



FULBRIGHT
Alumni e.V.

GERMAN FULBRIGHT ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

FRANKLY

THE FULBRIGHT ALUMNI E.V. MAGAZINE

Issue 2025

#36

Transatlantic Transformations

OUTREACH

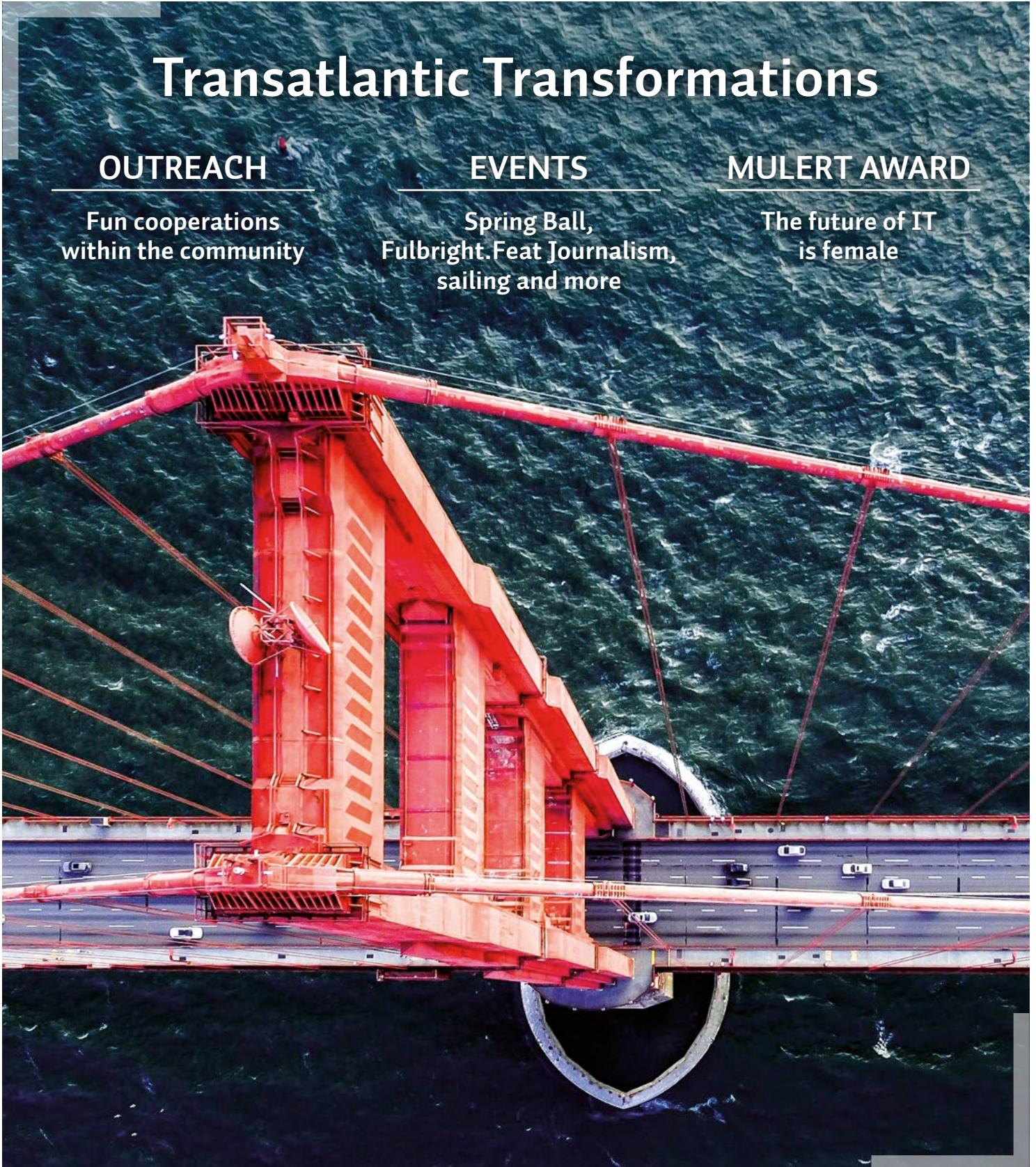
Fun cooperations
within the community

EVENTS

Spring Ball,
Fulbright.Feat Journalism,
sailing and more

MULERT AWARD

The future of IT
is female



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Dear Readers,

Fulbright means so many things to us – far beyond academic exchange it enriches our lives with transatlantic friendships, sense of purpose and community. As a strong force we bring about transformation towards a better mutual understanding as well as innovation – may it be in art, science, economic fields or the humanities. There are no better testaments to these **transatlantic transformations** than those by our authors in this year’s FRANKly:

Alexandrea Swanson, the winner of this year’s Mulert Award, is actively **transforming the IT landscape in Germany**. Bringing in her US-American perspective, she strives to achieve what has never been done before. *“We have a lot of work to do to get more than 17% of women into tech.”*

Sterling De Sutter Summerville reflects on how much he gained through Fulbright, which he is able to give back as a **mentor** and in other ways. *“I work with **professional sports teams**, and have been to as many countries as I have years of living, and my Fulbright experience was a foundational element in all of that.”*

Reinhard Lipperheide, now retired **professor in the field of theoretical physics**, shares with us his memories of his Fulbright experience going back all the way to the 1950s!

Asja-Melina Schenk is **building a business** which binds memories to wearable tokens, reminding us of our achievements and the power within.

These four are only a few examples of the amazing stories waiting for you.

See for yourself the transformations we bring about as an alumni association: **outreach** to other Fulbright organizations across Europe, study trips to Brussels and Luxembourg as well as cooperations with the Spanish alumni

are highlighted in this year’s issue. Our **Fulbright Feat.** series enables fantastic networking events by inviting Fulbrighters to speak about their passions in journalism, performance or any other field. Read up on our lovely **Spring Ball**, the year round activities of our **Regional Chapters** and other exciting moments!

Thus I am highly honored to present to you FRANKly 2025 – in a brand new layout. A huge thank you goes out to all authors and contributors to our alumni magazine. They are not only voices of transformation, but also witnesses to transformations all around us. The German Fulbright Alumni Association supports the **#StandForFulbright** campaign, hoping the Fulbright program will continue to flourish as it has in the past.

For the first time as lead editor, I also want to thank everyone who has helped me bring the magazine to life. Astrid Weingarten artfully arranged every article with her brilliant design skills. Tristan Cristofolini’s support from our Frankfurt Office has been priceless! Jonas Happ, thanks for your input in choosing a new layout, and thank you, Amanda Gläser-Bligh, for always being in my corner as our VP Communications. And last but not least, many thanks to my co-editor Nelly Mekus for all you did.

Now enjoy the read and get ready to be transformed!

Sincerely,

Vera Fuller
Editor, German Fulbright Alumni Association

The views and opinions expressed in the following articles reflect those of the individual authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the association.

Greetings from Our President & from Fulbright Germany



Paul Künzle



Hakan Tosuner

Dear Fulbrighters and Friends,

It is my great honor to introduce you to the 2025 issue of the FRANKly magazine. In this yearly outlet, our alumni celebrate the stories, reflections, and achievements of our vibrant community. I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to all contributors and authors for their insightful and inspiring articles, and to give a special acknowledgement to Vera Fuller. Vera, your dedication and efforts have been invaluable, and we are deeply grateful for your contributions.

In this edition, we invited our contributors to reflect on these times of different challenges, where the future can sometimes feel uncertain. The topic of “transatlantic transformations” invited our community with its wealth of skills, ideas, and visions to leverage their individual talents to share their perspectives on transatlantic relations. As you know, our mission is to keep the Fulbright experience going and extend its impact beyond the time in the U.S. by enabling our community to strengthen transatlantic understanding.

I am grateful for all that our alumni do, whether serving on the (extended) board, participating in regional chapters, or contributing individually to our shared vision as part of the “One Fulbright Community”. We hope these reflections spark new ideas and encourage each of us to contribute toward a brighter tomorrow.

Yours truly,

P. Künzle

Paul Künzle
President, German Fulbright Alumni Association

Dear Fulbright Community,

It is always a pleasure – and a privilege – to reconnect with all of you. In these times, full of complexity and change, one thing remains steady: the strength of our Fulbright Community. Together, we build bridges, expand perspectives, and – perhaps most importantly – keep hope alive.

We draw strength from standing together. Our *One Fulbright Community* spirit lives through YOU. And I’m deeply thankful for the continued engagement and the many meaningful conversations we’ve had over the past months. In April of this year, we signed the important “One Fulbright Community” agreement – marking a significant milestone in strengthening our shared commitment and vision. We already have ideas and visions for our future collaboration – and especially for how you can support us in concrete ways. Stay tuned.

Let me thank the members of the board, extended board, and all members of the German Fulbright Alumni Association – your perspectives, time, and commitment are invaluable in shaping our shared mission and keeping the Fulbright spirit alive and going. I would also like to thank outgoing President Andreas Drexler for his dedicated service and contributions and warmly congratulate Paul Künzle on his election as the new President. I look forward to working together.

Let’s keep working together – towards a world that fosters understanding, access, and exchange. Towards a transatlantic dialogue that takes *soft power* seriously: through education, through encounters, and through empathy.

I look forward to what lies ahead and remain grateful for each and every one of you.

Warmest regards,
Hakan Tosuner
Executive Director, Fulbright Germany

Meet the Board & the Extended Board



PAUL KÜNZLE | PRESIDENT

Paul’s Fulbright: Harvard University, 2019

Subject Area: Genetics

And Now: Research Associate at Charité (Universitätsmedizin Berlin)

Mission: Strengthen transatlantic relations with an exceptional team.

Personal Fun Fact: I’ve never lost a fight against a grizzly bear.

Favorite Fulbright Flashback: Finally finding an affordable room in an amazing, shared apartment.

Jan Brinkmann | Project Management

Jan’s Fulbright: Leaders in Entrepreneurship at Virginia Tech University, 2024

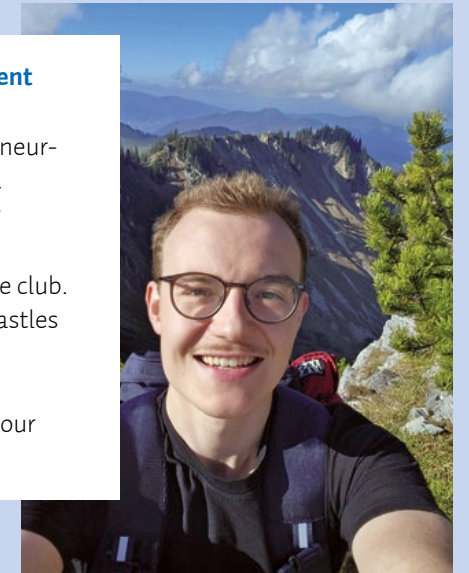
Subject Area: Electrical Engineering

And Now: Master student at TUM

Mission: Provide merchandise for the club.

Personal Fun Fact: I really like old castles and palaces.

Favorite Fulbright Flashback: Our reunion in Munich with some of our cohort and 3 mentors from America.



Enes Karacaoglan | Diversity

Enes’ Fulbright:

Auburn University, Alabama, 2023

Subject Area: Electrical Engineering

And Now: Undergraduate student

Mission: Creating a Fulbright community, in which everyone feels welcomed.

Personal Fun Fact:

I really love carnivorous plants!

Favorite Fulbright Flashback:

Dancing Salsa at the Fulbright Associations Annual Conference in Denver.



Jacky Biergans (she/her) | Diversity

Jacky’s Fulbright: CUNY - The Graduate Center, New York, 2021-2024

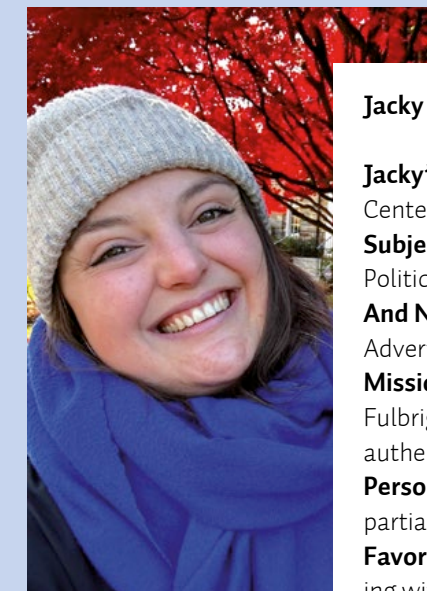
Subject Area: International Relations/Politics

And Now: Programmatic Media/Advertising at Omnicom Media Group

Mission: To support all members of the Fulbright community in embracing their authentic selves.

Personal Fun Fact: I know how to partially sign in German Sign Language.

Favorite Fulbright Flashback: Connecting with 20 to 30 other Fulbrighters from around the world at many legendary private NY rooftop parties, just like in How I Met Your Mother or Friends.



ADRIAN BERGER | VICE PRESIDENT FINANCE

Adrian's Fulbright: 2022, Columbia University, New York

Subject Area: Finance

And Now: Business Analyst and Sales Manager at itestra GmbH

Mission: Fostering transatlantic exchange and cooperation in both easy and challenging times by building on a strong, western partnership that creates a better future for all.

Personal Fun Fact: I once fell from a balcony while attending a student conference.

Favorite Fulbright Flashback: Finding myself sitting in a free opera display in front of the met with 6 new friends a mere four hours after I had arrived in New York.



Andreas Drexler | Outreach

Andi's Fulbright:

Purdue University, Indiana, 2017-18

Subject Area:

Master in Technology, Leadership and Innovation

And Now: Senior Consultant at LEAD Forward

Mission: Strengthening and connecting the transatlantic community and bringing Strategic Doing to Germany and our alumni community so it can reach its full potential.

Personal Fun Fact: I can ride the unicycle.

Favorite Fulbright Flashback: Potluck at my place with Fulbrighters from over 15 nations.



Max Diekmann | Sponsoring

Max's Fulbright: 2022, Leaders in Entrepreneurship at Virginia Tech University

Subject Area: Electrical Engineering

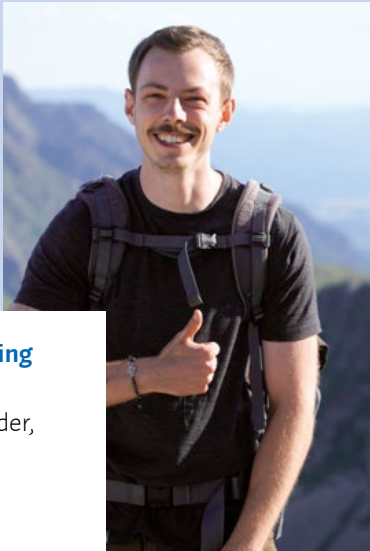
And now: Master thesis at Siemens AG

Mission: Building bridges to companies and acquiring partners for the outstanding Spring Ball.

Personal Fun Fact:

I can open bottles with any tool!

Favorite Fulbright Flashback: Spontaneous trip to NY, took the nightbus, whirlwind eighteen hours NY city tour, another nightbus south, brief four-hour rest in Washington. Yep, took another bus back and made it just in time for an incredible Hookie football game.



Iwo Hasenkamp | Welcome Meeting

Iwo's Fulbright: 2021-2022 in Boulder, Colorado

Subject Area: Political Science

And Now: Master's student

Mission: The Fulbright community is a wonderful concoction of many different biographies, personalities and skill sets, and I want to encourage people to be a part of it. The Welcome Meeting is a great and easy way to get in touch.

Personal Fun Fact: Your skin wrinkling in water is a reaction by your nervous system, not a physical one!

Favorite Fulbright Flashback: Randomly meeting another Fulbrighter while waiting in line for my visa interview.

NOURA BOUHRA | VICE PRESIDENT EVENTS

Noura's Fulbright:

Intercultural Communication at Michigan State University, 2024

Subject Area: Computer Science

And Now: Final year Bachelor student in Applied Computer Science

Mission: I'm excited to create meaningful, memorable experiences for our Fulbright community as VP Events. My goal is to bring people together, spark connections, and help everyone feel at home - no matter where they're from or where they're headed.

Personal Fun Fact: Music's always been my passion - what started with the violin has taken me on stage as a singer in India, with the State Youth Jazz Orchestra, and with a few bands along the way.

Favorite Fulbright Flashback: Meeting Fulbrighters from our cohort and beyond at the Spring Ball 2025 and sharing an unforgettable night together.



Lia Bomheuer | Community Weekend

Lia's Fulbright: Illinois State University, 2022-2023

Subject Area: Mathematics - Actuarial Science

And Now: Senior Consultant at Oliver Wyman (advising firms in the financial sector)

Mission: Reviving the Fulbright community weekend in a new format - as a skiing trip.

Personal Fun Fact: I once managed to get stranded in the Australian desert without phone signal due to a car accident - made it out alive!

Favorite Fulbright Flashback: Meeting amazing people at my first Fulbright Alumni event, the Welcome Meeting 2023 in Nürnberg.

Timo Päsche | Event Support

Timo's Fulbright: University of Wisconsin-Stout, 2021

Subject Area: Industrial/Product Design

And Now: Student

Mission: Looking forward to helping organize the Welcome Meeting and Spring Ball. I have already gained experience organizing various events at my university, including design exhibitions, programs for visiting exchange students, and themed bars.

Personal Fun Fact: I own a tractor and manage/maintain my grandparent's farm alongside my studies.



Favorite Fulbright

Flashback: Joining the university car club and experiencing American (and Japanese) car culture in real life.

JULIUS HOFFMANN | VICE PRESIDENT MEMBERS

Julius' Fulbright: University of Wisconsin Madison, 2021
Subject Area: Engineering Management
And Now: Research Associate at KIT
Mission: To continue fostering the Fulbright spirit within our community in Germany.
Personal Fun Fact: I've been to 28 U.S. states!
Favorite Fulbright Flashback: Spring Balls in Heidelberg and Munich.



Lukas Dausend | Mentoring

Lukas' Fulbright: University of Kentucky, Lexington, 2023
Subject Area: Seminar for German Administrators in International Education
And Now: I lead the Study Abroad Team and manage U.S. exchange partnerships at the University of Mannheim
Mission: To find a match for U.S. grantees through our mentoring program.
Personal Fun Fact: I like watching theme songs of cartoons from my childhood and I've visited 41 states in the U.S. (and counting)!
Favorite Fulbright Flashback: Feeding carrots to a former Kentucky Derby winner.

