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From: Karin Fischer

Subject: Latitudes: For community colleges, new efforts to go global

Making the case for Fulbright in community colleges

Laurie A. Wolfe never saw the Fulbright Program as being for her. "I always thought you had to be at a big research university," said Wolfe, a professor of psychology at Anoka-Ramsey Community College, in Minnesota.

But at a professional-development conference for community-college instructors, she met a Fulbright alumna who encouraged her to apply for a scholarship to teach and do research abroad. Wolfe did, and she and her then-15-year-old son spent the spring semester of 2019 in Uzbekistan, where she created a bullying-prevention program for the national Ministry of Education and trained teachers on such strategies.

The semester away changed Wolfe's professional trajectory. She discovered a real passion for research and has gone on to earn a doctorate in education leadership. The ties she made have brought her back to central Asia for additional research projects. Now she is working to get Anoka-Ramsey, where she has taught for 18 years, to sponsor a visiting Fulbright scholar from abroad.

"Fulbright made me a better teacher and a better academic," she said.

Wolfe's sense that the premier U.S. academic-exchange program wasn't for her isn't entirely unfounded, however. Each year, Fulbright grants are awarded to some 800 American faculty members, said David J. Smith, an educational

consultant and Fulbright alumnus. Typically, fewer than 20 go to professors at community colleges.

The [barriers](#) are many. Not only are community-college faculty members often not encouraged to apply, but their college leaders may be focused locally and not see value in international-educational experiences. The Fulbright Program itself isn't structured in ways that work with such professors' schedules or reflect their expertise.

A new organization is trying to change that narrative. A [recently established chapter](#) of the Fulbright Association, the organization for Fulbright alumni, will focus on two-year institutions, attempting to raise participation of their scholars and students in the program. While most chapters are geographically situated, this new chapter will meet virtually to encourage a wider membership.

"The transformative nature of the Fulbright Program shouldn't be denied to people at community colleges," said Smith, who is the virtual chapter's new president. After all, he notes, more than 40 percent of American undergraduates enroll at such institutions.

Because the number of Fulbright community-college alumni is low, those interested in the program are often applying "in isolation," without guidance, Smith said. For example, it took Wolfe, who is also serving on the new chapter's board, 14 months to complete her application.

Chapter members can mentor potential applicants, and online workshops are already being planned.

The group hopes to make the case for participating in the program to community-college leaders who may take a more parochial view of their institutional missions. Smith acknowledges that community colleges are "asked to be all things for all people," but said international education should be more of a priority as they work to prepare students for a global work force. Such institutions are also on the front lines of response to international crises, teaching English to refugees and job skills to migrants.

In addition, community colleges are increasingly diverse places, so it matters that professors understand cultural difference firsthand. Wolfe said that her time in a predominantly Islamic country raised her awareness of issues facing a growing Muslim population in Minnesota, such as the learning challenges for students who are fasting for Ramadan.

Wolfe and Smith said they hope the chapter can serve as a clearinghouse for best practices in supporting Fulbright scholars at community colleges, including both Americans going abroad and those from other countries coming to U.S. institutions.

While the U.S. Department of State has backed the new chapter, the board members said they would advocate to the government for changes to make Fulbright more community-college-friendly. For example, the full teaching load of most community-college professors can make it difficult to cover their courses while they're abroad. Rather than semester-long and yearlong grants, fellowships could allow scholars to do research or teach overseas for shorter periods during the semester or over the summer.

Smith said he would push for an expansion of the categories for Fulbright scholars and specialists. Right now, the program is more geared to applicants in traditional academic disciplines than to the occupational fields in which community-college professors often specialize, yet foreign countries are often hungry for such expertise.

Wolfe said she hoped to return to the conference where she first learned about Fulbright and encourage others to apply. “I want there to be more awareness of what Fulbright can do for you as an academic,” she said, “and what community-college professors can do for Fulbright.”

A program expands global awareness and presence at community colleges

Asked to describe a typical international student, many people would paint a similar portrait: A student with enough wealth to pay for an American education, at a brand-name college.

But a collaboration between the State Department and a group of community colleges is turning that stereotype on its head. The [Community College Initiative](#) brings talented students from around the globe who otherwise wouldn't have a chance to study abroad — or maybe even to go to college at all — to two-year institutions to learn technical skills in high-need fields.

Since the program began, in 2007, more than 3,700 students from more than 25 countries have studied at 80 community colleges across the United States. Currently, 10 colleges are hosting about 150 students.

“It's the only State Department program that specifically targets community colleges,” said Sara Mohamed, who coordinates the program at Northern Virginia Community College, outside Washington, D.C.

