

THE  
**News**  
FULBRIGHT FINLAND

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Message from the  
President of the  
Republic of Finland

Strengthening  
Finland's  
Tech Diplomacy

Studying  
Sustainability

Towards a Global  
Alumni Community

Making an  
Outsized Impact

Neuroscientist Nelson Totah Advocates for Exchanges

# 75 Years of Finnish-U.S. Exchanges



“For me, studying in the United States was a turning point,” says **Alexander Stubb**, the President of the Republic of Finland, whom we are honored to have as the Patron of our 75th Anniversary Year (p. 4). He describes his personal study experience, but simultaneously captures the sentiments nearly universally shared by the Fulbright Finland Foundation grantees over the many decades: “a turning point.”

Since the inception of the Foundation’s programs in 1949, over 6 200 students, scholars, researchers, artists, and professionals, Finns and Americans alike, have taken part in the profound experience of personal growth and advancement through academic and cultural exchange, pushing the boundaries of science and research, and adding to all areas of human creativity. This year we celebrate the 75th anniversary of these exchanges, and the immense contribution of the programs’ alumni for both societies, and for the world (pp. 5, 7).

The alumni have grown into a strong community that participates in every aspect of the Foundation’s work, including helping secure opportunities for the next generations of grantees (pp. 12–14).

In this issue of the magazine, we also explore the pressing and timely topics of our current grantees, ranging from sustainability (p. 10), and health literacy and misinformation management (p. 9), to peace, mediation, and conflict research (p. 15), and from tech diplomacy (p. 8) to disability art (p. 11). The common characteristic of alumni and grantees alike is their commitment and drive: “Pushing for outsized impact to reshape the world into a better place,” as the Foundation’s Vice-Chair **Nelson Totah** puts it (pp. 12–14).

Our visiting columnist, Finland’s Minister of Science and Culture **Sari Multala** underlines the Foundation’s key role in Finland’s science and innovation ecosystem and the exchanges of talent and knowledge, and she calls for further deepening scientific engagement and people-to-people ties between Finland and the United States (p. 3). I could not agree more!

**Terhi Mölsä**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Fulbright Finland Foundation

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LAURI HEIKKINEN

## United States a Key Partner for Finland in Science and Technology

I see Fulbright Finland Foundation as Finland's key long-standing instrument for promoting exchanges of talent and knowledge between Finland and the U.S.

In the last years, the relationship between the United States and Finland has become more intense than ever in higher education, research, and culture. Collaboration for supporting Ukraine against Russia's unprovoked and unjustified war has been consistent. Finland's membership in NATO strengthen long-term strategical connections between our countries.

Finland and the United States share a long history as dependable partners and last years have shown that our bonds are stronger than ever. This was very clear when Finland hosted the United States for a Joint Committee Meeting (JCM) on Science and Technology Cooperation in Helsinki last Fall.

### CONTINUING AND DEEPENING SCIENTIFIC ENGAGEMENT AND PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE TIES

between the U.S. and Finland will not only propel both economies forward, but also lead toward a more resilient future for all citizens. Our actions at the Governmental level combined with the excellent work done by individuals and research-performing organizations have contributed to the vibrant collaboration between Finland and the U.S. both at federal level administration and state level.

I see Fulbright Finland Foundation as Finland's key long-standing instrument for promoting exchanges of talent and knowledge between Finland and the U.S. in various fields and on a yearly basis. In addition, the vast Fulbright Alumni network has and continues to contribute to building bridges between U.S. and Finnish institutions and individuals at all levels.

In terms of joint research projects, the Research Council of Finland organizes joint research funding opportunities with U.S. research funders in several areas on a yearly basis. The Council's key partners in the U.S. are National Science Foundation (NSF), National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Basic Research Office of the Department of Defense (DoD).

### AS A PREREQUISITE FOR SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COOPERATION,

we need to be able to identify key collaborators and collaboration opportunities in the U.S. and keep up with developments in U.S. science and technology policy. Our key assets in this respect are our Team Finland Knowledge Science Counselors in the U.S., one at the Finnish Embassy in Washington D.C. and the other one at the Consulate General of Finland in Los Angeles.

I had the opportunity to visit Los Angeles in October last year, and was delighted to learn about collaboration opportunities for Finnish actors within Southern California in culture, science and the creative sectors. Finland has now signed a letter of intent with the City of Los Angeles on promoting climate cooperation and economic development.

We also have an active expert network called Finnish-American Research and Innovation Accelerator (FARIA), which brings together researchers, universities, research funders and governmental representatives on both sides of the Atlantic.

Finland is hosting a joint European supercomputer, LUMI, which is currently the world's fifth most powerful supercomputer and the most powerful one in Europe, and we are currently preparing to upgrade it. LUMI has already served as a platform for cooperation between Finland and the U.S. states of Colorado and Texas. Recently, NASA has expressed their interest to our Ministry in utilizing LUMI in a collaborative fashion.

### FULBRIGHT FINLAND FOUNDATION PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE

in the ecosystem as the facilitator of people-to-people connections, and I wish to thank the Foundation for all the valuable work you have done over the past 75 years.

**Sari Multala**

Minister of Science and Culture



## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FINLAND

Finland has had a special status in the Fulbright programme. In times gone by, our country dared not participate in the programme for the fear of the Soviet Union, and the dedicated ASLA programme was developed for Finland instead. It channelled to us influences from the Western community of values, to which we have belonged in spirit for as long as Finland has been an independent state. The relationship between Finland and the United States as allies is today stronger than it has ever been in the history of our countries.

Over the decades, the Fulbright programme has enabled numerous Finnish students and scientists to study and work in the United States. In addition to studying and conducting research, they have built up their understanding of multicultural interaction. Personal contacts and networks established while studying increase in value over the years, serving the interests of our countries.

For me, studying in the United States was a turning point. When I left Furman University in South Carolina, I was full of enthusiasm for studying, Anglo-Saxon learning methods and Western values. Ever since my student days I have been a firm believer in liberal democracy, the market economy and globalisation.

I would like to thank the Foundation and its donors for your important work. Thanks to you, we can today celebrate a 75-year-old foundation that has inspired a yearning for knowledge and learning on both sides of the Atlantic.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alexander Stubb', with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Alexander Stubb  
President of the Republic of Finland

The President of the Republic of Finland **Alexander Stubb** is the Patron of the 75th Anniversary Year of the Fulbright Finland Foundation. The President's message (above) on the the Foundation's Anniversary was delivered at the Fulbright Finland Awards Ceremony in May 2024 (p. 5). Alexander Stubb (PhD) has his undergraduate degree from Furman University in South Carolina in 1993.



STUDIO TERHO PHOTOGRAPHY

## Celebrating 75 Years of Finnish-U.S. Exchanges 2024-25 Awards to the U.S. Announced

A new cohort of students, scholars, and professionals from Finland joined the community of over 6 200 Fulbright Finland Foundation alumni in the annual Awards Ceremony at the Helsinki City Hall in May. Celebrating the 75th anniversary year of the Fulbright Finland Foundation and Finnish-U.S. exchanges, the event was hosted jointly by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, and the City of Helsinki. Remarks on behalf of the two governments were delivered by U.S. Ambassador **Douglas Hickey**, and Ambassador of Finland in the United States, **Mikko Hautala**.

At the event, the Foundation announced 36 new grant recipients representing a wide range of disciplines and research topics from biocultural diversity, advancement of democracy, and peace and conflict resolution to bioinformatics, construction management, and folklore studies. The awards have been made possible by support from the Finnish and U.S. governments, the Finland-America Educational Trust Fund, the Foundation's partners from the higher education and private sectors, as well as alumni, and individual donors.

This year's awards included the first Fulbright-Idman Foundation grant, awarded to **Eero Kaarsalo** who will be completing a master's degree in Entrepreneurship and Innovation at the University of Southern California. The very first Fulbright Finland Centennial Award was made for the study of peace and conflict resolution, and it was granted

to **Joona Mäkinen**. The Fulbright Finland Centennial Award is funded from the yields of a special fund created entirely by contributions from private donors in recognition of Finland's Centennial Year in 2017.

Three scholars were selected for the multi-disciplinary Fulbright Arctic Initiative (FAI) program: **Tanja Joonas**, **Juho Kähkönen**, and **Alexandra Middleton** will be collaborating with fellow researchers from the Arctic Council member countries during the 18-month FAI program to address key research and policy related questions related to promoting Arctic Security.

Over 60 Finnish and U.S. grantees have so far been selected to participate in the Foundation's programs for the academic year 2024-25. Additional selections, primarily for the short-term programs, will be made later in the year, likely bringing the total number of next year's grantees to approximately 100.



