

The 258th meeting of the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board (FFSB) took place in Washington, DC on February 11 and 12, 2013 at Gallaudet University.

Members in attendance at the quarterly Board meeting were: Chairman Tom Healy, Vice Chair Susan Ness and Members, Lisa Caputo, Betty Castor, Christie Gilson, Gabriel Guerra-Mondragón, Shelby Lewis, Anita McBride and Laura Skandera Trombley. Participating via phone was: Member Rye Barcott. Excused was Member: Mark Alexander

Monday, February 11, 2013

The Board met in closed session on Monday February 11 to discuss Fulbright program specifics and other Board business.

As a part of the Board meeting, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Adam Ereli swore in Laura Skandera Trombley as a new member of the FFSB.

Tuesday, February 12, 2013

The Board hosted a public Panel Discussion on:

The Fulbright Experience: Reaching Out to All People with Disabilities

The panel was introduced by:

- T. Alan Hurwitz, Ph.D., President, Gallaudet University
- Tom Healy, Chairman, FFSB
- The Honorable Tammy Duckworth, United States Representative for the 8th District of Illinois

Panelists were:

- Dr. Christie L. Gilson
 - Member, FFSB, Moderator
- Dr. Steven Collins
 - Assistant Professor, Gallaudet University and Fulbright Alumnus
- Dr. Marcelo de Franca Moreira
 - Current Humphrey Fellow at American University School of Law
- Cerise Roth-Vinson
 - Chief Operating Officer, Mobility International U.S.A.

The panel session began with President Hurwitz greeting the audience and welcoming them to Gallaudet University. He said how pleased and honored the Gallaudet community was to host this meeting and its important topic of discussion. He demonstrated the ASL (American Sign Language) sign for Fulbright to the audience. President Hurwitz asked that all Fulbright Students and Scholars in the audience stand and be recognized, noting that they are proof of dreams coming true based on hard work, dedication and support. He talked about the strong participation that Gallaudet has had

with the Fulbright Program, noting that there have been 26 students and faculty who have been Fulbrighters since 1998 who have done projects on topics including linguistic research, deaf education, interpreter training, sign language research, and deaf/blind issues. He thanked members of the Fulbright Committee at Gallaudet, recognizing their hard work and commitment to the program, especially noting the hard work that they do on the Gallaudet campus.

President Hurwitz emphasized the importance of Gallaudet students educating the world about how people with disabilities can do anything that those without disabilities can do, and he noted that Fulbright can help them do this. He concluded his remarks by saying that being proactive and acting as inspiration for others will certainly promote awareness and influence society in a positive way.

FFSB Chairman Tom Healy then thanked President Hurwitz for his introduction and welcome to the university, saying how pleased he was that the FFSB was able to meet there. He noted that the day of the panel was Abraham Lincoln's birthday, 204 years ago, and that President Lincoln was the one who signed the legislation to create Gallaudet University. Chairman Healy told the audience of his trip to Nepal, where he spoke to a group of students about opportunities to study in the U.S. One of the students he met while there told him of her limited computer use, and how she had read about Fulbright Board Members and was so impressed by Dr. Christie Gilson and her accomplishments as a blind woman, saying that her sister was also blind. Knowing what Dr. Gilson has done gave her sister hope that she never had before. Chairman Healy mentioned that Fulbright is "one way to meet and learn from people quite different from ourselves, to appreciate ability in all its forms from people all over the world."

Chairman Healy then introduced Congresswoman Tammy Duckworth from the 8th District of Illinois. Congresswoman Duckworth was one of the first Army women to fly combat missions, and in 2004, her helicopter was shot down in Iraq and she lost limbs in the accident. Congresswoman Duckworth then spoke, thanking the audience for the invitation to participate in the event. She talked about the journey she has gone through, having been born with no disabilities, and then with her accident, having to relearn how to do many things after losing both legs and then having to learn how to manage in a wheelchair.