Jack Henne | U.S. Grantees

Jack's Fulbright: 2018-2020 at Gymnasium Arnoldinum and Schiller-gymnasium in Münster
Subject Area: Economics and actuarial science
And Now: I'm an operations analyst for renewable energies in Düsseldorf.
Mission: Help new Fulbright grantees adjust to life abroad by offering guidance, answering questions, and fostering a sense of community – all while representing and promoting the values of Fulbright.
Personal Fun Fact: I can ride a unicycle.
Favorite Fulbright Flashback: Experiencing Karneval for the first time.



Alexander Rose | Juergen Mulert Award

Alex' Fulbright: Purdue University, Indiana, 2019-2020
Subject Area: Industrial Engineering and Management
And Now: Procurement and Supply Chain consultant in Germany, France and the U.S.
Mission: Select and support exceptional Fulbright community projects and initiatives that promote mutual understanding.
Personal Fun Fact: I spent half of my study time abroad exploring as much as possible.
Favorite Fulbright Flashback: Berlin Seminar 2019 – where everything started.



AMANDA GLÄSER-BLIGH | VICE PRESIDENT COMMUNICATIONS

Amanda's Fulbright: Uni Bremen, Germany, 2005
Subject Area: Fulbright Enterprise Scholar
And Now: Communications at Zalando
Mission: Keeping the Fulbright experience going by bringing you all the news from the association.
Personal Fun Fact: I am an avid Pokémon Go player.
Favorite Fulbright Flashback: Joining the board of the German Fulbright Alumni Association in 2020.

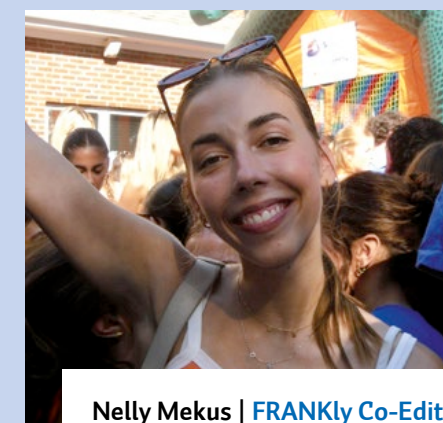
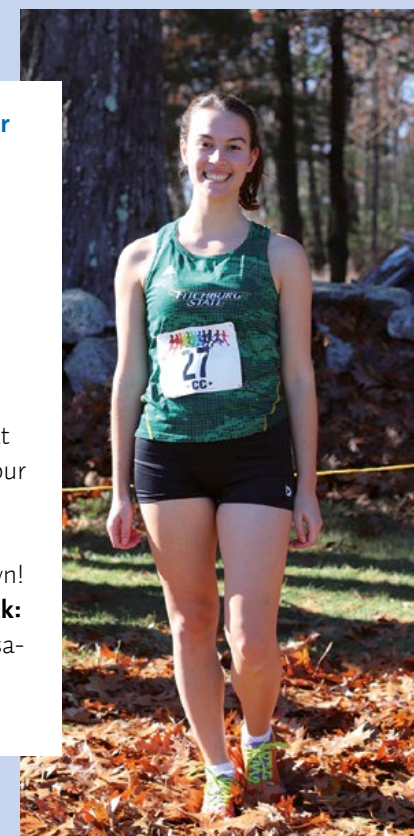


Caroline Gunderson | Social Media

Caroline's Fulbright: Jena, Germany, 2021-2022
Subject Area: English Teaching Assistant
And Now: Master's Degree of International Affairs at the Hertie School
Mission: As Social Media chair, I am excited to share the wonderful work done in and expand the reach of our Fulbright community.
Personal Fun Fact: I've wanted to run the Athens marathon for as long as I can remember! (Though, as expectation management, my current running level suggests I'll be enjoying working towards rather than achieving the goal for a while longer.)
Favorite Fulbright Flashback: My first Welcome Meeting in Bonn! The weekend was full of lovely memories, good conversations and a great amount of laughs. Many of my closest Fulbright friends are ones I met over that event.

Vera Fuller | FRANKly Editor

Vera's Fulbright: Fitchburg State University, Massachusetts, 2019
Subject Area: Audiovisual Media and Media Studies
And Now: Editor for a publisher, parental leave
Mission: Being part of a great community, contributing to our alumni magazine.
Personal Fun Fact: I have a transatlantic family of my own!
Favorite Fulbright Flashback: Countless wonderful conversations at the Berlin Seminar in 2019.



Nelly Mekus | FRANKly Co-Editor

Nelly's Fulbright: University of Florida, Gainesville, 2024
Subject Area: Global Communication and Linguistics
And Now: Working student at WDR, freelance contributor at the Max Weber Foundation
Mission: Fulbright enabled me to have the biggest adventure of my life so far, now I want to give back!
Personal Fun Fact: I can count to ten in eight languages.
Favorite Fulbright Flashback: Dancing the night away at the Munich Spring Ball 2025 – my first ever Fulbright event!

Marius Brinkmann | [Webmaster](#)

Marius' Fulbright: 2018-19 at Florida Polytechnic University

Subject Area: Electrical Engineering

And Now: Ph.D. Candidate & Development Engineer

Mission: Keeping our website running as the webmaster.

Personal Fun Fact: I'm a hobby barista that can draw a swan on your cappuccino.

Favorite Fulbright Flashback: Sharing a room with people from 80 different nations!



Jürgen Simon | [Archive](#)

Jürgen's Fulbright: 1977-78 at Indiana University, Bloomington

Subject area: International Business Administration

And now: Enjoying life without having a boss telling me what to do.

Mission: Sharing my decades of FAeV experiences with whoever wants to listen and preserving the association's documents for future generations of Fulbright alumni.

Favorite Fulbright flashbacks: Uncountable, after 37 years of my life with the German Fulbright Association.



Shamaila Ghaffar | [Fulbright Diversity Chapter Lead](#)

Shamaila's Fulbright: University of Kentucky, Lexington, 2010

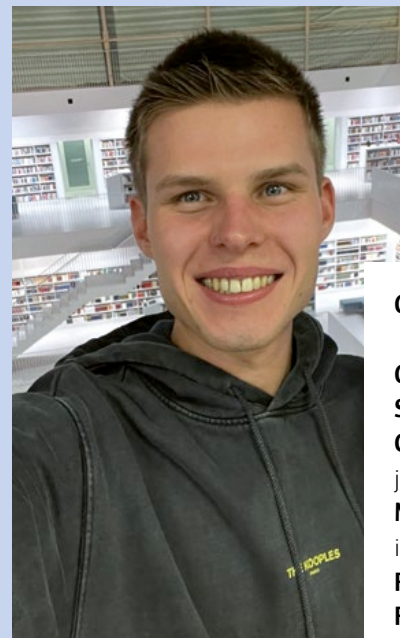
Subject Area: Economics and Real Estate

And Now: Project Manager Real Estate

Mission: Taking social action by giving back to our Fulbright community.

Personal Fun Fact: I like traveling to non-touristy countries and places!

Favorite Fulbright Fashback: There are so many ... K-Week, my first football match, when I tried Subway for the first time in my life, discovering my love for the U.S.



Orest Tkach | [IT](#)

Orest's Fulbright: Virginia Tech – Leaders in Entrepreneurship

Subject Area: Business Information Technology & Digital Media

Current Role: Bachelor thesis student at Porsche AG, researching international joint ventures

Mission: Using IT to empower the Fulbright network and support innovative ideas across the community.

Fun Fact: I speak seven languages.

Favourite Fulbright Flashback: Watching the sunrise from McAfee Knob and spotting a bear along the way! The combination of the breathtaking Appalachian view, the hike, and that unexpected encounter will stay with me forever.

Jonas Happ | [PULSE Podcast](#)

Jonas Fulbright: Virginia Tech University, Blacksburg, 2022

Subject Area: Summer School "Communicating across Differences", Digital Design

And Now: User Experience Designer at interone

Mission: Telling and listening to stories for those, who have not yet have the chance!

Personal Fun Fact: During Covid lockdown, I learned to play golf, since it was the only allowed sport (outside, distance etc.).

Favorite Fulbright Flashback: Singing "Country Roads" with the crowd in a club in Virginia.



Marc Wasserek | [Data Management](#)

Marc's Fulbright: 2021, Louisiana State University

Subject Area: Industrial Engineering

And Now: Writing my master's thesis about digitalization in the area of district heating.

Mission: Supporting the digital knowledge transfer of our association.

Personal Fun Fact: Despite my passion for digitalization, I use my 2.5m² whiteboard every day.

Favorite Fulbright Flashback: Cooking with my fellow Fulbrighters.



Tristan Cristofolini | [Frankfurt Office](#)

Tristan's Fulbright connection:

Working at the Fulbright-Office, always striving for greatness.

Subject Area: American Studies

And Now: Writing my master's thesis.

Mission: Trying to help every member of the Alumni Association to the best of my abilities.

Personal Fun Fact: If you are reading this, I am standing behind you.

Favorite Fulbright Flashback: The many balls and Welcome-Meetings!

NOT PICTURED

Christian Holzbauer | [Sustainability](#)

Maximilian Haberer | [Anniversary Event](#)

Dagmar Schreiber | [Sailing Trip](#)

Crispin Scholz | [Entrepreneurship](#)

It’s Been a While Since My Time With Fulbright

by Aynur Mengi



Streetart in NYC

Over the past few years, I’ve shared many stories – about the people I met, the places I visited, and the moments that changed me. What was supposed to be a simple month abroad turned out to mean more than words could ever express.

But right now, it’s hard.

Talking about travel, moving away, or even spending a few weeks in the U.S. as a tourist feels overwhelming. Political tensions, global instability, and personal uncertainties make every potential journey feel like an emotional storm. You’re constantly torn – on the one hand, there is the desire to see one of the world’s most influential places; on the other, the fear of what that choice could mean for your safety, your work, your family, your identity.

As Fulbrighters, we are encouraged to be open-minded, to live by our values, and to stay connected as a global community. When I meet someone from the Fulbright network – even if they’re a complete stranger – it feels like running into an old friend. That connection is powerful. And yet, in today’s world, even boarding a plane can feel like a risk.

In moments like these, I often think of Senator J. William Fulbright – the man who believed that if we knew the people behind other nations, if we had faces to the names, we would be less likely to go to war with them. He was right. And yet, like many others, he actively opposed key civil rights legislation – making it difficult to fully celebrate his legacy.

So why does this matter?

Because – just like J. William Fulbright – the United States holds both light and shadow. While thousands continue to fight for their country, for climate justice, for peace in the Middle East, for women’s rights and equity – others actively push back against the very values we hold dear as a community. That tension makes it harder to keep the American Dream alive – especially for young people longing to begin their Fulbright journey.

In recent years, the voices of division have grown louder. Many have begun to lose faith in the idea of a better future. We scroll past meme after meme joking about global collapse, see headlines that feel more like warnings than information. Each day seems to bring another tragedy, another decision that pushes the world closer to midnight on the Doomsday Clock.

The world has grown heavy. People have grown tired. And we – especially young people – have grown uncertain. And who could blame us?

Seeing the results of U.S. elections ripple across the entire globe in less than a year is hard to witness. Watching human rights backslide, international cooperation fray, and global trust weaken makes it difficult to believe that our actions matter. That we matter. So why even keep going? Why keep trying? Why hold on to community when it sometimes feels like the people around us have already let go?

Because remembering J. William Fulbright teaches us two important truths: First, that one person, one choice, one voice can change the course of millions of lives. Second, that while not every individual should be celebrated, their ideas still can be. Even someone who made deeply harmful decisions can make one powerful, enduring contribution.

If Fulbright had never founded this program, thousands would never have studied abroad, never taught in classrooms far from home, never dared to dream beyond borders. Especially not in the fragile years after World War II – in a time of deep division, suspicion, and fear.

When hopelessness rises, hope must rise higher.

And that is exactly what our community stands for. Each Fulbrighter who chooses to listen instead of judge, to reach out instead of turn away, to learn instead of fear – carries this legacy forward. The Fulbright program was never just about academic exchange. It was – and still is – about building peace where politics fails. Through cultural understanding. Through human connection. Through stories.



photos: Aynur Mengi



Friends in a place far away from home

When we meet people from other cultures – when we hear their laughter, their fears, their dreams – we stop seeing strangers. We start seeing humans. Not headlines. Not statistics. Just people. And as a community, that is where our power lies: in showing up. In listening deeply. In daring to care.

I know uncertainty makes it hard. I am aware of the terrible things that happen in this world. But we can change something. We can have an impact. Even if we are afraid – no, especially when we are afraid.

One voice can change the world.

And sometimes, it starts with one person who simply wants to travel abroad to the U.S.



Aynur Mengi is many things: a daughter, a student, a writer, a sister, a wife, and a friend. She’s also a few less flattering things: a world-class procrastinator, an unapologetic dreamer, and (sometimes) a bit of a mess. What more is there to say?

Headshot photo: Şeyda Tunç

Take Action to

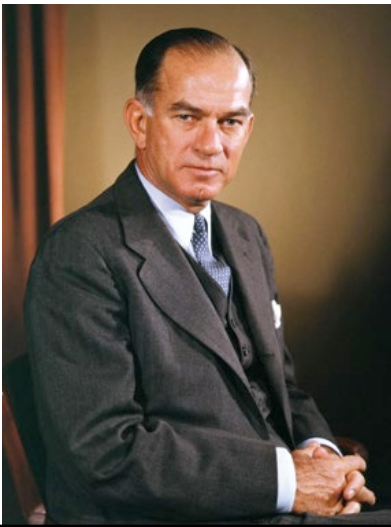
#StandForFulbright

This article is one in a series that FRANKly is dedicating to the #StandForFulbright campaign. The Fulbright program is under threat – and your voice can make a difference. As Congress considers funding for fiscal year 2026, now is the time to speak up for this essential program that strengthens American diplomacy, fosters international cooperation, and empowers future leaders. The Fulbright Association on behalf of its alumni and members is spearheading a writing and donation campaign to protect the Fulbright program. More information at fulbright.org.

Ancestral Retaliation, Global Redemption

My Fulbright Story of Rage, Resilience, and Reach

by Sterling De Sutter Summerville



J. William Fulbright in 1960; photo: Bachrach - Bachrach Photography

As a child growing up in Indianapolis, Indiana, USA, some of the earliest lessons I learned in integrated settings taught me that there is great power in the privilege of one’s skin tone. And though I was taught by my family and community to adore my beautiful, radiant, smooth sun-kissed skin; and I took to heart the instruction to value the innovative nature and indomitable resiliency of heritage, I would grow to learn that albeit precious, my skin would be a lifelong magnet of consequence in my country. A common misconception that I met overseas was that racial discrimination is something that the U.S. has solved. However, similar to how racism and colorism plague societies all over the globe, sadly the U.S. still has a long way to go.

As a toddler, I would hear stories from my grandmother about the unimaginably horrid conditions of her grandmother who was born enslaved. In my adolescence, I would come to witness unfair racial profiling by police and judicial brutality steal the potential of my family and friends. By the time I was in college I had become intimately acquainted with structural, institutional, interpersonal and societal forms of racial discrimination and racism that I never knew existed. I was fatigued. And still am. But having had a taste of the respite international travel could provide, at 21 I endeavored to find my way overseas as much as I could. I knew there were places and people who could show me something different – enter the Fulbright program.

Call the motivation to travel chasing hope, call it searching for belonging, or call it professional development; by whatever name, four months after graduating from Valparaiso University I would willingly schlep my anxious

bones across the sea in a reclamatory act of ancestral retribution. After the painstaking process of proving excellence that included countless interviews and rewrites of personal statements; trust and faith all played a role in getting me to Poland. All of which I am very grateful for because my experience there made me a better person. Despite my reluctance to apply, I owe a great deal to the Fulbright program.

Though underacknowledged at the time, the Fulbright program challenged me before I was even accepted. I initially hesitated to apply, because to apply meant to face myself and pray for irony. Irony in that a program that bears the name of a man who during his campaign to become a U.S. Senator stated, “I am not for Negro participation in our primary elections, and I do not approve of social equality.” For me to apply for the program meant I would swim up the high road river, and graciously swallow my pride (pride that I know now was a critically important seed for me). Not many people speak about this part of the program’s history, but J. William Fulbright himself took actions to see my people be disenfranchised. According to The Legacy of J. William Fulbright Book Subtitle: Policy, Power, and Ideology, “J. William Fulbright maintained a perfect anti-integration voting record in Congress from his first election to the House in 1942 until 1970, when he first deviated from the segregationist line with his vote to extend the Voting Rights Act (VRA). Prior to that moment of personal history, he had voted against the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, 1964, and 1968 and against the 1965 VRA. He was an active participant in various filibusters of nondiscrimination legislation between 1948 and 1964 and signed the Southern Manifesto of 1956.”¹ It is not for me to speculate whether or not he would have wanted to see a

scarred, tattooed, loud and proud Black man engage the program he created, but I am glad to have been able to take advantage of it either way.

Though it hurts to type words that sought to hold back the progress of my people, the pain I can handle. In the illustrious words of the prolific James Baldwin, “to be Black and Conscious in America is to be in a constant state of rage” and I have been in that state for as long as I can remember. That said, in spite of that pain and rage, I was, and remain resolute because to be Black in this world you need a thick skin and a more than healthy portion of confidence. The Fulbright program helped me develop those attributes and much more. I look back on my time as a Fulbright scholar fondly for to it I credit many friends I gained and understanding I gathered. Today I mentor, I work with professional sports teams, and have been to as many countries as I have years of living, and my Fulbright experience was a foundational element in all of that. It is with that gratitude and standing that I proudly aspire to inspire, and attest that programs like this should be supported and praised.

I can’t describe what it’s like for everybody, but I can certainly say that for me, the Fulbright program was both the path and the pathmaker. The program’s founding created a pinwheel effect that operates as a generator of inspiration and seat of power. A seat that showcases what can be when we build bonds instead of divides. There are few programs that initiate and foster cross-cultural collaborations and I find that often the fellow Fulbright alum who I know are ardent encouragers of healthy and responsible intercultural dialogue.

Without that period of growth and real-world experience, I don’t use that momentum to launch efforts giving back to the youth in my community. I don’t share those stories in my interviews for Google, Snapchat or Micron; and I wouldn’t have had opportunities to influence the policy and cultural dynamics that helped shape products and platforms billions use. So for the impact I have had, and all that I will, to the catalytic accelerating force that is the Fulbright program, I say thank you.



As a Cultural Dynamics Strategist and the founder of The Asterisk Group, **Sterling** activates cultural intelligence to push leaders and brands beyond the obvious. After spending more than a decade leading strategy in the education, technology, and human rights advocacy sectors, Sterling

continues to combine his passions for executive coaching and cultural intelligence to empower and guide his clients to navigate complexity and reimagine their relevance. Holding a Master’s degree from the University of Cincinnati and a Bachelor’s from Valparaiso University, Sterling develops leaders and organizations by using techniques honed over experience leading strategy work at Google Inc., Micron Technology, Snapchat and across Africa, Asia and Europe. His work with professional sports clients includes having worked with esteemed organizations such as the Los Angeles Lakers, Baltimore Ravens and Chicago Bears.

