

OPEN LETTER TO THE GLOBAL FULBRIGHT COMMUNITY ON HISTORY & STATISTICAL REPORTING

Dear Colleagues and Former Associates,

As many of you may know, I am working on a book project for the University of Arkansas Press with the working title *Remembering Fulbright: The Remarkable History of the Fulbright Program, 1946-2021*. This project entails reconstructing the history of the Fulbright Program and its narrative from its inception to the present and also relies on information available in routine reporting. I am reaching out to you now to alert you to concerns I have about serious lapses that have crept in to the historical narrative for the program and in the quality of statistical reporting on the program conceived to inform the public about its structure and scope. Both of these issues impact seriously on the public perception of the program in the United States and abroad.

Executive Summary:

The following analysis focuses on shortcomings in the historical narrative of the Fulbright Program and the paucity of reporting related to it:

- The program narrative has become increasingly imbalanced and focuses exclusively on the role of the U.S. in the program.
- The program narrative no longer includes Senator Fulbright nor his vision of the program based on bi-nationalism, reciprocity, non-partisan implementation, and long-term cultural immersion.
- The “paradox” of Fulbright’s illiberal voting record as a Southern Democrat on civil rights and his otherwise distinguished career as a liberal internationalist, international educator, and dissenter is not addressed or contextualized.
- The quality and punctuality of the FFSB’s annual reports have deteriorated substantially. In particular, the annual and cumulative data on numbers of grants, their distribution, and the contributions of non-U.S. partners, have been dramatically reduced or disappeared altogether.
- The absence of this information cumulatively deprives partner countries of the acknowledgement they deserve, and complicates the task of advocating for the Fulbright Program with Congress.

- The comprehensiveness of the Fulbright Program’s historical narrative and the quality of the reporting mandated by federal statute warrant robust discussion.

The Fulbright Program without Fulbright

The new Fulbright Program “gateway” portal that IIE recently launched as a contractor for the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau for Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) at <https://fulbrightprogram.org/> reproduces the omissions and inaccuracies that were characteristic for the State Department’s 75th anniversary commemoration of the Fulbright Program in 2021. It attempts to craft a narrative for the program that omits Senator J. William Fulbright’s instrumental role in the establishment and the development of the Fulbright Program. It also underexposes the central role of binational Fulbright commissions – currently forty-nine – in the history, philosophy, reputation, financing, management and execution of the program. Furthermore, it departs from the established historical narrative of the Fulbright program based on the philosophy and practice of binationalism by promoting a new unilateralist Fulbright Program narrative: “a [program](#) of the U.S. Department of State with funding provided by the U.S. Government” that ostensibly is “led by the U.S. Government,” which is based on a new Fulbright “[brand narrative](#)” introduced in May 2018.

I documented the historical revisionism of the 75th anniversary celebration of the Fulbright program – the attempt to create an historical narrative for the Fulbright Program without Senator Fulbright – in part II of my article “[Memory, Crisis, Commemoration: The 75th Anniversary of the Fulbright Program, 1946-2021](#)” (*Hungarian Review*, Vol. XII, No. 2 & 3), which has a section with the subtitle “Censure, Omission, and Silence.”

ECA’s erasure of Fulbright from the historical record has been systematic. As part of the run-up to its 75th anniversary revision of the program narrative in the course of summer 2020 – after the wave of Black Lives Matter protests that followed the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020 – ECA tacitly took down the pages on its website that traditionally had provided [background information on Senator Fulbright and the history of the program](#). As a result, neither the official ECA website at <https://eca.gov/fulbright/> nor the recently launched IIE Fulbright gateway portal at <https://fulbrightprogram.org/> have information on Fulbright’s biography, his role in the establishment of the program, its statutory basis, or its foundational philosophy of binationalism. The ECA website even manages to avoid mentioning Senator Fulbright in the [FAQs](#) about the program.

The “About Fulbright History” page that was taken down from the ECA website had links to two other, more extensive pages, which also can be accessed using the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine. The first link was to a [stock biography of Fulbright](#) that ECA used since a relaunch of its website in 2012 (which distinguished itself by failing to mention Fulbright’s voting record on

civil rights). This biographical page had two related links: one to an informative collection of over [fifty of his speeches digitally archived by the University of Arkansas Libraries](#) with the title “A Calm Voice in a Strident World: Senator J.W. Fulbright Speaks” and another to a collection of [seventeen quotable quotes on Fulbright’s philosophy of international education](#) from his writings, which were liberally cited for decades in conjunction with the Fulbright Program.

A second link on the history page was to “[the early years of the program.](#)” It contained excerpts from what is perhaps the best brief introduction to the historical origins and statutory basis of the program and its trademark “binational approach”: the introduction to the Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board’s 25th anniversary report for the program in 1971.

In the course of the program’s 75th anniversary year in 2021, ECA did not reference the importance of Senator Fulbright as the author and sponsor of the Fulbright Act of 1946; his agency in reorganizing and expanding the program with the Fulbright-Hays Act in 1961; nor his political stewardship of the program until 1974 during his 30-year career in the Senate. Fulbright also was not mentioned by name in the remarks ECA scripted for the festive [75th anniversary celebration of the program](#) at the Kennedy Center on November 30, 2021.

These omissions are reproduced and incorporated into the new Fulbright Program gateway portal, which ECA has contracted IIE to create at <https://fulbrightprogram.org/> using 75th anniversary materials. On this website, the statutory basis of the program, its complex structure, and its 75-year history have been reduced to a “[Fulbright Timeline](#)” with 19 “tiles,” each of which consists of a date with a picture and a one-sentence explanation.