She discussed the importance of Fulbright partnering with Gallaudet to show the world what "normal" is, and how there are many different definitions of the word. She then spoke about a trip she had taken to Thailand where she met with the disability community, and described her meeting with members of several Thai Paralympic sports teams. She told a story of a young girl she met who didn't think that she could do much with her life, since she had a disability. The Congresswoman talked about assuring her that she could still do anything at all with her life. Congresswoman Duckworth told the audience to be themselves in order to show the world what they can do, what they can achieve and how everyone's contribution to diversity in a community is worthwhile.

Congresswoman Duckworth then told the audience about one of her mentors; saying that she was one of the first people that the Congresswoman went to with the challenges that she was facing as a new amputee. Congresswoman Duckworth discussed how most people don't have a grasp of the challenges that disabled people face each day, noting that is the reason why it was so important for

Fulbright to be at Gallaudet. She then told the audience that it was because of her disability that she ran for Congress, as without it, she'd still be flying helicopters. But by running for Congress, she has new opportunities to serve the nation, something she had never imagined before her accident. She noted the importance of having a role model, saying that sometimes the best one is someone closer to your own age, one to whom you can relate well.

Congresswoman Duckworth said how proud she was to be there and offered to be supportive in any way that she can, knowing how hard the path can be. She mentioned the importance of reintroducing the Convention on Persons with Disabilities for passage by Congress. "The true strength and might of this nation, the legacy that we will leave to the world for this democracy having been here is what we've done to improve the lives of our own people and the people around the world. And that diversity is critical," she said. She encouraged students to participate, noting that this is their way of serving their nation and serving humanity.

The audience applauded the Congresswoman's comments as she concluded. She departed and the panel began.

FFSB Member Dr. Christie Gilson introduced herself to the audience. Indicating that she is blind, she asked audience members to identify themselves and if they had any disability to clap. At the same time, she asked those from various organizations to do the same, so she'd know where they were in the room. Dr. Gilson thanked Congresswoman Duckworth, Tom Healy, and Gallaudet President Hurwitz for their participation. She noted how honored she is to be a part of the Board, thanking the Board Members as well as staff members for their hard work.

Dr. Gilson echoed Chairman Healy's words, stating what an incredible program Fulbright is, how it helps us to better understand ourselves as well as others, and to adapt to new situations and unaccustomed challenges. Dr. Gilson said what a joy as an educator it is to be an advocate for the program, and said that there are currently more than 8,000 Fulbrighters both in the U.S. and abroad doing the most amazing work.

She also echoed Congresswoman Duckworth's plea to Congress to pass the convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, urging audience members to contact their Senators and Representatives to do so, noting that America needs to step up and be an example for others. Dr. Gilson indicated that several of the panelists are Fulbrighters. She asked if any audience members were Fulbrighters, asking them to clap again to indicate where they were in the audience. Dr. Gilson informed the audience that the Fulbright Board is on twitter (@FulbrightBoard) and would appreciate any tweets about the event in order to connect with others who might be interested in learning more about the program.

Dr. Gilson then introduced the panelists, beginning with Marcelo de Franca Moreira, a Humphrey Fellow from Brazil at the American University School of Law in Washington, DC. She then introduced Cerise Roth-Vinson, the Chief Operating Officer at Mobility International, responsible for managing programs that provide technical assistance to higher education organizations, international studies faculty, disability services officers at universities throughout the world, as well as to other types of exchange programs. Dr. Gilson introduced Dr. Steven Collins, a professor at

Gallaudet University. He is the departmental chair for bachelor and master's degree programs in the Department of Interpretation and also serves as the Fulbright advisor and is a Fulbright alumnus.

Dr. Gilson then asked the panelists to share their most meaningful experiences while abroad. Dr. Moreira mentioned his experiences at the University of Oregon in Eugene, where he attended a pre-academic program which included intensive English courses. Dr. Collins spoke about his time in Italy working with blind-deaf children, and meeting a young child of seven years who had been isolated from her family due to her disabilities. He began working with that child, with the assistance of interpreters, and ten years later, he is still in touch with the child and the family, who is working much more closely with her. Dr. Collins also had the opportunity to travel throughout Italy providing interpreter training, working with other deaf individuals, talking about disability rights, and really advocating for these rights. Dr. Gilson also shared her own story as an alumna of the Fulbright Program, having gone to Hong Kong as a Fulbright Scholar. She told the audience of a trip to a Buddhist Temple where she walked up to the top of it, which was about 300 steps, never thinking she could walk that far in the heat, and being so proud of herself for that accomplishment.

