

BIBA JASMINE

A Journey of a Thousand Miles



Do you have a dream deep in your heart that you want to pursue, asked me one of my colleagues at the Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun? If you do, have you taken the first step necessary to achieve it?

Taking the first step is perhaps the most difficult thing to do in achieving a dream. There are a lot of mental obstacles that make it difficult to take that first step. I had never dreamt of going to US to get a second Master's as a Fulbright scholar. So, I applied for the Fulbright Fellowship considering myself worthy of applying for the prestigious universities in the United States.

Let me first tell you who J. William Fulbright is. In 1945, Senator J. William Fulbright introduced a bill in the United States Congress that called for the use of surplus war property to fund the 'promotion of international goodwill through the exchange of students in the fields of education, culture, and science. On 1 August 1946, President Harry S. Truman signed the bill into law, and Congress created the Fulbright Program, the flagship international educational exchange program sponsored by the U.S. Government.

From its inception, the Fulbright Program has fostered bilateral relationships in which citizens and governments of other countries work with the U.S. to set joint priorities and shape the program to meet shared needs. The world has been transformed in ensuing decades, but the fundamental principle of international partnership remains at the core of the Fulbright mission.

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Now, what does the Fulbright Program entail? The Fulbright Program awards approximately 8,000 grants annually. Currently, the Fulbright Program operates in over 155 countries worldwide, where the primary source of funding for the Fulbright Program is an annual appropriation made by the United States Congress to the Department of State. Participating governments and host institutions, corporations and foundations in foreign countries and in the United States also provide direct and indirect support.

The United States Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) administers the Fulbright Program under policy guidelines established by the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board (FFSB) and in cooperation with bi-national Fulbright Commissions and the Public Affairs Sections of U.S. embassies abroad.

As the administrative and executive arm of the Fulbright Program, ECA has fiscal responsibility for the preparation of an annual budget request to Congress and makes decisions on funding allocations to participating countries. Under policies



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established by the FFSB, ECA also holds primary responsibility for the administration of the program, together with the assistance of cooperating non-profit organizations.

All Fulbright program initiatives in India, including the advising and selection of its award candidates, are coordinated by the United States-India Educational Foundation (USIEF). Fulbright-Nehru Awards facilitates the most outstanding students, academics and professionals in India and the US to study, research and engage in work experiences with greater potential benefit for both countries.

India has one of the largest Fulbright Programs worldwide, awarding more than 17,000 Fulbright fellowships and other grants to Indians and Americans since it began. Scholars are selected through a rigorous application and interview process and receive a high level of support ranging from visa processing and health insurance to a comprehensive pre-departure orientation. For more information you can go to the site <http://www.usief.org.in/Fellowships.aspx>.

I felt the urge to write about my journey, to encourage young students, who might be interested in applying for the prestigious Fulbright fellowship.

However, my journey wasn't an uncomplicated and simple one. On my first day in the US, I felt a little nervous and unsure about adjusting in a new land and getting accustomed to the environment around. But, my fear gave way to determination,

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First day at the school, and the first class for which I registered 'Conservation Biology', made me realize, that now my hazy thinking and dreams shall get converted into reality. I have survived several months here, with a promise to learn as much as possible, about wilderness, nature and naturalness. However, I still don't feel completely satisfied; challenges are in abundance, but, my will to grow and mature in the field is tough and unwavering.

The Fulbright Program does not only provide participants – chosen for their academic merit and leadership potential – with the opportunity to study, teach and conduct research, exchange ideas and contribute to finding solutions to shared international concerns, but also gives them the platform to interact with a diverse set of people and grow as a cultural ambassador of one's own country.

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