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Fulbright Program awards university, faculty, students

Melissa Rojas

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A Fulbright U.S. Student Program journal is displayed on a table at Marquis Hall on Nov. 29, 2023. Photo by Brendan McDonald

The university, alongside several faculty and students, received awards from the Fulbright Program, a flagship international academic exchange program founded by the federal government, for the 2023-2024 academic school year.

The Fulbright Program was started in 1946 by U.S. Congress and has allowed 400,000 applicants to study, teach, research and collaborate internationally across 160 countries, according to the U.S. Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The university was named as a

Fulbright Hispanic-Serving Institutions Leader for 2023, which recognizes HSI's who were committed and engaged with the Fulbright Program. According to the U.S. Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, 46 institutions were awarded by the U.S. Department of State.

"I think with the ranking, it definitely helps to really kind of expand UNT's reputation as an HSI at the national level and being able to be associated with Fulbright, which is a well-known international education exchange program, and to recognize our very wonderful and robust campus community of individuals that come from different backgrounds and are participating in Fulbright programs," said Amanda Bennett, the director of Global Partnerships and Engagement at International Affairs and the university's Fulbright Program advisor and scholar liaison.

The university has had more than 95 faculty and staff awarded as Fulbright Scholars and Specialists since 1960 and has had more than 52 Fulbright Student Award winners since 1949.

For 2023-2024, seven faculty, staff and students were awarded.

Fulbright Scholar Program

- Dr. Diana Berman, Department of Materials Science and Engineering associate professor
- Dr. Joseph Oppong, Toulouse Graduate School associate dean

Fulbright International Education Administrators Seminar to South Korea

- Lauren Jacobsen-Bridges, Senior Director of International Student and Scholar Services

Fulbright Scholar Program

- Dr. Saraju Mohanty, Department of Computer Science and Engineering professor

Fulbright U.S. Student Awards

- Dr. Garrison Gerard, completed his doctorate in Music Composition in May 2023
- Lorelei Nichols, past spring graduate of Bachelor of Arts in English
- Odalis Alvarado, 2022 master's graduate in Public Administration

Lauren Jacobsen-Bridges, the senior director of international student and scholar services, said this was her second time applying and she was awarded after spending about eight to nine months in the application process. During her time in South Korea, Jacobsen-Bridges said she was able to experience a new culture and a new higher education system.

“It was really amazing and I appreciated the time that I had to discuss similarities and differences between the Korean higher education system and the U.S. higher education system,” Jacobsen-Bridges said. “Also the time away from the office to think about how things are currently structured, and how things could change. You know, what are some of the things I could bring home from Korea, what are the successes that we have that I could share with our counterparts in Korea?”

Jacobsen-Bridges said she traveled to 15 institutions in different cities and regions for two weeks, which allowed her to see the differences within the country and be able to talk to more people who were eager to collaborate and share ideas.

“I think going into it, I expected most people would only want to talk about their successes because I think that is a very natural human thing, is to only talk about what you are good at, but everyone was so willing to talk about shared challenges and how we can overcome those and really brainstorm ideas,” Jacobsen-Bridges said.

Saraju Mohanty, a professor at the College of Engineering and director of the Smart Electronic Systems Laboratory, said during his time in India, he interacted with STEM undergraduates, graduates, and faculty and saw the differences between higher education between India and the United States.

“During my trip, I learnt how professors allocate more time towards undergraduate studies as compared to our higher education that allocates more time for Ph.D. students,” Mohanty said.

Mohanty said that his lectures were well received by students in attendance, many of whom were interdisciplinary STEM students.

“It was an interesting experience to deliver long lectures in the large classrooms and teaching labs with an estimated 200+ students,” Mohanty said. “I delivered a dozen of expert lectures on emerging topics including smart electronics, smart healthcare, smart agriculture, cybersecurity and blockchain.”

According to International Affairs, the Fulbright Program offers opportunities for faculty and students to travel to different countries as part of their research, study and international exchanges. The Global Engagement Office hosts Fulbright faculty workshops for interested faculty and students can join the virtual sessions.

“We are doing a lot more in terms of promotional campaigns, print, digital and other opportunities to spread the word about Fulbright and as we have done that, we have seen increase interest from both our faculty and students about these opportunities,” Bennett said.

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