Watch greetings by Ambassador of Finland in the United States, Mikko Hautala:  
<https://youtu.be/2UrX3p-L5qg>

Fulbright Finland Foundation Grantees 2024-25  
[www.fulbright.fi/grantees](http://www.fulbright.fi/grantees)

*Text: Maija Kettunen*



KAUTE Foundation annually funds several Fulbright Awards.

"I'm eagerly looking forward to immersing myself in the research community, collaborating with esteemed colleagues, and contributing to the global conversation on technology, innovation, and sustainability management," says doctoral researcher **Larry Abdullahi**, 2024-25 Fulbright-KAUTE Foundation awardee to the University of Michigan.



# Tampereen yliopisto palkittiin USA- yhteistyöstä

**T**ampereen yliopiston pitkäjänteinen työ Suomen ja Yhdysvaltain välisessä tiede- ja koulutusyhteistyössä on palkittu “Top Producer of Fulbright Awards” -tunnustuksella. Tampereen yliopisto on rahoittanut suomalaisista korkeakouluista kaikkein eniten stipendejä amerikkalaisille Fulbright-tutkijoille ja -opiskelijoille viimeisen 10 vuoden aikana.

”Top Producer” -tunnus jaettiin Fulbright Suomi -säätiön juhlatilaisuudessa Helsingin kaupungintalolla ja sen vastaanotti Tampereen yliopiston rehtori **Keijo Hämäläinen**. Tilaisuudessa huomioitiin myös toiseksi ja kolmanneksi eniten stipendejä rahoittaneet LUT-yliopisto ja Turun yliopisto.

Merkittävä osa Fulbright Suomi -säätiön stipendiohjelmista yhdysvaltalaisille tutkijoille ja opiskelijoille rahoitetaan yhteistyössä suomalaisten yliopistojen ja ammattikorkeakoulujen kanssa. Fulbright Suomi -säätiöllä on kumppanuussopimus 12 suomalaisen korkeakoulun kanssa.

”Fulbright-stipendi on säilyttänyt vuosien ajan asemansa akateemisessa yhteisössä yhtenä arvostetuimmista apurahajärjestelmistä. Se on edistänyt ja edistää merkittäväällä tavalla kaikkein korkeimman tason tieteellisen osaamisen siirtymistä ja on Yhdysvaltojen kanssa tehtävän yliopistoyhteistyön kulmakivi”, sanoo Tampereen yliopiston rehtori Keijo Hämäläinen.

”Yhteistyösopimuksilla suomalaisten korkeakoulujen kanssa on keskeinen merkitys Fulbright-ohjelmien ja Suomen ja Yhdysvaltain välisten vaihtojen pitkäjänteisessä kehittämisessä ja kasvattamisessa”, toteaa Fulbright Suomi -säätiön



STUDIO TERHO PHOTOGRAPHY

toimitusjohtaja **Terhi Mölsä**. ”Yhteistyö Tampereen yliopiston kanssa on ollut aivan erinomaista.”

Vuosien 2013-24 aikana Tampereen yliopisto on rahoittanut 32 yhdysvaltalaisen Fulbright-tutkijan ja -opiskelijan stipendin yliopistolle.

Rehtori **Keijo Hämäläinen**, suurlähettiläs **Douglas T. Hickey** ja Fulbright Suomi -säätiön puheenjohtaja **Timo Korkeamäki**.

Fulbright on edistänyt ja edistää merkittäväällä tavalla kaikkein korkeimman tason tieteellisen osaamisen siirtymistä ja on Yhdysvaltojen kanssa tehtävän yliopistoyhteistyön kulmakivi.

- Tampereen yliopiston rehtori Keijo Hämäläinen

”Top Producer”-tunnustuksen yhteydessä Tampereen yliopistolle luovutettiin lasinen kuksa, jonka on säätiölle suunnitellut ja puhaltanut yhdysvaltalainen lasitaiteilija **Jonathan Capps** Fulbright-kaudellaan Suomessa lukuvuonna 2018-19. Palkinnon jakoivat Fulbright Suomi -säätiön hallituksen puheenjohtaja **Timo Korkeamäki** ja kunniapuheenjohtaja, Yhdysvaltain Suomen-suurlähettiläs **Douglas Hickey**. Fulbright Suomi -säätiön 75-vuotisjuhlavuoden kunniaksi järjestettyä tilaisuutta isännöivät ulkoministeriö ja Helsingin kaupunki. Tilaisuudessa jaettiin stipendit myös suomalaisille tutkijoille, opiskelijoille ja ammattilaisille Yhdysvaltoihin lukuvuodelle 2024-25.



# 75th Anniversary Celebration at Mystic Seaport

## A New Agreement with Finlandia Foundation National

The 75th Anniversary of the Fulbright Finland Foundation and Finnish-U.S. exchanges was celebrated in Mystic, Connecticut, in May 2024. The two-day celebration was organized by the volunteers of the Friends of Fulbright Finland (FoFF) Alumni Council in the United States, and it gathered over 60 alumni, current grantees, and friends of Fulbright Finland for multiple special events over the Memorial Day weekend: a guided tour of the Mystic Seaport Museum, a networking reception with special remarks, a historic steamboat cruise down the Mystic River, and a visit to the Mystic Aquarium.

The weekend was a true demonstration of the power of partnerships. Our local host **Mary Anne Butler**, Superintendent of Stonington Public Schools and FoFF Council Member, had arranged generous support from the Mystic Seaport Museum and the Mystic Aquarium that provided superb venues. Finlandia Foundation National co-sponsored the events.

During the celebrations, the Fulbright Finland Foundation and the Finlandia Foundation National

signed a Memorandum of Understanding laying the groundwork for new collaborations between the two organizations. **Mike Loovis**, Fulbright U.S. scholar alum and Alumni Council member, received a special recognition for his long-term contribution as a major donor for Fulbright Finland.

The event was an excellent opportunity for the U.S. alumni community to also meet the Deputy Consul General **Keijo Karjalainen**, who brought the greetings from the Consulate General of Finland in New York, and the new Honorary Consul of Finland in Connecticut, **Patrick J. Trostle**.

The event drew alumni from 14 states. **Edward Stevens IV** (2021-22 Fulbright-University of Helsinki Graduate Award) came from Pennsylvania. "I thoroughly enjoyed my time at the Fulbright Finland 75th Anniversary celebration. It was great to reconnect with people I met during my time in Finland as well as make new connections," he says.

The celebration in Mystic was part of a series of events honoring the Foundation's 75th Anniversary.

*Text: Terhi Mölsä*

Top left: Executive Director **Thomas Flanagan**, Finlandia Foundation National, and CEO **Terhi Mölsä**. More on the partnership: [www.fulbright.fi/about-us/news-releases/new-partnership-with-finlandia-foundation-national](http://www.fulbright.fi/about-us/news-releases/new-partnership-with-finlandia-foundation-national)

**More about Mystic event**  
[www.fulbright.fi/off-events-starting-2024](http://www.fulbright.fi/off-events-starting-2024)

**Support Finnish-U.S. exchanges through the Foundation's 75th Anniversary campaign:**  
[www.fulbright.fi/work-with-us/donate](http://www.fulbright.fi/work-with-us/donate)

Your support helps empower the next generation of changemakers!



# Strengthening Finland's Tech Diplomacy



## Heikki Hietala

Counselor, Adviser to the Under-Secretary of State for International Trade Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland

2023–24 Seeking Solutions for Global Challenges Award

[www.fulbright.fi/grants-research-postdoc-and-scholar/seeking-solutions-global-challenges-award](http://www.fulbright.fi/grants-research-postdoc-and-scholar/seeking-solutions-global-challenges-award)

The past year as a Fulbright visiting scholar at Stanford University has been a fulfilling experience both professionally and personally. It has allowed me to make use of my background in diplomacy, gain a whole new perspective on my field of work from an academic standpoint, and enrich my career path tremendously.

This experience would not have been possible without the generous support of the Fulbright Finland Foundation and the ASLA-Fulbright Mid-Career Professional Development Program. I am honored to be the inaugural recipient of the Seeking Solutions for Global Challenges award, which is intended for Finnish professionals who want to impact the future and make a difference, finding solutions to current and global challenges through their professional projects.

My research project continued where I left off working for the Finnish Government at the European Union and NATO with a focus on technology policy.

By analyzing the underlying global trends, identifying policy objectives, and exploring means for their implementation, it provides concrete policy recommendations for a high-tech country like Finland to pursue in its own diplomatic efforts as part of its foreign, security, development, and trade relations. To that end, I collected dozens of inputs from various stakeholders in government, academia, private sector, and civil society both in the U.S. and around the world.

