



2026

GRANTEE BOOKLET



FULBRIGHT
New Zealand

TE TŪĀPAPA MĀTAURANGA
O AOTEAROA ME AMERIKA

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US Graduate Stephanie Graham speaking at orientation in Wellington.

Cover Photo: US Grantees arrive for their orientation programme in February.
From left Julia Mansfield, Sahana Arumani, Carolyn Mavretish, Yitong Tseo

MESSAGE OF CONGRATULATIONS



Congratulations to all 2026 Fulbright award recipients. Since its inception nearly 80 years ago, the Fulbright programme has helped foster people-to-people relationships between New Zealand and the United States through academic excellence, enrichment, and exchange. Every year a new group of talented individuals take up that mission and we applaud them for their efforts. This unique opportunity will allow you to deepen your knowledge and understanding in your chosen field, while building enduring connections in your host nation. We wish you all the best in this and your future endeavours.

Rt. Hon. Winston Peters

*Minister of Foreign Affairs, New Zealand
Honorary Chairperson, Fulbright New Zealand*



Congratulations to all the 2026 Fulbright award recipients. This year as the United States celebrates 250 years since our founding and 80 years of the Fulbright program, we are proud to acknowledge that New Zealand has been part of it for 78 of those years. This longevity is testament to the depth of the relationship and friendship between our countries. The goal of Senator Fulbright to foster leadership, learning, and empathy between cultures is clearly thriving. The U.S. Mission New Zealand has always played a valuable and supportive role in the Fulbright New Zealand program and I am delighted to be part of it. You, as the new cohort of New Zealand and U.S. grantees, will cherish the experiences you gain through this program and I applaud your talent and aptitude that has enabled you to come so far already. Your Fulbright award will continue to open doors for you in the future and it will also give you the opportunity to open doors for others. I wish you continued success and I look forward to learning more about your adventures and achievements.

David Gehrenbeck

US Chargé d'affaires to New Zealand



On behalf of the Fulbright New Zealand Board of Directors and Staff, I extend my warm congratulations to our 2026 grantees. A Fulbright Award testifies not only to your high academic, professional, and creative abilities, but also gives you an important role as representatives of your country and your culture. As Fulbrighters, you have the opportunity to advance knowledge and practice in your chosen fields and sectors, and in doing so to strengthen the links between academic and creative communities in Aotearoa and the United States. I am delighted to welcome this new cohort of Fulbright Grantees, and I wish you all the very best for your Fulbright experience.

Alastair Bisley

Chairperson of the Board, Fulbright New Zealand

FULBRIGHT NEW ZEALAND

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THE FULBRIGHT PROGRAMME

The Fulbright programme of international educational exchange was an initiative of US Senator J. William Fulbright, who in the aftermath of World War II believed that mutual understanding between different countries and cultures was crucial to ensure a peaceful future for the world.

The Fulbright Act, passed by the United States Congress in 1946, directed proceeds from the sale of surplus war property, foreign loan repayments and reparations to fund the “promotion of international good will through the exchange of students in the fields of education, culture, and science.”

In Senator Fulbright’s own words, the Fulbright programme aims “to bring a little more knowledge, a little more reason and a little more compassion into world affairs and thereby to increase the chance that nations will learn at last to live in peace and friendship.”

“It has been described as one of the largest and most significant movements of scholars in the world.”

New Zealand was the fifth country to sign up to the Fulbright programme by bilateral treaty with the United States of America, in 1948. Since then, Fulbright New Zealand has granted more than 3,700 exchange awards, sending New Zealand graduate students, artists, academics, teachers and professionals on exchanges to the US and welcoming Americans on exchanges to New Zealand. It now operates in 165 countries and has been described as one of the largest and most significant movements of scholars in the world.

The more than 400,000 Fulbright alumni worldwide include university presidents, journalists, artists, professors, teachers, heads of state, cabinet ministers, ambassadors, politicians, judges, and heads of corporations. Alumni of the Fulbright NZ programme include Dame Anne Salmond, David Cunliffe, Gareth Farr, Witi Ihimaera, Michael King, Alan MacDiarmid, Bill Manhire, Dame Marie Clay, Sir Kenneth Keith, Sir Wallace Rowling, and many other prominent New Zealanders.

Fulbright New Zealand is jointly funded by the US and New Zealand governments with additional funding from award partners and alumni donors. It is governed by a Board of Directors comprised of New Zealanders and Americans.





FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Congratulations to the 2026 Fulbright New Zealand cohort! It is wonderful to be able to celebrate with you as we warmly welcome you to the Fulbright whānau.

