

Spring 2025



BRIGHT SPARKS

Cover Feature: 2025 Fulbright New Zealand Awards



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

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The mission of the Fulbright programme remains one of fostering compassion, mutual understanding and improving lives, crucial to a more peaceful world. This has been a constant through settled and unsettling times.

I firmly believe the health of the relationship between the people of New Zealand and the United States can be measured in terms of the tremendous insights that programmes like Fulbright bestow upon their recipients. We will feel that value now and, crucially, for the years and indeed decades ahead.

This year we sent a wonderfully talented group of New Zealanders to the United States, and we welcomed an equally impressive group of Americans to our shores. We will do the same next year, and the year after that, and beyond.

In that way, year on year, we work to continue Senator Fulbright’s legacy and ‘bring a little more knowledge, a little more reason, and a little more compassion into world affairs and thereby increase the chance that nations will learn at last to live in peace and friendship.’

At its heart, Fulbright is all about creating enduring connections. Connections between countries, but more importantly connections

between people. That is why our alumni network is so important, and why we are so pleased to celebrate the many incredible achievements of Fulbright NZ alumni around the world in our social media stories, newsletters, and of course our flagship Bright Sparks periodical.

In this issue, we celebrate not one but two Fulbrighters in the King’s Birthday Honours; revisit the 2025 Fulbright NZ awards ceremony; check in with Fulbright NZ alumna Makerita Urale; hear about a fabulous programme, born of a Fulbright exchange, bringing students from Worcester, Massachusetts to Wellington; and much more!

I hope you enjoy reading about your Fulbright compatriots, and I encourage you to get in touch with your own stories, reflections, and updates. As a Fulbright alumnus, friend or stakeholder, please know that your support is tremendously valuable and very much appreciated.



EDITOR’S NOTE

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of material in this newsletter, Fulbright New Zealand does not accept liability for any errors or omissions. Opinions expressed are not necessarily those of Fulbright New Zealand.

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COVER: 2025 Fulbright New Zealand Award recipients at the National Library

LEFT: 2025 Fulbright NZ Graduates (from left), Cam Young, Maria Rabino-Neira, Synteche Collins, Nathan Joe, and Phoebe Johnson

NEWS AND APPOINTMENTS



- Congratulations to Fulbright alumnus and Distinguished Professor Emeritus **Paul Spoonley**, who was made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit in the 2025 King's Birthday Honours for services to sociology.

In 2020, Paul received a Fulbright Senior Scholar award, which took him to the University of California, Berkley.



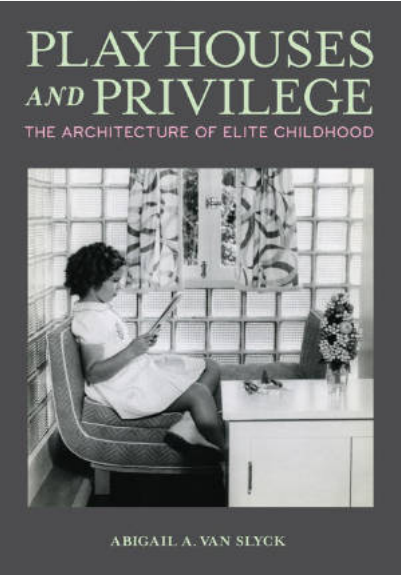
- Congratulations to Fulbright alumna and Professor Emeritus **Edwina Pio**, who was made an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit in the 2025 King's Birthday Honours for her service to ethnic communities.

Edwina is Associate Professorial Fellow at the Oxford Institute of Population Ageing, Research Fellow at Black Friars Hall Oxford University. In 2013 her Fulbright New Zealand Travel Award took her to Boston College.



- Congratulations to Fulbright NZ Science and Innovation Graduate **Andi Shirtcliffe**, who upon graduating from Johns Hopkins University was inducted into the Delta Omega Public Alpha Chapter and received the Timothy Baker Award for International Health Development. Andi has also been recently elected to the board of trustees for The Commonwealth Pharmacists' Association.

IN PRINT



Playhouses and Privilege: The Architecture of Elite Childhood

<https://www.upress.umn.edu/9781517916961/playhouses-and-privilege/>

- **Abigail Van Slyck's** 1993 US Senior Scholar Award brought her from the University of Arizona to Wellington's Alexander Turnbull Library. Her new book *Playhouses and Privilege* explores children's playhouses built on British and American estates between the 1850s and the mid-1930s. Different from the prefabricated buildings that later populated suburban backyards, these playhouses were often fully functional cottages designed by well-known architects for British royalty, American industrialists, and Hollywood stars. As Abigail shows, these buildings were more than extravagant spaces to cultivate children's imaginations and fantasy lives.

