Professional Fellows Wrap Up One-Month Exchange in the U.S. with Three-Day Conference in DC

Beginning April 1, the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs’ Professional Fellows Division welcomed 220 emerging leaders from 44 countries and territories to the United States for intensive month-long fellowships designed to broaden their professional expertise in governance, media, and economic empowerment.

The Spring 2013 Professional Fellows have spent the past three weeks working in public and private sector offices in more than 29 states across the country to learn first-hand how issues in their respective fields are addressed in the United States.

The Professional Fellows Congress, hosted in DC May 8-11, marks the culmination of the program, and provides an opportunity for the fellows to network, share their experiences, and engage in meaningful dialogue on critical topics in their respective fields.

Congress Snapshot:

- “The Power of One” panel discussion featuring DC activist and entrepreneur Andy Shallal along with two ProFellow Alumni
- Citizen Diplomacy Luncheon with DC-based foreign ambassadors and embassy staff
- Foreign policy panel discussion with Deputy Assistant Secretaries from all regional bureaus
- Poster show presentation given by the fellows as an opportunity to showcase their work and professional interests

Our office is excited to welcome the first recipients of the Professional Fellows Distinguished Alumni Award to this spring’s Congress!

As Distinguished Alumni, Shailey Hingorani, India, Legislative Fellow, Spring 2010, and Alexei Lazari, Moldova, Legislative Fellow, Spring 2012, will share their experiences through various speaking engagements, and inspire current fellows to meet their goals for positive change in their home communities.

Photo: Portland State University Economic Empowerment Fellows from Vietnam celebrate the completion of their fellowships!

1,285 leaders from 76 countries and territories have participated in the Professional Fellows Program since its inception in May 2010.
Spring 2013 Distinguished Alumni

The Professional Fellows Distinguished Alumni Award recognizes the contributions of alumni whose participation in the Professional Fellows Program directly enhanced their ability to make a positive impact on their communities, countries, territories, or regions. This is the first year the Professional Fellows Division has offered the award, and it has received more than 60 applications.

SHAILEY HINGORANI, India, Legislative Fellow, Spring 2010
U.S. Grantee Organization: World Learning
U.S. Placement: The Ohio Senate, Columbus, Ohio

Shailey Hingorani currently works as National Coordinator for Policy and Advocacy at Save the Children, based in New Delhi, India. As a policy advocate for the rights of marginalized communities, she has assisted in the drafting of the National Food Security Bill, built support for amending the current child labor legislation, assisted in developing implementation frameworks for the Right to Education, and reported on the performance of the government’s Integrated Child Development Scheme.

About the impact of her fellowship, Ms. Hingorani writes,

The Fellowship inspired me to think more democratically about policymaking. Upon returning to India, I set up the Youth Forum on Foreign Policy, a non-profit organization that aims to get young Indians involved in debates over foreign policy, which is vital to India’s developmental aims. Prominent among our activities is the creation of inter-cultural dialogue, and we recently organized the first-ever conference of young leaders from India and Bangladesh to help delineate solutions to bilateral challenges. The Forum now has 5,000+ followers on Facebook and our work has been officially recognized by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs.

Read Ms. Hingorani’s full bio and impact statement here.

ALEXEI LAZARI, Moldova, Legislative Fellow, Spring 2012
U.S. Grantee Organization: American Councils
U.S. Placement: Department of Justice, North Carolina

Alexei Lazari currently serves as the Chief of the Programs Development and Implementing Unit for the Ministry of Justice in the Republic of Moldova. He transitioned to this career from the non-profit sector in August 2011. Within this position, Mr. Lazari coordinates the unit and puts emphasis on project management development and implementation in the field of justice reforms, mainly focused on juvenile justice and prison system reform.

About the impact of his fellowship, Mr. Lazari writes,

The fellowship gave me the opportunity to think out of the box, and now with the help of my colleagues, we are reorganizing the prison system in Moldova. During the last nine months we organized theoretical courses and practical trainings based on the knowledge and materials I brought from the U.S. The programs focus on re-qualification of the staff from the Soviet type of prison to a modern one, and providing inmates access to education, giving them an opportunity to study, get a vocation, and prepare them for release. At present, we are in contact with the Departments of Justice in Ohio and North Carolina to make further official connections. Going forward, we intend to send 10 people each year to study at the North Carolina Academy of Justice.

Read Mr. Lazari’s full bio and impact statement here.
Snapshot: U.S. Fellowship Placements

29 U.S. States. 74 Cities. 167 Host Organizations.

Notable Placements:
- Office of the Governor of Georgia
- Indiana State Senate
- Minnesota State Council on Disability
- KGOU, NPR Radio, Oklahoma
- Montana Department of Agriculture
- Florida Central Credit Union
- American Public Health Assn.
- The Miami Herald
- Chicago Homeless Coalition
- Office of Senator Jon Tester (MT)
- Amnesty International

Special thanks to our Members of Congress and State Representatives who have hosted and supported the Spring 2013 Professional Fellows!