At its heart, the Fulbright programme exists to promote mutual understanding and empathy between people and nations, and every year a fresh group of outstanding individuals takes on that mantle.

The scope of research interests across all award categories this year is a testament to Fulbright's wide impact across disciplines. This, of course, is the great strength of the Fulbright programme—the breadth and depth of people and their research between our countries, building and sharing their expertise and experience.

The 2026 cohort of NZ and US Scholars and Graduate Awardees as well as our Axford Fellow and Distinguished Teaching scholar represent a wonderfully diverse range of research topics and backgrounds. Each one of them is an exceptional ambassador for New Zealand or the US and the collaborations that they forge will bear fruit for decades to come.

With that we are thrilled to recognise and celebrate a full cohort of 23 New Zealand Fulbright grantees who will be heading to the US to take up their awards very soon.

We currently have a total of ten US grantees spread around Aotearoa New Zealand and we welcomed them to the country in February. Every year we also welcome numbers of US grantees coming to New Zealand on shorter term programmes, including the US Specialist programme and Global Scholars.

I once again offer my admiration and congratulations and the very best wishes to our 2026 grantees.

He tino whakahihī ahau ki a koe.

Penelope Borland

Executive Director, Fulbright New Zealand

FULBRIGHT GRADUATE PROGRAMME

Fulbright New Zealand offers a range of awards to New Zealand and American graduate students to study or research in each other's countries. Grantees are selected on the basis of academic excellence and ambassadorial qualities. In addition to award payments towards study or research, all grantees receive return airfares, a health benefit plan, enrichment activities and programme support during their exchange.

FULBRIGHT SCIENCE AND INNOVATION GRADUATE AWARDS

These awards are for promising New Zealand graduate students to undertake postgraduate study or research at US institutions in fields targeted to support growth and innovation in New Zealand.

Seven awards were granted this year. These awards are sponsored by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment.



JOEY BACK

Joey Back from Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland will complete a Master of Science in Robotics at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Joey graduated with a Bachelor of Engineering (Hons First Class) in Computer Systems Engineering from The University of Auckland.



AMELIA BLAMEY

Amelia Blamey from Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland will complete a Master of Economic Policy and Practice at Boston University. Amelia graduated with MCom in Economics (Distinction), BCom in Economics, and BSc in Environmental Science and Geography from Victoria University of Wellington.



NICK DENTON

Nick Denton from Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington will complete a Master of Architecture in Urban Design at Harvard University in Boston. Nick graduated with a MArch(Professional) and a Bachelor of Architectural Studies, and a BSc in Physics from Victoria University of Wellington.



SARAH HUNTER

Sarah Hunter from Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland will research childhood bone and joint infections at Vanderbilt University Medical Centre in Nashville, Tennessee. She is studying for a PhD at The University of Auckland. Sarah graduated with a Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery and a Master of Health Science from The University of Auckland. She is a clinical research and training fellow with the Health Research Council of New Zealand and an Advanced Trainee with the New Zealand Orthopaedic Association.



THOMAS MARSLAND

Thomas Marsland from Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington will research artificial intelligence methods for antibiotic discovery at the Wyss Institute for Biologically Inspired Engineering at Harvard University in Boston. Thomas graduated with a BSc (Hons First Class) in Microbiology from the University of Otago. He is currently doing a PhD at the University of New South Wales, Sydney.



NIAMH ORR-WALKER

Niamh Orr-Walker from Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland will research health psychology and breast cancer survivorship at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute and Harvard University in Boston. Niamh has a BSc from the University of Otago and is working towards a Master of Health Psychology and a Post-Graduate Diploma in Health Psychology at The University of Auckland.



NIKKI SINGH

Nikki Singh from Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland will research the interplay of illness and identity for young adults living with autoimmune diseases at Stanford University in California. This is research towards a PhD at The University of Auckland. Nikki graduated with a Bachelor of Health Science (Hons First Class) from The University of Auckland.

FULBRIGHT NGĀ PAE O TE MĀRAMATANGA GRADUATE AWARD

This award is for a promising New Zealand graduate student to undertake postgraduate study or research in the US in the field of Indigenous Development.



EBONY KOMENE (NGĀPUHI, TE ARAWA, TAINUI)

Ebony Komene from Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland will be a visiting student researcher exploring Indigenous nursing at Washington State University in Seattle and Indigenous Nurse Practitioner models of practice at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Hawai'i. Ebony graduated with a Bachelor of Nursing (Hons First Class) at The University of Auckland, where she is currently a PhD candidate.

GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT – RYAN MEACHEN

2024 Fulbright NZ Science and Innovation Graduate Award



“I was asked to be on The Oprah Podcast to talk about my time at Harvard with Professor Arthur Brookes. I got introduced as a Fulbrighter!”

Ryan's award took him to the Leadership and Happiness Laboratory at the Harvard Kennedy School where he shadowed Arthur C Brooks the 'happiness professor' for a year. Ryan was interviewed by Oprah in April 2026. The episode is titled; Happiness Professor: How to Discover the Meaning of Your Life with Oprah and Arthur C. Brooks.

What would you do with a Fulbright?

FULBRIGHT NEW ZEALAND GENERAL GRADUATE AWARDS

These awards are for promising New Zealand graduate students to undertake postgraduate study or research at US institutions in any field. Seven awards were granted this year.



KAAN HIINI (NGĀPUHI, TE ARAWA, TE RARAWA)

Kaan Hiini is a design director and strategist from Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. He has a Bachelor of Design from Auckland University of Technology. Kaan will be completing a Master of Transdisciplinary Design, specialising in indigenous design methodologies, at the New School in New York.



JOVANA NEDELJKOV

Jovana Nedeljkov from Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland will complete a Master of Laws specialising in Competition, Innovation and Information Law at New York University in New York City. Jovana graduated with an LLB (Hons) from The University of Auckland.



HANSAKA RANAWEERA

Hansaka Ranaweera from Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington will complete a Master of Laws at Harvard Law School in Boston. Hansaka graduated with an LLB (Hons First Class) and a BA in Politics from the University of Otago.



LEE RICHARDSON

Lee Richardson from Waihōpai Invercargill, will complete a Master of Fine Arts in Graphic Design at Yale University. Lee graduated with a Bachelors of Fine Arts from the Ilam School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury.



EMMA SIDNAM

Emma Sidnam from Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland will complete a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing specialising in Fiction at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Emma graduated with an LLB and a BA in English Literature from Victoria University of Wellington.



FLYNN STRUCKMANN

Flynn Struckmann from Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland will complete a Master of Arts in Security Policy Studies at the George Washington University in Washington, DC. Flynn graduated with an LLB (Hons First Class) and a BA in Politics, Philosophy, and Economics from the University of Otago.



AMY WENG

Amy Weng from Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland will complete a Master of Arts in Asian Studies specialising in visual cultures at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Hawai'i. Amy graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Hons) and BA at The University of Auckland.

GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT – CHELSEA WONG

2024 Fulbright NZ General Graduate Award

“There is something incredibly powerful about being able to see something from a different perspective. This is a core part of international education.”

Chelsea's award took her to Rutgers University, where she completed a Master of Arts in American Studies – Public Humanities focusing on Asian diaspora experiences. She was the student presenter at the 2026 One to World Fulbright Awards dinner in New York City.

What would you do with a Fulbright?



FULBRIGHT US GRADUATE AWARDS

These awards are for promising US graduate students to undertake postgraduate study or research at New Zealand institutions in any field. Five US Graduates took up their awards in New Zealand this year.



SAHANA ARUMANI

From Great Falls, Virginia, Sahana Arumani is hosted by Massey University in Te Papaioea Palmerston North. She is researching leptospirosis through a One Health lens that connects human, animal, and environmental health, with a focus on prevention and community awareness. Sahana is working towards a Master of Science in Biohazardous Threats and Emerging Infectious Diseases at Georgetown University.



STEPHANIE GRAHAM

From New York and Massachusetts, Stephanie Graham is undertaking a Master of Museum and Heritage Practice at Victoria University of Wellington, focusing on how museum education supports K–12 learning. Stephanie holds a Master of Science in Humanistic/Multicultural Education from the State University of New York at New Paltz.



JULIA MANSFIELD

Julia Mansfield, from New York City is completing a Master's in Geology at the University of Otago, where she is researching the Green Island Fault and its seismic risk. Julia recently graduated from Harvard College with a BA in Earth and Planetary Science.