As one of the leading universities on technology issues, Stanford proved to be an excellent place to

conduct my research with its location right at the heart of Silicon Valley. The access it provides to a broad spectrum of thought leaders on and off campus is one of a kind, especially with Stanford's reach across the top companies and successive administrations.

While innovation-focused California can often feel far removed from the more policy-oriented circles of my previous stomping grounds in Brussels and Washington, D.C., that gap is now narrowing with the profound impact technology is having on our economy, democracy, and security.

The competitiveness of our economies in the technology race, the deepening digital divides globally, the transformative societal impacts of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum, synthetic biology and wireless communications, the battle for their global governance, as well as the risks posed for our national and economic security are all shared challenges that require joint solutions.

Promoting sustainable growth and development in the technology sector, ensuring values-based tech governance, securing the technology ecosystem, as well as deepening international technology partnerships are all areas where Finland and the United States can forge an even closer relationship and learn from each other.

I will be returning to Finland invigorated by the experience and can highly recommend the program to other professionals like myself that may not have a background as a researcher but are interested in deepening their expertise in academia.



KAROLINA KOKKO

## Read Online: My “Fulbright Supply Chain”

“While I am in Finland to partner with colleagues at Hanken, I am also inspired by the interdisciplinary ideas that emerge when engaging in social dialogue with other Fulbright Scholars in Finland from other academic areas. We are from what might seem to be disparate and radically different disciplines, yet our common interest in Finnish culture and issues links us together in ways that allow for academic overlap.”

**Terry Esper**, 2023–24 Fulbright-Hanken Distinguished Chair in Business and Economics

Read Terry's article *My “Fulbright Supply Chain”*  
[www.fulbright.fi/about-us/blog/my-fulbright-supply-chain](http://www.fulbright.fi/about-us/blog/my-fulbright-supply-chain)





MALJA KETTUNEN

## Cross-Border Collaboration for Health Literacy and Misinformation Management

**M**y Fulbright journey in Finland encompassed a dual focus: exploring regulations and ethics surrounding health literacy policy and refining inclusive strategies to counter the proliferation of health misinformation.

Utilizing a community-based participatory approach, I collaborated with expert stakeholders to explore the roles of regulatory frameworks and ethical considerations in combating health misinformation in Finland. I anticipate that the insights gained from this process will contribute to scholarship that promotes evidence-based decision-making and policymaking in the U.S., Finland, and beyond.

In addition to my research, I taught a graduate course on infodemic management. Course instruction was dedicated to engaging diverse communities, developing inclusive health literacy interventions, and monitoring the dissemination of misinformation during public health crises.

By providing future professionals with essential tools and strategies, the course aimed to empower them to collaborate with stakeholders in their local communities. Ultimately, this approach fosters a culture of informed decision-making in both public and clinical health settings.

Throughout my Fulbright experience, I seized serendipitous opportunities, including contributing to an ideation workshop hosted by the European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats (Hybrid CoE). This workshop provided a platform to address cognitive intrusions – insidious misinformation tactics aimed at undermining democratic values. The resulting trend report, a product of interdisciplinary collaboration, offers actionable insights to strengthen societal resilience against cognitive intrusions.

Additionally, my participation in the ‘Towards Sustainable Societies’ seminar, hosted by the newly established WHO Collaborating Centre on Health in All Policies and the Social Determinants of Health at Tampere University, facilitated connections with a multidisciplinary array of expert stakeholders, enriching my Fulbright research.

Beyond workshops and seminars, I delivered lectures and visited institutions such as the University of Helsinki, University of Oulu, University of Turku, and the Bibliothecarii Medicinae Fenniae—Finland’s professional association for medical and health

### **Bethany McGowan**

Associate Professor  
Purdue University, IN

2023–24 Seeking Solutions  
for Global Challenges  
Award

[www.fulbright.fi/  
seeking-solutions-  
global-challenges-award](http://www.fulbright.fi/seeking-solutions-global-challenges-award)

My experiences stand as a testament to the Fulbright program’s commitment to fostering mutual understanding and cooperation, transcending geographical boundaries to tackle urgent global challenges.”

librarians. Furthermore, I received an Inter-country Travel Grant, which enabled me to visit and lecture at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden.

My experiences stand as a testament to the Fulbright program’s commitment to fostering mutual understanding and cooperation, transcending geographical boundaries to tackle urgent global challenges. The steadfast support from the Fulbright Finland Foundation and my hosts at the Faculty of Information Technology and Communication Sciences (ITC) at Tampere University was instrumental in empowering me to embrace information diplomacy and drive positive change.

# Studying Sustainability in Finland

**W**hen deciding where to further our studies in sustainability, there was no doubt it had to be Finland. Apart from being the happiest country in the world, Finland is also a leader in sustainability. Finland has consecutively ranked in the top three performing countries in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and since 2021 has ranked first.

With the close connection to nature fostered within Finnish culture and the extensive amount of companies working towards a circular economy, Finland offers both personal and professional insights into the field. Additionally, the Fulbright Finland Foundation's commitment to sustainability has allowed us to pursue our degrees with the support of an organization that aligns with our values.

## Skye: Developing New Perspectives through Multidisciplinary Learning

A major factor that led me to pursue a master's degree in Creative Sustainability at Aalto University was its interdisciplinary nature. Coming from a background in Sustainable Materials & Technology and a minor in Art & Design, I have always been interested in discovering how science and art can interact to provide sustainable solutions. The Creative Sustainability program allows for this exploration as collaboration among design, business, and chemical engineering students is emphasized in our courses.

Through multidisciplinary learning, I have developed new perspectives on sustainability challenges, gained more tools for problem-solving, and learned how the different fields can support one another toward a common goal.

## Claudia: An Interdisciplinary Exploration of Circular Economics

I am studying circular economics in the School of Energy Systems at LUT University in Lahti. The courses contain a mix of economics, society, and environment. I studied economics during my undergrad with a focus on environmental economics.

Now my master's studies are building on that framework through an interdisciplinary approach. So far, I have learned about different business models through an environmental lens with discussions about corporate social responsibility, degrowth, and regenerative business. I have learned about the energy transition by examining Finland's plans to become carbon neutral, the exploitation of people and the environment in Congo, and the biofuel economy.



MAIJA KETTUNEN

The studies have also provided me with a community of highly educated peers with whom I can discuss new ideas. Many of the classes focus on group work that emulates working life in order to prepare the students for our future careers.

### Claudia Partridge

2023-24 Fulbright-LUT University Graduate Award

### Skye Pham

2023-24 Fulbright-Aalto University Graduate Award

## Insights from the Sitra Lifestyle Test

Through the Fulbright Finland Foundation, we were introduced to the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra. Our Fulbright cohort had an opportunity to take their Lifestyle Test to understand our impact on the environment. The test provided helpful personalized tips to increase our positive impact on the environment. We broke into small groups to discuss our results and feelings about the test. Discussions stretched from the infrastructure differences in railroad systems, corporate responsibility, to energy transitions, and money-saving behavior.

In addition to taking the test, we learned about different profiles Sitra created to understand consumer behavior in order to motivate different consumer groups to act in environmentally beneficial ways.

## An Eye-Opening Experience

Sustainability is visible in everyday Finnish life through their transportation system, heating system, and recycling practices. Living in Finland has been an eye-opening and inspiring experience so far. Many Finnish people we have met take personal responsibility for environmental care. We have observed this attitude reflected in think tanks like Sitra and organizations like the Fulbright Finland Foundation, as well as in the government and schools.

Finland has proven to be the perfect place for us to pursue studies related to the environment and sustainability issues. The interdisciplinary nature of the Finnish master's programs has also allowed us to explore different aspects of our respective fields.

[www.fulbright.fi/lut-graduate](http://www.fulbright.fi/lut-graduate)

[www.fulbright.fi/aalto-graduate](http://www.fulbright.fi/aalto-graduate)



PÄÄSKY MIETTINEN

## Dance Enriched Through Disability

**D**ancing between topics and roles has been a routine, straddling disability studies and dance studies, educator and dancer, scholar and artist. Coming to Finland, I hoped to be firmly in the arts area. I came to conduct a dance ethnography with Kaaos Dance Company. Founded in 2010, the company aims to “present work that dissolves distinctions and transforms concepts between able and disabled by presenting art that is enriched through difference”.

This research for my dissertation explores how the culture of companies incorporates the artistic expression of dancers with intellectual disabilities (ID) with the goal of establishing best practices for supporting their artistic development.

Observing the company perform at festivals and rehearsals, I discovered that although I was in a new country, there is something crossnational about the disability experience. Dance has a way of physically connecting individuals in a cross-impairment experience. Watching **Siiri Tiilikka** perform her solo *Birdsong* at Oodi library for DiDa – Disability Day Art & Action festival I was reminded of this when the MC of the event began to weep onstage. I came to Finland to be enveloped in the artistic academic experience.

