

BRIGHT SPARKS

Cover Feature: 2025 US Cohort Orientation and Reception



Also in this issue: News and Appointments | In Memoriam | In Publication | Grantee Spotlight | Alumni Experience | Around the Office | Campus Advisers

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It's hard to believe we are already coming to the end of February, but of course this time of year tends to go by in a flash.

It seems only a few weeks ago I was in Sydney for the Fulbright East Asia Pacific Regional Conference. In fact, that was all the way back in December, but it was a fantastic event—reconnecting with colleagues around the region, discussing regional priorities, key programme issues, innovations, strategic planning, and developing partnerships. Fulbright Australia did a fabulous job of organising and hosting the event, and we look forward to returning the favour here in Aotearoa in a few years' time!

Also in December, we were thrilled to reopen the Fulbright Distinguished Awards in Teaching programme. These awards had been on a hiatus for a couple of years, so it's great to be back in the business of giving outstanding primary and secondary school teachers the opportunity to travel from New Zealand to the United States, or vice-versa, for an intensive four-month professional development programme. Read on for a special insight into the programme from alumna Maiken Calkoen.

Elsewhere in this issue, we hear from Ryan Meachen, 2024 Fulbright Science and Innovation Award recipient. Ryan is based at the Harvard Kennedy Centre's world-renowned Leadership and Happiness Laboratory. Ryan tells us about what lead him to apply for a Fulbright award, about his PhD and the work he is doing at Harvard, and about his wider Fulbright experience in Boston. Not to be missed!

Following a relaxing Christmas and New Year break, we returned to the office and immediately launched into final preparations for our February Orientation event. This is where we formally welcomed our 2025 US cohort to the country and, as the photo spread further on attests, it is always a wonderful occasion.

Welcoming our newest grantees gave me pause to reflect on the astonishing longevity of this programme, and what that longevity teaches us about the true nature of relationships between nations. The Fulbright New Zealand Commission has existed now for over 75 years. That is over 75 years' worth of scholarly, cultural, social exchanges that have enriched the lives of thousands of participants, many of whom have gone on to make significant contributions in their respective countries. The Fulbright programme remains a testament to a deeply held, shared commitment to bettering our world and our place within it.

With that in mind, I wish you all a happy and prosperous 2025, and I hope you enjoy this latest edition of *Bright Sparks*.

EDITOR'S NOTE

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LEFT: 2025 Fulbright US Scholar Angela Cooke-Jackson (right) with a member of the Kiwa Kapa Haka group.

NEWS AND APPOINTMENTS



- Congratulations to **Andi Shirtcliffe**, who has been appointed an Honorary Fellow of the University of Otago – Pharmacy. Andi's Fulbright Science and Innovation Graduate Award has taken her to Johns Hopkins University's Bloomberg School of Public Health, in Baltimore, where she is completing a Master of Public Health specialising in Health Behaviour and Society.



- It was wonderful to begin the year with the news that **Rachel Simon-Kumar** has been made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit, for services to women's studies, health research and to ethnic communities. Rachel's NZ Scholar Award took her to Georgetown University, in Washington DC, where she carried out research on a feminist political science project called the 'Ethnic Minority Women in New Zealand Politics Project.'



- Congratulations to **Julia Horsfield** on her appointment as Dean of the School of Biomedical Sciences at the University of Otago. Julia's Fulbright NZ Scholar Award took her to University of California, Irvine, where she researched how cell fate decisions are controlled in the Zebrafish animal model.

IN MEMORIAM



- Fulbright New Zealand mourns the untimely passing of **Damian Scarf**. Damien was an Associate Professor at the University of Otago. In 2008, Damien received a Fulbright-Ministry of Research, Science and Technology Graduate Award and travelled to Columbia University in New York, where he researched episodic memory in non-human species.



- Fulbright New Zealand acknowledges the sad passing of **Lady Joy Axford**, wife of the late Sir Ian Axford. Chair of the Ian Axford Fellowship Board Roy Ferguson notes that Lady Axford had always taken a keen interest in the Fellowships programme and met a number of Axford Fellows over the programme's 30-year history.



ADAM CLAASEN, GRID

Adam Claasen, Fulbright NZ alumnus and Campus Adviser, talks about newest book Grid

This interview originally appeared on www.nzbooklovers.co.nz and is reprinted here with permission.