¹ Brogi, Alessandro, Giles Scott-Smith, and David J. Snyder, eds. *The Legacy of J. William Fulbright: Policy, Power, and Ideology*. University Press of Kentucky, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvk3gm7g>.

It All Started With Fulbright

by Prof. Reinhard Lipperheide

Prelude

When I was still busy with passing the pre-diploma examinations at the Technical University of Berlin, I happened to see a notice announcing a Fulbright scholarship for the academic year 1954/55 at an American university. So I sent in the required documents and papers, and it all went quite smoothly! An interview (or two?) with a German-American committee at the Berlin U.S. headquarters on Clayallee and recommendations by two professors and two further persons later, I rather quickly received the letter of acceptance for a year at the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA). As I learned later, we were 82 German students in this second group of grantees, with 6 from Berlin. Early in July 1954 I got on the plane at Tempelhof airport to attend an orientation course for about 40 grantees in Bad Honnef. We had a wonderful week of informative talks, excursions, and networking. The course was directed by the very proficient and personable Dr. Heinrich Pfeiffer, who at the end of the course took us on the night train to Genoa, where we boarded the SS Constitution for New York the next morning.

New York and Yankton, South Dakota

After about ten sunny and restful days on a calm sea, one morning, we reached our destination. It was foggy, and the eagerly awaited event of catching sight of the Statue of Liberty and the skyline of New York was denied to us. We stayed in New York for almost two weeks and were generously cared for by the Institute of International Education: a weekend at a country estate on Long Island, a musical on Broadway, museums, and much more. We also explored the town on our own, two of us, and happened to meet a young German speaking lecturer on the campus of Columbia. They insisted on taking us out in the evening to a dixie-land bar in Harlem, where we were greeted effusively and gleefully included in the party.

As a group of ten German students we subsequently went by sleeping car to Yankton, South Dakota. Here each one of us was to live with a local family for about a month. I stayed with the Stuelpnagel family. One of their ancestors

had long ago left the well-known family of generals, von Stuelpnagel, to settle in America (being a pastor, he was considered the black sheep).

We were passed around the town; appeared on TV, and there were excursions to the Badlands, Mt. Rushmore, and so on. Mr. Stuelpnagel was running an egg-shipping business, and periodically sent huge trucks loaded with eggs to California. I went along on one of these, and after three days, I woke up and looked forward – I saw a long, wide road, which somehow got lost far off in the haze. This was the notorious smog which had been identified with Los Angeles for years. The extension of Los Angeles is enormous; closer to the coast, where UCLA was located, the smog was bearable. At some warehouse I was dropped, here I was met by Frieda Schroeder, a cousin of Mr. Stuelpnagel, and her husband Carl. For a few days I stayed at their beautiful home in Beverly Hills.

Ph.D. Student at UCLA

The one-year Fulbright grant was conceived such that I could attend courses in graduate college and pass the written tests, so that at the end of the academic year I would earn the degree of Master of Arts in Physics. I attended courses in experimental and theoretical physics as well as in mathematics. At the close of the quantum mechanics course given by professor David S. Saxon, the latter asked me if I would like to stay on in order to work on problems in theoretical nuclear physics under his guidance, with the aim to earn also the Ph.D. degree. This opportunity I could not pass up, so I extended my sojourn in the U.S. beyond the year scheduled for the Fulbright grant. Dr. Saxon gave me ample leeway and accompanied my studies with weekly discussions that could last several hours. Under his steadfast guidance I wrote my Ph.D. thesis on a topic which I had chosen myself. It was later published in the journal Annals of Physics in almost full length with me as sole author. This meant the official end of my stay in the U.S.. Dr. Saxon arranged for me to obtain a Ford Foundation Fellowship at the Institute for Theoretical Physics at the University of



Herr Pfeiffer sees us off at Bonn main station



The Stuelpnagel family and their guest



Royce Hall, the landmark of UCLA

Copenhagen (now Niels-Bohr-Institute). This was followed by two years in Heidelberg from where I finally returned to Berlin for a permanent position at the Hahn-Meitner-Institute for Nuclear Research (now Helmholtz-Center for Materials and Energy). Later, Dr. Saxon became president of the entire University of California, and afterwards chairman of the corporation of MIT. He launched and promoted my professional career, and I think back to him full of affection and gratitude.

After my arrival at UCLA, I presented myself to the foreign student advisor. He had me meet a young student who invited me to live in his fraternity near the campus. This fraternity had a Masonic background and its name was Acacia, not a combination of Greek letters. About 40 students lived in the house. They were undergraduates and a little younger than I was, but they accepted me as one of them, first as pledge, then after a week-long initiation at the end of the semester, as active. I took part in all activities of the fraternity. Later I discontinued this. I was given a single room, so that from then on, I was leading a comfortable, independent life with food and lodging in friendly surroundings.

Life in Los Angeles

When my Fulbright grant (\$150 per month) had run out after a year's time, I could cover the expenses for my further sojourn through UCLA grants, assistantships, and translations. I had enough money to travel twice to Germany to visit my family, and for extensive trips to Mexico, Cuba, and the East Coast of the U.S.; by car with friends or as a passenger via ads in the UCLA student newspaper. My own rickety '47 Plymouth never made it beyond the confines of California. Physics was not everything for me at UCLA. There were almost professional theatrical performances, concerts by the university orchestra conducted by Lukas Foss, and also an appearance of Igor Stravinsky on the occasion of his 75th birthday. Prominent speakers came: Kennedy (not yet president), Truman, Trotsky's secretary, and on Charter Day in March 1960, Adenauer, who received an honorary doctorate together with Jascha Heifetz. They

All photos: Reinhard Lipperheide

#StandForFulbright



Adenauer meets with German students



Acacia

walked at the head of the solemn procession of professors, dressed in their black gowns, one tall the other short, with the same stony expression peculiar to both of them. Afterwards, in the hotel, Adenauer exchanged a few words with our small group of German students.

Los Angeles, soon to be the second largest city in the U.S., was on its way to become an important cultural center. There was no opera house, though, but the San Francisco Opera Company used to visit for about six weeks in the summer and gave performances in the rather ill-suited 6000-person Shrine Auditorium, at which I twice made an appearance as an extra (in Tosca and Carmen). The New York Philharmonic as well as the Berlin with Karajan were forced to make do with this colossal all-purpose venue. But Gehry's concert hall, the opera house, and the Getty Museum were coming. Also there were small stages where, owing to the proximity of Hollywood, many good actors appeared, and which I frequented with great delight; once I sat beside the half-blind Aldous Huxley! Good jazz-bars and restaurants were a matter of course. And in addition to all this the eternal if somewhat overcast sun, and the beaches of the Pacific only a few miles off.

Looking back

As my American years recede ever further into the past, they also seem to more and more vanish into the realm of the fantastic. After the war I long retained the images of the assault of the Red Army and of my five years in the Soviet-occupied zone, which fortunately ended with our move to West-Berlin, then still half in ruins. The universally admired free, rich, beautiful America, and in particular, the faraway California, were for me nothing but a transfigured dream – which then became reality.

The campus of UCLA is situated in one of the most beautiful parts of Los Angeles, between Beverly Hills and Santa Monica. It borders on the wondrous Sunset Boulevard, which winds westward for many miles to end at the coast near Pacific Palisades. I never saw much of downtown, where the Mexican and the Chinese communities lived, or of the poor suburbs. America was shining: the Korean War and the McCarthy affair were over, the murder of the Kennedys and of Martin Luther King, Vietnam, the student revolts (also UCLA was heavily affected), Angela Davis, all that could not even be imagined. In this country, everything had so felicitously been joined together for me that sometimes I ask myself who might have been the amiable spirit behind all this? But one thing is clear: it all started with Fulbright.



Reinhard Lipperheide was born in Berlin in September 1932. He was a Fulbright grantee in 1954/55 at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). He extended his sojourn so as to finish with a Ph.D. in Physics in July 1961. This was followed by two years each at the Niels-Bohr-

Institute in Copenhagen and the Institute of Theoretical Physics of the University of Heidelberg. In 1965 he joined the Helmholtz-Center for Materials and Energy in Berlin-Wannsee, where he became a group leader and professor at the Free University Berlin.

All photos: Reinhard Lipperheide

Who Knew?

How Fulbright Took Me Beyond My Barriers

by Gabrielle E. Taylor

Fulbright's Open Door

Every major event connected to Fulbright has marked me in a significant way. Funny enough, each time I applied to or began a Fulbright experience, I did so with a larger dose of naivete than realized. I was blessed to participate as both an English Teaching Assistant in 2014, and also the Fulbright Germany "On the Road" roadtrip program to commemorate the year of German-American Friendship in 2019. Each time, I would take a leap of faith because a program, an initiative, a connection, sparked my interest enough to give it a shot. Little did I know that what I would encounter with every Fulbright moment was deeply rooted friendships, a new layer of myself I did not know was present, and opportunities to grow in learning and life. *Who knew* that a seventy-nine year old program to increase mutual understanding and peaceful relations would reach a tall southern black girl from Birmingham, Alabama, who just wanted to get better at German?

Ruhrgebiet Revels

Fulbright's English Teaching Assistantship in Germany from 2014-2015 met me in a place where I had never been on a train, subway, or even a public bus before. After arriving at the Frankfurt airport, I was lost for an hour looking for the train station before finally finding it – *underneath the airport* – only to sit and watch my train to Köln stop in front of me and continue on...without me. I did not know how any public transportation really worked, but while introverted, I was not afraid to ask for help. To seek insight and inquire knowledge was not a new concept for me. I asked strangers for help to buy a train ticket and another person explained how to read the schedule so I could catch the next train.

On top of that, I wanted to make sure to connect with fellow Fulbrighters in the Ruhrgebiet area in Nordrhein-Westfalen, and so intention drove my steps. With my living in Dortmund, my three Fulbrighter "next door neighbors" in Bochum became more than just travel buddies. Three out of four of us



Susanna, Gabrielle, Claire, and Liz; photo: Gabrielle Taylor

Gabrielle, Liz, and Susanna in Berlin at the 25th anniversary of the Fall of the Berlin Wall (Mauerfall)

are from the southeast U.S., and Susanna, Liz, and Claire were my connections to home and my guides to this new endeavor. As the youngest (and tallest) of us, they empowered me to be me, whatever we did together. They didn't know me previously, so there were no pre-conceived expectations. That freed me to live fully as myself. I did not hide when I didn't understand something. I had no hesitation asking



Schauspielhaus Bochum;
photo: Gabrielle Taylor

how hostels worked. I was not nervous to speak German or say the wrong word, because I knew they would correct me if necessary. I shared my need to find a church during my year abroad, and whether they desired that themselves or not, they helped me find a church and would attend with me.

Of all the adventures, or dare I say, revelry, we had throughout our year in Germany, each one has made an imprint because of *who* I experienced them with: from the Fulbright Conference in Berlin, dealing with train strikes and thinking on our feet, frying southern-style chicken in Susanna’s apartment, watching Jane Austen shows while baking and drinking tea, visiting cities and countries around Europe together, to one of my highlights, seeing *Bochum* the musical in the Schauspielhaus in Bochum, listening to the locals sing these classic Herbert Grönemeyer songs in one voice. All these moments and more were an incredible thing to witness, but without Susanna, Liz and Claire, they would not have been as impactful. The fact that we still talk, laugh, stay connected (even while living around the world) and support each others’ goals is a once in a lifetime bond that only Fulbright could foster.



Team Yellow in Lexington, Kentucky. Rebecca (in front), Markus, Marie, Gabrielle, Lynn and Jens; photo: Rebecca Miller

Fulbright On the Road: Team Yellow, Team Rebels

Imagine: It has been five years since your time abroad, and you stumble across a call for applications for a Year of German-American Friendship Fulbright program. A road trip? Three Americans and three Germans, all Fulbrighters, spending a week together traveling the U.S. in a van and organizing the stops, interactions and events along the way? Sign me up!

Once again, I began this program thinking it would be cool to meet some fellow Fulbrighters, see new areas of the country, and learn about ties between Germany and the United States. *Who knew* that the group I was in would be another chance to see myself better than before.

We were “Team Yellow”, that is, Lynn, Markus, Rebecca, Marie, Jens and I. One of three groups, our route started in Ohio, traveled through Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, and ended in my hometown of Birmingham, Alabama, before meeting the other groups in Arkansas. What first began with awkwardly meeting in the airport quickly turned into an exciting and unconventional ride with extraordinary people. I saw the exceptional work and heard the inspiring stories of my team and thought, wow, they are so innovative, breaking down barriers, navigating new countries and planning to apply lessons learned. Brilliant.

We jokingly called ourselves “Team Rebels”, because we thought uniquely about how our budget should be used. We got creative to find places to stay throughout our journey, as well as who to consider inviting for a discussion on German-American friendship and partnership. This opened up possibilities to engage with smart and talented people,



Team Yellow posing at rushing waters in Georgia. Left to right: Rebecca, Lynn, Marie, Jens, Gabrielle, and Markus; photo: Rebecca Miller

organizations, and cities. Everything from a couple in Ohio who frequently traveled to Germany hosting us in their home for free, to being invited to German Mass and having Früh-schoppen in their church basement, sleeping in a church, having meaningful discussions with leaders of German-American associations and initiatives, bingo night with the locals in Helen, Georgia, and the privilege of hosting my team in my home city and state to show them the honest history of Birmingham, Alabama, as well as the significant work happening all around.

But I realized I still felt insecure about what I brought to this group of incredible people. In my freedom of never having met them before and knowing that what they knew about me was not colored by previous encounters, I shared my thoughts with Lynn. We were walking back from somewhere and had all joked about being the rebels of the program. I told Lynn that I was always the rule follower, the one who did what the teacher says, and so on, and everyone else seemed like the rebels, doing impressive work. Lynn paused, then said, “Gabrielle, I think you’re more of a rebel than you think!” That statement made me reflect. Not because I wanted to disobey the rules, but because it made me think about the entire trip I was on.

Team Yellow was on amazing adventures, meeting city and community leaders, organizing events and meetups, and networking with all kinds of people with a heart for or tie to Germany and the U.S. I was a *part* of Team Yellow. I was doing those things right alongside my team members! So I felt less rigid in how I thought I had to present myself. I can be southern Gabrielle, black Gabrielle, Gabrielle who speaks “good enough” German, Christian Gabrielle, tall Gabrielle,

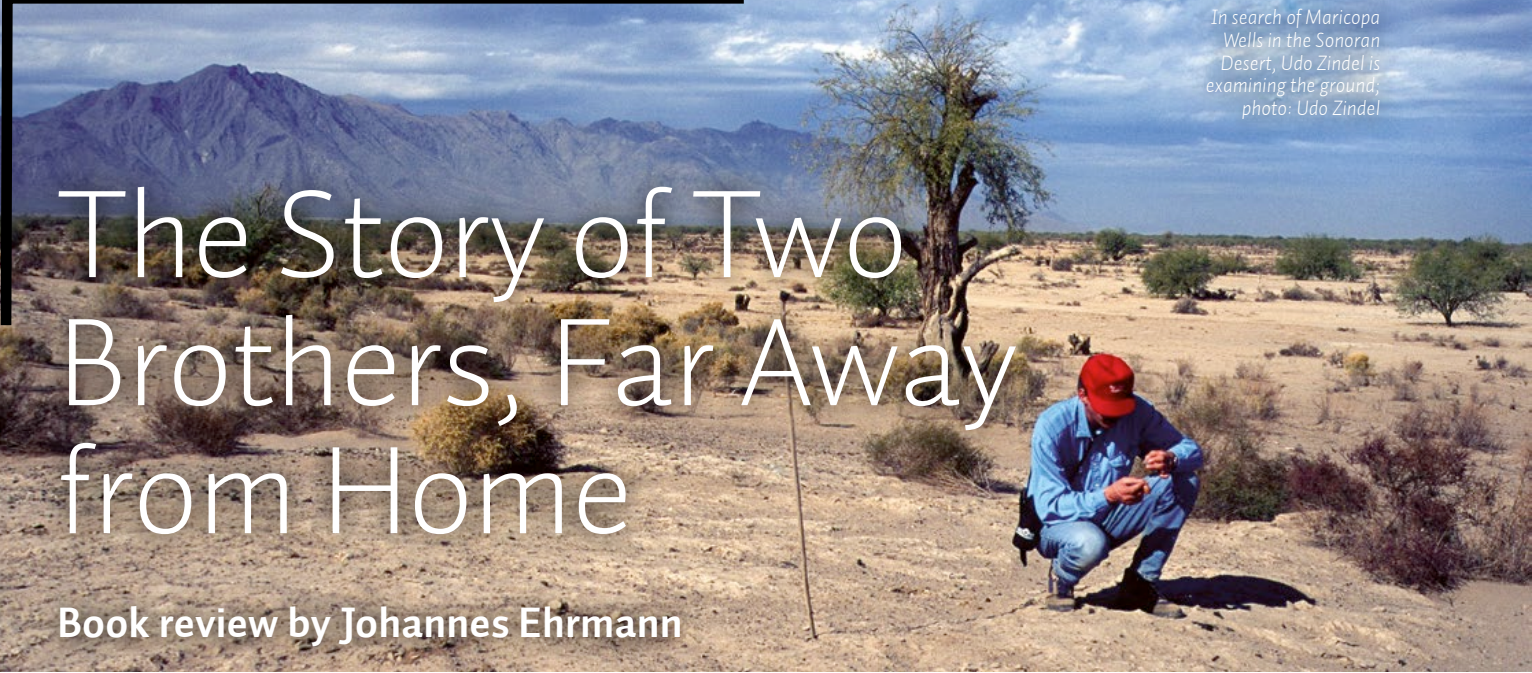
etc. I was all these facets at the same time, and whatever parts of Gabrielle wanted to stand front and center that day, they were *all* Gabrielle. It was going to be me every time.

Who Knew?

As I reflect on the way that Fulbright has changed my life, career, and mindset as a global citizen, I keep going back to my faith. Had it not been for my faith step of “why not?” in applying, I would not be where I am today. I think about the places I traveled, people I met, and opportunities given. I ponder on this reality: *Who knew* that a tall, black, Christian, and southern girl from Birmingham could be part of the ever-growing tapestry of Fulbright? I had something to add to the cohort of leaders, creatives, and innovators who are connected to this initiative. My mutual understanding has greatly expanded and my heart for all people has increased exponentially. *Who knew?* I think J. William Fulbright did. Thank you.