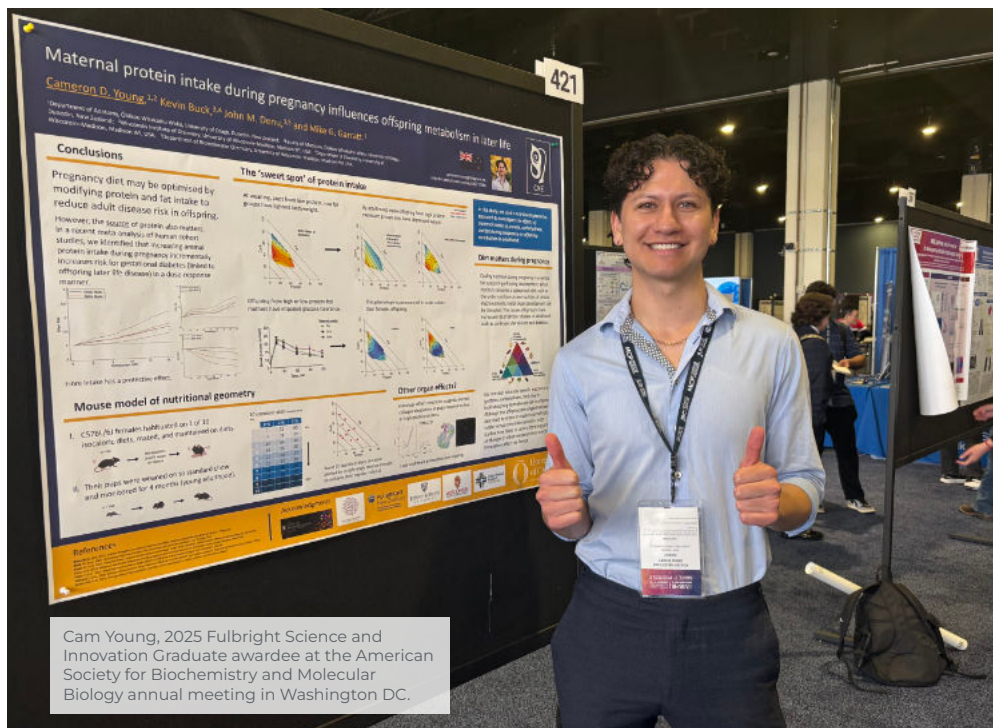
CAROLYN MAVRETISH

From New Jersey, Carolyn is studying for a Master of Landscape Architecture at Lincoln University in Ōtautahi Christchurch. Carolyn is drawn to land-centred design and sustainable landscape practice. Carolyn has a BA from Amherst College concentrating in Environmental and Architectural Studies.



YITONG TSEO

Yitong Tseo is a PhD candidate and bio-artist at MIT whose work explores sustainable materials and bio-fabricated soft robotics inspired by living systems. Before MIT, Yitong received a BA from Williams College double majoring in chemistry and computer science. Yitong is hosted by The University of Auckland and the Auckland Bioengineering Institute to conduct research on biohybrid robotics.



Cam Young, 2025 Fulbright Science and Innovation Graduate awardee at the American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology annual meeting in Washington DC.

FULBRIGHT SCHOLAR PROGRAMME

Fulbright New Zealand offers a range of awards to New Zealand and American academics, artists and professionals to research, teach, present their work and gain practical experience in each other's countries.

Awards range from small contributions towards short term visits to fully funded exchanges of up to one academic year, including airfares, a health benefit plan and programme support.

FULBRIGHT NEW ZEALAND SCHOLAR AWARDS

These awards are for New Zealand academics, artists or professionals to lecture and/or conduct research in the US for three to five months.



LEFAOALI'I DION ENARI (LEPA, MALAELA, VAIALA, NOFOALI'I, VAIUSU, SAFUNE, SALEAAUMUA-SAMOA)

Lefaoali'i Dion Enari will research Indigenous Dance as Physical Activity and Educational learning at Brigham Young University, Hawai'i. Dion is an Associate Professor at Ngā Wai a Te Tūi, Māori and Indigenous Research Centre at MIT Unitec, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland. He is also Honorary Associate Professor at University of Queensland.



RIZ FIRESTONE

Riz Firestone will conduct research and co-design a youth-focused type 2 diabetes prevention programme at the Fielding School of Public Health, University of California, Los Angeles. Riz is a Professor of Pacific and Public Health at the Centre for Public Health Research at Massey University, Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington.



HAMISH MCDUGALL

Hamish McDougall will research a history of Nuclear-Free New Zealand at Georgetown University in Washington DC. Hamish is an international historian of the Cold War, decolonisation and international trade. Until recently he was Executive Director at the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs and is currently Non-Resident Fellow at the Centre for Strategic Studies, Victoria University of Wellington; and Research Associate at the Public Policy Institute, The University of Auckland. Hamish is based in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.



PIP THOMAS

Pip Thomas from Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland will research the career transition experiences of New Zealand student-athletes navigating US collegiate programmes, focusing on transitional demands, institutional responsibility, and individual agency. She will be at Illinois State University. Pip is a researcher, practitioner, and consultant specialising in emerging athlete career transitions, and Founder of Continuum Performance Hubs.