My Fulbright is at the University of the Arts, Helsinki where I took classes and collaborated with a new cohort of performing arts doctoral scholars at Tutke, where scholars complete their artistic research after years of established practice in the field. Here I found myself embedded in conversations with artists and faculty questioning scholarly methods and the ethics of artistic research.

My collaborations highlighted the ways my research is framed between two fields, just as I am.

As I reflect on my year in Finland, I realize I have created one more community to dance between. Outside of the university, I spent hours taking dance, teaching, attending rehearsals, and attending or talking about performances. This is where I found my Finnish *rampa* (crip) dance community. After spending a year in two communities, one U.S. and one Finnish, I have started to choreograph future collaborations to share cross-national artistic practices.

Returning to the U.S., I hope to merge my scholarly, pedagogical, and artistic communities to create partnerships in order to share artistic and access practices to expand the possibilities of disability art and aesthetics.



**Sydney Erlikh**  
PhD Candidate  
University of Illinois  
at Chicago  
2023–24 U.S.  
Fulbright Fellow  
University of the  
Arts, Helsinki  
Kaaos Dance Company

[www.fulbright.fi/us-student](http://www.fulbright.fi/us-student)

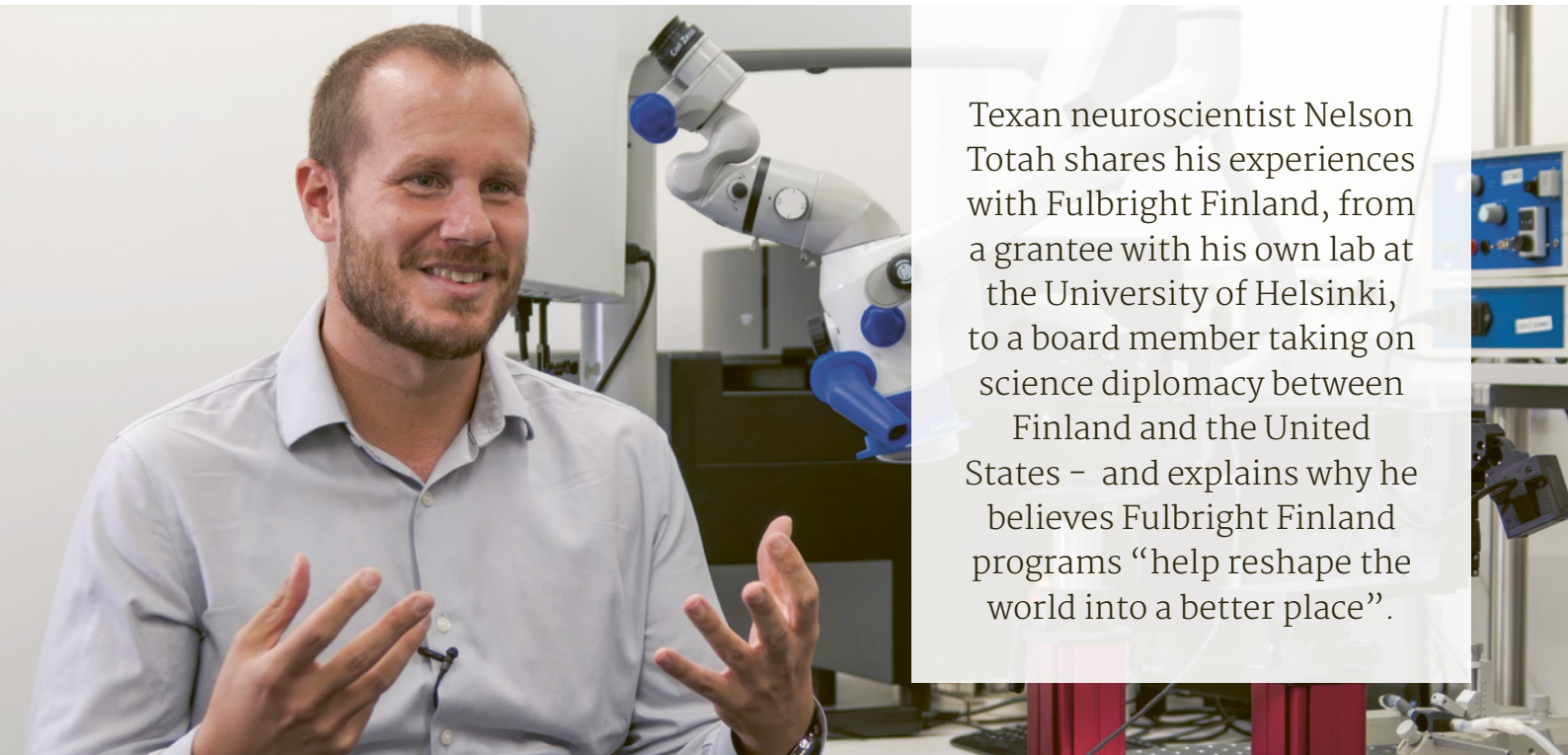
### SYDNEY ERLIKH WINS THE ROTH-THOMSON AWARD



**Sydney Erlikh** received the 2024 Roth-Thomson Award. The award supports her return to Finland in 2025 to continue collaboration with the University of the Arts' Theatre Academy and the Kaaos Dance Company.

The Fulbright Finland Foundation has worked with the Lois Roth Foundation since 1991 and each year the Roth-Thomson Award is granted to U.S. Fulbright students in Finland focusing on social sciences, humanities, and the arts.

The Lois Roth Foundation is based in Washington D.C. and it supports the exchange of people across national and cultural barriers to enhance international communication. <https://loisrothfoundation.org>



Texan neuroscientist Nelson Totah shares his experiences with Fulbright Finland, from a grantee with his own lab at the University of Helsinki, to a board member taking on science diplomacy between Finland and the United States – and explains why he believes Fulbright Finland programs “help reshape the world into a better place”.

# Making an Outsized Impact

Text LOUISA GAIRN Photo MARIA MÖLSÄ

## Nelson Totah

Associate Professor of Neuropsychology and Pharmacology  
University of Helsinki  
2020–21 Fulbright Finland Travel Grant for Research Collaboration  
Vice-Chair of the Fulbright Finland Foundation Board of Directors

[www.fulbright.fi/travel-grant-research](http://www.fulbright.fi/travel-grant-research)

Nelson Totah has always been curious about the world – a lifelong trait that has led him on unexpected paths: from medicine to neuroscience, and from the U.S. to Europe and Finland, setting up his own research lab, during which a Fulbright Finland travel grant blossomed into a research breakthrough.

“When I was looking to start my own lab, I looked almost all over the world. And one of the places I applied was the University of Helsinki, with no idea what to expect,” he recalls.

“But boy, am I glad I came here, because things kind of fell into place,” he says with a smile.

“One reason I’m really glad I came to Finland is that fate landed me some interesting things to do, and I’ve been able to have what I think is an outsized impact.”

Now this enterprising academic has taken on yet another challenge: hands-on international science diplomacy, engaging face-to-face with U.S. policy-makers to develop more support for Fulbright Finland’s professional exchange programs.

“Finland is a relatively small country, population wise, that punches far above its weight in science, technology and I would even say in global affairs. It’s a country that shares a border with Russia, and that, like the United States, is an Arctic nation.”

“I think some of the most impactful things I’ve ever done with my life are being done in Finland, because I see the work I’m doing is strengthening the personal connections between the United States and Finland in a way that can really benefit not only both countries, but I believe it benefits the entire world. The work that people like **Terhi Mölsä** are doing with Fulbright in Finland can help reshape the world into a better place.”

## From Medicine to Neuroscience

Nelson initially set out to study medicine at college, and indeed later qualified as an emergency medical technician and spent around a decade working with a disaster medical team. However, after taking some medical classes on the brain, he discovered his true passion, and decided to switch to neuroscience and behavioral biology, the focus of his bachelor’s degree from Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia.

“I realized that neuroscience brought together everything I wanted. It was about psychology and the mind, it was still hard science, about how things are working in the world in a very physical way.”

Nelson completed his PhD in neuroscience at the University of Pittsburgh, followed by postdoctoral training at the Max Planck Institute for Biological Cybernetics in Germany, before moving to

Finland to set up his very own lab at the University of Helsinki.

“Running a lab in academia, you’re literally an entrepreneur. The University of Helsinki has a great sense of community and a lot of support, but you can feel very dissociated because you have to get your own grant money, you have to hire people, and sometimes fire people. It’s a bit like running a start-up, except that outside of your lab, you’re also doing classroom teaching. It’s an interesting career.”