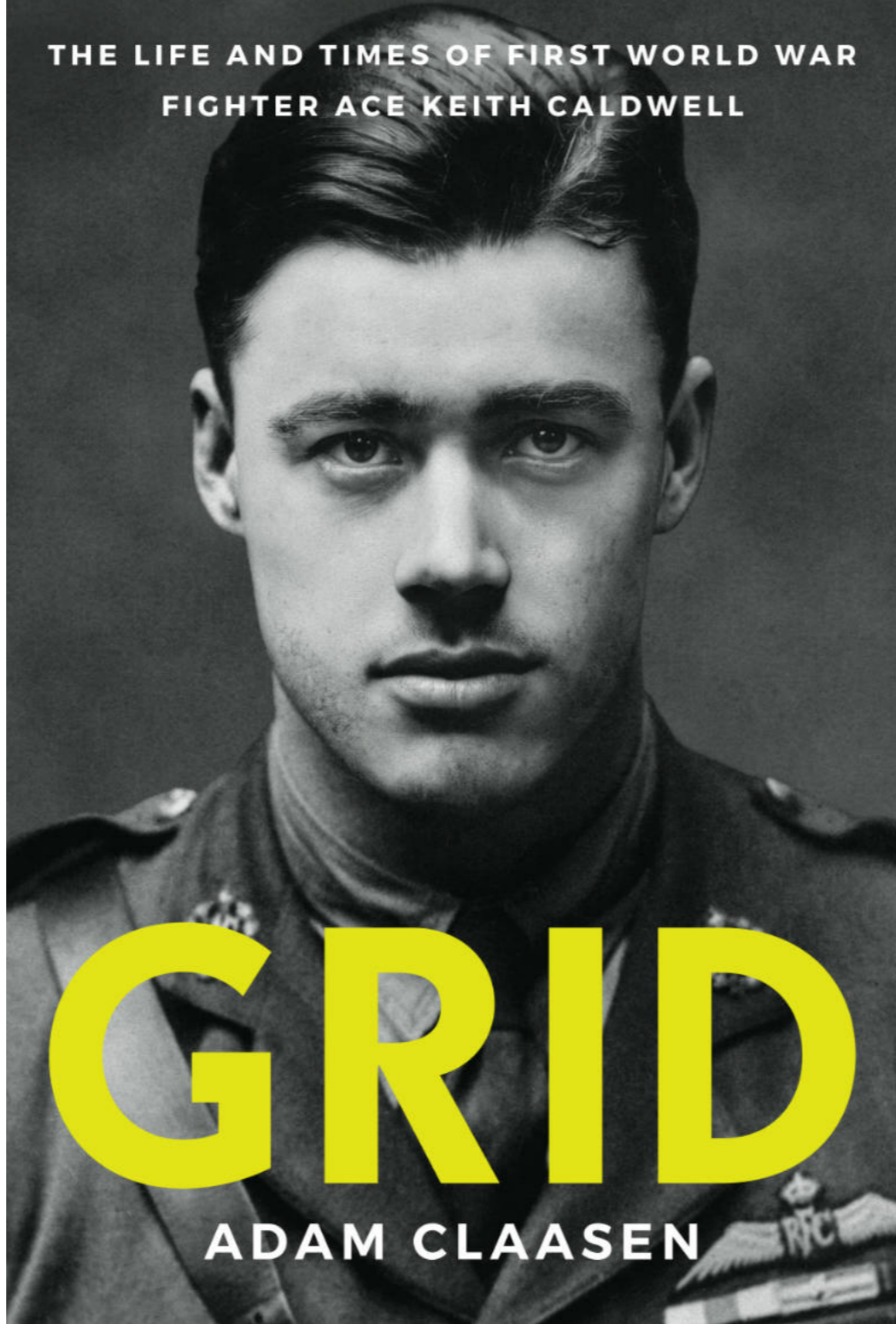
Dr Adam Claasen is a historian at Massey University. He is a Smithsonian Institution Fellowship grantee, a Fulbright Scholarship (Georgetown University) awardee and a Massey University research team medallist. Adam teaches on the Second World War and American foreign policy and is a Vice-Chancellor's award recipient for sustained excellence in teaching.

Keith Caldwell was one of the stars of your last book, *Fearless*, about the New Zealand airmen who flew in the First World War. As you were finishing that book, were you pretty sure you wanted to write specifically about him?

I looked over everyone who appeared in *Fearless* and realised that one individual stood head-and-shoulders above his peers in terms of achievements and substance. Caldwell was by far the most well-known New Zealand airman of the First World War. His strong personality and command of one of the best squadrons of war meant he appeared in numerous airmen's memoirs and his name regularly turned up in histories of First World War air fighting. All of this and his amazing exploits made him a natural choice for a biography.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF FIRST WORLD WAR

FIGHTER ACE KEITH CALDWELL



ADAM CLAASEN

That was five years of work. How hard was it to find the material you needed?