After those introductory remarks, Dr. Gilson then opened the floor to questions from the audience, noting that some would be coming in via twitter. There was a question that came from a current Fulbrighter in Washington, DC from Ireland who was concerned about maintaining funding and the cost of living in certain cities and how the Board sees funding questions going forward. The student mentioned the high costs of living in Washington, DC and that she had to receive additional funding from her home institution in Limerick to assist with her needs. Dr. Gilson asked David Levin from the Department of State to answer, as he oversees all disability-related issues for the Department of State-run Fulbright programs. Dr. Gilson also indicated that the Board has created a disability task force to address issues related to accommodating Fulbright grantees with disabilities. The Fulbrighter indicated that the school she is at did not provide certain accommodations, and that proved to be a problem for her. David Levin then spoke up, indicating that State Department will work with the student to be sure that she is able to get the proper accommodations, indicating that there is a mechanism in place to address these challenges.

This led to a discussion on the panel about challenges of travelling overseas with disabilities. Dr. Moreira discussed the challenges that he faced when arriving in Washington. He said that he needed to hire two assistants to work for him, noting that they'd need to be paid by him, and would need a salary, health benefits, food, etc. He noted a request form that he filled out, which then gave him the extra funds from the program. Dr. Moreira also mentioned that a great challenge he has faced was that of the bathrooms, and the lack of wheelchair accessibility.

Dr. Collins then noted that he was also able to secure extra funding for interpretation services that he needed while in Italy, as he was connected with an organization there that does similar work to what he was doing. He mentioned that a challenge was the qualifications of the interpreters, as they were working with two different forms of sign language. With the extra funding he secured, he was able to provide extra education and funding for his interpreters in order to facilitate language and communications.

Dr. Moreira also mentioned that he had difficulties securing the visas for his assistants as temporary employees, and they were received only two days before they were to leave for the U.S., causing a great deal of stress to everyone involved.

Cerise Roth-Vinson then spoke, saying how much she enjoys working with these issues and finds it inspiring. She meets nearly everyone with a disability who goes on a Fulbright. She mentioned a number of Fulbrighters with whom she has worked, noting that they all had very different disabilities, and they all serve as wonderful models for the program, as they are doing such amazing work all over the world. She said that she is so passionate about the program because of all of the good work being done and how these Fulbrighters are serving as role models for others, and they are so important, especially in positions of leadership. She really encourages all students and scholars to apply for a Fulbright, and there are so many resources to help them no matter what their circumstances.

Dr. Gilson thanked Ms. Roth-Vinson for her inspiring words to potential Fulbrighters. She said it's so wonderful to come home and share your story with others, and that is one of the most important things, to use these stories to encourage others to participate. She noted that Americans make a lot of assumptions about those with disabilities, and that we need to show everyone that negative assumptions are most often untrue.

Dr. Moreira then said that cities in Brazil are not very accessible for those in wheelchairs, and how frustrating that is for him and others in the same situation. Dr. Gilson said how helpful people in Hong Kong were when she was there, saying how opposite that is from most people she had encountered in the U.S., as it is very difficult for one to ask for help here, as it can be considered shameful to need help. She said that people were always willing to help her get around, and asked Dr. Moreira if this was similar in Brazil. He said yes, people are very friendly and willing to help. Dr. Collins said that he had difficulties with this in Italy, as the rights that he receives in the U.S. under the Americans with Disabilities Act are not valid in Italy. But he did point out that in Italy there are similar disability rights organizations, and he was able to work with them and receive the interpreting services he needed. He said that perhaps other countries could learn from Americans in this regard.

Ms. Roth-Vinson noted the importance of not making assumptions about others, and not putting limitations on ourselves. We should not assume anything, but be ready for new challenges. The point of going abroad is doing things differently, and that is so important in order to better ourselves. "So I just encourage you to not always think of disability as being this very big piece of the pie. Sometimes it's really just a small sliver of what it means to go abroad, both in asking for accommodations, but also making that cultural adjustment."