- Rep. Bill Batchelder (OH)
- Rep. Chris Van Hollen (MD)
- Rep. Danny Davis (IL)
- Rep. Gene Ward (HI)
- Rep. John Barnes, Jr. (OH)
- Rep. Karen Awana (HI)
- Rep. Michael Stinziano (OH)
- Rep. Mike Curtin (OH)
- Rep. Nydia Velazquez (NY)
- Rep. Ron Amstutz (OH)
- Rep. Rosa DeLauro (CT)
- Rep. Sean Duffy (WI)
- Rep. Tim Walberg (MI)
- Rep. Tom Petri (WI)
- Sen. Floyd Prozanski (OR)
- Sen. Frank LaRose (OH)
- Sen. Jon Tester (MT)
- Sen. Keith Faber (OH)
- Sen. Lena Taylor (WI)
- Sen. Maile Shimabukuro (HI)
ProFellows in the Media

“*I never thought that...in the U.S. people also have to fight for democratic values and against racism. It seems to me that this struggle is something that we have to fight for, no matter where we live.***”

-Anita Vodal, Legislative Fellow, Hungary

Full Article

Articles written by Media Fellows from Uganda, Kenya, and Nigeria:

- Miami archdiocese launches citizenship initiative By Alphonce Shiundu, Kenya
- Charles Reed: Higher education aids job growth By Ibrahim Kasita, Uganda
- Wake Forest expert: Linking Boston bombings to terrorism difficult By Kabir Garba, Nigeria

Articles written by Media Fellows from Bangladesh:

- Bangladesh garments industry source of pride, pain for visiting journalist By Sohana Nasrin
- Deadly Building Collapse, radio spot by Sima Bhowmik while
- Nine Bangladeshi Journalists Attend Medieval Fair in Oklahoma By Ponuel S Bose
- Ismat Jerin Khan’s live report on Canadian geese in Oklahoma

“It is absolute that if the garment factory owners don’t improve the wage structure and working environment, instability in production channels and lives risked on thousands of our cheap labor force will prevail.”

-Sheikh Rokon, Media Fellow, Bangladesh

Full Article

“My organization, the National Organization of Disabled People Federation of Romania, and Paraquad [fellowship placement], have similar visions about disabilities because we both fight for disability rights and we mediate for independent living.”

-Silvia Ursu, Econ. Empowerment Fellow, Romania

Full Article

Additional Media Coverage:

- Head Secretary of Laos Chamber of Commerce finds much to emulate in the Kalispell Chamber model in Montana.
- South East Asian Economic Empowerment Fellows explore sustainable agriculture and business development on Montana farms.
- Econ. Fellows from Egypt, Israel, Libya, Tunisia, and the Palestinian Territories promote global entrepreneurship through exchange with Univ. of Michigan
Legacy International’s Legislative Fellows from Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya hosted a Congressional Briefing entitled “Political Change in North Africa: Where is the Arab Spring Heading?” on Tuesday, April 30th in the Rayburn House Office Building on Capitol Hill. Addressing a standing room-only crowd, the young activists spoke about the conditions in their countries and prospects for democratic change. On Libya, Muataz Oshebi remarked, “Our objective was not just to remove Gaddafi from power, our objective was and is to build a democratic state.” Photo: Remarks by Legislative Fellow, Muataz Oshebi from Libya.

World Learning Legislative Fellows from Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan with fellowships in Atlanta, Georgia, were hosted by Georgia State Representative Mike Cheokas in his home district of Americus, Georgia, for a weekend of hospitality that showcased historical and cultural activities in the rural district. The biggest highlight for the Fellows was the opportunity to meet former U.S. President Jimmy Carter and former First Lady Rosalynn Carter and present gifts from their home countries. Photo: Rafiq Azm Badshah presents Carter with a gift from his home country, Pakistan.

Ten University of Montana Economic Empowerment Fellows from Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam met with Senator Jon Tester (D-MT) to brief him on their three-week exchange in Montana and to discuss economic and agricultural issues. While the meeting was only scheduled for 30 minutes, the Senator stayed on to continue the discussion, and nearly missed a floor vote due to his enthusiasm for the meeting! Photo: Senator Tester with fellows following their meeting on Capitol Hill.

In Boston, MA, six Legislative Fellows from Egypt and Tunisia with Hands Along the Nile Development Services (HANDS) attended a workshop presented by Priti Rao, the Executive Director of the Massachusetts Women’s Political Caucus, to explore strategies for getting more women into elected government positions. The group also spoke with Taylor Woods-Gauthier, the Executive Director of Emerge Massachusetts, about recruiting and training strategies for female political candidates.
Spotlight: ProFellows Host

Leslie Jensen, Vice-President and Commercial Banker at First Interstate Bank in Missoula, Montana, has spent the past three weeks hosting Economic Empowerment Fellow, Kyawat Kay from Burma. Her insight as U.S. host encompasses the mutually beneficial, two-way nature of the Professional Fellows Program.

For me, the professional growth opportunity surrounding the Professional Fellows Program extended beyond marshaling the resources of my company and my broader business network, structuring the work schedule, inspiring peers and colleagues to participate and assist, and managing the logistics and communication for the fellowship period. It gave me the chance to learn more about the governance of the company I work for and how the corporate vision that First Interstate Bank communicates to employees and the outside world is practiced every day at the top levels of the company.

The most surprising thing I learned in hosting Kyawat was that I could have so much in common with a person from another country who is also much younger than me! We found ourselves to be a lot alike in important ways: an interest in understanding complex transactions, a drive for excellence in the work that we do, and a natural curiosity about other cultures. This made for a strong connection between us and made our time together not just productive, but fun.

I have a new-found curiosity for the culture and history of Burma, and the idea of continuing our friendship after the fellowship period is complete feels wonderful!

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For a copy of the ProFellows social media toolkit, Please contact Alana Rudkin at RudkinAB@state.gov.