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 FULBRIGHT NEW ZEALAND AWARDS

It was an inspirational delight to honour and acknowledge our 2025 NZ and US grantees at our 2025 Annual Awards Ceremony.

This, of course, is our flagship event of the year and a chance for our latest grantees to come together with friends and whanau, along with Fulbright alumni and stakeholders, to celebrate their enormous success.

We recognise the achievements they have already made, the journeys they will take, and the impact they will have on the future, both here in Aotearoa and in the United States.

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



TOP: Sophie Couper (from left), Katie Ellis, Laura Gemmell-Sinnott, Eric Shen, and Cam Young – recipients of the 2025 Fulbright Science and Innovation Graduate Awards

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

BOTTOM RIGHT: Cam Young shares a celebratory embrace at the 2025 Fulbright New Zealand Awards Ceremony



TOP LEFT: Nate Rowe delivers the mihi at the 2025 Fulbright New Zealand Awards Ceremony

TOP MIDDLE: US grantees meet their New Zealand counterparts

TOP RIGHT: Paul Holland, recipient of an Ian Axford Fellowship in Public Policy

BOTTOM LEFT: Guests and alumni gather to honour this year's cohort

BOTTOM RIGHT: James Waite, Fulbright New Zealand Board member and Divisional Manager – Americas at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade



TOP LEFT: Paul Palkovacs (from left), Kelly Tikao, and Sarah Goff

TOP RIGHT: Executive Director of Fulbright New Zealand, Penelope Borland, congratulates grantees

BOTTOM LEFT: Chargé d'Affaires David Gehrenbeck, U.S. Embassy & Consulate in New Zealand, the Cook Islands, and Niue

BOTTOM RIGHT: Fulbright New Zealand grantees at the 2025 Awards Ceremony



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.



2025 FULBRIGHT NEW ZEALAND AWARD GRANTEES

The full 2025 Fulbright cohort is as follows

Fulbright Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Scholar Award

Kelly Tikao

Fulbright NZ Scholar Awards

Michael Baker, Jerome Ng, Albert Refiti

Fulbright-CNZ Pacific Writer's Residency

Simone Kaho

Fulbright Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Graduate Award

Leteisha Te Awhe-Downey

Fulbright Science and Innovation Graduate Awards

Sophie Couper, Katherine (Katie) Ellis, Laura Gemmell-Sinnott, Eric Shen, Cameron (Cam) Young

Fulbright New Zealand General Graduate Awards

Synteche Collins, Nathan Joe, Phoebe Johnson, Maria Rabino-Neira, Anna Rankin

Fulbright US Scholar Awards

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

Fulbright US Graduate Awards

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

Ian Axford Fellows

Julie Buchwald, Kathleen Cochrane, Paul Holland



TOP: Bret Hatzinger (from left), Emily Lau, Miah Clark, Naeisha Ngatuvai-McClain, Elinor Fajer, and Travis Richardson — recipients of the 2025 Fulbright US Graduate Awards

BOTTOM LEFT: Alastair Bisley, Chairperson of the Fulbright New Zealand Board, with Persefoni Harvey, Fulbright NZ Executive Assistant

BOTTOM RIGHT: Eric Shen, recipient of a 2025 Fulbright Science and Innovation Graduate Award

MAKERITA URALE

Makerita Urale's 2010 Fulbright-Creative New Zealand Pacific Writer's Residency took her to the University of Hawai'i at Manoa, where she spent three months working on the first draft of a play entitled The Heathen's Way. Here Makerita reflects on her Fulbright experience and the opportunities it unlocked in the years that followed.

I spent three months at the University of Hawai'i in 2010 as the recipient of the Fulbright-Creative New Zealand Pacific Writer's Residency at the Manoa campus. I had been writing and working as an independent freelance Producer and documentary director for over 15 years. My sister Sima, a filmmaker and writer, had been the first recipient of this Fulbright opportunity many years before, so I was already aware that this opportunity existed, and her sharing with me the positive difference it had made in her writing, arts practice and understanding Hawai'i culture. Applying for the Fulbright came at a time in my life when I needed space and time to research, reflect and write about our place as Pasifika creatives in Aotearoa and the contemporary world, and specifically exploring our place in institutional settings, such as a university. I posed the question of whether a Pasifika person could influence change from inside an institution and vice versa.



The irony is that in my last few weeks of my residency, I received an email from Creative New Zealand inviting me to apply for the Senior Adviser Pacific role. It was the only specific Pacific role at the government agency at the time, which had also supported me in my arts career for many years. I had also served a two-year stint in the mid-1990s as a member of Creative New Zealand's Pacific Arts Committee under the extraordinary leadership of the visionary Albert Wendt, who was the committee Chair as well as a member of the Arts Board. I already had a good relationship with Creative New Zealand and the many advisors and staff over the years. I remember being surprised at the Creative New Zealand email informing me of the job vacancy and strangely, my time in Hawai'i and the theme of my project meant I decided to 'jump off the cliff' and apply for the job, and let fate take its course. My arts experience including international work fitted the job description, and I unexpectedly got the job offer which I then accepted, with great trepidation as I would be entering government and have a full-time job instead of my freelance work and independence in the arts industry.

