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Fall 2018, UNH Fulbrighters Making an Impact Working with Immigrants in Austria and the U.S. and Migrating Whales in the Pacific

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UNH Global

UNH Fulbrighters Making an Impact Working with Immigrants in Austria and the U.S. and Migrating Whales in the Pacific

Thursday, October 25, 2018

Inspired to Teach Immigrants after Fulbright Year in Austria



Laurianne Posche (at the chalk board) teaching English to a class

For the academic year 2017-2018, I was awarded one of Fulbright Austria's Community-Based Combined Grants. The experience was transformative and highly educational: I was an English Teaching Assistant at an Austrian high school, took two seminars at the local university called "Migration and Mobility" and "Othering," and I volunteered at a local non-profit organization that assists asylum seekers and refugees from countries like Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, and Somalia, to name a few. My volunteer work there included helping

asylum seekers and refugees with German and English language acquisition at a language café, as well as teaching a beginner English course to this population. This unique, multi-faceted grant allowed me to explore immigration in Austria from many angles and, by the end of my time in

Austria, I knew that upon my return to the U.S. I wanted to explore immigration in the U.S. in a similar fashion – through teaching English to immigrants in the community – before deciding on a Master’s degree to pursue.

In Austria, I witnessed the bitter truth that, at the end of the day, it is usually the state’s policies that determine asylum seekers’ and immigrants’ fates. Yet, I also experienced how teachers can make a dramatic difference in immigrants’ lives – not only by empowering them with the language skills they need to become a part of the community, but also by offering moral support and encouragement at a critical time. So, since returning home this summer, I have obtained a certificate in Teaching English as a Foreign Language and started a job as an ESOL instructor at an immigrant welcome center in Boston. The best part of the job? My students. Their resilience and their commitment to learning English make me excited to come to work every day – it is truly a privilege to learn from them as they learn English from me.

Created in 1945, the Fulbright U.S. Student Program offers research, study and teaching opportunities in over 140 countries to recent graduates and graduate students. The Community-Based Combined Award to Austria is an integrated experience combining university coursework and English teaching assistantships with community service, internships, capacity-building and other community-based projects.

Laurianne Posch is a 2016 UNH graduate with degrees in German and International Affairs.

Faculty Scholar Kerri Seger Studies Ocean Soundscape to Protect Humpback Whales

How can Colombia create economic benefits with a new port facility and advance the development of its human population without stressing the endangered humpback whale population off its Pacific coast? UNH’s latest Fulbright Faculty Scholar, Kerri Seger, is helping find the answers.

Humpback whale survival relies on their ability to call to each other to find mates and protect calves. On the Pacific coast of Colombia, industrial, commercial, and tourist activities that support the livelihood of local communities in the Gulf of Tribugá may interfere with many humpback whale contact calls. An increase in human-created noise is projected to occur once port construction begins nearby as early as 2019, further inhibiting the whales’ communication ability.

This summer, in partnership with colleagues from Fundacion Macuaticos, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, and Wildlife Pacific Ecotourism and Research, Seger is conducting the first stage of a Before-After Control-Impact marine study. Data about the range of natural and man-made sounds in the Gulf is being gathered using a new, long-term passive acoustic monitoring system, and through more traditional methods: vessel-based visual observations of species that are known to vocalize, and over-the-side recordings from small boats that target specific signals in the environment (e.g., humpback whale song) for short durations. Using the computer code that



Kerri Seger

Seger created to statistically quantify the sounds, a baseline soundscape will be produced. In the future, the amount of acoustic pressure that port construction and its associated traffic will place on Colombia's Pacific Coast ecosystem can be compared against this "before" picture.

The data about the baseline acoustic environments and estimates of how sound intensity may change in each will be shared with the construction agency, the Port Authority of Colombia, and associated marine consulting and lobbying agencies, allowing these groups to visualize how resident species near one of Colombia's national marine reserves could be affected. These data and collaboration efforts will provide encouragement for Colombia to adopt sustainable construction and management practices.

When she isn't out in the Gulf collecting data, Seger will be sharing her research with Colombians. She plans to introduce a short course about marine bioacoustics for local landowners, policy makers, and university scholars. She also will present guest lectures at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Universidad de Los Andes, and Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano.

Now that Seger has completed her post-doctoral appointment working with Jennifer Miksis-Olds in UNH's Center for Coastal and Ocean Mapping, Seger anticipates that her Fulbright-supported project will jumpstart the development of her own research laboratory as she embarks upon the tenure-track faculty route. Her work this summer lays the groundwork for time series data collection to monitor and quantify the changing soundscape and species' reactions in the Gulf of Tribugá for decades to come. She also expects that the strong relationships she has developed with her fellow researchers and educators in Colombia will translate into other research projects and study exchange opportunities for Seger's future students and those at the Colombian universities where her colleagues are based.

Want to know more about the project? Follow **PhySIColombia** on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

Contributed by Lynnette Hentges, Senior Associate for Research Development

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Countries: [Austria \(/global/country/at\)](/global/country/at)

[Colombia \(/global/country/co\)](/global/country/co)

News & Events (</global/news-and-events>)

[News \(/global/news\)](/global/news)

[UNH Fulbrighters Making an Impact Working with Immigrants in Austria and the U.S. and Migrating Whales in the Pacific \(/global/unh-fulbrighters-making-impact-working-immigrants-austria-and-us-and-migrating-whales-pacific\)](/global/unh-fulbrighters-making-impact-working-immigrants-austria-and-us-and-migrating-whales-pacific)

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[Buddies Without Borders \(/global/buddies-without-borders\)](/global/buddies-without-borders)

[NH International Seminar \(/global/nh-international-seminar\)](/global/nh-international-seminar)


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