
University of Rochester

Hameed Ahmed is the Associate Head Squash Coach of the men's and women's squash programs at Harvard University. Before Harvard, he coached the men's squash team at his alma mater, University of Rochester, while obtaining his graduate degree from the Simon School of Business.

www.fulbright.fi/undergraduate

www.fulbright.fi/grant-programs-to-us/fulbright-finland-renewal-grant

For many months into my freshman year at the University of Rochester, I thought I had made the biggest mistake of my life. I had left my home, family, and friends – a perfectly happy life. Without necessarily realizing it, I had left my comfort zone and entered my courage zone. I was stressed.

Coincidentally, 13 years later, I find myself coaching the men's and women's squash teams at Harvard University. Every day, we immerse our student-athletes in stress. We don't leave them there. We guide them as they are bouncing between their comfort and courage zones in practice, in matches, and of course, in the classroom. After each stress cycle followed by recovery, they become better versions of themselves.

At the same time, we help them develop a strong foundation from which to build their confidence and stress tolerance. We work on their ability to put things into perspective. We teach them to embrace the challenge. And to be grateful for where they are and who they are becoming both on and off the court.

Without realizing, I used many of the same techniques during my transition to the U.S. My way to add perspective was telling myself that *"I can always return home"* – something many people in this world can't say or do. That gradually resulted

in gratitude for having the opportunity to study abroad and it allowed me to start enjoying the experience in a more meaningful way.

I started valuing what I had and things I had grown up with. But more importantly, I became excited about the next version of myself; this future self I didn't know yet but who I knew was starting to form inside of me. I didn't necessarily have an end goal but I knew I was on the right path.

You can get out of your comfort zone wherever you live but moving abroad certainly accelerates your growth. Coming from a place like Finland, it is likely that you have a strong foundation to build from and to fall back on. Furthermore, if you have a supportive network like the Fulbright Finland Foundation guiding you through the stressful transition, you are not alone in the process, and much more likely to have a fulfilling experience.

If you feel like you've already won the lottery by being born in Finland, you may ask why you should leave? No matter what, experiences away from home will make you become more grateful for what you have. They will also show you new ways to experience life. And who knows, you might eventually return home and help Finland become the next version of itself.

What do you have to lose? You can always return home.



PHOTO: DILIP CHAJED

A Sense of Connection

Avanti Chajed talks about her Fulbright experience, her work with immigrant families in Finland and low income students in the U.S. and India, and how she fell in love with the small Finnish city of Turku.

Text LOUISA GAIRN

In 2016 **Avanti Chajed** came to Finland with a Fulbright–University of Turku Graduate Award, studying education at the University of Turku. She loved it so much that she moved back in 2020, and is now living in Turku with her Finnish husband, and working on her doctorate with the Teachers College, Columbia University. But what inspired her to come to Finland in the first place?

“When I was teaching in the U.S., I was working with kids in a low income school, seeing inequalities and wondering about other ways of doing things. Finland has this utopic kind of image in the U.S., so I thought a master’s would be a good way to go abroad and get a different perspective.”

Avanti was awarded a Fulbright to pursue graduate studies at the University of Turku, opting for a master’s degree in Learning, Learning Environments and Educational Systems.

“I loved it when I first got here. I felt very optimistic – it was like a new beginning for me. I really liked the city itself. I found it comfortable.”

Having worked as a teacher in low income schools both in the U.S. and India, Avanti feels passionately about equality for students from diverse backgrounds.

“My motivation has always been the

fact that schools don’t meet the needs of all students equally. Initially when I came to Finland on Fulbright, my focus was on how the needs of students from poor backgrounds are not being met. But now that my life and geographic center has shifted to Finland, that population has changed to immigrant children, because I think the needs of immigrant children are not understood very well, by teachers, and by society in general. I want to work to bridge that gap between immigrant family experiences and the way those experiences are talked about and thought about.”