I am now an executive and Senior Manager Pacific Arts at Creative New Zealand – a looped circle. I have learned an incredible amount of new skills and knowledge, including strategy, policy and partnerships which have supported my arts community. It's fantastic work in public service and aligns with my Samoan values of tautua which means service to your community and village. My role means I am directly responsible for the Fulbright programme that supported me, which also gives me a unique lived experience of programmes that can make a difference in the lives of New Zealand artists. I have developed a range of new and similar programmes for artists in New Zealand, the Pacific Islands and globally. I don't believe I would have made such a pivotal change in my life without the Fulbright opportunity so many years ago. The opportunity to spend time away from New Zealand in another Pacific culture that is part of the USA, was a privilege and has been invaluable in my work in the public service, and gave me a greater understanding and sense of connection in being part of the Fulbright global community. Thank you for the opportunity to share with our community.

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MICHAEL ELMES

It's hard to think of an initiative that better highlights the enduring value of a Fulbright exchange than Michael Elmes and the WPI Wellington New Zealand Project Center. The following text is mostly taken with permission from a chapter by Michael Elmes and Ingrid Shockey in J. Pirini, S. Cummings, and A.M Paredo (April 2026), Indigenous Management: Knowledge and Frameworks, Sage Publications (used with permission).



A WPI student cohort gathers at the Frank Kitts Park Amphitheater with faculty advisors, Professors Ingrid Shockey and Dominic Golding (2017).

In 1970, the Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) in Worcester, Massachusetts made the transition from a traditional science and engineering-based university to one that was built around cross-disciplinarity and project-based learning. The Plan, as it was originally termed, enables faculty and students to engage in highly collaborative, project-based opportunities in each of their 4 years of undergraduate education. Students gain experience with essential teamwork skills early in the process.

By the third year of their 4-year degree program, all students participate in a rigorous 14-week project learning experience. This project is usually with an external project partner often outside the U.S., typically complex in nature, and situated in a community of stakeholders around some community challenge at the intersection of environment, technology, and society. These projects are cross-disciplinary by design and intended to directly expose STEM students to the nuances of complex decision making in real world situations.

Unlike traditional study-abroad programs, the learning outcomes for the WPI project program include reinforcing the value of face-to-face dialog, fostering cultural understanding and humility, and sensitizing STEM students to shared learning through joint problem solving. To that end, WPI currently hosts students at more than 50 project center sites across 6 continents, including domestic sites within the University's own city of Worcester, Massachusetts. To date, WPI has supported over 20,000 STEM students through this immersive off-campus educational program (WPI Global Projects Program, 2024).

In 2011, Michael Elmes leveraged his 2005 Fulbright Senior Scholar Award in New Zealand to explore the possibility of inviting local interest in projects and strengthening his collaborations in Aotearoa New Zealand. Former Fulbright New Zealand Executive Director, Mele Wendt MNZM, and Victoria University colleague, Sally Davenport MNZM MInsD, were gracious in helping WPI identify and meet potential project partners across the Wellington region. The Wellington Project Center welcomed the first cohort of WPI students to the North Island of Aotearoa in 2012. Since then, the Center has grown to include new WPI faculty advisers and student-participants from many of WPI's academic domains and completed over 70 projects with 20+ NZ partners and over 275 WPI students.

WANT TO JOIN US FOR THE MORNING QUIZ?

EMAIL INFO@FULBRIGHT.ORG.NZ

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

Projects have explored, for example, strategies for climate change adaptation in fragile riparian and coastal regions, innovation for land management practices, wildlife protection in projects with NZ DOC, and science communication and citizen involvement in museum outreach efforts, among others. Partnerships in the Wellington region have enabled key community stakeholders and student teams to measure local perceptions, conduct feasibility studies, create resource archives, develop and deploy community action plans, establish citizen engagement initiatives, track biodiversity threats, and craft communication that bridge environmental findings and community planning. Students also have been exposed first-hand to the urgency of disproportionate health and infrastructure challenges that exist outside the university setting. Teams have collected climate change stories, developed business plans for locally resilient agriculture, recorded traditional skills, developed innovations for production, identified regional climate change hazards, and uncovered other significant outcomes that come from working collaboratively in the public domain.

