

# Go Away. Here's How.

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What began with a simple click at [www.cies.org](http://www.cies.org) led me to an abundance of once-in-a-lifetime opportunities and, eventually, to Nepal. I received the Fulbright Award in March of 2004 along with an offer to choose a 5- or 7-month stay, and even an extension without stipend for an additional few months in the South Asian wonder.

However, my journey began long before my 7-month stint. I applied for the Teaching/Research Award twice. I did not receive the award the first time I applied, and at the suggestion of the then-director of the Fulbright Commission in Kathmandu, I considered new approaches to the process and revised my application.

Of course, the application process begins with the decision to pursue a Fulbright Award. One can access the available awards for the 2007-2008 academic year at [www.cies.org](http://www.cies.org). Awards are listed by world area or country, by discipline, and by profession. In my case, I knew that I wanted to go to Nepal, so I did not spend time looking at opportunities in other countries but focused my application on this destination. I have been visiting Nepal, teaching short intensive courses in cross-cultural social psychology and conducting crosscultural research with Nepali colleagues since the mid-90s. I was asked by the then-head of the Women's Studies Program at the Padma Kanya Campus of Tribhuvan University to teach a course in Research Methods. I appended a letter of her support to my application. I also outlined my teaching goals with my research agenda, proposing to utilize the students in my research methods class as research assistants who would help collect questionnaire data and conduct focus groups as part of their learning experience. Later, when I was "in country," I found that my proposal had been overly ambitious, though I was able to provide my students limited introduction to data collection using both questionnaires and focus groups and more extensive experience in back translation. (Read O'Leary's essay about [her Fulbright experiences in Nepal](#) in the December 2005 *Observer*.)

The selection process for Fulbright Awards is two-tiered. First, you must be approved by a US-based committee that determines eligibility for applications to be sent to the host countries. Without that approval the application goes no further. However, such approval is no guarantee of an award, as a separate "in country" committee reviews the proposals it receives from the Council for International Exchange of Scholars (the organization administers the Fulbright Scholar Program) to make the final selections. In Nepal, the Commission for Educational Exchange between the United States and Nepal (USEF/Nepal or the Fulbright Commission) was established by agreement between the US government and His Majesty's Government (HMG) of Nepal in 1961 to administer the Fulbright program. The Commission is headed by an executive director. Overall policy is determined by a bi-national board of directors consisting of 10 members. The board, or a subcommittee of the board, also nominates the American and Nepali Fulbright scholars. The board consists of five Americans appointed by the US ambassador to Nepal, who is the honorary chair, and five Nepalis appointed by HMG of Nepal.

One's final selection as a Fulbrighter — which an initial award letter makes quite clear — is contingent

upon his or her passing the mandatory physical exam. The State Department considers Fulbright Awards a flagship program, and the federal administrators have little interest in poor publicity attendant to the loss of a scholar. Thus the standards for passing the physical are stringent, and applicants should be mindful of maintaining good physical health. I myself became anxious about passing this final hurdle, as even functions of age, such as high blood pressure, can affect one's candidacy. To my surprise, however, the only physical challenge that my Fulbright presented occurred upon my return to the United States. For almost a month I was plagued by daily gastric distress occasioned by my digestive tract's adjustment to processed, genetically manipulated foods. Having detoxed in Nepal, I was forced to detox back in the US.

Arduous as the application process was, the reward was great, and my stay in Nepal had a profound effect on me. I took the opportunity to learn Nepali and was privately tutored 10 hours a week for 6 months. Though I could not claim fluency by the time I left, I can carry on meaningful conversations — an added benefit considering recent research points to the cognitive advantages of studying a second language at any age. I have been back in the United States for 7 months and not a day goes by that I do not think about the experiences that changed my worldview. I am even arranging a return visit as a senior specialist, to assist with the chair of the department of psychiatry in stimulating research in his department and to advise my colleagues in psychology on curriculum development.

For those currently interested in pursuing a Fulbright Award, there are several steps that may improve one's chances of success. First, I recommend contacting the desired country's USEF director, as well as colleagues who can provide a sense of that country's needs. That way, your application is tailored to meet a real need. Next, it is no secret that Fulbright awards are extremely competitive, so remember that it pays to persevere. Finally, refer to the successful application of a colleague as a model. If you contact me at [olearvi@auburn.edu](mailto:olearvi@auburn.edu), I would be happy to share mine.