Gabrielle was a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant in Hagen, Germany, during the 2014-2015 program year, and spent 10 months teaching English at Fritz-Steinhoff Gesamtschule. She is currently a Regional Director with WorldStrides, a leading study abroad program provider, advising students on study abroad programs at her alma mater, The University of Alabama. She enjoys writing in various forms, especially poetry, and is very engaged in volunteer work in her church and hometown of Birmingham, Alabama.



In search of Maricopa Wells in the Sonoran Desert, Udo Zindel is examining the ground; photo: Udo Zindel

The Story of Two Brothers, Far Away from Home

Book review by Johannes Ehrmann

What is the story of our past? What happened to our ancestors? Did they make it in America? For journalist and author Udo Zindel, these questions came up with two dozen letters in an old suitcase in his stepfather’s garage. The case had not been opened for decades, the letters possibly unread for generations. They were written by two of his relatives back in the 1850s: Karl and Friedrich Herzog who came from Stuttgart, Germany, and went to America in search of a better life. Did they find it? The author, who studied and lived in Arizona as a Fulbrighter, set out to trace what he could find. His vivid account was published as a compelling 450-page-turner, “Heiß ersehntes Amerika – Auf den Fährten zweier Auswanderer“, by Osburg last year – the second edition being released in May 2025.

Two common men, two inconsequential fates, out of the over five million Germans who went across the Atlantic to settle in the United States in the 19th century alone. Karl and Friedrich were no men of means or might, rather two bystanders of history who get drawn into their surroundings – like Karl who gets arrested during some pre-revolutionary unrest in Stuttgart, presumably for nothing else than his own curiosity. A life-changing event, nonetheless, as this episode (and his following prison term) marks the prelude for his emigration.

Karl and later Friedrich, his younger brother, set out for the promised land, where no kings rule, where taxes are low and freedom rings – or so they think. A first reality-check for the just-arrived Karl in New York City: no one has waited for another German. Thousands of them arrive every month, most of them unemployed, drifting into the Little Germanys, the German Clubs and Relief Societies, figuring out where to go next amongst the ones who at least speak their language.

A home away from home? The English majority demands its tribute: Karl turns his first name into Charles, Friedrich will be Fred. The anglicization of the first name is the most

common trend among German immigrants from the days of Germantown in the 1680s and the War of Independence in the 1770s – an independence from England that is also won thanks to eager Germans like the brothers Charles and Fred.

The author and his stepfather follow the traces of their ancestors from coast to coast. Their stories are enriched by countless sources from the time of their ancestors. We read and see and grasp America in the antebellum years through the words of Charles Dickens, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Walt Whitman. These additional texts and sources are great and necessary tools because the story’s essence is based on only 23 letters, as well as the occasional archive find. The author does a masterful job of weaving the big picture and the two individual biographies together. We learn how the U.S. felt in those years and how the great promise met the stark reality of transatlantic migration.

“I have not erred in my expectations of this country”, Fred, who eventually settles in New Orleans, writes home, defending his choice. And yet he has already met the extreme



First page of Karl’s first letter, written on July 16, 1848, in New York City; photo: Udo Zindel

Maricopa Wells, where the survey expedition for the Southern Pacific Railroad camped in June, 1855. Karl participated as a soldier in the escort – a 2,000-mile march. Picture: Courtesy of The Linda Hall Library of Science, Engineering & Technology.



The rescue of shipwrecked passengers from the paddle steamer “San Francisco.” An engraving by Currier & Ives in New York City (Bancroft Library, UC Berkeley).

individualism that rules in his new home: “I have always helped myself, but whoever relies on the help of others here is usually fooled. Every man cares for himself.” Fred is gardening for another European immigrant, laboring during the early morning hours and into the late evenings, because the rest of the day is too hot and humid to do anything outside. Charles works for a German newspaper in the German-dominated Midwest, typesetting and printing the outspoken articles of Friedrich Hecker and other “48er” revolutionaries. Yet the pair do not stop to dream of a new tomorrow, a better future, wherever it may lie.

In 1853, Charles Herzog joins the U.S. Army. “Grey eyes, brown hair, 5 foot 9 and ½ inches”, his measurements have survived the decades in the National Archives. He wants to be able to move to the West Coast free of charge, to California, recently annexed from Mexico, to the promised land of the Gold Rush and the Pacific Coast. But before getting there, he barely survives the sinking of his paddle steamer, the “San Francisco”. The breathtaking account of this deadly catastrophe is a reminder of just how much of an immigrant’s (or anyone’s) fate really hinges on pure luck. In the 19th century certainly.

It is moving for the reader to follow the social connections the brothers struggle to uphold over monthlong postal ways, these two struggling Swabians, trapped in their two lives.



Udo’s stepfather (right) and his professor Malcolm Comeaux, from Arizona State University (left) joining the author in the desert; photo: Udo Zindel

They write to each other, again and again, and make plans that never come true. They write to their father and siblings back in Stuttgart. The family sends some plant seeds to America and a lock of hair of the brothers’ eight-year-old niece.

Charles and Fred set out for liberty and modest wealth. They meet hostility and a violent society that lashes out against recent immigrants, against its indigenous population, against blacks, along with a bloody civil war only a few years away. Yellow fever and other illnesses threaten the lives of working poor men like them.

It is a great testimonial to the author that we soon cheer for them, that we wish them luck. As one dream after the next dies down, a return to the motherland is being discussed in earnest, the question lingering looms larger and larger also in us: Was it all worth it?

The read, to be sure, is worth every page, and it is remarkable how dense a story can be written about two lives that might not have left the greatest of marks on history or in the archives, but who testify to the great upheavals of their time.

What we realize, again: of the average man, little might be left some 170 years later. But we can see so much of the blood, sweat, and tears between the lines. Or as Whitman, America’s great poet who was of Karl’s and Friedrich’s generation, put it: “I am the man, I suffer’d, I was there.”



Johannes Ehrmann is a journalist with DIE ZEIT and the author of “Söhne der Freiheit”, the story of the German-American founding family.

Sitz Bath Diplomacy

An Old German Spa Tradition in the Heart of Arkansas

by Adel Fansa

When I first heard the theme “Transatlantic Transformations,” I thought about the many ways my recent Fulbright year changed how I see connections between the U.S. and Europe. One of the most unexpected examples came during a cross-country road trip, where I found a piece of German spa culture in the middle of Arkansas. It was a small but meaningful moment that reflected how traditions travel, adapt, and shape our understanding of health and history on both sides of the Atlantic.

As a Fulbrighter, my year in the United States was defined not only by academic exploration, but by a sprawling journey across the country’s breathtaking national and state parks. What began as a group trip turned into a deeply personal adventure – one that somehow led me to a sitz bath in the middle of Arkansas. Yes, you read that right.

It all started a month after I arrived in the U.S. last August. I was studying Public Health at UC Berkeley when a few fellow international students and I set off for Yosemite National Park – one of the most spectacular landscapes I’ve ever seen. That trip lit a spark. A few months later, I found myself in a camper van, zigzagging from the West Coast to Savannah on the East Coast on a three-week trip. I hiked through dense Sequoia forests in Central California, crunched across snowy paths at Kings Canyon, narrowly avoided the unforgiving needles of desert cacti in Arizona, slid down white sand dunes in New Mexico, and crossed into Mexico for a short visit from Texas at Big Bend.

Ironically, I experienced nature more intimately than ever before in a country often associated with industrial power and consumerism. After ringing in the New Year with a stunning fireworks show on the Savannah River, I began the slow journey back west, passing through rural Georgia and the rolling hills of “Sweet Home Alabama.” Then, a few days later, I crossed the Mississippi River into Arkansas.

After a hike to the top of Pinnacle Mountain with panoramic views of the Natural State, I headed south to Hot Springs

National Park – expecting, well, hot springs. What I found instead was something that felt oddly familiar.

Cobblestone streets, redbrick buildings, and European-style shops greeted me. Curious, I parked my camper van and did what I always do at national parks: visited the visitor center for my stamp and a chat with a ranger. What started as a routine conversation turned into something far more personal. When I asked about the history of the park, the ranger told me about the sitz bath.

Wait – sitz bath? In Arkansas?

As it turns out, Hot Springs National Park – originally protected as federal land in 1832 and designated a national park in 1921 – is deeply rooted in European, especially German, spa traditions. Thanks to its naturally heated thermal waters, the area became a major health resort in the 19th century. Among its most popular treatments was the sitz bath – a method where only the lower part of the body is immersed in warm water.

This practice, called Sitzbad in German, was a cornerstone of 19th-century hydrotherapy across the German-speaking world. It was championed by figures like Sebastian Kneipp, a Bavarian priest who popularized Wasserkur therapies that emphasized the healing power of water. German immigrants and physicians brought these ideas to the U.S., shaping the development of places like Hot Springs. The elaborate Bathhouse Row, with its neoclassical architecture, reflects not only the grandeur of American ambition, but the influence of European approaches to wellness, hygiene, and preventive medicine.

When the ranger found out I was from Germany, he smiled and even spoke a little German. He asked if my Opa and Oma had ever tried a sitz bath. I laughed – the moment made something click. Here I was, in the middle of Arkansas, immersed not just in warm mineral water, but in a transatlantic story: one that flowed from the healing



One of the historic bathhouses of Hot Springs National Park – once a hub for hydrotherapy inspired by European spa culture.



Yosemite: where my love for America’s national parks began.

springs of Bavaria to the forests of Arkansas, from German spa culture to American national heritage.

Inspired by our conversation, I decided to fully embrace the experience and booked a session at one of the historic bathhouses. I stepped into a beautifully preserved building from the early 20th century, complete with marble floors, porcelain tubs, and the soft scent of eucalyptus. The spa ritual included steam cabinets, warm mineral soaks, and yes – a sitz bath. The bath was both physically soothing and emotionally grounding – a quiet moment of connection across continents and centuries.

As a medical student, the experience reminded me how health practices – like hydrotherapy – are shaped by centuries of cross-cultural exchange. It also underscored the importance of global cooperation in healthcare: the sharing of knowledge, the blending of traditions, and the recognition that well-being is a universal concern that transcends borders. Experiences like mine – standing in an American national park shaped by European medical ideas – show just how global health has always been. In a world facing pandemics, climate-related illness, and rising inequality, international solidarity isn’t optional – it’s essential.

This is the magic of the Fulbright experience. It’s not just about studying or traveling – it’s about discovering the hidden connections between people, cultures, and systems. And sometimes, that discovery happens in the most unexpected places – like a sitz bath in the heart of Arkansas! In that sense, this experience reflects what “Transatlantic Transformation” has meant to me: realizing how cultural and medical traditions continue to influence each other across the Atlantic – and how my own perspective as a future public health practitioner and physician has grown through these encounters.



Adel Fansa is a 2024/2025 German Fulbright Scholar and now a proud alumnus. During his Fulbright year at UC Berkeley, he studied Public Health. Originally from Germany and Syria, he is currently a final-year medical student and doctoral researcher based in Berlin, with a strong interest in global and occupational health, preventive medicine, and transatlantic collaboration.

Adorno-Gymnasium was Amy's school during her 2024/25 Fulbright year as an English Teacher Assistant.

Across Oceans, Beyond Classrooms A Transatlantic Transformation

by Amy Webb

During my first year as an English Teacher Assistant in Germany (2024/25) at Adorno-Gymnasium in Frankfurt am Main, I experienced significant personal and professional growth. Stepping into the classroom, I quickly learned how to engage with students, build meaningful relationships with teachers, and develop confidence in leading discussions. Within a month, I transitioned from adjusting to flourishing – co-teaching various grade levels, experimenting with interactive lessons, and creating an open, engaging environment where students felt comfortable participating.

Throughout the year, I had the opportunity to explore a range of topics – from the American Dream and everyday life in the U.S. to gender, race, and political discourse. These lessons often led to thoughtful and lively discussions. My colleagues were open to collaboration and valued the perspective I brought into the classroom. One example that stands out is from my ninth and tenth grade English classes, where we read novels such as *The Giver* by Lois Lowry and *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas. These books address pressing social and cultural issues in the U.S., and I was able to lead a classroom discussion on book bans; an issue gaining momentum in the U.S., particularly in public schools. Before receiving my Fulbright grant, I worked at both my college and local public libraries for five years, so book censorship is a topic I care deeply about. It meant a great deal to share that passion in a classroom across the Atlantic. Some of the students I worked with are immigrants from countries where free

speech and access to literature are tightly controlled, which made our discussions about censorship even more impactful and relevant.

Book bans and censorship aren't the only political developments in the U.S. that affect transatlantic relations, so does the growing risk of defunding the Fulbright program. Fulbright's mission to promote intercultural understanding and academic integrity is something I deeply value, and this program gave me the chance to embody those ideals in meaningful ways. While designing lesson plans was important, it was the day-to-day experience of leading classroom discussions that truly helped me grow as an educator and mentor. As a recent U.S. undergraduate with a double major in International Studies and German, I was able to bring a current and personal perspective to topics like American culture, politics, and U.S. student life into the classroom. My insights added depth to lessons and helped spark student interest. I worked alongside my colleagues by offering cultural insights and helping students connect the lessons to real-life perspectives from the U.S. In a time when misinformation spreads quickly and political tensions can lead to cultural misunderstandings, the Fulbright program plays a vital role. It fosters empathy, encourages critical thinking, and helps break down stereotypes shaped by media or distance. The impact goes beyond the classroom, because it ultimately leaves a lasting, positive impression on Fulbrighter scholars, students, teachers, and the broader community by turning perceived differences into opportunities for dialogue and growth.



After the symphony orchestra's 2024 candlelight concert in Frankfurt am Main. Amy Webb (middle) with her colleagues from Adorno-Gymnasium who came to watch the concert.



Amy is standing on a bridge in Frankfurt am Main in Old Sachsenhausen with the skyscrapers in the background.

Another way that my Fulbright experience shaped me and my community around me was how I was able to continue playing violin with a symphony orchestra. Music is a universal language that transcends language barriers, and playing in the orchestra was a fantastic way for me to connect with others. The symphony orchestra also opened up more opportunities for me to connect and perform with the Mainhattan Strings, a string group based in Frankfurt am Main where we had the privilege to perform at Comic-Con in Dortmund, and school-project ensembles with the Frankfurt University of Music and Performing Arts. Joining and performing with these incredible groups gave me the chance to meet people of all ages and expand my transatlantic network.

All in all, my first year as an ETA laid the foundation for intellectual growth, creating strong connections between students and teachers, and collaboration skills across different cultures. Now, with a solid first-year experience, I am ready to step into a second year with even greater purpose and clearer expectations and goals. I look forward to the opportunity to continue inspiring students, deepening cultural connections, and further developing my skills as an educator and mentor. As I consider my future career paths in education, international law, or diplomacy, this second-year experience would provide invaluable skills in leadership, adaptability, and cross-cultural communication, qualities that will help me within and outside of the classroom.

All photos: Amy Webb

Looking ahead, my vision for the future of transatlantic relations is a world where everyone's voice matters. Where every citizen has access to civic education and publicly funded, independent media to combat misinformation and polarization. It's a society where government criticism is not silenced, and journalists can report on politics and social issues without fear for their livelihoods. I envision a democratic system that also prioritizes future generations when addressing climate change, education, and equitable healthcare for all. With this vision, I look forward to fostering a stronger and inclusive transatlantic network.



Amy Webb is a 2024 alumna of Luther College where she studied International Studies and German with a minor in English. She had the wonderful opportunity to be a Fulbright English Teacher Assistant in Frankfurt am Main, and she is excited to return there for her second year. In her free time, she enjoys reading books, playing instruments, hiking, and biking.

From “Incapable of Learning” to Fulbright Photographer

The Transatlantic Journey of Viktor Hübner

by Jennifer Witt & Viktor Hübner

What does it mean to cross not just borders, but barriers of identity, background, and belief in oneself? For photographer, author, and Fulbright alumnus Viktor Hübner, education was not merely a classroom experience – it became a bridge between past and future, Germany and the U.S., limitation and possibility.

In early 2025, Viktor Hübner stood before a classroom of students at the Gutenberg School in Leipzig – not as a typical guest, but as someone who had once sat in similar seats with a head full of doubt and a future that felt out of reach. Today, he holds a Master of Fine Arts from the Rhode Island School of Design, speaks on international stages, and is the award-winning author of *The Americans I Met*, a book born from a 26,000-kilometer hitchhiking journey through 41 U.S. states. But the story that matters most to him isn’t one of accolades – it’s one of transformation.

A Label Nearly Accepted

Hübner’s early academic life was anything but promising. In the first grade, he was nearly classified as “incapable of learning.” He struggled with concentration, lagged behind his classmates, and watched his self-esteem erode under the weight of low expectations. Comments from his immediate surroundings – especially his siblings, who innocently echoed what society seemed to suggest – left deep marks on his young mind.

“I internalized a loop of self-doubt and inferiority,” he later reflected. “It was like a social media algorithm feeding me my worst thoughts, over and over.”

The first crack in this loop came not through institutional support or a revolutionary educational program, but through a simple conversation in seventh or eighth grade. An acquaintance casually mentioned a friend who had at-

tended the same kind of lower-track school as Hübner – yet was now studying medicine. The remark wasn’t meant to be motivational, but for Hübner, it was a turning point. If someone from a background like his could pursue such a path, why couldn’t he?

“That sentence was like a beam of light in a dark room,” he recalled. “It showed me a different future might be possible.”

A New Lens Through the Atlantic

Years later, that glimmer of hope would carry him across the Atlantic on a Fulbright Germany Student Grant to the Rhode Island School of Design – one of the most prestigious art schools in the United States. For someone whose English grades were once consistently poor and who, after graduation, could barely speak fluently, the achievement was nothing short of staggering.

“Fulbright was a miracle,” Hübner said. “It didn’t just open academic doors – it completely reshaped how I understand background, education, and agency.”

In the U.S., Hübner was immersed in a culture that approached learning and identity with a different vocabulary. Discussions about equal opportunity, cultural heritage, and personal responsibility were not abstract debates – they were living conversations, ones that helped him reflect more deeply on his own upbringing. The child of immigrants from the former Soviet Union, Hübner had never fully understood the systemic forces that shaped his educational path.

“My parents came to West Germany in the late ‘80s,” he shared. “They learned German quickly, entered vocational training, and supported me however they could.



Viktor’s book, “The Americans I met”; photo: Jenny Witt

motivational talks with practical workshops in photography, identity, and storytelling. “I want students to understand: It’s never too late to write your own story,” he said.

