



With Honors: Meet Queens College's Fulbright Scholars

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BY ARIEL HERNANDEZ

Seven students from Queens College have been awarded prestigious Fulbright grants for the coming year, among the highest number of any American college, according to the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

"We are very proud that our students are being recognized so frequently by the Fulbright Program," Queens College President Félix V. Matos Rodríguez said in a statement. "These honors speak highly of both the quality of the students that Queens College attracts and the skill and dedication of the faculty members who teach here."

According to the Fulbright Scholar Program database, the program provides 8,000 grants for research or teaching in more than 140 countries throughout the world. It is named after former U.S. Senator William Fulbright of Arkansas, who founded the program in 1946.

The Fulbright scholarship covers the students' flight to and from their destination, and a living stipend, which includes money for food, housing, teaching materials, and baggage allowance.

Eric Becker, a Minnesota native who lives in Jackson Heights, will be receiving his Master's in Fine Arts for creative writing and literary translation. He has received a Fulbright scholarship to conduct research and translate literature in Brazil.

"I feel very fortunate," Becker said. "This scholarship allows me to further my development and growth as a literary translator that otherwise might've been hard to come by."

Becker has been preparing for an opportunity like this ever since he first began translating. He said he is excited to experience working intimately with writers.

"Being able to work with them face-to-face and understand the cultural context of the book is spectacular," Becker said. "Studying in Brazil allows me to see how the language (Portuguese) is used on a day-to-day basis."

Becker worked with translator Esther Allen, whom, he says, taught him how translating is more than just converting one language to another.

"It's a work of art," he explained.

After completing college, Becker's goals are to continue working as a translator, as well as being the editor at "Words Without Borders," an online database that promotes cultural understanding of international literature.

Kathryn Cox of Ridgewood, an education major in the Macaulay Honors College, will spend nine months teaching English in Cyprus.

Cox studied abroad before, teaching English in Spain and Peru, with the help of the Macaulay Honors Opportunities Fund.

"Studying abroad gives me the opportunity to visit other parts of the world," Cox said. "It also allows me to learn about second language acquisition which is something I want to pursue after my masters."

Although Cox enjoys traveling the world, her long-term goal is to stay in New York. She said she will use her abroad experience to show how teaching a second language has a positive effect on education.

"Considering that New York is such a diverse place, my traveling experience helps me appreciate the diversity New York offers," Cox said.

With their Fulbright grants, Carlsky Belizaire and Karissa Caputo, both of Nassau County, will be working in Taiwan, teaching English to elementary or middle school students. Belizaire

will be an assistant English teacher in the city of Kaohsiung, and Caputo will be an English teacher on the island of Kinmen.

“This is something I’ve always wanted to do since I was little,” Caputo said. “I was always drawn to the Asian culture and thought about teaching English abroad; I just never thought it would happen.”

Caputo hopes that her experience teaching in Taiwan will advance her Mandarin. She wants to draw more connections in English and foreign languages, and teach a more diverse group of students in the future.

Caputo completed student teaching at Floral Park Memorial High School this semester. While there, she taught two advance Spanish ninth grade classes and a level three Spanish class primarily for tenth graders.

“I want students to have hope in the classroom and a good outlook for a promising future,” Caputo said. “I want to help children believe in themselves.”

Caputo previously studied abroad in Argentina, studying Latin American literature, and in Shanghai, China studying Chinese language and Chinese culture and society.

“Every time I come back from studying abroad, I feel more connected to people,” Caputo said. Belizaire is excited that he was granted the prestigious scholarship. As he likes to teach, Belizaire will be using the opportunity as an experience he feels he can use in his future in political science.

After graduation, Belizaire will apply for either graduate or law school as beginning steps to his long term goal of becoming a cultural ambassador for the United States.

Alyssa Blumenthal of Long Beach, LI, received a Fulbright Study/Research Award that allows her to spend a year researching renewable natural gas at the Bio-Gas Research Center of Linköping University in Sweden.

“I’m being given the opportunity to do research and being able to explore something that I am very passionate about,” Blumenthal said. “I get

to learn from brilliant people at a university that is dedicated to their research.”

After graduating, Blumenthal will be working with Con Edison’s energy department in New York City.

Her overall goal is to work in the energy world finding solutions on how to use energy sustainably. She’s very passionate in researching waste from paper production and natural gas alternatives that come from waste.

“I want to not only grow academically but as a person,” Blumenthal said. “Going to a place you’ve never been to and not knowing anyone there can be scary, but you learn a lot about yourself. It’s going to be a growth opportunity.”

Carla Spensieri of Flushing, who received her Master’s in Art and Teaching, was granted the Fulbright scholarship to work as an English teaching assistant in Brazil for undergraduate students who want to become English professors.

“This is the biggest accomplishment of my life,” she said. “I’ve always been supported by my parents so this is exciting because it’s something I’ve been working on my own.”

After obtaining her degree, Spensieri is 90 percent sure that she wants to work for the United Nations.

“I love to travel to different places,” she said. “I would love to live in places like Thailand and Korea to teach English to children of the elementary age.”

According to Queens College, another Fulbright award winner was Sarah Chung of Douglaston, a Korean American with proficiency in the Korean language. She will be teaching assistant in the land of her ancestors.

- See more at: <http://queenstribune.com/with-honors-meet-queens-colleges-fulbright-scholars/#sthash.FW2grrVQ.dpuf>