Students in the program, who are recruited by U.S. embassies and Fulbright commissions, study in areas that are in-demand in their home countries, such as agriculture, applied engineering, and early-childhood education. In addition to technical certificates, students gain skills such as critical thinking, leadership, and networking. All are required to do community service and complete an internship, and many take part in campus programming, such as extracurricular clubs or student government.

In January, Community College Initiative students gathered at Mesa Community College, in Arizona, for a retreat. Mesa, which has participated in the program since 2013, is hosting 14 students from 11 countries as well as running a State Department pilot program to provide semiconductor training for about a dozen students from Mexico.

Aziz A. Alhadi, director of international education at Mesa, said community colleges are well-positioned to run such programs because they can create new curricula more quickly and with greater flexibility than four-year institutions. Mesa has a full-time staff member who works with participating students.

Mohamed said the program has helped to raise the profile of community colleges overseas, where the dual model of technical training and transfer is often poorly understood.

It can also give international exposure to community-college students who are unlikely to study abroad. “The more globally aware our community-colleges students are,” Alhadi said, “the more employable they are.”

At Mesa, Community College Initiative students take part in public events such a speaker series and cultural gatherings. Their presence has helped spur efforts to globalize the curriculum, Alhadi said, and more professors are stepping up to lead study-abroad programs.

In addition to “catalyzing” other international programming, Mesa’s track record has given it credibility with the State Department and other grantmaking groups, Alhadi said. Recently, Mesa was selected to do semiconductor and English-language training in Vietnam.

The sponsoring community colleges have also built a network among themselves to help share best practices and increase capacity for supporting international students.

Alhadi has written recommendation letters for graduates of the program to continue their studies, in the United States or elsewhere. But Community College Initiative students are also back in their home countries, working in small-business development in India, teacher training in Indonesia, and sustainable agriculture in Kenya.

U.S. must improve international scientific collaboration, report says

A federal-government interagency report said the United States has made strides in improving international scientific collaboration, but that global research ties are under threat from politics and conflict, at home and abroad.

International scientific and technological cooperation “has been a pillar of U.S. foreign policy and national security since the end of World War II, and it is at risk of deteriorating at a time when it is more important than ever,” the [report concludes](#).

Around the globe

The White House hosted a [roundtable](#) with Asian American scholars to discuss the challenges they face on the two-year anniversary of the end of the [China Initiative](#), the government investigation of academic and economic espionage.

The Institute of International Education will work to diversify [study-abroad participation](#) with the Council for Opportunity in Education, a nonprofit group that seeks to expand college access to low-income and first-generation students.

A parliamentary inquiry in Canada has concluded that a pair of microbiology researchers passed on [scientific secrets to China](#), held undisclosed appointments at Chinese universities and research institutes, and allowed Chinese graduate students to violate laboratory security procedures.

Concordia and McGill Universities have filed lawsuits against Quebec’s provincial government, challenging a tuition increase that disproportionately affects [English-language institutions](#).

One third of prospective international students would reconsider their choice of country in which to study based on changing government policies. A [survey](#) by IDP Education found interest in the United States has grown after other

top destination countries, including Australia, Britain, and Canada, have imposed [new restrictions](#).

The number of British student visas issued [fell](#) 5 percent between 2022 and 2023.

Rishi Sunak, Britain's prime minister, is being criticized for [reopening](#) an elite international scholarship program to applicants from Russia.

At least 2,500 scientists have left Russia since its military invaded Ukraine two years ago, according to [estimates](#).

One in five higher-education institutions in Ukraine has been [damaged or destroyed](#).

A survey of professors in Israel found that they think the war with Hamas has caused [significant harm](#) to academic research.

Poland's new government has approved the largest increase to [scientific and research spending](#) in a decade.

Australia should diversify its foreign-student recruitment and more closely tie its international-enrollment strategy to skills needs, a [government report](#) recommends.

While international students account for a large number of doctoral students in the United States, their academic performance is [on par](#) with that of domestic students, suggesting their high representation in graduate programs isn't because they are "towering geniuses," a researcher with the Center for Immigration Studies, a group that favors more restrictions on immigration, argues.

And finally ...

In the original *Dune* novels, the inhabitants of the Arrakis speak a vernacular that derives words from French, Hebrew, Navajo, and especially Arabic. On the movie screen, they talk in a [conlang](#), or constructed language. The linguist who developed the language for the film said he created it from scratch because the fictional world of the movie is set so far in the future that no remnants of modern dialects would have survived.

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