Looking Ahead

Hübner’s current focus lies in three directions. First, he’s continuing readings and outreach related to *The Americans I Met*. Second, he’s preparing a long-term journalism project in Germany, aimed at documenting the voices and tensions shaping the country’s sociopolitical landscape. And third, he’s investing in education – not in the conventional sense, but through presence, conversation, and lived experience.

“There’s a real need for positive, relatable male role models in schools,” he emphasized. “Not flawless heroes, but people who can say: I failed, I doubted myself – and I still made it.”

A Transatlantic Transformation

Viktor Hübner’s story is many things: a testament to perseverance, a critique of educational systems, and a celebration of cross-cultural exchange. But above all, it’s a reminder of what becomes possible when someone dares to rewrite the script handed to them – and when institutions like Fulbright provide the pen.

In the spaces between what he was told and what he now knows, between Leipzig and Rhode Island, between failure and fulfillment, Viktor Hübner built something remarkable: a bridge. Not just for himself – but for anyone who needs to cross.

My time in the U.S. gave me a vocabulary for what that all meant – and a deeper empathy for others navigating similar paths.”

It was during this time that his project *The Americans I Met* took shape: a visual and narrative journey through the complexities of American life under the Trump presidency. The resulting book captured everything from gun culture and racial tensions to acts of quiet kindness and resilience. In essence, the project mirrored his own transformation – an exercise in seeing past assumptions, whether of a nation or of oneself.

Paying It Forward

Back in Germany, Hübner is now channeling his experiences into advocacy, education, and storytelling. His talk at the Gutenberg School was more than a motivational detour – it was a homecoming of sorts. Standing before students who might be carrying similar burdens, he offered not a roadmap, but a mirror.

“The students asked about everything – self-doubt, life’s detours, even suicidal thoughts,” he said. “You could see how healing it was to hear someone say, ‘I’ve been there, too.’ That made me realize how urgently we need real, honest stories in schools.”

In response, Hübner is developing a broader initiative to bring his story – and the tools he’s learned along the way – into classrooms across Germany. His dream is to combine

Sunset; photo: Jacob Eder

Jacob Eder on a Defining Year in America's Heartland

Interview by Jennifer Witt

Nearly two decades ago, a Fulbright grant took Jacob Eder from Munich to Lincoln, Nebraska – a destination he often jokes he might not have chosen himself, yet one that left a lasting mark on his academic and personal path. Today, he is a professor of history, with a focus on memory culture and transatlantic relations, at the Barenboim-Said Akademie in Berlin, Germany. Reflecting on his Fulbright year as part of the 2025 Frankly theme “Transatlantic Transformations,” Eder described it as a pivotal moment that shaped both his academic path as well as his perspective on international exchange.

Finding Direction in the Unexpected

Jacob Eder arrived in Nebraska in 2005 already well into his studies in history and American studies, but was unsure whether his future would lie in journalism or academia. What tipped the balance? Not one defining moment, but the overall experience, especially the mentorship he received. “I was fortunate to have an excellent mentor,” Eder recalls. “Alan E. Steinweis not only supported me during my time in Nebraska, but also helped me move on to a fellowship at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., and eventually to the University of Pennsylvania for my Ph.D.”

A Shift in Perspective

The move from Munich to Lincoln was a culture shock, but one that proved transformative. “Without Fulbright, I probably would never have set foot in Nebraska,” Eder says. “At first, I was shocked. Lincoln felt like the middle of nowhere. But that’s part of Fulbright: stepping out of your comfort zone, staying curious, and developing a deeper understanding of your environment.” Eder quickly realized that the American Midwest offered a different lens on global affairs. “At the time, many Europeans were baffled by the re-election of George W. Bush. But in Nebraska, I came to understand why most Americans didn’t

care much about European opinions on their politics. They simply had very different priorities.”

A Journey Back in Time

Returning to Nebraska nearly 20 years later brought back many memories. Some things had changed: new coffee shops, a modern basketball arena, but much remained the same. “It felt like a time capsule,” Eder says. “The main library, the campus buildings – it all looked exactly as it did in 2005. It almost felt like traveling back in time.”

During his visit, Eder also reconnected with a professor who had just started her career when he arrived as a student in Lincoln. “Meeting her again, now as a colleague, was a moving experience. We had dinner together and reflected on two decades of academic life, even as both sides of the Atlantic face major challenges.”

Windmill;
photo: Jacob Eder

Nebraska 2005: Eder standing to the left; photo: Jacob Eder



Nebraska 2005: Stadium; photo: Jacob Eder

Academic Inspiration and Legacy

For roughly 20 years, Jacob Eder has been studying what he calls the “posthistory” of the Holocaust. Topics like memory, memorialization, and historical reckoning. His year in Nebraska was foundational for this focus. “Before I arrived in Nebraska, I had read an essay by my academic host, Alan E. Steinweis, titled ‘Reflections on the Holocaust from Nebraska’. That really intrigued me: how – but especially: why – would people in Nebraska remember the Holocaust?” It was in Lincoln that Eder began to develop a research agenda on the global dimensions of Holocaust memory. “By 2005, it had already become a universalized narrative. You can’t really understand that development without looking at international and transnational dynamics.”

Advice for the Next Generation

What does Jacob Eder tell today’s Fulbright grantees? “Engage deeply with new perspectives, not just in your field, but also by getting to know people outside academia,” he advises. “Seek out conversations with those whose lives differ greatly from your own.” One of the biggest takeaways from his time in the Heartland? A kind of cultural resilience. “After Nebraska, no culture shock can throw me off,” Eder says. “More importantly, I’ve come to understand how the American Heartland thinks. That’s something you can’t learn from books. You have to experience it.”

Thank you, Jacob Eder, for sharing your insights and reflections. Your story is a powerful reminder of how transformative a single year abroad can be, academically and personally. Fulbright Germany is also deeply grateful for the inspiring collaborations and projects they’ve had the privilege to support and share with you over the past years: featuring voices like Frank Trommler, Kira Thurman, Alan E. Steinweis, Jacob Kushner, Stefanie Fischer and many others who continue to enrich our transatlantic community.



Jacob Eder speaking at the lectern; photo: Peter Adamik



Nebraska 2025; photo: Jacob Eder

Making Space for Something New

by Asja-Melina Schenk

I still remember sitting at my laptop late into the night, trying to come up with a design that felt even halfway good enough. It was the fifth week of my one-year master’s program in Atlanta, and I already felt completely lost. My ideas kept getting rejected. My confidence crumbled. Do you know that feeling – when you’re completely unsure of what to do next? When doubt creeps in and rejection makes you feel even smaller? Eventually, you arrive at a choice: give up and accept failure, or keep going – without any promise that it will lead to something at all. That year abroad turned out to be one of the hardest – and most important – of my life. Because somewhere between the self-doubt and the learning curve, something shifted. And in that process, I found love, a purpose, and eventually, a business rooted in something I had been chasing for years: good memories.

Becoming My Own Home

People often say, “Travel changes your life.” It sounds cliché – until it’s true. My first big trip was in 2013. I spent two years in Australia, chasing adventure but also, unknowingly, chasing healing. When my visa expired, I had to return to Germany – but something felt off. I wasn’t excited to go

back. In fact, I felt like I was leaving home, not returning to it. That was the first time I realized that home wasn’t where I was from – it was something I was learning to carry within myself. Singapore came next. While studying there, I followed my intuition and took a course in exhibition and spatial design – a decision that reshaped my academic path. I also had the opportunity to explore Southeast Asia, and through those solo adventures, I began to feel grounded – not in a place, but in myself. Over the years, I opened up more. The more I traveled, the more I learned to trust people – and myself. The world started to feel like a possibility. Then came Atlanta. I went through the Fulbright program, and it became a year full of growth – both professionally and personally – because that’s where I met my now-husband. He saw me in ways I hadn’t seen myself. With him, I didn’t have to shrink or pretend. I could simply be. He gave me space to dream, to heal, and to grow – even when those dreams meant traveling again, even when they meant being apart.

If you had asked me ten years ago what “home” meant, I might’ve answered with a location or a childhood memory. Now I know better: Home is the feeling of being completely



Photo shoot for a student project;
photo: Anushka Nigam

yourself, with someone who wants to see you become even more. And sometimes, that kind of home moves with you. Last year, we lived together in Los Angeles – a city I had never imagined calling home, but one that quickly became just that, because of who I shared it with. It wasn’t the apartment, the weather, or even the excitement of a new place. It was waking up next to someone who made space for all versions of me – the ambitious one, the lost one, the evolving one. Home is where your heart is – and mine was there, beating quietly in the background as I explored a new chapter of my professional life. At the Getty, I had the incredible opportunity to work with and learn from a team that helped reignite my creative confidence. It was there that a new idea began to grow – shaped by everything I had carried with me from my travels, especially the belief that memory matters.

Turning Memory Into Meaning

When I finally returned to Germany for a longer stay – during a difficult period in my life – I realized something that has never left me: the moments I carried with me, the mem-



Graduation at the Savannah College of Art and Design;
photo: Olaf Schenk

ories made across all the different countries, were the ones that kept me grounded in hard times. They reminded me of who I was, what I’d overcome, and where I still wanted to go. So, I’m building a business to help others do the same.

My little creative studio is dedicated to helping women actively create meaningful moments – and find ways to hold on to them. At the heart of the business are memory pieces (currently earrings) – small, wearable tokens of a moment you never want to forget. They’re not just jewelry. They’re anchors to courage. Symbols of becoming. Reminders of who you were when you dared to try.

My long-term goal is to create workshops and retreats for women – especially those in their 30s who feel stuck, lost, or in-between identities – to help them reconnect with their creativity, their confidence, and their next chapter. Because even when life feels uncertain, we deserve to feel rooted. And sometimes, all it takes is one good memory to bring us back to ourselves.



Australia;
photo: Daisy Jane Flowers



Asja-Melina was born and raised in Germany and is an interdisciplinary designer with Master’s degrees in Exhibition Design and Advertising. Awarded a Fulbright scholarship, she completed her Master’s at the Savannah College of Art and Design in Atlanta in 2022.

Today, she is building her own creative enterprise while working as a business coach, empowering others to bring their entrepreneurial visions to life.

Headshot by Fabienne Schenk

Managing the Divorce

Transatlantic Insecurity and Europe's Strategic Awakening

by Bernardo Navazo

In The Hague in June of 2025, NATO leaders reaffirmed their “ironclad” commitment to Article 5 and agreed to increase defence spending to 5% of GDP by 2035. But behind the show of unity lies growing divergence. The transatlantic bond, once a source of unquestioned stability, is now a source of strategic insecurity driven by America's new interests and world vision. As Europe scrambles to rearm, the deeper question lingers: how do you defend an alliance whose foundations are shifting beneath your feet?

1. A Summit of Silent Panic

The Hague summit confirmed what many in Europe have long suspected but only recently begun to articulate out loud: the transatlantic bond is no longer what it used to be and may never be again. The 5% GDP defence spending target may grab headlines, but its deeper meaning lies not in the figures themselves, but in the silent consensus they mask: the United States is disengaging from Europe. The question is not whether, but how fast, and under what terms, this disengagement will unfold.

The agreement reached in The Hague is as political as it is financial. Allies pledged to spend 5% of GDP on defence and security by 2035: 3.5% on NATO-defined core defence requirements and 1.5% on a broader range of resilience, innovation and industrial capabilities. For many, this was a bitter pill disguised as a show of unity. Behind closed doors several governments, including Spain, pushed to dilute the language or delay the targets. In the end, they yielded. The language of the declaration refers ambiguously to “Allies” (not “all Allies”) when setting the main 5% and 3.5% goals, but switches to “all Allies” for the 1.5% component: subtle linguistic games that betray deeper political divergences.

This silence, or forced consensus, reveals the true function of the 5% target. It is not just a commitment, it is a litmus test. Those who meet it are inside the castle walls (ie, America's security umbrella); those who don't may find the drawbridge up when they need it most.

The deeper crisis is not one of money, but of trust. Asked on his way to The Hague whether he still stood by NATO's mutual defence clause (Article 5), Donald Trump answered with characteristic ambiguity: “depends on your definition... I'm committed to life and safety. I'll give you an exact definition when I get there.” His comments were consistent with a long record. In 2018, Trump had famously told a NATO leader that if their country wasn't “paying its dues,” the U.S. would not come to its defence. “I'd encourage Russia to do whatever the hell they want,” he reportedly said.

This is not strategic ambiguity but strategic extortion. The resulting panic forced NATO to move Article 5 to the top of the final declaration, highlighting an underlying sign of how far things have shifted: what once was assumed now has to be spelled out. “We reaffirm our ironclad commitment to collective defence,” the text insists. But the very need to reaffirm exposes the erosion of deterrence. Without credibility, no clause can deter.

2. Trust, Conditionality, and Strategic Drift

The irony is sharp: NATO, once the cornerstone of collective security, now operates within a climate of *Transatlantic Insecurity*, not because of the alliance itself, but due to the unpredictability of its leading power and its new world vision. The relationship that once promised stability to Europe now carries risk. If Article 5 no longer offers guarantees, but instead hinges on conditionality and personal whim, it ceases to be a shield and becomes a gamble.

And the deeper irony is that, within this new paradigm, it is not far-fetched to imagine Washington engaging in some form of aggression (whether subtle or overt) against the territory of another NATO member state (i.e., Greenland), or the United States invoking mutual defense in a crisis of its own making, thereby dragging Europe into a conflict it neither started nor wants. The recent attack on Iran, undertaken without prior coordination with allies, is a case in point. While such actions may not legally trigger Article 5, they raise the troubling prospect that Europe could be pressured into showing solidar-



ity not out of defense, but as a consequence. That prospect politically blurs the line between today's formal alliance and a growing divergence in world views; and therein lies the essence of today's transatlantic insecurity.

The U.S. defence establishment is currently reviewing its global force posture and is expected to release a new National Defense Strategy by autumn 2025. Quietly but steadily, Washington is repositioning itself toward the Indo-Pacific. Europe is no longer the primary theatre of U.S. strategic concern; China is. This is not a temporary shift. It is a structural rebalancing.

The shift is not merely geographic, it is perceptual. While much of Europe still sees Russia as a vital and even existential threat, especially in countries like Poland, Estonia, or Finland, Washington increasingly treats the Russian front as a manageable legacy issue. The Pentagon's strategic gaze is now fixed firmly on Asia. This divergence is not benign. It breeds a sense of strategic abandonment in European capitals where deterrence still depends on a credible American presence.

And yet, if Article 5 were to be invoked in the foreseeable future, it would almost certainly be in response to a Russian act of aggression (cyber, hybrid or conventional). The irony is that the only truly collective war scenario for NATO is the one the United States seems progressively less invested in. That is the heart of the *Transatlantic Trust Gap*.

3. The Real Test Ahead

What Europe is discovering, perhaps not fast enough, is that strategic autonomy is no longer optional: it is the condition for NATO's survival, or at least its evolution into something more symmetrical. As Emmanuel Macron

warned years ago, “we are witnessing the brain death of NATO.” What he meant is clearer now: the alliance, as it was, no longer exists. What remains is a brand, a memory, and a habit. Whether it can become something new depends on Europe's ability to grow up politically, and fast.

France and the UK have already hinted that the continent's nuclear umbrella may no longer be American. Germany is rearming after decades of pacifism. Sweden and Finland are accelerating defence integration. Even the most Atlanticist countries now speak the language of diversification and risk management.

What is still missing is a unifying doctrine. Without it, Europe risks becoming a sum of reactions rather than a strategic actor.

The real test is not military. It is political. Can Europe defend itself without losing its soul? Can it reconcile deterrence with democracy, security with values? As Sánchez put it in a recent op-ed, “defending the European project requires investing in defence, yes, but also strengthening the welfare state and preserving the values that define our way of being in the world.” It is not a choice between security and principles. It is the challenge of holding both in an increasingly aggressive environment.

The U.S. once helped Europe face this challenge. Now, it is part of the challenge itself.

Bernardo Navazo is a geopolitical risk analyst and founder of Geopolitical Insights (.eu). He is a member of the Spanish Fulbright Association.

History and Purpose

The German Fulbright Alumni e.V. was founded in Frankfurt in 1986 by former Fulbrighters and now has over 1,200 members. The association is guided by the ideas of the program’s founder, Senator J. William Fulbright, to bring together people of different nations to contribute to world peace through better international understanding.

The association gathers globally minded students, scholars, and practitioners of a wide range of academic fields and professional expertise. Most of our members have spent a Fulbright year in the United States, and the Fulbright Alumni e.V. serves as the platform for which former grantees can continue to promote and work toward global understanding. We are committed to diversity, acceptance, and true internationality and perpetually strive to encourage further education regarding others’ customs, histories, and challenges.

Based on personal and academic experiences and insights gained through participation in an international exchange program, the fundamental tenets of the mission of German Fulbright Alumni e.V. members are the following:

- to strengthen and support cross-cultural contacts and exchange between Fulbrighters from all over the world
- to encourage dialogue and interaction between international scholars, experts, and activists on topics important to the political, social, and cultural life of our societies.

In promoting its political support for the Fulbright program, our association maintains close but independent contact with the Fulbright Commission in Berlin to support the German-American Fulbright program.

The Fulbright Alumni e.V. is supported solely by its members. Grants and contributions from foundations, corporations, and individuals are welcomed.

Activities

Based on a young, lively, and broad-based membership, our association organizes a diverse range of regional and nation-wide events. Admission is reduced for members of the association, but all events are open to guests and members of partner organizations.

National Events

The Fulbright Alumni e.V. organizes a series of national events every year in order to realize the goals mentioned above. Equally important are the exchanges fostered among our members and interdisciplinary discussions on current issues.

General Assembly & Winter or Spring Ball

Every year, all members are invited to the General Assembly. At the assembly, each board member reports on his or her activities during the year, followed by the election of a new board. After the General Assembly, the ball takes place to mark another year in celebration.

Welcome Meeting

Each fall, the Welcome Meeting offers an exciting opportunity for contacts and networking. Our main goal is to welcome back German returnees as well as get to know American Fulbrighters just embarking on their Fulbright experience in Germany. The meetings foster discussion forums to address issues relevant to those newly returned from a year abroad and jointly serve as an introduction to the Fulbright family beyond the exchange year.

Strategy Meeting

At the Strategy Meeting, the most devoted core of our members gather to discuss the present and future of the association we all hold so dear.

Sailing Trips

“Bright People under Full Sail:” International sailing trips on the Baltic Sea and on Lake Constance have brought lots of joy over the years.

Ski Trip

NEW: An official Fulbright Ski Trip is planned for January 2026. Make sure to sign up soon!