Nelson and his team investigate neuronal networks for cognitive control, which includes research on the brain activity of rats. “We try to understand how the activity of the cells in the brain generate mental functions – things like attention, learning, memory, and volitional actions or what some might call free will,” he explains.

“One of the things we’re well known for is recording neurons deep in the brain stem. That’s an incredibly challenging place to put a probe because the brainstem moves around a lot and this causes electrodes to damage the brainstem instead of recording from it – the field of neuroscience has needed a probe that would be so thin and so flexible that it would just integrate into the tissue and move with the brainstem.”

### Collaboration Through Fulbright – and a World-first Neuroscience Breakthrough

That’s what brought Nelson his first experience of Fulbright, he explains. At a scientific conference, he met Dr. **Chong Xie**, an Associate Professor at Rice University specialized in biomedical engineering, who was working on precisely what Nelson was looking for: flexible neural probes.

Nelson secured a Fulbright Finland Travel Grant for Research Collaboration, which enabled him to go to Houston to work with Chong Xie’s lab in developing the technology for use in the brainstem – a professional exchange which allowed his research to take a giant step forward.

After two years of effort, his lab, in collaboration with the Xie lab, has successfully recorded activity from many neurons simultaneously in the brainstem of an awake, behaving animal – a feat never before accomplished, Nelson explains. The breakthrough, led by doctoral researchers **Amelien Vreven** from Belgium and **Dmitrii Vasilev** from Russia, was underpinned by the techniques developed by Nelson’s Fulbright-funded collaboration.

Nelson and Chong are continuing their joint work, writing a successful grant proposal to the U.S. National Institute of Health which brought in significant funding to support their ongoing research.

“Fulbright Finland gave me €3 000, and this enabled me to get €400 000 in money to Finland, to do first-of-its-kind scientific work. There was this huge return on the investment of Fulbright Finland funds.”

The experience made Nelson an enthusiastic advocate for Fulbright, actively posting on social media and speaking at various events about the

importance of international exchange – which in turn, led to an invitation from the Fulbright Finland Foundation for him to join the board.

### Fulbright Finland’s Unique Focus on Experts and Professionals

“When people in the U.S. hear Fulbright, they tend to think of college or graduate scholarships – and these are of course incredibly important. I believe that you have to reach young folks at the age where they’re forming their relationship with the world, trying to figure out what their place is in it. Your entire perspective of what’s possible changes when you live and work abroad – it reshapes you completely.”

“But it’s important to realize that every single binational Fulbright Commission is unique, and can come up with their own programs,” Nelson emphasizes. “The Fulbright Finland Foundation has some of the broadest programming in the world, and a lot of the programs are focused on experts and professionals, which can have a huge policy impact.”



I think the time to invest in this relationship is now. Both governments have been incredibly supportive, and Fulbright Finland’s programs have paid, and will continue to pay, massive dividends for both societies.

### The U.S. and Finland: Arctic Nations, with Expertise to Share

Nelson describes one very telling example of the wider benefits this kind of professional-level exchange can have, in the context of the United States and Finland’s shared status as Arctic nations – where a single Fulbright Finland mid-career development grant could have a game-changing impact on the U.S.’s presence in the Arctic.

“America needs to be in the Arctic. As the sea ice there melts and changes, this is opening up new shipping routes, which will cut the distance to get goods from Japan to the European Union in half. It’s going to affect the whole world as we see more maritime traffic travel through the Arctic, as well as opening up lots of resources there.”

However, Nelson points out, the U.S. currently has only one heavy ice-breaking ship, which is forty years old. A Mid-Career Professional Development (MCPD) grant, awarded to U.S. Coast Guard Executive Officer **William Woityra**, currently Oceania Policy Division Chief at U.S. Indo-Pacific Command,

enabled a valuable exchange of knowledge with Finnish ice-breaking ship experts – with what Nelson defines as an “outsized impact”, with experts able to share knowledge across national boundaries.

“That’s where professional exchanges with Finland can make such a difference,” he says, highlighting another recent professional exchange which took a U.S. grantee to Finland to collaborate on coastal erosion research.

“Together with his Finnish colleague, he wrote a first-of-its-kind policy manual for small, medium and large American cities on how to deal with coastal flooding due to coastal erosion. I cracked this book open myself, and I was incredibly surprised and very happy to see that it’s really written for a non-specialist. It uses flow charts and checklists, meaning that a mayor or a city councilwoman can flip through it and figure out practical things that they can do to solve that challenge,” Nelson says.

### A Unique Commission

“These are the sorts of policy impacts we have. We’re this unique commission, doing some amazing programming targeted at professionals and experts, making an impact on everything from climate change to rural energy needs to Arctic security, and a lot on emerging and dual-use technology, quantum, and other leading-edge areas. And that’s unique,” Nelson points out.

“These Fulbright Finland professional and expert programs have unbelievable policy impact – and they’re cheap. But because of recent cuts in public funding support for exchanges, we are in danger of having to cut these programs.”

This gave Nelson an idea: “I said, well, we’re part of both governments, we’re a bilateral Commission set up by agreement of both the U.S. and Finnish governments. As a U.S. citizen, I can go talk to Congress on behalf of the Commission that I serve on – that’s my way of serving my country.”

This kind of science diplomacy was a completely new experience, Nelson explains. “I didn’t know what would happen. I wrote to a lot of different members of Congress engaged on these topics, everyone involved in foreign policy, like the House Foreign Affairs Committee or the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. I also wrote to members that have oversight of the U.S. Coast Guard, maritime transportation, and infrastructure.”

In total, Nelson has personally met with 83 different Congressional offices from both parties and across both chambers, and in addition corresponded with 37 offices. To all of them, he has highlighted the reasons for special funding targeted to Fulbright Finland and focused on professional and expert grants.

### The Outsider Diplomat

“Policymakers get a lot of white papers, briefings, and statements from various groups. But there’s no substitute for sitting down in a room and talking with people, whether formally or informally. Just sitting face to face. People can read your body



MARIA MÖLSÄ

language. You can communicate really fluidly and you can come to some decisions as a group that hopefully helps the situation.”

“I think that personal interaction is the importance of diplomacy for me. I was never trained in diplomacy – I’m coming at it as an outsider, but I think that outsider approach is a good thing and I’m hopeful that I can help both countries,” Nelson says.

“Fulbright Finland is incredibly grateful to the U.S. Congress for their unwavering support of the Fulbright program for so many decades, and I believe Congress is very protective of the Fulbright program.”

At the University of Helsinki, Nelson Totah and his team investigate neuronal networks for cognitive control.

**Fulbright Finland has some of the broadest programming in the world, and a lot of the programs are focused on experts and professionals, which can have a huge policy impact.**

“Finland is also an amazing partner. Both the former and current Finnish governments have been incredibly supportive and we’re so grateful to Finland for it. But we think we can do more. We want to continue these professional expert grants – and this is where I believe Congress can devote a special injection of money to support them,” he adds.

### Fulbright Finland in Support of U.S.-Finland Relations

Again, Nelson emphasizes the “outsized impact” that Fulbright Finland’s programs can achieve.

“What I tell members of Congress is that while NATO ensures the relationship between the United States and Finland in the military realm, Fulbright Finland is the primary platform we have for ensuring the relationship in the diplomatic, economic and research realms.”

“We need to take a much wider angle lens on the possibilities for the Fulbright program, given Finland’s rapidly growing role in global affairs,” Nelson affirms.

“I think the time to invest in this relationship is now. Both governments have been incredibly supportive, and Fulbright Finland’s programs have paid, and will continue to pay, massive dividends for both societies.”

# Everyday Peace

Fulbright U.S. graduate students Mia Filardi and Anezka Boyle talk about their experience studying peace, mediation, and conflict research in Finland.

In today's world, peace has become a buzzword that is heard repeatedly in the news, on social media, and in the international sphere. But what does 'peace' really mean? What would peace look like in places such as Ukraine, Palestine, or Sudan? How can peace be defined, and how do you know if it already exists?

One year of the Tampere University master's program in Peace, Mediation and Conflict Research has taught us a lot about the different definitions and contexts of peace. Negative peace, for example, is the most common interpretation of the word and describes an absence of violent conflict or war.

Alternatively, positive peace is seen as the creation of structures and institutions in a society that prevent future conflict from becoming violent. Positive peace focuses on the integration of a society in such a way as to avoid future instances of violent conflict.