While Caldwell was an eminent candidate for a book and other authors had made runs at it, there was always the difficulty of finding sufficient material to produce a fulsome and rounded study that looked at him across all seasons of his life, not just the First World War. I already had enough sources to make a start from what I had collected for *Fearless* and added to these materials from the Whanganui Collegiate School's archive, the Air Force Museum of New Zealand (AFMNZ), Archives New Zealand and MOTAT. Further work at British institutions — The National Archives (UK), the Imperial War Museum and the Royal Air Force Museum, Hendon — filled out the operational materials to determine where and what he was doing throughout the war.

What were the breakthroughs?

The biggest breakthroughs were from the family. His grandchildren were incredibly helpful and furnished me with materials others had failed to uncover. Sally Gordon had a vast collection of letters from the Second World War and Andrew Caldwell plied me with suitcases of letters, old passports, financial records and photograph albums. One of the real delights was very late in the writing when his granddaughter Deborah Stovell delivered a box that contained over two dozen letters written by Caldwell to his mother in the war — these had never been seen before. Another good find was a confidential folder at the AFMNZ that Caldwell had kept while he was Commanding Officer of Royal New Zealand Air Force Station Wigram in the Second World War — it is full of controversy and a bit of intrigue.

You do an excellent job of describing the era in which he was raised and educated — one where discipline, loyalty to the Empire, privilege and a sort of muscular Christianity prevailed. This was just the perfect fertile environment for manpower for a war, wasn't it?

Yes, the elite schools of the Empire were well suited to creating young men fit and eager for war. God, king and country were the holy trinity to which the boys were wedded. Sports were

often seen as more important than classroom teaching because they created gentlemen (cricket) and men (rugby) of good character steeped in the virtues of sacrifice, honour, hard work and teamwork. War was the ideal environment for such attributes to shine. I think all this goes some way to understanding the eagerness with which many of Caldwell's generation rushed into uniform.

That war was his moment. One has the sense that life was somewhat dull for him before he signed up, and he took a while to adjust to civilian life afterwards. And is it incredible that he actually survived it when so many airmen did not?

His prewar life at Whanganui Collegiate School was full of activity, with sporting events, debating and soldering, but he did end up doing clerical work in a bank in Auckland, which was not to his liking. I didn't put this in the book, but one of the family members told me that when Caldwell got his acceptance into the Walsh brothers flying school at Kohimarama he was at work, and he joyously ripped off his tie and just walked off the job. His twenty-seven months of military air service is phenomenal when the lifespan for many was a matter of days. The slow, plodding training in New Zealand, his very good flying skills and a healthy dollop of luck were all factors in his survival.

He was always eager for combat but not necessarily the consummate pilot. Was it the case that he was not a great shot?

He was a very good pilot. You didn't survive that long in the air war against some of the best Central Powers airmen — Caldwell tangled with the Red Baron's Flying Circus and arguably Germany's best pilot, Werner Voss — if you're merely average. You're also not selected as only one of two airmen on the entire Western Front to evaluate the arrival of one of the most dangerous machines in the Allied inventory, the Sopwith Camel. Regarding his air fighting and marksmanship, it's complicated. Caldwell did like to dogfight and mix it with the enemy — he was impossibly aggressive at times — but his

lacklustre marksmanship, which is often commented upon, did improve with time and by 1918 he was one of the leading commanding officers knocking down enemy machines. A lot of this improvement had to do with his time at various flying and air fighting schools over the winter of 1917–18. By his own standards he would have said he was not the greatest marksman of the war, but he was certainly in the top echelon of airmen.

It seems remarkable that he was put in charge of his own squadron when he was only 22. What were the qualities of his leadership?

Heavy losses in the British air service did lead to young men being rapidly elevated to such positions. Caldwell started the war in 1916 as a second lieutenant but by late 1917 he was posted to 74 Squadron as a major in command. He was a team player who had little time for glory-seeking lone wolves. Looking after your fellow brother-in-arms was far more important than individual tallies of victories. He also led from the front. There was general prohibition against squadron commanders flying operationally. Caldwell had specific orders not to do so but regularly ignored this by leading late afternoon squadron offensive patrols. He also eased newcomers into the squadron patrols to give them the best chance of surviving more than a few days.

You describe how the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) planes evolved over the course of the war. They were so primitive and often so unreliable or flawed. Does this make the pilots' feats of derring-do even more remarkable?