Regional Chapter Activities

Regional chapters organize more informal cultural and social events on a monthly basis, including lectures, discussions, and Stammtische. To find out about the next Stammtisch in your area, contact the regional coordinators listed on the following page. Other typical events open to everyone include movies, outdoor activities, and cultural events. Of course, we also celebrate American holidays, such as Independence Day and Thanksgiving.

International Activities

Our association places emphasis on strengthening personal contacts among Fulbright alumni from around the world. Some core activities are listed here:

- 2024 Fulbright Association 47th Annual Conference in Washington, D.C.
- 2023 ENAM Conference “Future of Democracy – Where Do We Go Now?” in Tblisi, Georgia
- 2023 Fulbright Association 46th Annual Conference in Denver
- 2023 ENAM Conference “Our Energy Future in a World of Disinformation” in Dublin, Ireland
- 2022 Fulbright Association 45th Annual Conference in Washington, D.C., USA
- 2022 ENAM Conference in Cagliari, Italy
- 2019 Fulbright Association 42nd Annual Conference in Washington, D.C., USA
- 2019 ENAM Conference “Disinformation: Fake News of New Trolls” in Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria
- 2018 ENAM Conference “One Europe – One Transatlantic Partnership” in Cologne, Germany
- 2018 Fulbright Association 41st Annual Conference in Puebla, Mexico
- 2018 “Alumni-Focused Strategy Seminar: Best Practices, Success Stories and Alumni Associations” in Yerevan, Armenia
- 2017 Fulbright Association 40th Annual Conference in Washington, D.C.
- 2016 ENAM Conference “Energy, Renewables & Sustainability” in Baku, Azerbaijan
- 2016 Water Act! Heritage and Innovation Symposium, Ifrane/Morocco
- 2016 Fulbright Association 39th Annual Conference in Washington, D.C.
- 2015 International Fulbright Conference “Water Act”, Paris
- 2015 Fulbright Association 38th Annual Conference in Atlanta
- 2014 Fulbright Association 37th Annual Conference in Washington, D.C.
- 2013 Fulbright Association 36th Annual Conference in Washington, D.C.
- 2012 1st ENAM Annual Conference in Rome
- 2010 Fulbright Association 33rd Annual Conference, Buenos Aires

Our Services

The association publishes the national journal, the FRANKly, every year, as well as running a mentoring program for incoming U.S. grantees and local alumni. As a service to the general

public, the national office provides information and assistance to any private person, university, or institution on questions of cultural and academic exchange with the United States. Each regional chapter contacts and assists American Fulbright visiting scholars in its local area. For further information, please contact our national office in Frankfurt or one of our officers listed here. Our newest format is our podcast “Fulbright Pulse” which features alumni from around the world.

PowWows / Focus Conferences

Different regional chapters of our association organize several national conferences and seminars every year, usually covering a specific topic.

A selection of past events:

- 2023 Transatlantic Alumni Conference “Reimagining Transatlantic Bridges for a Brighter Future,” Erfurt
- 2014 International Fulbright Conference “Entrepreneurs in a Borderless World,” Berlin
- 2011 The German Fulbright Alumni Association at 25: Shaping a Changing World, Berlin
- 2009 change(a)crisis, Munich
- 2007 Climate Change, Erlangen
- 2005 J. William Fulbright Centennial, Frankfurt
- 2004 EU Enlargement, Berlin
- 2002 Quo vadis USA, Berlin
- 2001 Nutrition, Calw
- 1999 Biotechnology, Frauenchiemsee
- 1998 Intercultural Communications, Frankfurt
- 1997 Managing Public Organizations, Frankfurt
- 1996 A Chance for Global Understanding, Berlin
- 1995 Environmental Strategy, Heidenheim
- 1994 Where is our New Frontier? Stuttgart
- 1993 Market Leadership and Brand Names, Böblingen
- 1992 Health, Cologne
- 1991 German Reunification and the Future of German-American Relations, Berlin
- 1990 Signs for Tomorrow’s Architecture, Landscape, and Urban Development, Darmstadt
- 1989 The French Revolution in American and German Perspectives, Regensburg
- 1988 The United States and Germany: Corporate Cultures in Comparison, Mannheim



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New Members

Welcome to the Fulbright Alumni e.V.! As a member, you become part of a unique network of change-makers. Participate in our national and regional activities, meet inspiring people, and contribute new ideas!

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 - Vera Wedekind
 - Andreas Weiß
 - Cornelia Wenzel
 - Christiane Wiehe
 - Luca Zampa
 - Maria Zirenko

Remembered

Celebrating the Lives of Alumni and Friends	Prof. Harald Euler	1943-2025
	Prof. Dr. Rolf Moeckel	1973-2025

Greetings from the J.W. Fulbright Association of Spain!

by Demian Martos

Over the years we have enjoyed cordial relations with the German Fulbright Alumni, and we would like to deepen those ties by increasing contacts and exchanges. We are excited for the opportunity of doing so by contributing to this year’s edition of FRANKly. We hope it will be one more way of strengthening our friendship and collaboration in a mutually beneficial effort to put the Fulbright spirit into practice – the spirit we bring to help make the world a better place as we give back to society a bit of what we have received. This common effort is more important than ever at a time when the value of the Fulbright program is being questioned.

What better way to celebrate our shared Fulbright heritage than to meet up in person! In the year 2000 we organized an international gathering of Fulbrighters in Toledo to celebrate the new millennium, and of course the Germans came in force. Some of us met up again in Athens in 2004 and in Marrakesh in 2006 followed by a visit to Tenerife in the Canary Islands in 2007. In April of this year, we were delighted to have some German Fulbrighters join us in a visit to La Palma, the most northwesterly island of the Canary Islands.

It was so much fun, we are planning another in-depth cultural visit to the island of Lanzarote in the spring of 2026.

And to more effectively channel information about similar events of mutual interest, the German and Spanish Fulbright associations are pleased to announce the formation of the **FA Alemania & Spanien Interest Group!** Through this forum we will provide information about our various activities and projects. For over 30 years we have featured a monthly guest speaker series on a wide range of topics. In Spanish these are known as tertulias. These talks are streamed on Zoom whenever possible, and we would like to propose that we forward an invitation to German FA members, whenever one of these talks is in English. Furthermore, if any German FA members are visiting Madrid at Christmas time or early summer we would like to welcome them to attend our Xmas or summer dinners during which we introduce new members of the Fulbright community.

Part of our mission as an association is to raise funds for scholarships. In addition to the generous donations from members of the Fulbright community, we also sell quality wine and olive oil. This year we are again offering an excellent **extra virgin olive oil from Jaén**. If anyone is interested, we could even organize a tasting event in Berlin! Don’t hesitate to reach out to **Demian Martos** (demian.martos@gmail.com). For more information about the Fulbright Association of Spain go to **www.asoc-fulbright.es!**



Fulbright Alumni trip to La Palma, April '25



Photos: A. López

Selected olive oil from Jaén

Our New Outreach Section in FRANKly

As Outreach Coordinator, my goal is to strengthen ties between our alumni and the broader Fulbright and transatlantic community. The articles of our new

outreach section highlight the value such connections can create for our alumni. If you have ideas for future outreach activities, I’d be glad to hear from you > **Andreas Drexler** (outreach@fulbright-alumni.de).

Palmero sube a La Palma

2025 Trip

by Wiltrud Hammelstein

After an unforgettable trip to Tenerife in 2003*, the Spanish Fulbright Association organized another trip in the week before Easter – Semana Santa – to the Canary Islands. This time it took 40 Fulbrighters to the beautiful island – la isla bonita – La Palma, including 3 Fulbrighters from Germany. Our Spanish Fulbright friends, Agustin Guimera and Angel Alvarez, put together an extraordinary program by getting the group access to people and places that one would not get to see as a visitor or tourist.

Angel was the chief of logistics and also created a WhatsApp group called “Palmero sube a La Palma” which was very helpful to communicate before, during and after the trip, up to today as I write this article.

For this report, Agustin who is a native from Tenerife and historian by trade, provided a summary on La Palma’s history. From its conquest in 1493 till the 18th century, La Palma was renowned for its sugar cane and wine exports to Northern Europe and the Spanish West Indies. An important merchant community of Flemish, Portuguese and Castilian origin settled on the island. Up to today, the island has an outstanding history and artistic legacy of that time: architecture, sculpture, paintings, silver handcraft, silk works and more. Besides its rich cultural history, La Palma also has unique

natural history and beauty. The island has been shaped by volcanic activity over centuries, with the latest eruption in 2021 still very visible.

La Palma contains one of the Spanish National Parks, a deep valley with pine trees and water cascades. On the North-East side, it has a botanic relic of the tertiary age – Los Tilos Rainforest. Our visit to the rainforest was cut short. After a bit of hiking we had to leave due to warnings of torrentious rains.

During our 5 day trip our group visited 5 churches in Santa Cruz and Los Sauces as well as the Sanctuaria Las Angustias with Flemish art and architecture. We also went to various museums, like the silk museum in El Paso, the rum museum in San Andres, the island museum in Santa Cruz and the Royal Cosmological Society’s Municipal Library.

Our ‘guagua’ (the name for a bus on the Canary Islands) and our driver, Jonas, mastered the steepest serpentine of which we encountered a lot. We visited the La Caldera de Taburiente National Park and were able to witness spectacular views with changing lights, clouds and rainbows. We also drove into the lava bed of the 2021 Tajogaite volcanic eruption. As the lava could still be hot, we were asked not to wander off the paths. From the viewpoint Mirador El Time we had a spectacular view of the new volcanic lava beds and the west side of La Palma.

Our busdriver, Jonas, did his masterpiece by driving our guagua through the clouds

*see FRANKly 15

All photos:
Wiltrud Hammelstein



In the rainforest



In front of the Grantecan above the clouds

The volcano San Antonio



The author at Mirador El Time



Agustin Guimera in conversation with author Elsa Lopez



On the Calle Real with the typical wooden balconies



At the procession

and up La Palma’s mountains to the astrophysicist observatory Roque de los Muchachos (2.426 meters altitude). There the “Grantecan” (Gran Telescopio de Canarias) can be found – the biggest optical and infrared telescope in the world – as well as the new gamma Cherenkov telescopes.

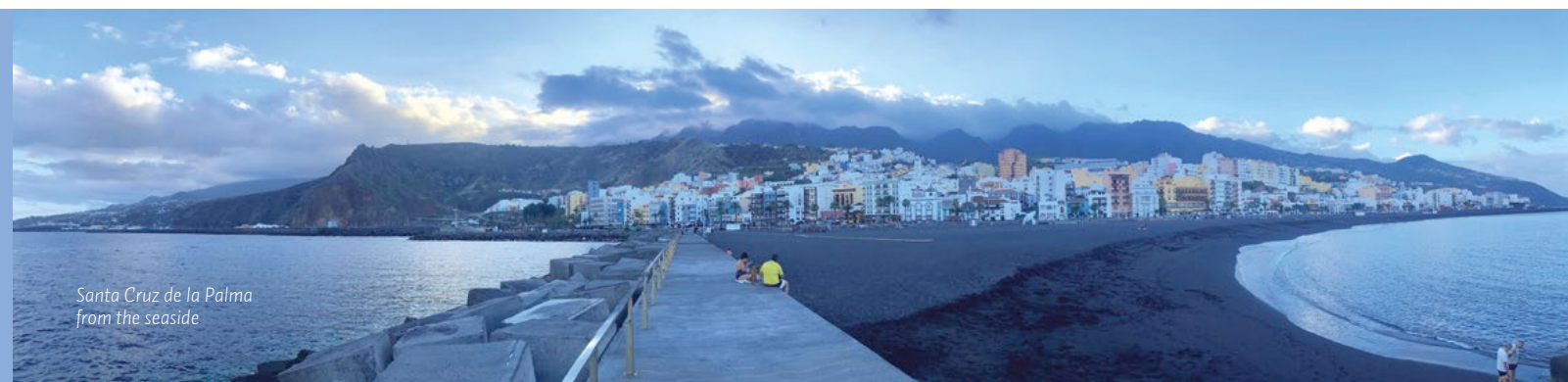
A visit to La Palma would not be complete without a walk on the rim of the San Antonio Volcano and to the visitor centers. The volcano erupted in 1677 and its lava formed a new coastal platform. In the vicinity of the volcano, the typical malvasia grapes are grown. We visited the Teneguia wine cellars and were treated to a wine tasting in nature. South of Teneguia are the Salinas and the Fuencaliente Lighthouse. After a walk through the colorful salt fields, we had lunch at the restaurant Jardín de la Sal which also hosts a little exposition about the manual harvest of the salt and has a shop.

Semana Santa is a special season in La Palma (and all of Spain), with processions every evening in the streets of Santa Cruz. They feature religious floats and participants in traditional robes with hooded sinners carrying the cross and the wooden figures of holy people on floats on their shoulders. The processions are accompanied by a marching band which plays solemn but beautiful tunes and people follow the procession slowly through the streets.

Another cultural highlight was the “Tertulia” at the exquisite Club Nautico with renowned Spanish author and poet Elsa Lopez who lives in La Palma. She had agreed to read from some of her books and engaged in conversation with Agustin. For Roman Kritsberg, one of the participants from Germany, they organized a piano so he could play before and after the reading. The evening ended with the group singing “Besa me mucho” accompanied by Roman.

Our meetings with another La Palma native, Enrique Luis Lorroque, provided insights into the history and current economic and cultural challenges the island is facing. He accompanied the group from Santa Cruz Calle Real, with its typical Canarian Renaissance facades, past the Plaza de Espana, with the townhall, to the Royal Nautic Club of Santa Cruz de la Palma – right at the sailing harbor for dinner. He also welcomed the group to his family’s “Hacienda de Abajo” in Tazacorte for a delicious lunch. Enrique Luis gave the group a tour through the estate which houses authentic art from various centuries.

We all agreed that this had been a fantastic trip with so many unforgettable memories and that we should not wait another 20 years to organize the next trip to the Canary Islands during Semana Santa. Muchas gracias y hasta la proxima vez!



Santa Cruz de la Palma
from the seaside

Designing Europe's Future

A Fulbright Journey into Policy, Participation, and Transatlantic Collaboration

Fulbright Study Tours: Brussels (2024) and Luxembourg (2025)

by Genevieve Brechel and György Kovács

Innovation and citizen engagement are the cornerstones of Europe's future. Technological advancements alone are not enough to solve complex societal challenges; active public participation – through design thinking and co-design approaches – is essential for a resilient, democratic, and inclusive society.

This is a perspective shared by Genevieve Brechel, a service designer, design thinker, strategist, design mentor, Service Design Drinks Berlin co-host, one of the community builders of the German Fulbright Alumni Association's Berlin Chapter and initiator of FULBRIGHT FEAT. She has observed how immersive Fulbright study tours, like those to **Brussels (2024)** and **Luxembourg (2025)**, are profoundly shaping the transatlantic Fulbright community's understanding of the European Union. These journeys offer a deep dive into European policymaking through firsthand encounters and are enriched by comparative insights from American counterparts.

The trips, organized by the European Network of American Alumni Associations (ENAM) and the Hungarian Fulbright

Association and led by its president, Dr. György Kovács, go beyond mere education. They embody the Fulbright mission to foster mutual understanding: *"We connect alumni and inspire you to give back in ways that advance cultural understanding and peaceful ties around the world."* György Kovács is a European legal scholar, attorney, head of the graduate program for Digital Technology and Data Economy at the Catholic University in Budapest, a former European Commission policy officer, and member of the executive board and co-founder of ENAM.

The Evolution of EU Decision-Making

EU decision-making is shifting from isolated policy work to an interplay between institutions, technology, and citizens, driven by demands for transparency and inclusion. Concepts like CrowdLaw as well as democratic innovations are now practical tools for co-creating policy. CrowdLaw channels public input via platforms such as the commission's "Have Your Say" (used for the AI Act). Democratic innovations include processes like the Irish Citizens' Assembly and the Conference on the Future of Europe citizens' panels, using deliberation to inform lawmaking.

This collaboration boosts legitimacy and expertise while empowering citizens to shape policies that fit real needs. It aligns with the Draghi Report, which stresses community and engagement for resilience. Legally, instruments such as the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) make governance more responsive; EU law increasingly blends traditional doctrine with design thinking and co-design.

Designing Europe Through Fieldwork and Co-Design

As a service designer, Genevieve Brechel views design thinking and co-design – developing policies with citizens by engaging diverse users – as fundamental to addressing the EU's complex challenges. These empathy-, collaboration- and iteration-based approaches are reinforced by her work and the immersive Fulbright trips.

György Kovács, a European lawyer, underscores the value of embedding these methods in EU legal and institutional practice. He sees the trips as spaces for interdisciplinary learning, where law evolves through dialogue and experimentation. In areas like digital platform regulation, legal certainty must balance with adaptability and citizen-centred policy.



Visiting EU institutions in Brussels

The transformative potential appears in trip experiences:

- **Empathy:** Direct engagement with institutional "users" builds understanding of contexts and constraints, laying the groundwork for citizen-centred policy.
- **Co-creation:** Diverse participant profiles mirror the interdisciplinary collaboration central to design thinking – akin to the Conference on the Future of Europe's citizens' panels.
- **Iteration:** The EU's proactive work on topics such as AI shows the need to prototype and refine. The commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC), particularly through its EU Policy Lab, uses design sprints and co-creation workshops to develop policies.

The Draghi Report and the Role of Design

The recent Draghi Report, "The future of European competitiveness," provides a roadmap for the EU, identifying three critical areas: closing the innovation gap, accelerating decarbonization, and enhancing economic security. These topics were central to discussions during the study trips, with US Fulbright fellows providing valuable comparative insights. The report emphasizes that success requires a fundamental shift in approach, highlighting the need for massive investment in high-tech and AI, addressing skills gaps, and promoting less regulatory complexity.

The report also stresses the vital role of proactive citizen involvement. This is where approaches in service design, design thinking and co-design become indispensable.

Designers can help the EU realize the report's ambitions by:

- **Establishing Service-Oriented Strategic Projects:** Fundamentally rethinking and redesigning public services to focus on the entire user journey.
- **Driving Citizen-Centered Innovation:** Ensuring that investments in AI truly meet societal needs by co-creating solutions with diverse user groups.
- **Facilitating Cross-Sectoral Collaboration:** Breaking down silos to integrate public administrations, startups, and citizens into a coherent ecosystem.
- **Prototyping and Iterating Policy:** Using low-risk, iterative testing of policy ideas to make policies more agile and resilient.