Coined by peace scholar **Roger Mac Ginty** in 2021, the term everyday peace is used to describe peace at the hyperlocal, intimate, familial, and community levels. In conflict settings, everyday peace describes the ways that 'ordinary people'— that is neighbors and community members— can disrupt continuums of violent conflict and instead make the conscious decision to focus on their similarities and foster an environment of peace. Everyday peace can also mean the steps that people take to foster a sense of understanding amongst diverse members of a community, a process at the core of the Fulbright program.

## Fulbright Founded as a Peace Program

At its founding, Senator **Fulbright** emphasized the importance of Fulbright as a peacemaking program in the world, and through the years it has been successful in fostering everyday peace and cross-cultural understanding at hyperlocal and community levels.

Programs like Fulbright work passionately towards all these varying kinds of peace and illuminate the necessity of producing and protecting peace work. Propensity for conflict is an inherent aspect of human nature, especially within the contemporary geopolitical landscape.



Peace studies, and specifically how Finland approaches peace research and practices, is an area of increasing necessity to deal with these intractable elements of human behavior.

Within the Nordic peace tradition, these countries have developed collaborative projects and aspirations for peacebuilding due to growing geopolitical shifts in the Nordic neighborhood and greater international sphere.

**Mia Filardi** (left) and **Anezka Boyle**

2023-24 Fulbright-Tampere University Graduate Awardees

Everyday peace can also mean the steps that people take to foster a sense of understanding amongst diverse members of a community, a process at the core of the Fulbright program.

Mediation, in particular, is a strategic priority in Finnish foreign policy due largely to the legacy of **Martti Ahtisaari**, former President of Finland and renowned Nobel Peace laureate. Finland's specific focus within this cooperative framework is an emphasis on informal dialogue tracks and grassroots engagement with conflict entities, seen in the exemplary work being produced by Finnish peace organizations and civil society actors.

Facilitating sustainable conflict transformation requires the integration of local agency and Finland's approach to peacemaking places this need at the forefront of its mediation praxis.

Finland has also long since been an active participant within the UN, contributing to the development of international law, disarmament diplomacy, and multilateral development cooperation. At both the domestic and global level, the strides in Finnish peacemaking have had transformative influence in countless conflict areas.

These dimensions of Nordic peacebuilding contribute to Finland's identity as a global peace mediator and reveal just how crucial this kind of peacemaking is to the inescapable conflict dynamics in the world.



**Mujde Yuksel** (left) and **Henna Syrjälä** (right) invited Fulbright Scholar **M. Berk Talay** from France to the University of Vaasa to collaborate with their research group.

## Short Research Visits Spark New International Research Collaboration

*Text: Emilia Holopainen*

The Fulbright Inter-Country Travel Grant program provides Finnish institutions an opportunity to invite current U.S. Fulbright scholars and professionals from other European countries to Finland for short visits. The experience of hosts and the scholars alike prove that carefully planned visits with broad institutional support can be highly impactful and create long-term collaboration.

During her Fulbright term at the University of Vaasa, Suffolk University Associate Professor **Mujde Yuksel** shared the information about the Inter-Country program with her host institution, which resulted in inviting U.S. Fulbright scholar **M. Berk Talay** to Finland for a three-day research visit. “It’s incredible how a short visit can open doors to lasting academic and professional relationships, all while enjoying great conversations and plenty of laughs,” Mujde Yuksel says.

Professor Talay is Department Chair at the University of Massachusetts Lowell’s Manning School of Business. He spent the fall semester 2023 in France as a Fulbright scholar and came to Finland before his return to the U.S. “My visit to the University of Vaasa is a testament to the profound impact of the Fulbright Finland Foundation’s commitment to fostering international academic exchange with Finnish institutions. Through this opportunity, I not only presented my research but also had a chance to exchange ideas with the University of Vaasa faculty,” he says.

The host of the visit, Associate Professor **Henna Syrjälä**, was very pleased with the possibility to invite another U.S. Fulbright scholar to their Marketing and Consumption Research group. “Our research group has been very happy with Mujde, and the Inter-Country Travel Grant was a great

bonus: Not only did we have a chance for creating connections with a long-term visitor, but also had this extra possibility! We really enjoyed having an Inter-Country visitor, created excellent connections with him and intend to continue the collaboration. In addition, it was a meaningful way to learn about different cultures,” Henna Syrjälä says.

“This experience underscored the significance of Fulbright Finland Foundation’s role in connecting Finnish universities and scholars with their peers elsewhere in the world,” Berk says. “The direct impact of their support is evident – it fosters deep connections, nurtures collaborative research endeavors, and promotes a cross-pollination of ideas, all of which are essential ingredients for conducting robust and impactful research,” he concludes.

During the 2023–24 academic year, four U.S. Fulbright grantees from other European countries visited Finland on an Inter-Country Grant. All are now valued members of the Foundation’s active alumni community.

**Fulbright Inter-Country Travel Grant program**  
[www.fulbright.fi/inter-country](http://www.fulbright.fi/inter-country)

**Read previous Inter-Country Travel grantees’ experiences**  
[www.fulbright.fi/about-us/blog/still-winds-fiskars](http://www.fulbright.fi/about-us/blog/still-winds-fiskars)

<https://issuu.com/fulbright-center-finland/docs/ff-news-119/14>



U.S. professionals and advanced PhD students can also be considered for an Inter-Country Award in Finland. **Stephanie Schofield**, a U.S. Fulbright graduate student in Germany, visited the Tampere University of Applied Sciences on an Inter-Country Travel Grant. “My grant under the Fulbright Finland Foundation

has helped me to form a strong foundation with leaders in education in healthcare genetics. I look forward to continuing this collaboration with my Finnish hosts and am excited to see what global achievements come from our continued work together,” Stephanie Schofield says.



## Intensive Program Transforms School Leadership

The Fulbright Leaders for Global Schools (FLGS) program brought 16 U.S. K-12 school administrators to Finland in January for an intensive exploration of Finnish school leadership, education system, and culture. The 10-day program, designed by the Fulbright Finland Foundation, facilitated sharing of good practices across the Atlantic and the collaboration between the participants continues.

“During my exchange, I experienced a complete paradigm shift in the way structures, policies, and beliefs shape the Finnish educational system and how it serves all students,” says **Jose M. Rodriguez**,



MAIJA KETTUNEN

Administrative Coordinator at Los Angeles Unified School District. “Collaborating with leaders from across the United States and immersing ourselves with our Finnish counterparts created an authentic and productive dialogue that was mutually beneficial,” he concludes.

*Text: Mirka McIntire*

FLGS fellows **Jose M. Rodriguez** (right), **Khaliyah Williams-Rodriguez**, and **Susan Outlaw** presented at 2024 EDUCA event. Fulbright Finland alumna **Tuija Niemi** (second from right) facilitated the discussion.

## Onnistunut vierailukokemus kasvattaa pitovoimaa

Kansainvälisten osaajien houkuttelu, Suomen pitovoima ja kannusteiden lisääminen Suomeen jäämiseksi ovat puhuttaneet osaaajapulan aikana monella eri yhteiskunnan sektorilla.

Korkeakoulujen kansainvälistymisen, osaaajien rekrytoinnin ja Suomeen jäämisen kannalta on merkitystä muun muassa sillä, kuinka hoidamme kansainvälisten vieraiden vastaanoton ja tutkimusvierailujen isännöinnin. Onnistunut vierailukokemus luo mahdollisuuksia pitkäjänteisen yhteistyön kehittymiselle. Hyvän kokemuksen syntymisessä kyse on usein hyvin konkreettisista ja melko yksinkertaisistakin käytännön toimista.

Fulbright Suomi -säätiö kerää kattavaa palautetta kaikilta stipendiaateiltaan sekä vastaanottavilta korkeakouluilta koskien stipendikautta ja siihen vaikuttavia tekijöitä.

Yhdysvaltalaisen tutkijoiden ja asiantuntijoiden antaman palautteen mukaan suomalaisissa korkeakouluissa ja tutkimuslaitoksissa apurahatutkijoina työskentelevien kansainvälisten osaaajien vierailun onnistumiseen vaikuttaa akateemisten seikkojen lisäksi erityisesti kokemus vastaanottavan isäntäorganisaation valmistautumisesta vierailuun. Eriytyisen tärkeäksi koetaan muun muassa se, että vastaanottava taho lähettää riittävästi ja oleellista



KAROLIINA KOKKO

tietoa vierailijalle jo hyvissä ajoin ennen saapumista. Niin ikään kaikki käytännön asiat on hyvä saattaa kuntoon jo ennen vierailijan saapumista sekä tiedottaa vierailijasta etukäteen riittävän laajasti organisaation sisällä.

