



Ryan Lojo is learning about business relations between the U.S. and Mexico.



Lauren Yuriko Baba strategized ways to ensure culturally competent health care.



Kirsten Aoyama studied in Japan and now leads UW's Global Business Center.

## Fulbright Scholars

By Elizabeth M. Economou

**You might not expect celebrated** soprano Renée Fleming and Italian astrophysicist Riccardo Giacconi to have much in common. Fleming, a National Medal of Arts recipient and Grammy Award winner, is a world-renowned opera singer and ambassador of music, while Giacconi is a 2002 Nobel laureate whose work led to the discovery of cosmic X-ray sources.

Yet these two belong to a distinguished group that represents many fields of study and counts Nobel Prize winners, MacArthur Foundation Fellows and Pulitzer Prize recipients among its ranks. Fleming and Giacconi are both Fulbright alumni.

Since the Fulbright Program's inception in 1946, some 360,000 Fulbright alumni from the United States and more than 160 other countries have gone on to achieve acclaim in government, science, the arts, business, philanthropy and education, according to Elaine Clayton, a spokesperson for the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, which oversees the program.

Fulbright's mission is to build relations between the U.S. and other countries and to help individuals develop new skills and

find connections that will create positive changes in their communities through research and teaching opportunities around the world.

Today, Fulbrighters past and present—including Ryan Lojo, Lauren Yuriko Baba and Kirsten Aoyama—continue to make their marks on the world.

### Ryan Lojo—Mexico City, Mexico

Ryan Lojo was on a quest to find basil. He was a few months into his Binational Business Internship Fulbright in Mexico City and he needed basil to help cook for a dinner with fellow Fulbrighters. He visited juice vendors, chile stall owners and others but couldn't find the herb. Until he found one seller/grower who had basil and more.

Lojo spent an hour talking to the man.

"Our conversation spanned decades of Mexican history, including perspectives on NAFTA [the North American Free Trade Agreement], the currency crisis and changes in fertilization methods."

That same grower then directed Lojo, who is from Casper, Wyoming, to a nearby cafeteria and suggested he order mole, made with chile peppers and chocolate. "In less than an hour, the kindness of someone previously unknown led me to understand more about the country than hours of study could have," Lojo says.

Lojo is currently a long way from home, but the former Peace Corps volunteer and 2013 graduate of Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, likes it that way. While interning full-time as an analyst at Convixion, a consulting company operating in various business sectors in Mexico City, Lojo is also taking Spanish classes at the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México—a perk that comes with his Fulbright scholarship.

The Binational Business Internship Fulbright is designed to help participants

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## Fulbright Facts

The Fulbright Program, which is overseen by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, is a widely recognized international exchange program that has been supported through an annual appropriation bill from the U.S. Congress since 1946.

The mission of the Fulbright Program, which was originally introduced by Arkansas Senator J. William Fulbright, is to build relations between the U.S. and other countries and to help individuals develop new skills and find connections that will create positive changes in their communities, says Elaine Clayton, a spokesperson for the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The Fulbright Program offers opportunities for U.S. graduate students, academic faculty and professionals to conduct research and/or teach in more than 125 countries, as well as opportunities for students, faculty and professionals from more than 160 countries to lecture and/or conduct research in the U.S.

In total, approximately 8,000 Fulbright fellowships are available each year, and awardees are selected from about 13,500 applicants. Eligibility requirements are dependent on the specific scholarships, but all Fulbrighters must have a bachelor's degree prior to beginning Fulbright work. The application period opens March 31 every year.

For participants, Fulbright can be life-changing. "Upon returning to their home countries, institutions and classrooms, Fulbrighters share their stories and experiences, and often engage in follow-up projects or continue the work they started abroad, creating a multiplier effect and leading to lifelong collaborations," says Clayton.

To learn more, visit [eca.state.gov/fulbright/fulbright-programs](http://eca.state.gov/fulbright/fulbright-programs).

—E.M.E.



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focus on mutual understanding between the business communities in the United States and Mexico.

Lojo says his time in Mexico City has helped him gain a more nuanced appreciation of the world, especially because he's been able to compare Mexico City, a bustling metropolitan area of about 21 million people, to the Dominican Republic, where he served as a Peace Corps economic development volunteer. In the Dominican Republic, he assisted cocoa farmers in Chinguelo, a tiny village of about 300 people that lacks modern conveniences such as electricity.

"In the United States, there is a tendency to think of all of Latin America as one and the same, when there are massive cultural, economic and linguistic differences between each country—and even within each country," says Lojo.

