

Happy birthday

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Today marks the 65th anniversary of the Fulbright program—a program that has sent more than 110,000 American scholars abroad and welcomed more than 180,000 from other shores. I am lucky enough to be among them.

Every year, about 6,000 American Fulbright scholars are selected to carry out investigative, teaching, creative and other types of projects in one of more than 155 countries for up to a year. Starting in 1996, I spent nine months in Spain researching how European immigration policy would have an impact on the relationship that country had with Latin American countries and the enclaves of immigrants already there.

Conversely, every year, more than 1,800 Fulbright fellows from other countries enroll in graduate programs at U.S. universities. World leaders, presidents, Nobel laureates, intellectuals and artists are among the generations of alumni who pursued their studies and training in the United States while gaining a deeper understanding of our society.

The program is named after the late Senator James William Fulbright, a Democrat who represented Arkansas from 1945 to 1975. Throughout his political career, he showed great interest in expanding international understanding; he supported the creation of the United Nations and became the longest-serving chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

“The Fulbright Program aims to 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,” he said.

Being a Fulbright scholar is a remarkable privilege that has shaped my worldview to this day. My experiences in Spain—from attending courses at a university to spending hours at the

national archives to working with immigrant nongovernmental organizations—informed and broadened my sense of the world. I returned home with a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of people.

Additionally, I learned many things about myself, which continue to define who I am and how I shape the world around me. I discovered the power of information and the necessity and responsibility to share it, which greatly influenced my decision to practice journalism. Working closely with a national organization allowed me several opportunities to present my research at conferences and panels throughout Spain, specifically in areas with large foreign populations. As an immigrant to the United States, their experience resonated with me and linked their experiences to my family’s.

There are many bold-name Fulbright alumni who change the world in big ways, but there are tens of thousands more who do it in quieter, equally meaningful ways—in classrooms, in studios, in labs, in board rooms, in government bureaus. That is the gift and the legacy of the program: individuals who are transformed by and who transform their worlds, large and small.

I hope the program celebrates many more anniversaries and that its participants continue, as I did, to marvel at the world while imagining and defining their place in it.

