



Bright Futures Begin Abroad

By Nicole Brace '07

Many Hope graduates aspire to travel the world. Some aspire to teach. Others dream of conducting ground-breaking research. Now, a record number of those students have received prestigious Fulbright awards to do all of those things with funding, honor and acclaim.

Fulbright grants are one-year awards which allow U.S. citizens to participate in a variety of activities overseas, primarily university lecturing, advanced research, graduate lecturing, and teaching in elementary and secondary schools. These grants are awarded to recent college graduates and graduate students, college and university instructors, and professionals in other fields. In 2008–09,

Hope tied for 30th place among bachelor's institutions nationwide for the number of students (four) receiving the award—an impressive count, given the college's comparatively small student population.

It isn't a fluke. Hope students have steadily been winning Fulbrights for years. But it also isn't easy. Students face an arduous application process beginning early in the spring semester of their junior year, which requires them to write two finely-crafted essays detailing their plans. Two faculty advisors officially assist them: Dr. Janis Gibbs, associate professor of history and chairperson of the department, and Dr. David Cunningham, director of the CrossRoads Project and professor of religion.



Hope is a national leader among undergraduate colleges in the number of students who have received highly competitive fellowships to teach English abroad through the Fulbright U.S. Student Program. Here, Danielle Johnson '09 (second from left) and friends enjoy one another's company and the magnificent view atop the Rock of Ifach in Calpe, Spain.

"The competition that they will face is extraordinarily strong," says Dr. Cunningham, "so the application as a whole (and the essays in particular) have to be the students' absolutely best work: grammatically perfect, brilliantly constructed, and attention-getting. Their writing has to go through many revisions and intense scrutiny—probably more so than for anything they've written in their college career."

They also must be willing, says Dr. Gibbs, to put in the time to make their applications the best they can be. "Our successful Fulbright applicants work very hard on their applications. Both the teaching assistantships and the research fellowships require creativity, organization and enthusiasm. It's a privilege to work with students and watch them develop their ideas and their proposals."

Yet time and again they rise to the challenge, succeed, and find themselves halfway around the world, teaching English in a German high school (as did Kathryn Goetz '04) or conducting research in biophysics at a Hungarian university (as was the case for Brandon Alleman '06) or devising ways to encourage shy South Korean students to join English class discussions (one of Karen Russell '08's most rewarding tasks as a boarding-school teacher). They run the English Conversation Club at the University of Cartagena in Cartagena, Colombia (Lani Pickard '09's

assignment), and they help nursery school children learn the unfamiliar sounds of the English language at a public school in Spain (Danielle Johnson '09's position through this month). They make tracks.

These aren't the only talented Hope students being recognized internationally, though. The governments of Austria and Spain have awarded Hope graduates teaching fellowships, and Hope French majors are consistently awarded competitive grants from the French government to teach English in France. Former French students are currently teaching in Montpellier, Normandy, and Caen.

This means that Hope students are well-prepared for both teaching and living abroad, says Dr. Anne Larsen '70, professor of French. "We have nothing but good results," she says,

"and we credit the students for their hard work and desire to learn and grow."

The assistantships offer a chance to explore France, improve fluency in the language, travel widely, and, Dr. Larsen points out, to develop important skills such as "learning to rent an apartment in a foreign country, living on their own, learning to pay bills, teach classes, and to represent their country and themselves wherever they go."

For Fulbright recipients, leaving their native country was just the beginning of another sort of journey. Reflecting on her two years in Germany, Kathryn Goetz describes experiencing an "ah-ha!" moment of epiphany. "When I went abroad with Hope my junior year," she says, "there was considerable support: language help, organized activities, guidance on navigating a foreign culture. During the Fulbright year, it was more 'sink-or-swim.' If you wanted friends or wanted to engage Germans to learn the language, the burden was solely on you. You had to figure it out. I realized that I loved the 'figuring it out' and when I returned, I wanted a job that was challenging and which required me to problem-solve constantly. I also wanted to interact with the international community. People have developed such unique ways of expressing themselves, and I enjoy the diversity of cultures."

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— Karen Russell '08

She now serves as chief of staff at The Buxton Initiative and as chief administrative officer at PathNorth, Inc. The two Washington, D.C., organizations are dedicated to building relationships and fostering conversations between people of different cultural, religious, and economic backgrounds. "It's a lot of problem-solving, managing people, fundraising, and event planning," she says. "In a way, I'm a jack-of-all-trades, and I love it. Dealing with many moving parts and enjoying the chaos is a critical skill!"

And as Karen Russell emphasizes, sometimes being pushed out of your comfort zone yields the most profound, and necessary, insights. "In front of the chalkboard with thirty pairs of eyes on you, each waiting to be impressed, you learn very quickly what works in the classroom, and what doesn't." What took a bit longer, but offers just as much lasting value, she says, was "fully discovering and confidently settling into my own personal teaching style. Thanks to my Fulbright year, I have grown into myself as a professional, prepared, and passionate teacher."

From where does such settled, passionate commitment come? These students have taken careful stock, and they all point backwards in gratitude to professors, programs, and personal encounters at Hope. Whether it be the close assistance of the Fulbright faculty advisors—"they are amazing!" notes Lani Pickard from her post in Cartagena—to whole departments—"My English professors always encouraged me to explore learning opportunities like the Fulbright provided," says Danielle Johnson from the *colegio* in Spain—it is clear that gifts given at Hope (and in hope) have yielded more gifts in the lives of these students.

After completing his Fulbright-funded research project at Semmelweis University in Budapest, Hungary, Brandon Alleman enrolled in the University of Iowa's Medical Scientist Training Program, through which he is training to be a physician-scientist and will earn a combined M.D./ Ph.D. He hopes to explore the causes of preterm birth and solve related problems in a patient-oriented setting. This year, his work may take him to India.

For him, preparation for the Fulbright—and life afterward—came during the hundreds of times when someone at Hope gave him a chance to work in a lab, showed him how to be responsible for his own education, or mentored him through the uncertainties that accompany college life.

"People are what make any place, including Hope, special," Alleman says.

"I can point to very specific people and times that shaped my academic attitude and pursuits," he says. "Their impact was great."



The Fulbright fellowships provide an opportunity for their alumni recipients not only to serve others abroad but to learn from and engage with the peoples and places they encounter. Here, Lani Pickard '09, serving in Cartagena, Colombia, learns a Spanish Christmas carol with a friend's little sisters.