Lojo says the work itself in Mexico City

has also been enlightening, and it aligns perfectly with his desire to continue to learn Spanish as well as with his academic background—he majored in business administration with a focus on entrepreneurial leadership and economics.

"It has already allowed me to do a huge variety of projects in a short span of time—from sales and marketing to management and even investment analysis," he says.

Lojo's Fulbright runs through June of 2017, after which he is planning to stay in Latin America for a year before pursuing his MBA in the United States.

"I would like to spend my career working with U.S. companies with Latin American operations," he says. "It is such a vibrant zone."

#### Lauren Yuriko Baba—Victoria, B.C.

Lauren Yuriko Baba can still see the totem pole, the carved doors and the ceremonial

hall in the building modeled after a Salish longhouse. That's because it was the site of an inspiring moment during her Fulbright term at the University of Victoria Centre for Aboriginal Health Research (it has since changed names) in Canada.

Baba's Fulbright in 2011 and 2012 focused on how to ensure that culturally appropriate care can be provided to indigenous communities in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States.

Inside the longhouse-style building on campus, Baba was helping to run an indigenous health-learning institute for students and community members, and she ended the day deeply moved.

"As institute participants introduced themselves, many recognized that we were guests on traditional Coast Salish land—it was a gesture to honor the Salish tribes and respect their territory," Baba says. "The participants' show of gratitude and humility



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## EDUCATION

is symbolic of a worldview that recognizes and preserves indigenous culture—and something I hope to raise awareness for in public health and health care.”

The Issaquah, Washington, native has been interested in eliminating health disparities in indigenous communities since her days as an undergrad majoring in health sciences and policy studies at Rice University in Houston, Texas, where she graduated in 2011. During her nine-month Fulbright experience, Baba studied how public-health and health-care professionals might provide culturally appropriate health services by asking patients what their beliefs are about health and wellness; being open to the use of traditional foods, medicines and ceremonies as part of prevention, treatment or healing; and considering patients’ whole lives, not just their clinical symptoms.

“It is essential that practitioners who work with indigenous communities acknowledge the cultural influences on health,” says Baba, now a research associate specializing in health policy and program evaluation at Group Health’s Center for Community Health and Evaluation in Seattle. “It is my hope that my research will contribute to the public-health dialogue on reducing the health burdens of indigenous communities.”

### Kirsten Aoyama—Sendai, Japan

For Kirsten Aoyama, living in Japan was a dream come true. She’d been interested in the culture since kindergarten, because her best friend’s parents were from Japan.

“I still remember her mother packing extra *musubi* [rice balls] in her lunch to share,” says Aoyama, who grew up on Mercer Island near Seattle.

She majored in Asian Studies at Tufts University outside of Boston, and one of her Japanese history professors was a Fulbright alumnus, which inspired Aoyama to pursue her own Fulbright.

Aoyama was the recipient of a one-year Fulbright student grant to study at Tohoku University in Sendai, Japan, which is about 225 miles northeast of Tokyo. Her research

focused on Date Masamune, a 17th century feudal lord who lived in the Sendai region and was instrumental in funding a major expedition to establish relations with the pope in Rome and also encouraged foreigners to visit his land, according to Aoyama.

In addition to her research, Aoyama was also getting an up-close look at cultural differences. On her first day in Japan, she ignored warnings from hotel staff that her meeting's location was too far to walk to.

In classic American form, Aoyama set out on foot anyway. Jet-lagged and growing more nervous, she set her pride aside and asked for help from a woman who appeared to be on her way to work. Rather than give only verbal directions, the stranger kindly walked Aoyama to the nearest subway station, showed her how to buy a ticket and made sure she knew when to exit the train.

The gracious gesture left Aoyama contemplating her own cultural values and whether most Americans would help a stranger in this way.

Aoyama was especially attuned to cultural values during her Fulbright term, 1990-1991, because it came while America was engaged in the Gulf War.

"As a foreigner living abroad, you are viewed as an expert on your own country and the decisions of your government."

Aoyama's experience in Japan ultimately gave her a deeper insight into herself. "I was able to see more clearly my personal strengths and weaknesses as well as those of the United States and Japan," she says. Today, Aoyama credits her Fulbright for career success and more.

"I learned to be more open to new experiences and more open-minded. I know that when I do that, I will learn the most," she says. "I also learned tolerance, patience, flexibility, adaptability, humility and the priority of human interaction, which have contributed to my professional leadership role [as director] at the University of Washington's Global Business Center, and my role as a parent and spouse." ▲

*Elizabeth M. Economou writes from Seattle.*

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