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Fulbrights lead to self-discovery

Three alumni share insights into how Fulbright awards changed their lives.



Fulbright winners from top include Angela Jamison '99, who spent a year in Nicaragua; Seth Otto '00, who spent a year in Bolivia, and Sarah Monfort '03, right, who was in Croatia, shown here with Bethany Hackman, another U.S. student studying in Croatia.

Fulbright fellowship winners expect to discover new ideas and cultures. But Linfield recipients have found the award can be a ticket to self-discovery as well. A Fulbright opens doors. It opens minds.

Since 1999, 10 Linfield students have received Fulbrights for the year following their graduation. That exceeds the number awarded during those years at most of the other colleges and universities in Oregon. But the program's true impact is told not in numbers but in experiences.

Sarah Monfort '03 went to Croatia to write a novel and returned with a new passion, conflict resolution. For Seth Otto '00, a year in Bolivia instilled a commitment to urban planning. And a Fulbright in Nicaragua led Angela Jamison '99 to a new career path in research.

Monfort's look at the impact of strife led her to attend an international conference on peace and reconciliation last summer in Switzerland. She then entered a master's degree program in international peace and conflict resolution at Arcadia University in Pennsylvania.

Her novel, now nearing completion, focuses on Vukovar before, during and after the Serbian siege of 1991. "It fascinated me to know why people stayed in this town, why they returned when the economy, everything they had known and made, had been destroyed, and what it was like for them," she said.

Otto's experience in Bolivia was eye-opening in a different way. "The Fulbright exposed me to the

harsh realities of how international development works," he said. "Local people there had a great amount of skepticism and distrust of outsiders based on years of programs that didn't work or were even exploitative."

In December, Otto completed a master's degree in community and regional planning at the University of Texas at Austin. He said he has chosen urban planning as a good way to be involved in his own community, "making the world better by starting where I live." Otto said he still believes in the value of cross-cultural exchange. "I do feel like there's so much to learn from other communities and societies and cultures, but it's important to me to keep my own house clean."

Like Otto and Monfort, Jamison found her Fulbright a life-changing experience. She had grown up in rural Montana and, before entering Linfield, "had little awareness of the world beyond the split-rail fence of the ranch I grew up on," she said. "I was hungry to learn as much as possible about the world."

Jamison spent her year in Nicaragua studying the political history of the press there — how political opinion was expressed and how the press was used as a weapon in political conflict. A philosophy and communications double major at Linfield, she had planned to become a foreign correspondent covering war zones and hot spots. Fulbright, she said, set her on another path.

"I wanted to see if I had it in me to be a researcher," said Jamison, who is now completing a Ph.D. in sociology at UCLA.

Although she found herself spending many lonely hours poring over archives, she said, one of her biggest discoveries was that “academic research actually is not detached from the world but important to it.” And hanging out with Nicaraguans she met proved even more valuable than the academic research at times, she said.

Similarly, Monfort found engaging locals, and winning their trust, vital to the research for her novel. That sometimes meant devoting much of a day to having coffee with people, she said.

Laying the groundwork before going abroad can smooth the way for a Fulbright project, Otto said. “I think the more connections you can make and networking you can do in advance ... the stronger your experience will be,” he said. “Another point

would be to have realistic expectations about what you’re going to accomplish. You’re going to learn a lot about your subject, but it’s important to be open to other areas of interest as they come up.”

Several of the Fulbright recipients credited Deborah Olsen, Linfield’s Fulbright Program advisor, for helping them formulate their project proposals and navigate the arduous application process.

“Debbie Olsen was the one who made it happen for me,” Jamison said. “It only came about because of her guidance and her vision and keeping me on task.”

Olsen brainstorms with applicants and suggests ideas. “I help students imagine what is possible,” she said. “The ones who succeed are creative and can run with a good idea. These people have to be very

independent and enormously resourceful, especially in developing countries,” she added.

Despite its demands and adjustments, Fulbrighters heartily endorse the program. “The things I learned were literally priceless – the world I got to see and live in, the friends I made,” Monfort said. “It really did open a lot of doors.”

The Fulbright Program, initiated by the late Sen. J. William Fulbright, is the largest U.S.-based international exchange program in study, research and teaching. Its main goal, established by Congress in 1946, is to increase mutual understanding between U.S. citizens and people of other nations. For more information on the program, visit www.fulbrightonline.org.

– Beth Rogers Thompson

10 Linfield students awarded Fulbright grants since 1999

Angela Jamison, 1999-2000

“A History of Nicaraguan Print Journalism: 1830s through 1980s”; now attending graduate school at UCLA.

Staci Bryson, 2000-2001

Germany, teaching assistantship; now at Princeton Theological Seminary.

Seth Otto, 2000-2001

“Contemporary Indigenous Social Movements in Bolivia: Ideology, Class and Ethnicity”; recently completed master’s degree at the University of Texas.

Lynsey Farrell, 2001-2002

“Education and Dependency: The Future of Harambee Schools in Kenya”; now attending graduate school at Boston University.

Melissa Koosmann, 2001-2002

Austria, “Zweisprachige Dichtung/Dual-language Poetry”; now writing poetry and teaching at the

University of Arizona and Pima Community College.

Paul Beck, 2003-2004

“Germany’s Great Gamble: The Euro”; now an analyst for Goldman, Sachs & Co., Salt Lake City, Utah

Jennifer Cregg, 2003-2004

Germany, teaching assistantship; now attends graduate school at Heidelberg University.

Sarah Monfort, 2003-2004

Croatia, “Vukovar Cellars: A novel about Vukovar and its people;” now attends graduate school at Arcadia University in Pennsylvania.

Alexis Lien, 2005-2006

Austria, “Turkish Women Immigrants in Vienna.”

Maria Davis, 2005-2006

Iceland, “Ice-Volcano Interaction During Sheet-Flow Eruptions Under Thick Glaciers.”