“I initially had a policy focus, and planned to work on teaching and teacher education, but now I’m working with fam-

ilies. My focus is on multicultural education and immigrant children, but instead of looking at it from the school side, I’m looking at immigrant family experiences and practices, especially how they consider life back in their home country in helping to raise their children and make decisions for the family. So, I touch on a lot of issues to do with identity and belonging, but centered in the family home rather than in school.”

Avanti continues to reflect on how her personal and professional life relate to one another. “Really what I want to do is bring connection between people. That’s the way I’m trying to think about my work, so it’s grounded in something meaningful.”

Turku - a Place to Love

Originally from Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, Avanti reflects that she has moved from one university town to another. “I think that might be part of why I like Turku. The size is similar, it has the university, but it has its own life too.”

Avanti’s portrait of Turku was published in the New York Times feature, “52 Places to Love in 2021”, where she writes about her first impressions of the city, reflecting on the connection between nature and people. “I wanted to write about how I fell in love with Turku the day I got here. I was looking outside the window, where there is a little forest, I was thinking about how the trees seemed to be touching the sky here. I love that image, and I wanted to expand on that.”

www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/travel/places-to-visit-vacation.html#turku



Alumni Advising New Grantees

Things I Wished I Had Known Before Going to Finland

Text ANNE LAANTI

Some 70 American Fulbrighters – alumni from earlier years and newly selected grantees waiting to begin their term in Finland – came to an assembly online in May to discuss the Fulbright Finland experience. Alumni have always had an important role in the Foundation’s orientations, but this was the first time the Friends of Fulbright Finland (FoFF) Alumni Council organized a peer-to-peer discussion before the new grantees arrive in Finland.

This FoFF Finnish Fulbright Welcome Network event was offered as a part of a series of orientation trainings and welcome gatherings for the 2021–22 U.S. grantees. Grantees participated from all across the U.S., and the video conference provided a forum for the alumni to brief them about what to expect of their Fulbright experience in this far northern country.

Alumni led discussions on the theme of “things I wished I had known before going to Finland.” Topics were first explored in breakout groups based on specific grant categories. On the second round the discussion groups were formed based on the host city the grantees will be going to in Finland.

The alumni answered an array of questions ranging from “are there bike routes” to the assessment of the much more strict EU privacy rules concerning data collection compared to those in the U.S. Participants heard advice on city-specific bus cards, museum admissions cards, academic culture and practices, winter clothing, housing, and much more.

Alumni engagement and peer-to-peer advice are crucially important elements that contribute to successful exchanges, and the Foundation looks forward to collaboration with the FoFF also in the future in making this a recurring event offered for all grantee cohorts.

While nothing really beats face-to-face, the visuals including the discussion chair, 2013–14 Fulbright–University of Turku Scholar **Casie Hermsen’s** dog and cat wandering in and out of the screen and the occasional apprehension the outgoing grantees exhibited, provided a lively scene of home environs and committed participants. Professor **Barbara Mossberg** closed the event with her poem inspired by her two-term Fulbright experience called “I carry Finland and it is light.”

In May, the Friends of Fulbright Finland (FoFF) Alumni Council hosted a unique virtual event, the FoFF Welcome Network Event, bringing together almost 70 alumni and 2021–22 U.S. grantees.

Alumni shared insider tips including where to find the best coffee in the grantees’ host cities and what to expect with the Finnish university working life.

www.fulbright.fi/friends-fulbright-finland/finnish-fulbright-welcome-network



Cheryl J. Fish



Kelsea Turner



Michael Saffle

Welcome New Alumni Council Members!

The Friends of Fulbright Finland (FoFF) Alumni Council represents the Fulbright Finland Foundation alumni living in the U.S., and helps shape the future of the alumni network, and serves as an advisory Council to the Foundation. Council terms last for two years.