Dr. Gilson then shared some ways in which Hong Kong was more accommodating for her than the United States. She explained that she could find a Braille newspaper every day, whereas they are much more difficult to find in the U.S. She also explained how in public places, in open places such as the subway, there are metal strips on the ground where you can put your cane to help guide you around. There are also accessible pedestrian strips at each crosswalk that vibrate to signal when you may cross the street.

Dr. Gilson then asked for further questions, and if there were any from twitter. The FFSB staff read a question that had been submitted via facebook, asking "What kinds of collaborative opportunities exist to help deaf students navigate the Fulbright application process without hiring a sign language interpreter each time we interact?" Dr. Collins answered, indicating that he is the Fulbright advisor at Gallaudet, and special services are really not needed, since the application process is all online. The process is also done in ASL, so an interpreter should not be needed. Dr. Gilson also reminded everyone that it is important to know your rights if you need some sort of accommodation.

The staff also read another question that came in via twitter: "How do we make visual culture accessible to people with vision loss?" Dr. Gilson said that it was important to first assume that it is important to do so. She said that for people who might have lost their vision later in life, one can use ceramics in order to show 3-D representation. She also said that lighting can help with some.

An audience member noted that Gallaudet University has every kind of accommodation that you can imagine for people with any sort of disability, and if people came to the university to see what it offered, it would be very helpful for them, in order to figure out what they wanted to do and how they can assist others with disabilities. He also asked how Fulbright can help those in rural areas with little access to the internet learn more about the program and how to apply for it?

Michelle Johnson from the Department of State responded to that question, saying that the Embassies are making a great effort to reach out to those who would be good candidates, and realize that many are not in the larger cities. She said that American Corners and American Spaces abroad can often be used to assist in preparing the application, as those are all done online. She said that the first piece of advice would be to reach out to the Embassy in order to make that first contact. Dr. Gilson asked Ms. Johnson what kind of resources there are in developing countries and rural areas for people who are deaf to go through the online process when they might have another form of communications that would be simpler for them. Ms. Johnson stated that since there are more than 150 countries with Fulbright Programs, each one is run a bit differently, so there isn't an easy answer for that. She said that ultimately, applicants must use the online system, as that is how the information is transferred to IIE and then to universities for placements. If online communication doesn't work for them, they would have to reach out to the Embassy and find someone to engage with and come up with a system from there. It is important to find ways to interact with your local community.

Lisa Helling, Executive Director of the FFSB staff, confirmed Ms. Johnson's point about American Corners and Spaces, saying that they offer a wide range of educational advising services. Ms. Helling said that the Embassies have people who are specifically trained in knowing about American universities and the application process, and that they are able to facilitate the process of applying to U.S. universities.

There was another question from the audience, asking the panelists to describe their experience with using assistive technology and how that aspect differed in the U.S. and other countries. Dr. Collins indicated that deaf people in the U.S. often use video phones for communication, allowing them to have telephone access. This allows them to use sign language. He said that many embassies now allow for this as well, easing the process.

Ms. Roth-Vinson added that people coming to the U.S. are usually impressed by the assistive technology that exists here, and often not in their home countries, and that it can be very empowering for them to see these opportunities. This can plant seeds in people's minds, giving them ideas on how to change things in their home country when they return. As there are places that we haven't been to, it's difficult to imagine what reasonable accommodations might be in that country, and this is the reason that this process is ever-changing and flexible. She also noted that this assistive technology can also be difficult for Americans abroad, as they are used to having it at home, but certain things may not be available in many other countries.

There was one final question from the audience about frustrations with the lack of health care options in the U.S. The questioner asked if that was something that was being examined regarding the Fulbright program. Ms. Johnson indicated that things would be changing as health care requirements change in the U.S. over the next few years. Dr. Gilson expressed the same concern.

Dr. Gilson then closed the panel, thanking the panelists for their time. She also thanked President Hurwitz and Gallaudet University for being such wonderful hosts, and the Fulbright Board and Staff, as well as the audience members for their attention. "There's very little that should stop you from applying for Fulbrights. It will change your life," she told them.