

UC SANTA BARBARA

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Harrison Tassoff

To Germany, Japan and Nepal they go, with Fulbright awards in tow

Joining the ranks of the Prime Minister of Belgium Alexander de Croo, soprano Renée Fleming and dozens of other notable people, UC Santa Barbara graduate students Nicky Rehnberg, Rachel Levine and Claire Chevallier have been awarded fellowships from the Fulbright Program for teaching and research abroad, with another six of their classmates making it to at least the semi-final round.

“The Fulbright Program provides an amazing opportunity for UCSB students to gain experience researching and teaching abroad,” said Shawn Warner, director of professional development at the university’s Graduate Division. “We are excited to see the success of our student applicants this year, and we can't wait to see the fruits of their work abroad.”

The highly competitive program is the flagship international educational exchange of the United States state department. It aims to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and other countries. The program selects awardees based on their academic and professional achievements, as well as their record of service and leadership potential in their respective fields.

Doctoral student Nicky Rehnberg researches environmentalism in the 19th and 20th centuries in the history department. She’s particularly interested in how the power of public learning institutions can be manipulated. Her dissertation looks at German and U.S. national parks and natural history museums between 1920–1945, focusing

on how these institutions used specific species to promote and popularize eugenic ideas and ultimately, white supremacy.

This grant will allow Rehnberg to spend more time with her German case studies and the archives necessary to finish her dissertation. “I will also be able to meet and work with more European colleagues, which will make finishing my dissertation not only richer but more fun,” she said.

Rachel Levine studies gender and sexuality in Japan, with a focus on gender discrimination, sexual violence and sex trafficking. Her doctoral dissertation focuses on how actors combat sexual violence and advance women’s rights within Japan by framing these issues within the court and news media.

“This award is integral to my research,” Levine said. On-the-ground research in a student’s country of interest is crucial. “The Fulbright award allows me to be where everything is happening and experience the ongoing changes first hand.”

Claire Chevallier, a M.Ed. candidate in the Gevirtz Graduate School of Education, is pursuing her teaching credential in English Language Arts. “I hope that serving as an ETA (English teaching assistant) in Nepal will be the start of a long career in teaching English and public service in education,” Chevallier said. “I’m very excited to gain perspective about the teacher’s role in fostering authentic learning and student flourishing through connecting with Nepali students.” She’s also keen to experience a different kind of classroom dynamic than the American setting she’s familiar with.

Chevallier’s parents met through a French-Mandarin language exchange program. “They showed me that learning a new language not only opens up a whole new community of people with whom to communicate, but also that it enables one to empathize with people with backgrounds and beliefs different from their own,” she said. “That, I think, is a crucial step toward healthy international relations and inclusive societies.”

“The Graduate Division is extremely proud of the success of our students in the Fulbright competition,” said Leila Rupp, interim dean of UCSB’s Graduate Division. “Making it to the semi-finals is itself a great honor, and of course we are excited about the teaching and research that Claire, Rachel and Nicole will be doing in Nepal, Japan, and Germany. Our Fulbright winners attest to the excellence and geographic reach of departments across campus.

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About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.