Early war machines were extremely primitive and underpowered and prone to engine and structural failure, but by 1917 and 1918 they were increasingly robust, with the ability to fly faster and higher. Caldwell's Royal Aircraft Factory SE5a could exceed 200 miles per hour (320 kilometers per hour) in a dive and climb to 17,000 feet (5200

meters), so it was no slouch and able to sustain considerable amounts of damage. And, of course, all of this was done in an open cockpit. Nonetheless, if the structure of the machine was compromised by a high explosive anti-aircraft round or it caught fire under assault from the enemy, there were no parachutes for British air service pilots. People at the time thought the pilots' feats remarkable and with the passing of time this has not diminished.

What element of the story surprised you the most?

I was genuinely taken aback by what he did in the Second World War. I had thought I could cover the period 1939–1945 quickly but found it worthy of more attention. One chapter grew into two and could have been more. His command of RNZAF Station Wigram was fascinating as he negotiated the challenges posed by the largest contingent of women in uniform in New Zealand's military history and the difficulties arising from the interplay between military personnel and the local community. Caldwell's work in India was a revelation as was his role in the repatriation of New Zealanders at the war's end. While the First World War was the dominant event of his life, the war that followed was certainly much more than a postscript.

What do you hope readers will take from this book?

During his own lifetime Caldwell was relatively well known and even into the 1960s and 1970s regularly popped up in newspaper articles and on the radio. But in the decades that followed, his First World War generation and their achievements became less well remembered. It is my hope that this book captures something of the man and his times and brings back to life the story of a remarkable New Zealander for a twenty-first century audience.

delirious



Damien Wilkins

DAMIEN WILKINS, DELIRIOUS

Fulbright alum, celebrated writer, and Director of the prestigious International Institute of Modern Letters, Damien Wilkins has published his 14th novel, Delirious.

Delirious follows married couple Mary and Pete as they sell up and move into a retirement village. An emotionally powerful novel about families and ageing, the novel dramatises the questions we will all face, if we're lucky, or unlucky, enough. How to care for others? How to meet the new versions of ourselves who might arrive? How to cope? *Delirious* is also about the surprising ways second chances come around.

'Funny, sharp, sad and profound, *Delirious* made me laugh, think, weep and actually beat my breast. A masterpiece.' —Elizabeth Knox, *The Conversation*

Delirious is published by Te Herenga Waka University Press and is available now.

SHARE YOUR STORY – CONTRIBUTE TO BRIGHT SPARKS

We love hearing about what Fulbright alumni are up to. Help us to celebrate your achievements and milestones, your research and experiences, travel adventures, and more.

Send us your articles, blog posts, photo essays or anything you'd like shared with the Fulbright community. We email Bright Sparks to over 2500 Fulbright New Zealand alumni around the world, plus friends of Fulbright in various sectors across New Zealand.

Email your ideas to comms@fulbright.org.nz



2025 US COHORT ORIENTATION AND RECEPTION

Early in February, we were thrilled to formally welcome our latest group of US Graduates, Scholars and Specialists, along with three Axford Fellows, to Aotearoa.

A day of orientation activities included presentations on New Zealand history and culture, as well as plenty of opportunities to meet and connect with fellow grantees and Fulbright staff. We wrapped things up with a joyful evening reception.

This year's impressive US cohort cover an incredible array of research interests, from concussion awareness to Kauri dieback, and much more between.



TOP LEFT: The 2025 US Cohort gather for a mihi on the morning of their orientation

TOP RIGHT: 2025 Fulbright US Graduates Emily Lau (left) and Miah Clark

BOTTOM LEFT: Fulbright US Graduate Naeisha McClain (left) and Fulbright US Scholar Angela Cooke-Jackson

BOTTOM RIGHT: 2025 Fulbright US Scholar Jesse Abdenour (left) and 2025 Fulbright US Graduate Bret Hatzinger



TOP LEFT: The Kiwa Kapa Haka group perform
TOP RIGHT: 2025 Fulbright US Scholar Sarah Goff (left) with a member of the Kiwa Kapa Haka group
BOTTOM LEFT: A member of the Kiwa Kapa Haka Group
BOTTOM RIGHT: 2025 Fulbright US Grantees enjoy the performance



HAVE YOU JOINED FULBRIGHTER?

Fulbrighter was launched in 2019 and is an exclusive online networking platform specifically designed for Fulbright alumni and grantees. It is a space where you can share your news and events, build relationships, or collaborate on projects. To register for Fulbrighter visit <https://fulbrighternetwork.com/signup>

Fulbrighter is also available as an app for iOS and Android.



