The Fulbright 'recipe for success' – a Q&A with Emily Kotay

Research, Innovation & Impact
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When it was announced that the University of Arizona was the nation's top producer of Fulbright Scholars in 2022-23, U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken wrote a letter of congratulations to President Robert C. Robbins.

Blinken commended Emily Kotay, assistant director of international research in Research, Innovation & Impact, and her team for their hard work promoting the U.S. government's flagship international academic exchange program on campus.

In this Q&A, Kotay shares her recipe for success.

Why is the Fulbright International Scholars program important to you?

Working with the program is a favorite part of my job. I am a huge proponent of Fulbright's mission to enhance mutual understanding globally through scholarship. I also love that the Fulbright program has many different types of awards. There are opportunities for faculty, students, staff, artists, postdocs and teachers to go abroad, as well as opportunities for visiting international students, teachers and faculty to come to the U.S. There are short-term and long-term opportunities. The saying that "there is a Fulbright for you" is true!

What is your experience with Fulbright?

My first job at the University of Arizona was Fulbright program advisor in the Office of Nationally Competitive Scholarships in the Honors College. Five years later, I became the Fulbright Scholar liaison in Research Development Services, supporting faculty, researchers and staff applying to the Fulbright U.S. Scholar Program and the Fulbright Specialist Program. I've been doing that for five years now.

I recently became a Fulbright Scholar through the Fulbright International Education Administrators Seminar in Germany last fall. I encourage staff interested in internationalizing their offices and projects to apply; you do not have to work specifically in international education to participate.

How do you find, recruit and support strong candidates?

The biggest challenge is getting the word out. Many folks don't apply because they're unaware of opportunities that may be a good fit for them. The University's Fulbright Week every spring semester is a good place for students, faculty and staff to learn more. This year's is March 27-31. You can see the full calendar online.

Why do you think the University is so successful at producing Fulbright scholars?

Hands down it's our faculty's prowess. Our academic community is doing innovative research and following best practices. Plus, global engagement is strongly supported by our leadership and built into our strategic plan.

How can the University broaden and deepen the benefits of the program?

I'm starting to work with the Arizona Chapter of the Fulbright Association. I'd love to see more returned Fulbright alumni participate in the chapter's events. Alumni are the most effective promoters of the Fulbright program. They can help recruit interested applicants and connect with the current visiting international Fulbright Scholars on campus.

What's the first step for a person interested in applying for a Fulbright?

Interested faculty and staff should contact me at emkotay@arizona.edu. I suggest meeting with me to talk about the application process, figure out which award would be the best fit, and work to sync everything with your timeline. Most applicants start thinking of applying two or three years before they apply. Interested students should contact Valeria Quijada Montano, assistant director of the Office of Nationally Competitive Scholarships, at valeriaq@arizona.edu.

And while my role is limited for those applying internationally to come to the University of Arizona, I can provide advice.