This year, the Council welcomes three new members who will serve until May 2023: **Cheryl J. Fish**, 2006-07 Core Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program, from New York; **Kelsea Turner**, 2019-20 Fulbright Distinguished Award in Teaching Research Program grantee, from Spartanburg, South Carolina; and **Michael Saffle**, 2000-01 Fulbright Bicentennial

Chair in American Studies, from Spokane, Washington.

They join continuing Council members **John Self**, **Annette Jones**, **Bin Yang**, and **Maedeh Pourrabi** who serve on the Council until May 2022. Also, **Mike Loovis** continues in the FoFF Council as Special Projects Adviser for the Rediscover Suomi Alumni Journey 2022, a 10-day study tour with a unique chance to reconnect with Finland and the Foundation, and deepen the transatlantic collaboration.

Read more about the FoFF Alumni Council Members

www.fulbright.fi/friends-fulbright-finland/friends-fulbright-finland-alumni-council

Call for Applications



Alumni Enrichment Award Opens in August

This award provides American alumni a travel grant to pursue a return to Finland to continue or renew collaborations with Finnish colleagues.

The award is made possible by alumni donors' contributions.

The call for applications for travel in 2022 opens August 16 with a deadline on October 4, 2021.

www.fulbright.fi/foff-award



Peers to Support Early-Career Fulbrighters

With her blog series, 2013-14 ASLA-Fulbright Graduate grantee **Kirsi Cheas** invites Fulbright alumni and grantees to support each other by sharing their own thoughts about failure, success, empathy, and resilience in the Fulbright community at large.

Kirsi's latest post explores whether

and how alumni could offer more support to student and early-career Fulbright alumni in particular to help prevent the loss of their valuable talent and innovative potential as they prepare to become changemakers.

In her previous blog posts, Kirsi has discussed among other things the impor-

tance of peer support and how the Fulbright program enhances emotional intelligence.

Read the blog series here and participate in the discussion

www.fulbright.fi/about-us/blog/resolving-paradox-early-career-fulbrighters

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Join the Association!

Take an active role in the ASLA-Fulbright Alumni Association and become a member.

www.fulbright.fi/asla-fulbright-alumni-association/join-association

Board and Team News



Suvi Piipponen



Saara Martikainen
PHOTO: VUOKKO SALO



Inari Ahokas



Kibrom Berhane

David Yoken and **Timo Korkeamäki** have assumed new leadership roles within the Board of Directors of the Fulbright Finland Foundation. David Yoken, Senior Lecturer at the Arts Academy of the Turku University of Applied Sciences, has been elected Chair, having previously served as Vice-Chair of the Board. In this role he succeeds Dr. **Piia Björn** who concluded her two-year term as the Board Chair and now continues as a member of the Board. Dr. Timo Korkeamäki, Dean of Aalto University School of Business, was elected Vice-Chair of the Board. The Foundation warmly welcomes the new Chair and Vice-Chair, and conveys its gratitude to Dr. Piia Björn for her commitment and significant contribution during her term as the Chair.

www.fulbright.fi/about-us/board-directors

The Foundation congratulates **Emilia Holopainen** and **Mihkel Vaim** who have recently started their parental leaves, and welcomes **Suvi Piipponen**, **Saara Martikainen**, and **Inari Ahokas** to the team. Having previously worked at the Foundation on several occasions on a temporary basis, Saara Martikainen has now joined the team on a permanent basis as a part-time Program Coordinator. She works with the Finnish graduate student programs.

Inari Ahokas, who also has worked at the Foundation earlier, first as an intern and later as Program Assistant, has now rejoined the team as Program and Alumni Networks Coordinator. Suvi Piipponen has started as Program Assistant working with the U.S. student program. She comes with a U.S. Bachelor's degree in Sports Management as well as an MBA, and has work experience from two U.S. universities: Averett University in Virginia and The University of the South in Tennessee.