The 2025 Fulbright cohort is as follows:

US Scholar Award

Jesse Abdenour, Angela Cooke-Jackson, Sarah Goff, Eric Palkovacs.

US Graduate Award

Miah Clark, Elinor Fajer, Bret Hatzinger, Emily Lau, Naeisha McClain, Travis Richardson.

Fulbright Specialists

Mapuana Antonio, Carole Carlson, Cindy Roat, Ben Wildavsky.

Ian Axford Fellows

Julie Buchwald, Kathleen Cochrane, Paul Holland.



TOP LEFT: 2025 Fulbright US Scholars (from left) Angela Cooke-Jackson, Jesse Abdenour and Sarah Goff, with Fulbright Specialist Carole Carlson (far right)

TOP RIGHT: 2025 Ian Axford Fellows (from left) Julie Buchwald, Paul Holland, and Kathleen Cochrane

BOTTOM: 2025 Fulbright US Graduates (from left) Bret Hatzinger, Naeisha McClain, Emily Lau, Miah Clark, Elinor Fajer, and Travis Richardson

TOP LEFT: 2014 Fulbright NZ Distinguished Teacher Sutapa Makund with partner Keith



TOP MIDDLE: Fulbright NZ Engagement and Outreach Coordinator Rebecca Haig (left) and Fulbright NZ Executive Assistant Persefoni Harvey



TOP RIGHT: 2025 Fulbright US Graduate Naeisha McClain



BOTTOM LEFT: Fulbright US Graduates Bret Hatzinger (left) and Travis Richardson

BOTTOM RIGHT: Fulbright NZ Board member Jocelyn Woodley (centre) with Fulbright NZ Executive Director Penelope Borland and Professor Michael Baker



RYAN MEACHEN

Ryan Meachen's Fulbright Science and Innovation Graduate Award has taken him to the Leadership and Happiness Laboratory at the Harvard Kennedy School, Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he is researching organisational behaviour, leadership theory and wellbeing. Ryan graduated with an MBA from Te Herenga Waka – Victoria University of Wellington in 2020, where he is currently a PhD student, exploring how individuals fulfil their potential by striving towards becoming their ideal self.

The Leadership and Happiness Laboratory sounds fascinating—can you tell us more about its work and its history? What was it that made you want to study there?

I had my eyes on applying for a Fulbright award after I heard Te Puoho Katene [2017 Fulbright-Ngā Pae o Te Māramatanga Graduate Award] speak at Tātai Hono – an event for Māori students at the Wellington Business School. This was a few years back in 2019!

I wasn't even aware that the Fulbright award existed until I heard Te Puoho speak. His kōrero about his Fulbright experience, what he learned at Stanford, and what he brought back home to Aotearoa really opened my eyes and lit a fire in my belly to apply for a Fulbright scholarship one day too. That was the catalyst that set my eyes on becoming a Fulbrighter.

In the years that followed, I had one eye on the Fulbright award, and the other on potential scholars I could study under and learn from if I was fortunate enough to be a successful applicant. I was reading broadly across scholars who focused on studying human potential and the science of the good life. That's when I stumbled across a book called 'From Strength to Strength' by Arthur C. Brooks. 'From Strength to Strength' is Professor Brooks' guide to living a happy and fulfilling life – a life that continues to get better as we age. He teaches two courses at Harvard, the first is Non-For-Profit Leadership and Management at the Harvard Kennedy School. The second is Happiness and Leadership as a part of the Harvard MBA programme.

I had just completed my MBA at Victoria University of Wellington, and it blew my mind

that Harvard was offering a course on the science of Happiness as a part of an MBA degree. The Master of Business Administration traditionally covers your broad business functions – accounting, marketing, strategy, change leadership, economics. But a course on happiness? That felt like it fell beyond the bounds of traditional business education.

“I wasn't even aware that the Fulbright award existed until I heard Te Puoho speak. His kōrero about his Fulbright experience, what he learned at Stanford, and what he brought back home to Aotearoa really opened my eyes and lit a fire in my belly to apply for a Fulbright scholarship one day too.”

Harvard's Leadership and Happiness lab has been up and running for about 2 years now. The lab is led by Professor Brooks, and sits within the Center for Public Leadership at the Harvard Kennedy School. The Leadership Philosophy guiding the work and research of the lab is the belief that all great leaders should be happiness teachers.

In the last couple of years, the lab has led two missions to Dharamsala in India to learn about Happiness from the Dalai Lama. Professor Brooks has published a new book called 'How to Build a Life', co-authored with Oprah Winfrey. The lab also organized a Leadership and



Happiness symposium earlier this year, bringing in a number of globally renowned scholars to discuss the best practices for applying the science of wellbeing in university courses and research settings.