SOPHIE VAN HAMELSVELD

Sophie van Hamelsveld from Ōtautahi Christchurch will research the relationships between harmful algal blooms and antibiotic resistance at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. Sophie is a Senior Scientist at the New Zealand Institute of Public Health and Forensic Science in Ōtautahi Christchurch.

GRANTEE SPOTLIGHT – ALBERT REFITI

2025 Fulbright NZ Scholar Award

“What a busy and rewarding time. Including bringing kava to NYU and the Bard Graduate Centre.”

Albert Refiti's award took him to The Bard Graduate Center in New York City where he researched for a book titled “Cosmogonic Artefacts: Spatial Exposition of Pacific Architecture”

What would you do with a Fulbright?



FULBRIGHT NGĀ PAE O TE MĀRAMATANGA SCHOLAR AWARD

This award is for a New Zealand academic, artist or professional to conduct research and/or lecture in the US for three to five months in the field of indigenous development.



LUKE ROWE (NGĀTI TŪWHARETOA, NGĀTI RAUKAWA-KI-TE-TONGA)

Luke Rowe from Tokorangi is a trained and registered clinical psychologist. He works with high performance athletes helping them to thrive under pressure. His research project is titled: Ngā Uri o Māui: At the intersection of indigeneity, men's mental health, and sport. Luke will attend the University of Hawai'i in Mānoa, Hawai'i. Luke is based at Te Whare Whakatupu Mātauranga at Te Wānanga o Raukawa.

FULBRIGHT DISTINGUISHED AWARDS IN TEACHING PROGRAMME FOR NEW ZEALAND TEACHERS

This is a programme for highly accomplished New Zealand teachers in primary or secondary schooling to participate in an intensive professional development programme in the US.



MARY BLUCK

Mary Bluck is a senior kāiako at Te kura O Ngā Puna Waiora / Newtown School in Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington. Mary will be investigating how Indigenous playground play may be introduced into the classroom to accelerate learning.



RACHAEL KNEEPKENS

Rachael Kneepkens, from Ōtaki on the Kāpiti Coast, is the Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO) for Arahunga Special School, at Ōtaki College. Rachael will research how we motivate and support disengaged students at secondary school.

FULBRIGHT US SCHOLAR AWARDS

These awards are for US academics, artists or professionals to lecture and/or conduct research in New Zealand for three to five months.



XIN FENG

Xin Feng from Columbus, Ohio, is a Professor of Human Development and Family Science at The Ohio State University. Xin's research at Massey University in Palmerston North explores children's emotional regulation and the development of depression and anxiety across cultural contexts.



KERWYN HUANG

From Palo Alto, California, Kerwyn (KC) Huang is a Professor of Bioengineering and Microbiology at Stanford University. Trained in physics and mathematics, his research uses quantitative approaches to study microbial communities. KC's research at the University of Otago focuses on how traditional medicines influence the human gut microbiome.



TSIONE WOLDE-MICHAEL

From Washington D.C., Tsione Wolde-Michael is an arts administrator, public historian, and curator committed to developing lasting methods for collaboration between national museum systems. Based at the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in Wellington, Tsione's research explores comparative approaches to museum practice that strengthen community engagement and restorative work in collections, exhibitions, and public programmes.

FULBRIGHT DISTINGUISHED AWARDS IN TEACHING PROGRAMME FOR US TEACHERS

This award is for highly accomplished American teachers in primary or secondary schooling to participate in an intensive professional development programme in New Zealand.



LILI KUCHAR

Lili Kuchar is from Berkeley, California. She is based at Victoria University of Wellington, researching literacy practices in highly vulnerable communities. Lili brings 15 years of experience teaching in public elementary schools and currently teaches at a pregnant and parenting teen school in Oakland, California.



IAN AXFORD (NEW ZEALAND) FELLOWSHIPS IN PUBLIC POLICY

These fellowships, offered by the Ian Axford Fellowships Board and funded by various New Zealand government agencies, are for outstanding mid-career US professionals to research and gain first-hand experience of public policy in New Zealand for three to five months. Fulbright New Zealand administers these Fellowships on behalf of the Ian Axford Fellowships Board.



CHRISTINE PAGEN

Christine (Chris) Pagen, from New York is a senior development professional with 15 years' experience at USAID. She has worked across the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia. During her fellowship, she is based at New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Wellington, researching international development cooperation.



Above: Anna Rankin, 2025 Fulbright General Graduate awardee, graduation ceremony at Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism

Connecting people. Connecting nations.



FULBRIGHT
New Zealand

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O AOTEAROA ME AMERIKA

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