MacKeith and Roslof Appointed Senior Advisers



Peter B. MacKeith



Edward Roslof

The Foundation is very pleased to announce the appointment of two Senior Advisers, Professor **Peter B. MacKeith**, and Dr. **Edward Roslof**. Both of them come with a wealth of experience and expertise that the Foundation is very grateful to benefit from.

Senior Advisers are experienced experts with specialization in one or more of the areas of the Foundation's work, such as internationalization of higher education and research, academic and professional exchanges, leadership development, international relations and diplomacy, science diplomacy, alumni relations, non-profit management, advancement and fundraising. Senior Advisers provide critical guidance to and support for the Foundation based on their expertise and experience. Advisers serve in a volunteer capacity and appointments are unpaid.

www.fulbright.fi/senior-advisers

The Foundation is also excited to welcome **Kibrom Berhane**, from Ethiopia, who has joined the team for a virtual internship. He is conducting research exploring the reasons behind the increased number of U.S. Fulbright student applications for Finland, as well as working on a project analyzing the Foundation's social media engagement.

FULBRIGHT FINLAND NEWS

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Terhi Mölsä **MANAGING EDITOR** Maija Kettunen **DESIGN AND LAYOUT** Tanja Mitchell, Grafee **EDITING OFFICE** Fulbright Finland Foundation, Hakaniemenranta 6, FI-00530 Helsinki, FINLAND **TEL.** +358 44 5535 286 **E-MAIL** office@fulbright.fi **ISSN** 2489-2149 (print) **ISSN** 2489-2157 (online) **PAPER** Scandia White 150 g/m² and 115 g/m² **PRINT CIRCULATION** 600 **PRINTED BY** PunaMusta Oy **ONLINE** www.fulbright.fi/fulbright-finland-news-magazine

Fulbright Finland News on Fulbright Suomi -säätiön sidosryhmälehti, joka ilmestyy kaksi kertaa vuodessa painettuna ja verkkoversiona. Artikkeleissa ilmaistut mielipiteet ovat kirjoittajien omia. Aineisto vapaasti lainattavissa, lähde mainittava. // Fulbright Finland News is a biannual magazine published by the Fulbright Finland Foundation in print and online. Opinions expressed by authors are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the Foundation. Reproduction allowed, source must be cited. // While every effort is made to ensure the accuracy of the material in this publication, The Fulbright Finland Foundation does not accept liability for any errors or omissions.

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THE FULBRIGHT FINLAND FOUNDATION is an independent not-for-profit organization based in Helsinki, Finland.

Its purpose is to promote a wider exchange of knowledge and professional talents through educational contacts between Finland and the United States.

The Foundation collaborates with a range of government, foundation, university, and corporate partners on both sides of the Atlantic to design and manage study and research scholarships, leadership development programs, and internationalization services.

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The Fulbright Finland Foundation is financially supported by the Finland-America Educational Trust Fund.

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Currently on leave

- **Emilia Holopainen**
- **Mihkel Vaim**

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Calendar

June

9.6.
Webinar
Sustainable Partnerships
in the Arctic

15.6.
Alumni Open Mic
Sauna in my Backyard: from
Finland to Colorado

18.6.
Fulbright Finland Foundation
Board Meeting

July

12.-30.7.
Fulbright Finland
Office closed

August

23.-25.8.
Arrival Orientation for
U.S. Fulbright Grantees

24.8.
ASLA-Fulbright Alumni
Association Welcome Event

September

15.9.
2022-23 Application Deadline:
Fulbright U.S. Scholar Awards for
Finland

Fulbright Finland Foundation
Board Meeting

October

4.10.
2022-23 Application Deadline:
Friends of Fulbright Finland
Alumni Enrichment Award

8.-9.10.
American Voices seminar,
University of Turku

12.10.
2022-23 Application Deadline:
Fulbright Finnish Language and
Culture Teaching Assistant Program

November

Thanksgiving and Enrichment
Program for U.S. Grantees, Helsinki



LUT University Fulbrighters
exploring Finnish nature.