I'm here because I believe that Professor Brooks is one of the best in the world at translating the science and research on happiness into accessible language for everyday people. That's what I want to do back home. I want to educate for impact. I want to teach the next generation of students – who will one day be the leaders of our nation – how to live happy, fulfilling and meaningful lives. I'm here to learn what I can from Professor Brooks, so I can bring the Leadership and Happiness mission back home to the shores of Aotearoa.

“I had just completed my MBA at Victoria University of Wellington, and it blew my mind that Harvard was offering a course on the science of Happiness as a part of an MBA degree.”

Tell us about your project. Has everything been as expected, or have things changed, or surprised you? What kind of connections have you made to date?

I really had no idea what to expect when I arrived – I just wanted to show up, be useful to the Happiness Lab's mission, and learn. I've got a couple of things on my plate at the moment. I'm working on my PhD part-time while I'm here, auditing a number of courses at Harvard, and helping with relevant projects at the lab. Next semester I'll be a teaching assistant for the Leadership and Happiness course at Harvard Business School, which will be an incredible opportunity to apprentice under Arthur and learn from his teaching practice.

My PhD is focused on human potential in the workplace, exploring a concept I call 'ideal-self-

actualisation'. In plain language, I'm exploring on how individuals fulfil their potential by journeying towards their ideal self (the person they wish to be in the future). My research looks at the role 'ideal-self-actualization' plays in happiness and wellbeing, and employee work engagement. I also examine the factors in the workplace which either hinder or enable 'ideal-self-actualization'. My hope is that my research will be the first step towards understanding how we can design workplaces, organisations, communities and societies that enable people to fulfil their unique potential.

In the two months that I've been here I've taken an advanced positive psychology professional coaching course with Robert Biswas Diener and Christian van Nieuwerburgh – two leading scholars in professional coaching and positive psychology. In the last few weeks, I've connected a couple of times with Professor Roy Baumeister, who is a deity in the field of social psychology. I also connected with Professor Scott Barry Kaufman in Brooklyn, NY – whose book 'Transcend: The New Science of Self-Actualization' inspired me to study self-actualization as my PhD focus. I've also just got my hands on a signed copy of a book from Professor Richard Boyatzis, whose work is foundational to my PhD research. I'm hoping to connect with him too while I'm here. Honestly, even typing these names out right now feels surreal. These are scholars whose work has deeply influenced the research I do and how I see the world. And here I am connecting with them and hanging out with them in person.

How are you enjoying your broader Fulbright experience so far? What have you been up to in Massachusetts? Have you been in touch with other Fulbrighters?

Boston is a beautiful city – it feels big enough for my little kiwi wings, but small enough that it can feel like a second home for the coming year. My wife and I explored as much of Boston as we could once we arrived – checking out the freedom trail, eating new food (Boston cannoli, my new love!), and a few Red Sox games.

Beyond Massachusetts, I've been to New York twice. My wife and I explored the city and saw Back to the Future on Broadway, which was beautiful and mind-blowing. Last night I went to a professional wrestling show up in New Hampshire – no judgement please! 12-year me would be incredibly upset if I didn't see the wrestling when they came to town. I've got tickets to the WWE when they come to Boston too.

I've been in touch with a few of the other NZ Fulbrighters here. [2024 Fulbright NZ Scholar Award recipient] Jesse Pirini and I have caught up a couple of times, which has been helpful to make sense of our lives on the other side of the world and to touch base with another scholar from my home base at Wellington Business School. I'll be connecting with Lindsey Pointer at the end of November. Lindsey was a U.S Fulbrighter based at VUW a few years ago, we were friends and worked together on a number of Restorative Justice initiatives at Victoria University of Wellington. I hosted a few of the other NZ Fulbrighters based at Harvard for a dinner a month ago which was fun. We're overdue for a round two.



MAIKEN CALKOEN

LEARNING BEYOND BORDERS: A HAWKE'S BAY TEACHER'S BRIGHT ADVENTURE

First published in the New Zealand Education Gazette, reproduced with permission.

In 2020, Maiken Calkoen was awarded a Fulbright Distinguished Award in Teaching that set her on the learning adventure of a lifetime. With the awards recently re-established after a two-year hiatus, her experiences shed light on the transformative power of global professional development.

In 2022, Karamu High School kaiako Maiken Calkoen finally embarked on her Fulbright journey to the United States, delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The four-month programme saw her living and learning alongside educators from around the world at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Her cohort included 20 teachers from 14 countries, such as Botswana, Finland, and the Philippines.