Laadukkaasta isännöinnistä syntyvät hyödyt ovat vastaanottavalle organisaatiolle merkittävämpiä kuin ehkä usein ajatellaan. Hyvin hoidettu isännöinti mahdollistaa molemmille osapuolille suurimman mahdollisen hyödyn kansainvälisen osaaajan vierailujaksosta suomalaisella korkeakoululla, mikä puolestaan kasvattaa edellytyksiä osapuolten väliselle pitkäaikaiselle koulutus- ja tutkimusyhteistyölle.

Laadukkaasti hoidettu kansainvälinen vierailu lisää osaltaan myös vastaanottavan korkeakoulun samoin kuin Suomen kansainvälistä tunnettuutta, vahvistaa maakuvaa, näkyvyyttä ja vetovoimaisuutta ja sitä kautta edesauttaa myös kansainvälisten opiskelijoiden ja opetus- ja tutkimushenkilökunnan rekrytointia.

*Teksti: Karoliina Kokko*

Ohjelmapäälliköt **Emmi Jelekäinen** (vas.) ja **Karoliina Kokko** esittelivät korkeakoulujen kansainvälisten asioiden kevätpäivien posterisessiossa Seinäjoella Suomessa vierailien yhdysvaltalaisen tutkijoiden ja heidän isäntinään toimineiden korkeakoulujen ja tutkimuslaitosten kokemuksia ja niihin pohjautuvia parhaita käytänteitä laadukseen ja menestyksekkään vierailun takaamiseksi.

**Lue lisää hyvistä käytänteistä artikkelin verkkoversiossa:**

[www.fulbright.fi/posterisessio-miten-vastaanotamme-kansainvalisia-osaajia-korkeakouluissamme](http://www.fulbright.fi/posterisessio-miten-vastaanotamme-kansainvalisia-osaajia-korkeakouluissamme)



## A Community Connecting People Far Beyond Borders

*Text: Louisa Gairn*

*EU diplomat Ulla Hakanen reflects on her Fulbright experience at University of California Berkeley, the impact on her subsequent career in international diplomacy, and the unparalleled insights into other cultures and societies such international exchanges can provide.*

In 2006, Ulla Hakanen travelled to the United States as a Fulbright scholar, studying Russian literature at the prestigious University of California, Berkeley. The experience not only enriched her academic pursuits but also gave skills and insights for a future career path she hadn't yet anticipated.

Ulla's Fulbright journey began with a recommendation from an academic advisor, who encouraged her to explore Berkeley for its strong Russian literature program. Despite initial hesitation about the geographic distance, she decided to pursue the opportunity, securing an ASLA-Fulbright Graduate Grant Program from Fulbright Finland Foundation to conduct her doctoral research there.

"UC Berkeley had the best professors and programs, including in Russian literature," Ulla recalls. "It was an excellent program with professors from various backgrounds and countries, including Russia. The academic environment was extremely demanding but equally rewarding."

Fulbright scholarships often create a ripple effect, and Ulla became part of a chain of Finnish Russia scholars who would advise others after her to pursue the same opportunity. Despite studying Russian literature in an American university raising

some eyebrows, Ulla firmly believed that academic excellence transcended borders: "If American universities have the best professors and programs, why shouldn't that be the same for Russian literature?"

### Shift into International Diplomacy

After returning to Finland, Ulla eventually realized that academia wasn't her calling. "I needed more action and interaction," she says. With previous work experience at the Finnish Embassy in Moscow, Ulla applied to the Finnish Foreign Service and was accepted. After a decade, she transitioned to the European Union's diplomatic service, where she has served for the past eight years.

As Deputy Head of the Russia Division within the European External Action Service (EEAS), Ulla also draws on her Fulbright experience daily, she explains.

"After Russia's illegal and unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine, our work isn't about engaging with Russia but rather engaging with the world and explaining the global consequences of Russia's actions," she explains. The war has required intense collaboration with the EU's transatlantic partners, and particularly the U.S., Ulla notes, in an effort to counter Russia and coordinate the unwavering support to Ukraine.

### From Textual Analysis to Diplomatic Nuance

Ulla reflects that the analytical skills she honed through her literary studies at Berkeley have proven

#### Ulla Hakanen

Deputy Head of  
Russia Division  
European External  
Action Service

2006-07 ASLA-Fulbright  
Graduate Grant

[www.fulbright.fi/  
fin-graduate](http://www.fulbright.fi/fin-graduate)

invaluable in her later diplomatic career. “Seminars at Berkeley were excellent practice in analyzing texts and understanding subtle messages,” she says.

“These skills have become crucial in my work, which is about getting very weak signals, subtle messages, understanding connections: hold on, this person is speaking very similarly to someone else. Is there a link between them? So, these skills in literary analysis that I learned in Berkeley, to analyze, listen carefully, read carefully and sense the words, have been very, very useful as a diplomat.”

### **Building Networks and Fostering Understanding**

Ulla continues to cherish and maintain the network she built during her Fulbright year. “The program fosters a unique community where you meet people from around the world,” she says. Her contacts have proved valuable throughout her diplomatic career, providing insights into different cultures and expanding her professional reach. Indeed, she says, it was one of her fellow Fulbrighters at Berkeley who triggered the curiosity that made her apply for one of her first diplomatic posts abroad, at the Finnish Embassy in Israel.

Ulla says her Fulbright affiliation often serves as an instant icebreaker in meetings with American counterparts. “Whenever I mention that I’m a Fulbrighter, it creates an immediate connection,” she notes. The program’s reputation in the U.S. remains unmatched, and the mutual recognition opens doors and deepens conversations.

### **Learning to See the World the Way Others Do**

Despite the rise of the internet and social networks, Ulla believes face-to-face engagement is irreplaceable – and the opportunity to live and work in another country leads to a more profound understanding of societies different than your own.

“You reach a completely different level of understanding when you do your shopping in the local supermarket, when you see every day what is on their TV, when you interact with people, not as a tourist, but actually work, be it academic work or otherwise.”

**These skills in literary analysis that I learned in Berkeley, to analyze, listen carefully, read carefully and sense the words, have been very, very useful as a diplomat.**

“You can’t achieve the same depth of understanding through books or visiting as a tourist,” she argues. “Living in another country allows you to see things from their perspective.”

“There is a kind of development globally towards polarization, and there are also important global changes underway – for example, African and Asian countries are becoming increasingly important players. Europeans and Americans often think that others will learn to see things as we do, but we need to also be much more humble and learn to see things the way others do,” she says, pointing out that Fulbright programs provide amazing opportunities to understand the world beyond stereotypes, strengthening mutual respect and global cooperation.

“In that sense, I think these kinds of exchange programs are very important and indeed with the Fulbright, having the opportunity to really learn America, to learn the U.S., was a huge privilege.”

“Fulbright is really a family,” Ulla says fondly. “It’s a community that connects people far beyond borders.”

## **Peter MacKeith Appointed Honorary Consul**

**T**he Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland has appointed Fulbright Finland alum **Peter MacKeith** as the Honorary Consul of Finland for the states of Arkansas, Kansas, and Missouri.

MacKeith is dean and professor of architecture at the Fay Jones School of Architecture and Design at the University of Arkansas, and a nationally recognized design educator and administrator.

Since receiving a Fulbright Fellowship to Finland in 1989–90, MacKeith has worked as a

liaison between the architecture, art and design cultures of the United States, Finland and the Nordic region. Throughout the years, he has contributed in multiple roles for the Fulbright Finland Foundation, including as a Senior Advisor.

Currently, Finland has 30 honorary consuls in the United States. They are important partners for the Foundation.

<https://finlandabroad.fi/web/usa/honorary-consulates>



**Peter MacKeith**  
Dean, Professor of  
Architecture  
Fay Jones School of  
Architecture and Design  
University of Arkansas



MALJA KETTUNEN

## Broadcasting Studios and Quantum Computing

A key goal of the Fulbright Finland Foundation’s alumni engagement is to offer broad opportunities for professional networking and learning across industries and sectors in society. This spring, alumni visited Finland’s leading commercial broadcasting company, MTV and Bluefors Oy, a global company enabling the quantum computing breakthrough. Both visits were initiated and hosted by the Foundation’s alumni and organized by the ASLA-Fulbright Alumni Association.

The visit to MTV was hosted by **Leia Ahlström**, an ASLA-Fulbright Graduate alumna who works as General Counsel at MTV. During the tour of one of the most modern filming and news studios in Europe, the alumni learned how news, sports, and current affairs programs are produced on-site. The tour was led by Executive Editor-in-Chief and former news anchor **Tomi Einonen**.

“It was a truly unique opportunity to see how everything works and looks behind the TV cameras. And at the Q&A session held after the tour with Leia, we got an immersive insight into the diverse and hectic work at MTV as well as a sneak peek into interesting projects in the making,” says **Laura Niemeläinen**, a member of the ASLA-Fulbright Alumni Association Board. “I’m really glad our Association got to organize the visit, thanks to our close-knit Fulbright community.”