Beginning in 2014, the Wellington Project Center directors began developing projects with Māori partners in and around the Wellington region. These projects have included, for example, a review and assessment of a digital cultural atlas for Māori studies, an investigation into using water powered microgeneration to power a greenhouse on a marae near Rotorua, as well as resource management conflicts and challenges in the Wairarapa Moana. The projects required students and faculty to think sensitively and collaboratively across cultural differences, especially as they pertain to western engineering traditions – the background of most WPI undergraduate students – and traditional ecological knowledge and strategies in the Māori community.

Elmes and Shockey have built and refined syllabi, course modules, and resource websites for students in the preparation course prior to

their arrival in Aotearoa New Zealand. The conversation with students and faculty starts with tone: What can we bring to these collaborations? Who are we and what are our assumptions? Who or what is the main character in the project? What is our ethical responsibility to the story we share? Who is the owner of the findings? Their preparation also builds both conceptual and te reo Māori vocabularies: What is mātauranga Māori? What is meant by kaitiaki? Readings about the cultural and political history of Māori in Aotearoa give context to existing and proposed national policies behind the project. The writing of a literature review before arriving exposes students to frameworks like the legal personhood of rivers and Te Mana o te Wai as a baseline.

The Center works closely with sponsors to define the scope or focus of the projects it undertakes. Previous project sponsors have included GNS, Callaghan Innovation, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, New Zealand Department of Conservation (DOC), Zealandia, the Greater Wellington Regional Council (GWRC), Te Kawa a Maui – School of Maori Studies at Victoria University, The Museum of Wellington City and Sea, and the Child Obesity and Type 2 Diabetes Prevention Network, among others.

They are always looking for new sponsoring organizations that are doing interesting work at the intersection of environment, technology, and society – organizations that would benefit from a team (about four students) of hard working, independent, and technically-oriented students eager to investigate some interesting challenge and provide a fresh, data-driven perspective. WPI provides housing for the students during their stay in Wellington from mid-January to early March. In addition, WPI provides two faculty advisors who work closely with the students and sponsors during their stay in Wellington.

Find out more at <https://wp.wpi.edu/newzealand/>

If you have questions, feel free to contact the Wellington Project Center Co-Directors at mbelmes@wpi.edu or ishockey@wpi.edu.



A team of WPI students works with the NZ Department of Conservation on a survey project to protect New Zealand sea lions (2015).



A student team interviews local farmer, Vern Brasell, about sustainable farming practices and native plant restoration for a video project in support of Wairarapa Moana restoration (2025).

FULBRIGHT NZ TEAM UPDATES

LANA MIKHALCHUK

Kia ora and welcome to Lana Mikhalchuk our new Engagement and Outreach Coordinator. Lana joined the team in August and has been enjoying settling in. Asked about her early impressions of Fulbright, Lana had this to say:

“As Fulbright’s new Engagement Coordinator, my role is all about connecting with our incredible alumni community — and what a privilege that is! I’ve been truly amazed by the depth and breadth of knowledge, expertise and influence among our alumni. It’s an absolute treasure trove of experience, ideas, and inspiration.

“I’m really looking forward to getting to know more of you in the months ahead and to creating opportunities for meaningful connection — through events, stories, and conversations that reflect just how remarkable this network is.”

Great to have you onboard, Lana!



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 October 2025 are:



DR EMILY GORDON

Emily Gordon joined us in October as our newest Campus Adviser at the University of Auckland, where she is a Lecturer in Physics. Emily's 2020 Fulbright Science and Innovation Graduate Award took her to Colorado State University, where she completed a PhD in atmospheric science. She then spent two years as a Postdoctoral Fellow at Stanford University in the Department of Earth System Science before taking up her position at the University of Auckland in 2025.



RYAN MEACHEN

Ryan Meachen (Ngāti te Wehi, Ngāti Huia ki Poroutawhao) recently joined the School of Psychological Sciences at Te Herenga Waka–Victoria University of Wellington. He studies how workplaces help people realise their potential, with interests spanning happiness and well-being, meaningful work, identity development, leadership, and cross-cultural organisational psychology centred on Māori work experiences. Ryan received the 2024 Fulbright Science and Innovation Graduate Award and joined Harvard University's Center for Public Leadership as a Visiting Student Researcher, working with Harvard's Leadership & Happiness Lab.

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: lane@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 lane@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-Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Graduate Award

Fulbright NZ Scholar Awards

Fulbright-Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga Scholar Award

Fulbright US Graduate Awards

Fulbright Creative New Zealand Pacific Writers Residence Award

Fulbright Specialist Awards

Fulbright US Scholar Awards

Ian Axford Public Policy Fellowships*

Fulbright Distinguished Awards in Teaching Programme for US Teachers

Fulbright Distinguished Awards in Teaching Programme for NZ Teachers

APPLICATION DEADLINE

1 August annually

1 August annually

1 August annually

1 October annually

1 October annually

9 October annually

c. 1 March annually

1 June Annually

15 September annually

April 2026

February annually

April annually

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