"We shared food, stories, pandemic reflections, and many an anecdote about teaching in our home countries. We supported each other while being away from our families and through all the challenges that adapting to a new way of life brings."

The experience was as enriching culturally as it was professionally.

"Being with these teachers from such diverse countries allowed for much unexpected and delightful learning. We celebrated independence days, birthdays, national sporting successes and individual achievements," she explains.

The contrasts she observed were striking: in some countries, teaching is a revered and well-supported profession, while others grapple with teacher shortages and under-resourced schools.

One standout example was Botswana's innovative approach to addressing digital inequities, prioritising remote communities with solar-powered classrooms and online communication tools.

The programme included attending weekly seminars in teaching pedagogy, going on field trips, visiting high schools, and completing a university paper.

"The expectation was that we learned from the various courses and activities and in turn shared something of our culture and country with others we encountered."

A different environment

A highlight of the programme was Maiken's weekly visits to a high school in Pittsburgh, where she witnessed teaching in a context vastly different from her own. The school had metal detectors at the entrance, security staff on-site, and students remained indoors throughout the day.

Its population was predominantly African American and Hispanic, with many refugee students navigating challenges such as language barriers.

Despite limited resources and short class periods of under 40 minutes, Maiken observed the strength of teacher-student relationships. Teachers demonstrated unwavering dedication, forming bonds that became the foundation for student engagement and learning.

"Like here, teachers worked hard for the good of their students. And, like here, many were exhausted, burned out and weary."

When Maiken presented about Karamu High School and New Zealand education, students and teachers marveled at the differences they noticed.

"Most obvious to them was the connection we have to our land and the natural environment, education outdoors, and the range of learning experiences offered. Many of the students remarked 'I want to go to school there!'"

Pandemic perspectives

The global nature of the programme provided a unique opportunity to reflect on how education systems navigated the pandemic. Conversations with colleagues revealed a wide range of approaches, highlighting stark inequities in access to digital technology and tools.

In Singapore, robust infrastructure allowed for a relatively seamless transition to online learning. By contrast, some educators relied on platforms like WhatsApp due to a lack of school-based resources. Stories like these emphasised the resilience and ingenuity of teachers under immense pressure.

For Maiken, these discussions reinforced the importance of addressing inequities within New Zealand's education system, particularly in technology access.

While Aotearoa was fortunate to return to classrooms relatively quickly compared to some nations, the pandemic underscored the need for ongoing innovation and support to ensure all students can thrive in any learning environment.

Creativity in learning

While in the programme, Maiken completed an inquiry project focusing on creativity in project-based learning. This interest led her to explore how student agency and choice could enhance engagement and achievement.

Upon her return to New Zealand, Maiken applied her learning by offering students more opportunities to shape their projects. With the flexibility of Aotearoa's curriculum, she has seen how tailoring projects to student interests increases their ownership of learning.

This approach has been a rewarding shift, encouraging students to explore their creativity in meaningful ways.

"Overall, the experience has reinforced my deep belief that giving students the opportunity for creativity and guiding them through their own explorative project work is such a valuable learning experience.

"It means that to participate in this world and share your personal perspective in a creative manner can lead to much enrichment for all."

A Fresh Look at Aotearoa

Reflecting on her experience, Maiken gained a renewed appreciation for what makes New Zealand's education system unique. She highlighted the strong connection students have with our environment and the flexibility of a curriculum that allows teachers to innovate and adapt to the needs of their students.

"The experience of being in the American school system gave me a new perspective on what we do indeed have here. It allowed me the time and headspace to recognise the great things we can offer our young people and how we can continue to strive to make things even better."

The integration of mātauranga Māori into teaching is another area Maiken feels New Zealand can take pride in. This approach enriches learning and reflects the country's cultural identity in a way that many other systems do not.

Her time in the US also gave her space to think deeply about her role as an educator. Since returning, she has remained committed to fostering positive, supportive learning environments where every student has the chance to thrive.

"It made me more determined to continue as an educator and to strive to make my small realm of influence as positive as possible for the students I teach."

The Fulbright Distinguished Awards in Teaching Programme is for highly accomplished New Zealand teachers in primary or secondary schooling to participate in an intensive professional development programme in the US. Two awards are granted each year.

Applications are open now. For more information, visit fulbright.org.nz.

WANT TO JOIN US FOR THE MORNING QUIZ?

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We always welcome those in the neighbourhood to drop by for a morning cuppa and The Post quiz. Drop us an email at engagement@fulbright.org.nz if you plan on stopping by and we'll make sure there's enough coffee in the pot.