International Fulbright Group – European Council

All photos: Genevieve Brechel



Genevieve Brechel at the European Commission, exploring the heart of policy-making



At the European External Action Service (EEAS)

A Look Inside the Fulbright Study Tours

The Fulbright study trips are more than academic excursions; they are living laboratories for understanding the EU and transatlantic relations.

Brussels 2024: Navigating EU Governance

The trip to Brussels offered a direct engagement with institutions like the European Parliament, providing insight into legislative processes. A visit to NATO Headquarters highlighted the significance of transatlantic cooperation for global security. Interactions with the European External Action Service (EEAS) illustrated the EU's commitment to diplomacy. Participants also gained national perspectives with visits to the Hungarian Embassy and the Permanent Representation of Hungary to the EU. The program also included an insightful session with Viktor Bottka of the European Commission's Legal Service, who shed light on competition and state aid enforcement, and another with Krisztina Stumpf of DG CNECT, who provided an overview of the EU's evolving platform regulation landscape.

Luxembourg 2025: Experiencing AI and Diplomacy

The trip to Luxembourg placed AI, data, and justice at the forefront. Discussions centered on Europe's ambitious vision for AI. Engagements with the European Commission DG CNECT and the Court of Justice of the European Union provided insights into the legal and ethical frameworks. An unforgettable highlight was an audience with His Royal Highness Grand Duke Henri of Luxembourg, which reinforced the human dimension of diplomacy.



Exploring the city center of Luxembourg



Learning about the AI Continent Action Plan at the European Commission DG CNECT

Designing for the People, Pushing for a Better Europe

Genevieve Brechel is a strong believer in leveraging design methodologies to facilitate collaborative strategy formation. These study trips have provided her with an invaluable, deep understanding of the European system. She firmly believes human-centered design can fundamentally transform how EU policies are conceived and delivered, moving from bureaucracy to truly understanding and responding to citizen needs. Embedding design thinking into EU governance can foster stronger citizen participation, significantly enhance public services, and ultimately strengthen the Union from within.

These goals are powerfully complemented by György Kovács's expertise. Dr. Kovács brings critical insights into how EU law and policy evolve through dialogue, experimentation, and citizen engagement. His work emphasizes legal frameworks must be doctrinally sound yet responsive to real-world challenges. The study tours empower participants to explore EU machinery and boldly consider how law, policy, and design can work together for a stronger, more participatory Europe.

The Fulbright experience is a lifelong commitment. Fulbright alumni eager to deepen their understanding of Europe, engage with this vibrant community, or discuss how design can contribute to a better, more citizen-centered EU, are encouraged to reach out to Genevieve Brechel via email genevievebrechel@gmail.com or rc.berlin.projects@fulbright-alumni.de.

And those interested in being part of these transformative study trips are invited to reach out to György Kovács via email gyorgykovacs@hotmail.com or gyorgy.kovacs@fulbrightmail.org.

Their participation strengthens this vital network and continues to propel the Fulbright mission forward.



The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU)



International Fulbright Stammtisch with Belgium and Luxembourg based alumni

EVENTS



Participants in a Fulbright sailing trip during late summer of 2024; photo: Evelina Mathäus

by Henning Blunck

On August 30th, 2024, 17 cheerful and motivated Fullis gathered once again for the almost annual Fulbright sailing event in Kressbronn on Lake Constance. After a multi-year pause, the event successfully returned to its annual rhythm in 2023 and was a complete success. Thanks to the organization by Franz Berger, the preparations and schedule followed a well-rehearsed routine. Franz managed to recruit three colorful crews made up of experienced veterans and fresh faces. The skippers, alongside Franz, Robert and Axel, checked the boats on Friday afternoon – our lovely Tonga, the Sundowner and of course, the Chill-Out! After that, we got to know each other over fresh pasta with pesto (thanks, Rene!). On the Tonga, the obligatory pineapple was hoisted with party lights, and a cocktail bar was set up (thanks, Robert!).

After a hearty breakfast and a spontaneous battery swap on the Sundowner, we set sail towards Bregenz with a sporty 2.5 knots of wind (gusts up to 4!) and clear skies. Along the way, all boats made swimming stops. The members of the Sundowner discovered their synchronized swimming talent and performed a spontaneous, absolutely Olympic-worthy choreography. The Tonga and the Chill-Out even made a stop in the beautiful Fußacher Bay.

Just in time for a delicious dinner, all boats reached the Bregenz sports harbor. At Sail 73 (with live grilling by Roy), we enjoyed the sunset with a view of the lake. This time, the party hotspot was the Sundowner, where we enjoyed wine, cocktails, and of course, Aperol Spritz.

On Sunday morning, Axel and Robert treated their crews to a delicious breakfast of pancakes and Crêpe Suzette. I'm sure it was lovely at Franz's place too. Under similar wind conditions, we began our return journey, during which we didn't set any speed records. However, all boats took plenty of swimming breaks in the radiant sunshine. We enjoyed one last snack upon our return to the harbor of Kressbronn. The precautionary bribery beer for the harbor master was able to be returned to the crew thanks to our timely arrival.

The encounters with old and new acquaintances are the highlight of the Fulbright sailing event for me. This year, the Sundowner had two particularly fresh alumni on board. Alessandro and Henrik were in New York when COVID broke out. Nevertheless, they found the scholarship as enriching as we older folks who participated in the program many years ago.

It was once again a thoroughly successful event!

Spring Ball 2025

Märchenhaftes München
(Or: A Munich Fairytale)

by Caroline Gunderson

Once upon a time (ahem, on the first weekend of April) our Fulbright Community was brought together for our annual Spring Ball. A highlight-filled turn of events ensued.

Chapter 1: A Welcome in the Sun

Munich greeted us with the springy sunshine of southern Germany as the weekend kicked off with a little-known Bavarian tradition: an evening at a Biergarten. While Königlicher Hirschgarten served as our host, we caught up with old friends, chatted with new faces, and soaked up the Fulbright atmosphere long into the evening, all in anticipation of the festivities yet to come.

Hours later, with the Hirsche of the Hirschgarten eager to get their beauty rest and our group needing to do the same, the Kellner sent us trekking back to our accommodations for a good night's sleep. We did, after all, have an ambitious next day ahead of us.

Chapter 2: I Vote ... You

Of course, seasoned veterans know that for all the fun and festivities it entails, our Spring Ball weekend is not all fun and festivities. We had a bit of business to attend to.

Bright and early on Saturday morning, our Alumni Association members met at Scholastika, a beautiful venue directly in the heart of the city, for our annual General Assembly.

Over the course of the day, board members gave accounts of all the work and engagement done throughout the year. We made space to reflect on the last year and look forward to the year to come before starting this new 2025-26 chapter with the election of our new board.

And here, a belated congratulations to all elected, especially the new executive board of Paul, Julius, Adrian, Noura, and Amanda!

Chapter 3: A Night of Festivity

After a short wardrobe and set change, Scholastika reopened its doors to welcome Fulbrighters and their guests to the weekend's main event! A champagne reception and chance to mingle set the jovial atmosphere for the evening with all in high spirits as we opened the official evening program. We were hugely grateful to welcome as one of our honored guests the Consul General of the U.S. Consulate in Munich, Dr. James Miller. In his remarks, Dr. Miller shared a thoughtful account of his most formative experiences in transatlantic spaces, urging us to retain our openness to, curiosity in, and passion for cultural exchange.

After these sentiments had offered a bit of food for thought, the buffet was opened, dinner was enjoyed, and the space was filled with the energetic and thoughtful conversation.

The encore? The presentation of the Alumni Association's Jürgen Mulert Award, an honor given annually to a Fulbright alum who exemplifies our community in their work. This year, we were thrilled to present the award to Alexandra Swanson, the managing director of #SheTransformsIT, an initiative making strides to bring women and girls into technology spaces.

Concluding the honorary portion of the evening were a few words by the outgoing president of the Alumni Association, Andreas Drexler, a round of thanks to outgoing board members, and a warm welcome to the new set of engaged, passionate Fullies carrying the wonderful work of the Association forward!



The new board — Paul Künzle, Julius Hoffmann, Noura Bouhra, Amanda Gläser-Bligh & Adrian Berger; photo: Marius Brinkmann

Consul General of the U.S. Consulate in Munich, Dr. James Miller, with Alexandra Swanson (recipient of the annual Jürgen Mulert Award for her outstanding work at #SheTransformsIT) and Andreas Drexler (former president of the FAeV); photo: Marius Brinkmann



The new (extended) board



Cheerful crowd at Spring Ball 2025



Caroline Gunderson (main organizer) opening the buffet



Amanda and Caroline at our association's General Assembly



Our hard working GA election committee — Wiltrud Hammelstein, Jürgen Simon and Tristan Cristofolini. We even celebrated Wiltrud's birthday along the way!

And thus, the formal program was over. The dance floor was officially open.

And open it stayed. For a while. For a very good long while. Until finally, the clock struck 3 AM, our S-Bahns turned to pumpkins, and a karaokeing of Robbie Williams' Angels by the last Fullies left on the dance floor sent us packing.

I don't doubt the dancing could have soldiered on until the wee small hours, yet there was still one agenda item to be checked off.

The Final Act: The Schnitzeljagd

In an exciting twist of tradition, the typical Sunday city tour was turned into an exercise in Fulbright creativity and team spirit. Meeting at Marienplatz, Fullies were divided into teams and sent on a wild chase through the city, equipped with nothing but a few cheeky clues, their winning intellect, and the promise of prizes.

The hunt came down to a photo finish at the last stop, AmerikaHaus München, where a goodie bag of American snacks was waiting for the two winning teams.

With candy of all kinds dolled out and many a lovely memory made, it was time to bid adieu to the 2025 Spring Ball weekend, anticipation already building for next year!

P.S. A very big thank you to everyone involved in organizing this event. Alex Rose, Timo Päsche, the 2025 Executive Board, and all others whose generosity of time made the event possible, you are so appreciated!

All photos by Iwo Hasenkamp unless otherwise noted

An Evening of Exchange and Perspectives

by Alexandra Schaller

In September 2024, the frizzforum in Berlin hosted **FULBRIGHT FEAT. JOURNALISM**, organized in cooperation with Fulbright's Young Professional Journalist Program.

The event brought together media professionals, creatives, and journalism enthusiasts. In a series of short presentations, five members of the Fulbright network shared insights into their careers, current projects, and perspectives on the evolving role of journalism.

Perspectives from Across the Media Landscape

Jesse George opened the program with reflections on his work at the intersection of media, diplomacy, and public affairs. With over 15 years of experience – including positions at the U.S. Embassy in Berlin and Tagesschau – he discussed how institutions engage with the media and the importance of cross-cultural communication.

Rachel Stern, a Fulbright scholar and graduate of Columbia Journalism School, works as a freelance journalist and editor in Germany. Her writing has appeared in Spiegel Online, Die Zeit, Deutsche Welle, The Local, and The Huffington Post. She spoke about the opportunities and challenges of covering German society from an international perspective.

Viktor Hübner, a photographer and writer, uses a combination of photography, interviews, and written narratives to explore themes such as community, ideology, and economic class. His 2022 book, "The Americans I Met", documents his encounters from across the United States. In his talk, he emphasized journalism's role in capturing lived experiences and societal change.

Alexandra Schaller, head of audio and podcasting at FUNKE Mediengruppe, presented on the growing importance of digital formats in journalism. Drawing on her early work as a video and audio journalist at t-online, she highlighted the evolution of audience habits, discussed how podcasts are becoming an integral part of media outreach and engagement, and spoke about the increasing role of AI in journalistic work.

Johannes Ehrmann, a journalist at ZEIT Online and author of several non-fiction books, concluded the presentations. His work often focuses on family, migration, and masculinity. His most recent book, "Sons of Freedom" (2023), explores



An engaged and diverse audience – attendees from a wide range of backgrounds came together for the event.



The evening's speakers (from left to right): Jesse George, Alexandra Schaller, Rachel Stern, Johannes Ehrmann, Victor Hübner

the role of German immigrants in the founding of the United States. He spoke about connecting historical research with contemporary social issues.

Cross-Border Dialogue

The evening continued with a reception, offering space for informal discussion and exchange. Among the guests were 18 early-career U.S. journalists currently in Germany as part of Fulbright Germany's Berlin Capital Program, providing attendees with an opportunity to engage with emerging voices in American journalism.

Earlier that day, the group visited FUNKE Mediengruppe's central editorial office, where they explored current challenges faced by German media industry. Topics included audience engagement, combating misinformation, and the integration of AI and other digital tools in newsroom operations. The visit was part of the program's broader theme: "A German context to challenges journalists face."

FULBRIGHT FEAT. JOURNALISM highlighted the value of international dialogue in journalism and the importance of diverse perspectives in addressing shared challenges. With participants contributing experiences from both sides of the Atlantic, the event offered a timely space for reflection, learning, and collaboration in an ever-changing media environment.

Photos: Michel Rieck

Illuminating the Future of the Performing Arts

by Jennifer Williams

Live music, intriguing images, and compelling words filled Prachtwerk – Neukölln's beloved cultural venue – in December 2024. The Fulbright Alumni Berlin Chapter presented **FULBRIGHT FEAT. PERFORMANCE**, showcasing the cutting-edge work of Fulbrighters shaping the performing arts.

This unique event blended inspiring talks with live performances, all within the atmosphere of one of Berlin's hippest destinations. Curated by Fulbright alumna and opera director Jennifer Williams, the event included an exciting twist: Prachtwerk is owned by Fulbright alumnus John Hasler.

Fulbrighters are leaders in all their fields, including the performing arts. Alumni in performance include soprano Renée Fleming (Germany, 1984), composer Philip Glass (France, 1964) and composer George Walker – who was the first African American to win the Pulitzer Prize for Music (France, 1957). FULBRIGHT FEAT. PERFORMANCE featured five notable Fulbrighters currently making waves in Germany.

Daniel Brunet (Germany, 2001 & 2002) is a director, performer, producer, theater manager, and translator. Brunet became Artistic Director of English Theatre Berlin | International Performing Arts Center in 2012 and established an artistic concept there that mirrors his own work: English as a working language, used by non-native speakers and native speakers alike in bilingual or multilingual works.

Nik Divall (Germany, 2024) is an Australian-American guitarist and lutenist. He has won over 15 prizes in competitions, including twice winning the Tuesday Musical Guitar Competition, the ECU Guitar Competition, and placing second in the Adelaide International Guitar Competition.

John Hasler (Germany, 2001), hailing from the Chicago suburbs, owns and manages Prachtwerk, a bar and art venue in Berlin, Germany. He lives and works with his wife Stephanie and daughter Philomena in Neukölln.

Become a FULBRIGHT FEAT. Ambassador

FULBRIGHT FEAT. is not limited to journalism or performance. This event series aims to inspire other Fulbrighters to become ambassadors for their areas of expertise. Imagine events like



Panel discussion with the artists.



Delightful music was enjoyed!

Kaso (USA, 2017) is a German R&B singer and songwriter who creates modern sound through melancholic melodies and trap beats. His songs explore the complex facets of love and heartbreak. By contrasting a soft voice with raw lyrics, Kaso brings a fresh perspective to German Hip Hop.

Jennifer Williams (Germany, 2012) is an internationally acclaimed opera director, multimedia and devising artist, and author. Recent engagements include the Nederlandse Reisopera, Bayreuther Festspiele and Manhattan School of Music guest faculty. She is the author of the new book, Archaeology of the Political Unconscious: Theater and Opera in East Berlin, 1967-1977 (Routledge).

The event concluded with a stimulating panel discussion with all featured artists. Panelists shared their insights on the future of the performing arts and technology's influence on artistic creation and audience connection. Everyone lingered afterwards to enjoy networking and socializing, the opportunity to meet the artists, and a chance to soak in Prachtwerk's delightful ambiance.

FULBRIGHT FEAT. HISTORY OR TECH, or any other field that ignites passion within the Fulbright community. **Interested in hosting the next FULBRIGHT FEAT. event? Reach out to Genevieve Brechel at rc.berlin.projects@fulbright-alumni.de.**

Photos: Arundhati Shenoy



What's up in Munich

by Andreas Schoberth*

Eisstockschießen at Nockherberg;
photo: Andreas Schoberth

The past twelve months with the Fulbright Alumni regional chapter in Munich have been full of memorable moments which were sometimes busy, sometimes laid-back, but always with good company. One of the highlights was our Thanksgiving dinner at the Hard Rock Café. It felt great to see so many familiar faces gathered in one place, including our friends from the PPP and APPP exchange programs.

But that was just the start of our year-round fun. We celebrated the holidays with a joyful secret Santa at Hans im Glück, and kicked off the new year with some competitive and classic Bavarian curling at Nockherberg.

We also made a small but significant change: we renamed our monthly “Stammtisch” to “monthly get-together”. This simple change made our younger alumni feel more welcome, and it was so great to see them join us at places like Ruff’s Burger and Papa Benz. As the weather warmed up, our favorite moments were spent together in the famous beer gardens of the Englischer Garten, enjoying the sunshine at Chinesischer Turm, Aumeister, and Seehaus.

The 4th of July was a truly special experience, starting with an emotional speech from Consul General Dr. James N. Miller at the US Consulate, and the national anthems sung by a live singer. Chatting with PPP and APPP alumni afterwards while enjoying some typical American food and beverages was another experience. We then continued the celebration with a Fulbright Alumni BBQ on a private roof terrace, a party that holds a special place in our hearts as our second-favorite event after Thanksgiving.

Looking ahead, we’re all excited for our September sailing trip on Lake Constance. It’s moments like these that truly capture the spirit of our community – a positive, vibrant, and welcoming group that always has something to offer everyone.

For more information, visit our page:

<https://fulbright-alumni.de/regional-chapters/munich/>

* Supported by AI-Tool Google Gemini 2.5



Thanksgiving dinner in “The Chapel” at Hard Rock Café;
photo: Andreas Schoberth



Independence Day BBQ potluck with local Fulbrighters;
photo: Andreas Schoberth

Mannheim-Heidelberg



Celebrating Thanksgiving with a traditional dinner
at Benjamin’s Diner in Mannheim-Käfertal



A highlight in January 2025: the phenomenal Neue
Sachlichkeit exhibition at Mannheim’s Kunsthalle



Sailing and partying at Lake Constance; photo: Franz Berger



Katharina Viethen (APPP), Mareile Metzger (PPP), Andreas Schoberth
(Fulbright) at the Independence Day celebration, U.S. Consulate Munich;
photo: Katharina Viethen



Election Night speakers at Amerikahaus; photo: Andreas Schoberth

Photos: Benjamin Pflieger

Our fourth local Cleanup Day at
Gleisdreieckpark in spring 2025;
photo: Alexandra Schaller

Berlin

Capital of History and Transformation

by Alex Rohlf, Genevieve Brechel, Alexandra Schaller

The Berlin Chapter houses hundreds of active members and reaches almost 900 subscribers via its regional mailing list. Every year, dozens of new arrivals sign up as members and join local activities. Of course, they frequently share the stories of their personal journeys and how the Fulbright program and studying abroad transformed their lives, invariably in an incredibly positive way.