The visit to Bluefors Oy was hosted by U.S. Fulbright alum **Benjamin Alldritt**. After receiving his PhD from Aalto University, he has been working



BLUEFORS

as R&D Scientist at Bluefors. During the visit, the alumni also met with CTO Dr. **David Gunnarsson**, Marketing Operations Manager **Amelie Poumaer Saadi**, and Cryo Engineer Dr. **Vera Hansper**. The alumni learned about company highlights, recent examples of where its products are used, and the benefits of Bluefors products for measurement. They heard a presentation on the background and theory of dilution refrigeration, components of a dilution refrigerator, and how Bluefors products work. The group was taken on a tour offering a behind-the-scenes view on superconducting wire assembly, gas circulation testing, a view at a KIDE cryostat under construction, as well a look into the Bluefors assembly area, where numerous cryostats are assembled and tested before being shipped to customers.

“It was a pleasure for Bluefors to host the alumni and share more about this exciting world of low temperature refrigeration and its impact around the world,” Benjamin Alldritt says.

The visit to Bluefors was hosted by **Benjamin Alldritt** (right).

### Calling alumni!

If you are interested in hosting a visit for alumni and current U.S. grantees, contact [alumni.association@fulbright.fi](mailto:alumni.association@fulbright.fi) or the Foundation team [www.fulbright.fi/contact-us](http://www.fulbright.fi/contact-us)

# Towards a Global Alumni Community

Since the inception of the Fulbright Finland Foundation's programs in 1949, over 6 200 students, scholars, researchers, artists, and professionals, Finns and Americans alike, have taken part in the profound experience of personal growth and advancement through academic and cultural exchange, pushing the boundaries of science and research, and adding to all areas of human creativity. Together they form an active and innovative alumni community spreading across Finland, the United States, and across the globe. The Foundation is regularly in contact with almost 1 700 of them through an alumni newsletter, and via in-person and virtual events. Alumni actively participate in and contribute to every aspect of the Foundation's work.

## Community News Shared via Alumni Newsletter

To allow the alumni to engage with each other even more, from June 2024 forward the Foundation will combine its alumni newsletters, that until now have been sent separately to Finland and the U.S., into one combined alumni newsletter meant for all of the Foundation's alumni. This allows the increasingly mobile alumni to always stay up to date on opportunities and events nearest to them regardless of where they may reside or travel. Importantly, this will also allow everyone to get a wider perspective of what the Foundation's global alumni community has to offer for everyone and help widen their networks. All alumni are invited to contribute to the newsletter.

## Alumni Advising the Foundation

While all alumni are invited to participate and actively give feedback on all aspects of the Foundation's work, there are also two alumni advisory groups, one in the United States, and one in Finland, with the specific task to work together with the Foundation in alumni engagement and advise on alumni matters.

Established in 2015, the Friends of Fulbright Finland (FoFF) Alumni Council in the United States consists of up to 9 U.S. alumni. Serving in staggered appointment terms, the council members focus especially on alumni engagement in the United States and the integration of alumni activities across the Atlantic. The FoFF Alumni Council serves in an advisory role, but it also works quite concretely for instance on fundraising and development as well as organizing events. This spring, the FoFF Council had a major role in orga-

nizing the Foundation's 75th Anniversary event at the Mystic Seaport Museum in Mystic, CT. The Council also held its meeting in person in conjunction with the event.

In Finland, the ASLA-Fulbright Alumni Association Board serves as the advisory group for the Foundation, advising on alumni engagement and serving as a sounding board for new ideas and developments. The Association, lead by its Board, builds awareness of the Foundation's programs through events, meetings, visits, and lectures for the alumni and current U.S. Fulbright grantees in Finland, and serves as an important provider of networking opportunities. Founded in 1953, the ASLA-Fulbright Alumni Association is one of the oldest Fulbright alumni associations in the world.

*Text: Maija Kettunen and Terhi Mölsä*



## Alumni Get Together Locally in the U.S.

The Friends of Fulbright Finland (FoFF) alumni network in the U.S. organizes informal get-togethers and meet-ups all around the U.S.

In April, alumni and friends of the Foundation from Ohio, Michigan, and New Jersey, got together at Fulbright Specialist alumna **Joni Tornwall's** home in Pickerington, OH, to catch up, reminisce about Fulbright experiences in Finland, make new connections, and discuss future collaboration opportunities.

If you wish to host a FoFF event, we can help you connect with alumni in your region:  
[www.fulbright.fi/contact-us](http://www.fulbright.fi/contact-us)

See previous Friends of Fulbright Finland Events:  
[www.fulbright.fi/friends-fulbright-finland/friends-fulbright-finland-events](http://www.fulbright.fi/friends-fulbright-finland/friends-fulbright-finland-events)

### Opportunities for alumni

[www.fulbright.fi/work-with-us/join-fulbright-finland-alumni-community](http://www.fulbright.fi/work-with-us/join-fulbright-finland-alumni-community)

### See the current FoFF Alumni Council members

[www.fulbright.fi/friends-fulbright-finland/friends-fulbright-finland-alumni-council](http://www.fulbright.fi/friends-fulbright-finland/friends-fulbright-finland-alumni-council)

### Are you an alum of the Foundation?

Make sure the Foundation has your updated contact information so that you don't miss out on the opportunities shared in the alumni newsletters!



EMMI JELEKÄINEN

## Drawing Strength From the Networks

Over 160 countries participate in the Fulbright Program with the United States. The Fulbright Finland Foundation is a part of this global network which provides all of the Foundation's grantees direct access to the Foundation's worldwide collaboration and alumni network.


The Foundation's staff team also collaborates closely with Fulbright commissions in other countries, both regionally and globally. The staff of the 23 commissions in Europe recently met in Sofia, Bulgaria, for joint training. Program Manager **Emmi Jelekäinen** and Program and Alumni Networks Specialist **Emilia Holopainen** represented the Foundation in the conference, where Emilia (in the photo) presented on ways to increase the Inter-Country Travel Grant mobility of U.S. scholars in Europe.

The Fulbright Finland Foundation is also a member in the global network of over 400 educational advising centers in 175 countries that provide information and advice on study opportunities in the United States. The advisers in this Education-USA network also meet regularly for training and collaboration.

Together with advisers from other countries, Manager of Teacher Exchange and Education Programs, **Mirka McIntire** recently attended the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO) conference in Columbus, Ohio, where she also presented on ways in which U.S. institutions can collaborate with EducationUSA.

*Text: Emilia Holopainen and Mirka McIntire*






### Donate to Support Fulbright Finland

Create a direct and lasting impact! Donate to the Foundation's 75th anniversary campaign and help empower the next generation of citizen diplomats.

**Now is the time to invest in the future.**

[www.fulbright.fi/work-with-us/donate](http://www.fulbright.fi/work-with-us/donate)



Rahankeräyslupa RA/2022/61

### FULBRIGHT FINLAND NEWS

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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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**is to empower the minds  
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Currently on leave:  
Emilia Holopainen

# Calendar

## June

**17.6.**

Fulbright Finland Foundation  
Board Meeting

**23.6–20.7.2024**

Fulbright-Hays Seminar in  
Finland: Demystifying the  
Infrastructure of Happiness in  
Finnish Society

## July

**4.–26.7.**

Fulbright Finland Office Closed

## August

**19.–21.8.**

Arrival Orientation for  
U.S. Fulbright Grantees

**20.8.**

ASLA-Fulbright Alumni  
Association Welcome Event

**26.8.**

*2024–25 Application Deadline:*  
Fulbright Specialist Program

## September

**16.9.**

*2025–26 Application Deadline:*  
Fulbright U.S. Scholar Awards  
for Finland

Fulbright Finland Foundation  
Board Meeting

Friends of Fulbright Finland  
Alumni Council Meeting

## October

**1.10.**

*2025–26 Application Deadline:*  
Visiting Scholar and Mid-Career  
Professional Development  
Programs

**11.–12.10.**

American Voices Seminar,  
University of Turku

**21.10.**

*2025–26 Application Deadline:*  
Fulbright Finnish Language and  
Culture Teaching Assistant

**30.10.**

*2025–26 Application Deadline:*  
Friends of Fulbright Finland  
Alumni Enrichment Award

## November

**18.–22.11.**

International Education Week

**28.–29.11.**

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



JULIA KIVELÄ / VISIT FINLAND

**25.6.–20.7.**

**Fulbright-Hays  
Seminar:  
Demystifying the  
Infrastructure of  
Happiness in  
Finnish Society**

**Follow the journey:  
#FulbrightHaysFinland**