FULBRIGHT NZ TEAM UPDATES



PERSEFONI HARVEY

Kia ora and welcome to Persefoni Harvey our new Executive Assistant. Persefoni joined the team in September and quickly set about becoming an integral part of the Fulbright NZ whanau.

Prior to joining Fulbright NZ, Persefoni was EA at Ichor Leadership Search. There she supported the Consultants and research team on premium leadership searches where the primary focus of engagements were Chief Executive, Senior Leadership, and governance. Persefoni is also a registered Marriage Celebrant and a mother of two.

"I feel very fortunate to work for Fulbright New Zealand. We have a knowledgeable, supportive team, as well as a beautiful office space. It's a real privilege to know we are changing lives and even more meaningful to build life-long connections," says Persefoni.

Great to have you on board, Persefoni!



KATE ADAMS

We are thrilled to welcome Kate Adams to the team as our new Programme Manager. Kate just joined the team in January and is quickly getting up to speed on the Fulbright Distinguished Awards in Teaching, the Fulbright-Creative New Zealand Pacific Writer's Residency and the Fulbright US Scholar Awards.

Born and raised in Aotearoa, Kate spent several years living and working in Melbourne, where she built a strong background in tertiary administration. She primarily worked in the Faculty of Fine Arts and Music at the University of Melbourne for 12 years, in a variety of roles, from managing admissions and selection to curriculum development.

Now happily based in Wellington with her husband, Pat, and their seven-year-old daughter, Clara, Kate enjoys exploring the region's many trails and catching live music.

"So far, working at Fulbright NZ has been an excellent experience – I'm so delighted to be part of a supportive team that connects transformative learning experiences and makes a real impact on global education," says Kate.

Great to have you on the team, Kate!

CAMPUS ADVISERS

Fulbright New Zealand has Campus Advisers stationed on all major New Zealand campuses. Our Advisers are all Fulbright alumni who are available to discuss their exchange experiences with students and staff, as well as to give basic information about our awards.

Joining the team in 2024 were:



JULIA TALBOT-JONES

Julia Talbot-Jones joined us back in April 2024 as Campus Adviser at Te Herenga Waka Victoria University of Wellington., where she is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Government. In 2011 she was the recipient of a Fulbright NZ Ministry of Science and Innovation Graduate Award and travelled to the University of California, Santa Barbara, to study for an MA in economics.



TIMOTHY FADGEN

Timothy Fadgen joined us in October 2024 as our second Campus Adviser at the University of Auckland, where he is a Senior Lecturer (Politics and International Relations) and Programme Director (Master of Public Policy), as well as Associate Director of Graduate Programmes (Public Policy Institute). In 2014 Tim travelled to Samoa on a Fulbright-Clinton Fellowship (Fulbright Public Policy Fellowship).

Details of all our Campus Advisers are available on our website. If you are based on campus and like the idea of discussing your Fulbright experiences with students and staff, and giving basic information about our awards, please do get in touch: engagement@fulbright.org.nz.

FULBRIGHT NEW ZEALAND GOOD WORKS

Fulbright Good Works is a series of webinars that showcase the ongoing research and achievement of Fulbright NZ and US alumni. We welcome seminars of any nature, such as lectures, panel discussions, multimedia, storytelling, or performance. Seminars can be up to 60 minutes long and will be held virtually. To register your interest, please email engagement@fulbright.org.nz with a brief summary of what your presentation will be about and when you would ideally like to present. Please also include the year and title of your Fulbright award.



KNOW A FUTURE FULBRIGHTER?

Fulbright New Zealand offers a range of awards for New Zealand and United States citizens wanting to study, research, teach, or present their work in each other's country. We love for our alumni and contacts to share their experiences and spread the word about our programme to potential applicants.

AWARD TYPE

Fulbright New Zealand General Graduate Awards

Fulbright Science & Innovation Graduate Awards

Fulbright US Graduate Awards

Fulbright-Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Graduate Award

Fulbright NZ Scholar Awards

Fulbright-Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Scholar Award

Fulbright Creative New Zealand Pacific Writers Residence Award

Fulbright Specialist Awards

Fulbright US Scholar Awards

Ian Axford Public Policy Fellowships*

APPLICATION DEADLINE

1 August annually

1 August annually

9 October annually

1 August annually

1 October annually

1 October annually

7 March 2025

1 June annually

16 September annually

22 April 2025

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*Fulbright New Zealand Administers the Ian Axford Fellowships on behalf of the Ian Axford Board.