Yet, we all gather in a city that has been at the heart of transatlantic transformations for at least a century itself. History has left its mark at every corner of Berlin and its chill can be felt by everyone strolling the city with open eyes and an open heart. Anyone jogging through Mitte and the Wedding (e.g. in the area around Bernauer Straße) or along the “East Side Gallery” will casually cross the old “Berliner Mauer” several times – a barrier that people died to overcome or dug long tunnels to circumvent. Other routes may lead past countless “Stolpersteine” (brass plaques in the pavement commemorating victims of the “Third Reich”). Across the entire city, there are historical landmarks telling their stories of the past.

Living in an age of peace (at least in central Europe) transforms every stroll through Berlin into a testament to the success of democracy and the victory of international cooperation over totalitarian regimes. This includes artefacts reminding us of the division of the city and its reunification.¹ Others tell the tales of awe-inspiring scientific achievements and Berlin’s recent role as hub for a lively democracy, vibrant youth cultures, avantgarde arts and music. Interna-



President Reagan speaking at the Berlin Wall, Brandenburg Gate, June 12, 1987; photo: Reagan White House Photographs, public domain

tional artists flocking to the “West-Berliner” enclave to find inspiration in the divided city as early as the 70’s included Joan La Barbara, Romy Haag, Iggy Pop and David Bowie. A few decades later, derelict buildings from the Cold War era became home to the international electronic music scene in the wake of the reunification and are still producing the soundtrack to Berlin’s nightlife. Beyond the city limits, John F. Kennedy’s famous words of encouragement, Ronald Reagan’s ultimately successful plea to “tear down the wall” and the re-opening of the U.S. Embassy next-door to the Brandenburger Tor have become universal symbols of transatlantic friendship and peaceful transformation.

¹ Although paying tribute to several historical events, the article is in no way an attempt to compare or rank these. It is to be understood as an homage to the volatile history of the city and an account of the Chapter’s attempts to learn from these historical events through its events and community activities.



Fulbright FEAT. PERFORMANCE hosted by Prachtwerk in Neukölln; photo: Jörg Geier



Robert Greenan of the U.S. Embassy Berlin and Christina Gehlsen of the German Foreign Office kick off Thanksgiving dinner hosted by the Fulbright Commission and the DAAD; photo: Alexander Rohlf



Relay run with the Fulbright Commission in summer 2025; photo: Alexandra Schaller

The joint endeavor to overcome the Cold War without nuclear escalation led to decades of close cooperation culminating in the reunification and the formation of friendships across all walks of life – including politicians, artists and scientists. While the intimacy of political relations experiences ups and downs, the transatlantic ties at the scientific, cultural, economic and personal level have permeated every aspect of life. No one embodies this better than the Fulbrighters from across the globe, who spend their formative years abroad on either side of the Atlantic and return home to often become beacons for their academic fields and a democratic society. Notable examples from

the Berlin Chapter include Prof. Reinhard Lipperheide, who returned from his studies at UCLA in the 50’s to later teach at the Helmholtz-Zentrum (HZB) for Materials and Energy. He still visits our local “Stammtisch” meetings in Berlin today! Other prominent examples include the Fulbrighters Ulrich Wickert and Ingo Zamperoni who both served as correspondents in Washington and became long-standing moderators of the “Tagesthemen” afterwards, presenting the news of the world to millions of Germans. There are many more impressive Fulbright stories in the Berlin Chapter and some are being written right now.

At the core of the Fulbright program lies its diversity, not as a political slogan but as natural compass for a successful program that taps into the full potential of our democratic societies. By allowing for social mobility and by making international academic careers attainable for those without sufficient means or support, it is driving technological progress through cooperation among the brightest minds on both sides of the Atlantic. By fostering international cooperation, leading joint scientific endeavors and strengthening public discourse, dozens of Fulbright cohorts have subsequently made the United States and its closest allies safer, more prosperous and more democratic.

With U.S. signature brands ubiquitous (from cell phones to sports gear, from carbonated soft drinks to fine spirits)², Fulbright Alumni chapters switching their communication from Facebook to GoogleMail or WhatsApp, the 4th of July

² For those with a keen eye, there are both larger-than-life “Coca Cola” banners and “Aeroflot” adverts still signifying old divides in walking distance of the “Alexanderplatz”.



Halloween-Kegeln (German version of Bowling) at the Kugelbar.Berlin; photo: Genevieve Brechel

invitations by the U.S. Embassy rallying an impressive transatlantic community and more than 20,000 U.S. expats joining Berlin's work force on exciting career paths, life in Berlin demonstrates on an everyday basis just how intertwined our societies and market places have become – despite odd claims to the opposite and the challenges on both sides of the Atlantic to effectively maintain strategic industries. Instead, the transatlantic influence continues to run visibly through the veins of the city, as “Hollywood” movies play on the big screen right next to old German silent movies in the historic “Babylon” cinema and artists from both sides of the Atlantic draw tens of thousands of fans to the “Tempelhofer Feld”, the “Berlinale”, “Lollapalooza” and Berlin's countless cultural venues.

Consequently, our chapter honors Berlin's rich history and the mission to learn from its teachings. This is exemplified by past visits to the former concentration camp in Oranienburg, our regular participation in the “Lange Nacht der Museen” and the “World Cleanup Day”, a recent comic workshop “Reflecting on 80 Years of Liberation”³, exploring WWII bunkers with a huge group of Fulbright adventurers, a recent guided tour on the Benin bronze artefacts at the Humboldt-Forum as well as bike tours paying tribute to war memorials en route. Our members also participate in the fireside chats of the U.S. Embassy, support & join wonderful events hosted by the Fulbright Commission and actively contribute to our own initiatives such as the FULBRIGHT FEAT. events. Yet, there are plenty of historical landmarks left to explore as part of upcoming activities (e.g. the Stasi Museum alongside the prison in Hohenschönhausen or the “Gärten der Welt”) as well as countless museums and secret locations



Lange Nacht der Museen in front of the Berliner Dom; photo: Rozsa Simon

unveiled by long-time Berliners. Most importantly, we meet for lively “Stammtisch” events each month, where we explore the bars and restaurants frequented by our multi-faceted community.

Whether sad, sobering, awe-inspiring, hopeful or simply a sign of Berlin's recent good fortune, the countless testimonials to Berlin's rich history and turbulent transformations continue to touch the lives of Berliners every day. The Berlin Chapter cherishes this unique position and strives to remain a harbor for Fulbrighters from both sides of the Atlantic, to strengthen transatlantic cooperation, to provide an impartial platform for discourse (in a city that often takes its energetic political discourse to the streets) and to remain close to the pulse of ongoing transformations within one of Europe's fascinating capitals. None of this would be possible without our incredibly dedicated and motivated local members and we love to welcome new U.S. grantees and Fulbright returnees every year.

If you are interested in joining our activities or have ideas for new events in the area, do contact our chapter coordinators below.

Cheers,

Alex -

Regional Coordinator - rc.berlin@fulbright-alumni.de

Genevieve -

Project Coordinator - rc.berlin.projects@fulbright-alumni.de

Alexandra -

Event Coordinator - rc.berlin.events@fulbright-alumni.de

³ Hosted by the “Documentation Centre for Displacement, Expulsion, Reconciliation” in Berlin.

Cologne-Bonn

Fun and Food

by Ulrich Götz

Food is fun, so we started the academic year for our alumni group with our traditional Thanksgiving dinner in Cologne. The U.S.-themed Stars & Stripes Quiz, organized by the AmerikaHaus NRW e.V., was another fun way of getting together and demonstrating our knowledge of U.S. history, sports, and pop culture. Out of a total of 42 teams, our team even came in 6th. Musical fun came with the Indiana Jazz Exchange in the Altes Pfandhaus, a special jazz concert and an annual highlight organized by the Freundeskreis Köln-Indianapolis and the AmerikaHaus NRW e.V. in June. This year's concert (it was the thirteenth edition) featured the jazz violinist, arts leader, and recording artist Cathy Morris. On July 4th, we enjoyed a potluck barbecue in Stefan's beautiful garden. The food was delicious – and partly typical American style – and we exchanged stories and impressions from our time as Fulbright students in the U.S. with our current American Fulbright grantee in Cologne, who was part of our group.

We also used our 4th of July BBQ to kickstart the planning for the remainder of the year. Cologne's Museum Ludwig will host an exhibition titled “Five Friends: John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg, Cy Twombly” in the fall. We look forward to learning about this influential yet often overlooked network of five prominent and prolific artists in postwar America. Taking up an old tradition, we are also planning a potluck dinner: host Inga will provide the main dish, while the guests will contribute appetizers, side dishes, and dessert. For Thanksgiving, we plan a joint dinner with the Freundeskreis Köln-Indianapolis.



Thanksgiving dinner – the alumni were slightly hungry, as the turkey was delayed; photo: Isabel Wasgindt



Stars & Stripes Pub Quiz; photo: Isabel Wasgindt



Relaxed atmosphere after the 4th of July Barbecue; photo: Stefan Weybenmeyer



A dessert that both matched the occasion and tasted delicious; photo: Stefan Weybenmeyer

Frankfurt Calling

by Martin Kohler

Summer is now in full swing, and just last week we gathered once again in Knut's and Christa's lovely garden in Offenbach for our annual Independence Day celebration – enriched by lively conversations, sunshine, and excellent food. As always, we're deeply thankful for their warm hospitality!

This followed shortly after the official 4th of July party hosted by the U.S. Consulate General Frankfurt. With beautiful (and hot) summer weather, we celebrated the 249th anniversary of the independence of the United States of America. Many thanks to the consulate for the invitation to this fabulous event!

Another cherished American tradition of the Frankfurt Regional Group is our Thanksgiving celebration. Last November, Isabelle and Oliver once again graciously opened their home to host a festive and stylish dinner, completed with grilled turkey and warm conversation.

Beyond these highlights, our group continues to meet monthly, typically on the first Thursday, for dinner at a rotating selection of local restaurants, ranging from cozy Bavarian spots to spicy Indian eateries.

Whether you're new to Frankfurt or have been here for a while, we'd love for you to join us! For more information, visit <https://fulbright-alumni.de/regional-chapters/frankfurt-am-main/>. Don't hesitate to get in touch – we're always excited to welcome new members!



Fulbrighters and USMC at the U.S. Consulate Independence Day party – Semper Paratus; photo: U.S. Consulate General Frankfurt



The thankful Thanksgiving bunch; photo: Knut Mittwollen



Raise the flag!; photo: Knut Mittwollen



The star-spangled independence bunch; photo: Knut Mittwollen



The rockets' red glare ...; photo: Knut Mittwollen



How Alexandra Transforms IT

This year's winner of the Mulert Award, Alexandra Swanson, is working for the very significant initiative of #SheTransformsIT. There she is enabling more women to succeed in IT creating a real impact for our society's future.

Interview by Vera Fuller

Vera: Hi Alex, thanks for joining me! So how did you first get involved with #SheTransformsIT?

Alex: Hi Vera! In order to answer that question, I have to go back to my Fulbright experience. I came to Germany as a Fulbright ETA in 2014. I always say I went from the middle of America to the middle of Hessen. During my experience at a German school, a lot of the classwork that we did, especially the teaching, was still very... analogue. Not much of it was digital – we were still working with overhead projectors! I remember when I asked my students to make a PowerPoint – they were in eighth grade – and they had never used PowerPoint before. So I think a lot of that motivation to spread the love of digitalization started during my Fulbright experience. That's what led me to do my master's degree in politics, economics and philosophy. At that time in 2017/2018, everybody was talking about big data and what data goes into algorithms or large language models. There was always this question of "is this ethically good?" and "are these systems robust?" When I saw the job at #SheTransformsIT at the Federation of German Industry, it made perfect sense to go into an area where there's so much happening. We have a lot of work to do to get more than 17% of women into tech. Essentially I saw room for development and I saw that I could do something that had never been done before.

Vera: How did your sense for justice and equality come into the equation?

Alex: The female perspective comes in it for multiple reasons. I grew up with a very strong mother. My mom was always in the tech world. My mom was the one who pioneered bringing home a computer. I think it's so fun whenever I think about what my image of technology is, it's

always very female. I appreciate how in German "die Technologie ist weiblich" – because literally it is feminine. It's also "die Zukunft ist weiblich"! Both – future and technology – are some of my favorite things. For me this affinity to technology was always a female quality. Whereas when I moved here, I remember a lot of the discussions were, "women can't do these things". I'm not saying that we don't have this in the U.S., but I noticed it was much more prominent here in Germany. This just really bothered me and it definitely struck a nerve. I've always been a feminist. I always dealt with the question of "where are the women?". Now more specifically, I'm dealing with the topic of "where are the women in tech?". Women in Germany make up 51% of the population, 51%!! How can it be that we are nowhere equal to parity on so many different levels? Our future is digital and if women are not at the table, when it comes to who is regulating AI, who is developing technologies and what perspectives are being put into data systems, we set ourselves back – we have 130 years until parity – we will set ourselves back another 100 years, minimum!!

Vera: You mentioned the numbers, which are quite upsetting. I think in our pre-talk, you also said something about just 4% being in leadership.

Alex: When it comes to the overall percentage of women in technical areas, only about 17% of all employees are female – and this number stays relatively. Then 56% of women leave after two years in the IT workforce, because they don't feel accepted or welcome. So when it comes to top leadership, of course it's lonely up there. Yes, we've got about 4% – but interestingly enough, we don't actually have a lot of numbers, especially in Germany, about who those positions are, where those positions are. So what we do at the initiative is trying to make the few women who are



Why #SheTransformsIT is so important

in these positions visible, because we know that this has meaning for other women to see, “ah, there is somebody like me, this is something that I can do”.

Vera: What approaches do you take at #SheTransformsIT in order to motivate more women?

Alex: The first thing I always want to say is, women are not inherently less gifted at anything with regards to STEM fields than men. There are loads of studies that show right before puberty starts, girls and boys are pretty much the same in these areas – equally good at math. Once puberty hits along with many social stereotypes, girls all of a sudden sink in their math grades, boys start to rise up. This obviously demonstrates that women can be just as good at technical jobs as men. So what we do to communicate this positive message consists of three aspects. The first one is **transformation** – it’s in our name, but what this means is lobby work. We are working directly with the government. We meet with local representatives to talk about the current state of informatics and how computer science lessons in schools can look like. Do girls know what they can do in IT related fields, after completing their diploma? Because often it’s very nebulous what those career paths are. This means working with industry and the schools to make sure that there’s a good connection. When it comes to the federal level, we work with members of the opposition, but also the current administration talking about specific measures – what does the actual plan for more women in IT look like? It is now written in the coalition contract for the first time, which is super exciting!



Alexandrea Swanson speaking at the Spring Ball 2025 during the Mulert Award ceremony

Photos by Marius Brinkmann

The second aspect is **visibility**. We have a couple of campaigns running, where we introduce women on social media, who are working in tech and IT. It is not only helpful for them to showcase what they do, but also for us to have a nice portfolio of women in these fields. Some people say we don’t have the women. Of course, women are there! It’s just a bit harder to find them.

And the last aspect is for women to be **networking** with other women. They find it very helpful to be in communities where they can talk about their struggles, but also can learn from each other and share experiences. So those are the three things: **transformation, visibility, and networking aspects**.

Vera: It sounds like after looking at all those gloomy aspects, the numbers and negative stereotypes, there might be some light on the horizon. How is your outlook on everything in total?

Alex: You have to be an optimist to do this! Otherwise I’d go crazy and would want to go live in a basement. I get so much energy and hope from not only conversations like this and from awards, but also from politicians. I remember when we invited the members of the *Landtag*. Immediate responses! That’s when you know this topic is important and people care about it.

On a personal level it’s through so many conversations: In our interview formats, where we get to meet inspiring women, I often have to think “this literally is the future”.

I do think the country is waking up and I also think the EU is waking up to a lot of these issues, because we know we have this huge labor force gap. Those are the things that give me energy and then seeing so many programs pop-up and also seeing women, who have crazy cool startups. So it’s moving in the right direction.

Vera: Do you have any words of advice for an individual woman who wants to go into IT or anyone really who struggles with the odds, like societal, political, economical odds, that are stacked against them?

Alex: I think getting into IT is probably one of the smartest decisions you can make for your career and for you personally – just due to all the doors that it opens. I don’t want to paint it pretty or easy, because a lot of the discussions that I have with women reveal that many companies say that they’re very open to flexible work models, but they’re actually not. So I think it requires tough skin. I’ve met people, unfortunately, who applied to hundreds of jobs. But if this is something you want: don’t give up. I know that it’s hard. The advice that I can give is: be on LinkedIn, connect with women, connect also with men, who can help you open these doors. And if you need help opening one of those doors, I’d be happy to talk.

Vera: Wow, thank you so much, Alex!



Alexandrea Swanson currently serves as managing director for the #SheTransformsIT initiative at the Federation of German Industries, which aims on getting more women into IT and digitalization. It was during her Fulbright ETA in

Germany that she became passionate about digitalization and decreasing the digital gender divide. She currently lives and works in Berlin, Germany.

Contact via a.swanson@shetransformsit.org

Mulert Award 2026 – Call for Nominations

Since 2010, the German Fulbright Alumni Association has granted the “Jürgen Mulert Award for Mutual Understanding,” in memory of the association’s initiator and founder, Dr. Jürgen Mulert (1938-2008). The Mulert Award is awarded annually to a distinct researcher, artist, professional, and volunteer across disciplines whose work reflects and advances discourse and peace through mutual understanding.

It is our pleasure to invite friends and members of the Fulbright family worldwide to submit online nominations for candidates for the 2025 Mulert Award. Candidates must be former participants of one of the many Fulbright programs. Nominated candidates and their projects may be professional or volunteer, and may have an artistic, social, economic or similar character.

The prize package for the Mulert Award winner includes:

- Recognition and award reception during a festive ceremony at one of the association’s annual events in Germany, as a stage for the winner to personally present their project
- Project summary and biography in the 2025 issue of the FRANKly magazine as well as on the association’s website
- 1,000 EUR monetary support for the awarded project
- Networking opportunities within the Fulbright Alumni community
- Full travel support to the award ceremony (within Europe)

The call for nominations and all additional information is accessible online until

Sunday, February 1, 2026 on www.fulbright-alumni.de/about/mulert-award.

Contact for any further questions:

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