- 1946 shows the iconic picture of President Harry S. Truman signing the Fulbright Act on August 1, 1946, in the presence of two onlookers without identifying either of them: Senator Fulbright, the author of the legislation (center), and Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs William Benton (right), who was instrumental in its passage.
- 1958 has a picture of Jeff Davis Duty, Jr., the first Fulbrighter on record with a disability, being escorted by an unnamed person in London. The unnamed person escorting Duty is Senator Fulbright. This historically illustrates Fulbright DEIA policy by excluding a reference to Fulbright.
- 1961 allegedly shows a picture of the signing of the Fulbright-Hays Act (Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961) without mentioning the instrumental role of Fulbright in the passage of this legislation nor showing him in the picture. However, according to the archives of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, the image used by this timeline is the signing of the [Foreign Assistance Act on November 3, 1962](#), not the [Fulbright-Hays Act on September 21, 1961](#) with Senator Fulbright on

the far left of the picture. (In this context, Kennedy's eloquent acknowledgement of Fulbright and the Fulbright Program at the commemoration of the [15th anniversary of the signing of the Fulbright Act](#) on August 1, 1961 are especially noteworthy.)

There are constructive alternatives to this kind of tacit revisionism that distorts and misrepresents the history of the program. For example, there was an extensive public debate at the University of Arkansas in 2020-21 about Fulbright's legacies as an international educator, dissenter, and his voting record on civil rights as a Southern Democrat. The University of Arkansas is highly vested in the reputation of Fulbright, who was a graduate of this institution in 1925, its president in 1939-41, and among its most famous alumni. Furthermore, its College of Arts and Sciences was named after Fulbright in 1981. The University of Arkansas has acknowledged Fulbright's legacies as controversial and complex, and it has an ongoing project of contextualization to address them on its website under "[The Fulbright Paradox.](#)"

The Fulbright Association in Washington, D.C., also posted a collection of "[resources on the life of Senator Fulbright](#)" on its website to throw light on his life and political career. Particularly noteworthy is a sixty-minute video documentary, directed and produced by W. Drew Perkins – [Fulbright: The Man, the Mission, and the Message](#) – which the Fulbright Association also posted on YouTube. This documentary is based on archival material, historical footage, and interviews with Senator Fulbright and his former associates and coworkers in the early 1990s as well as his contemporaries, including Senators David Pryor (D-Arkansas), George McGovern (D-South Dakota), and President Bill Clinton, who worked on Fulbright's staff for two years in the mid-1960s while he was a student at Georgetown.

Annual Reports of the J. William Fulbright Scholarship Board (FFSB)

These reports reflect a different dimension of the deterioration of the Fulbright Program's public narrative: the extent to which the quality and punctuality of the annual reports of the presidentially appointed J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board (FFSB) have deteriorated in the last five years. In comparison to the recent past, FFSB annual reports have diminished in length and quality: They have dropped from 76 pages (2015) to 44 pages (2017) and to 28 pages (2019, 2020); the last four annual reports (2017-2020) in print were published way behind schedule; and the 2020 annual report also is incomplete. (FFSB reports since 2004 are archived as PDFs on the ECA website at <https://eca.state.gov/fulbright/about-fulbright/fulbright-foreign-scholarship-board-ffsb/ffsb-reports>.)

Furthermore, to date there is no annual report for the 75th anniversary year of the Fulbright Program in 2021, and no FFSB reports have appeared since then. This may be related to the fact that the FFSB appears to be consistently understaffed. However, these considerations are irrelevant in terms of reporting obligations the FFSB has according to federal statute.

Annual and cumulative statistics in FFSB annual reports

FFSB reports included the annual and cumulative figures for the number and the distribution of grantees in the Fulbright Program since the early 1960s. This type of annual reporting to Congress was mandated by the original Fulbright legislation in 1946 and assumed by the FFSB under the Fulbright-Hays Act of 1961. The numbers and breakdowns of participants by grant category, world region, and country were included in an appendix of the print versions of annual reports until the FFSB annual report for 2012.

Starting with the 2013 FFSB annual report, these numbers were segregated from the print version, and available on the ECA FFSB annual report website cited above as a downloadable Excel file: "Fulbright in the Numbers." However, this practice was discontinued after four years, and the FFSB annual reports for 2018, 2019, and 2020 appeared without the statistics for the annual and cumulative number of global, regional, and country-by-country grantees in the program. Therefore, the last accurate annual and cumulative statistics available for the program are six-years old: from the [2016-17 program year](#).

Annual contributions by foreign governments and countries

Since 1993 FFSB annual reports have included pie-charts with a breakdown of the funding for the program from five different U.S. and foreign as well as public and private sources:

- 1) U.S. Department of State allocation for the Fulbright Program proper
- 2) U.S. Department of Education allocation for Fulbright-Hays awards
- 3) Cash and in-kind contributions by foreign governments
- 4) U.S. private sector contributions towards Fulbright grants in the U.S
- 5) Foreign private sector contributions towards Fulbright grants from institutions of higher education, research centers, foundations, etc., solicited for the most part by commissions.

These pie charts have been accompanied by an alphabetical list of public and private and cash and in-kind contributions by partner countries, which averaged around \$104 million from FY 2012 to FY 2016. Countries with binational Fulbright commissions account for 93% of these contributions on an average, whereas 100 plus countries in which the program is managed unilaterally by the State Department out of U.S. embassies collectively account for less than 7%. Furthermore, countries with binational Fulbright commissions are collectively responsible for awarding and managing over 78% of the total number of Fulbright grants made between 1949 and 2016, with 64 % of the awards managed by commissions in the 2016-17 program year: the last year for which statistics are available.

However, FFSB reports do not distinguish between the cumulative contributions by countries with binational commissions and countries with programs that run unilaterally out of U.S. diplomatic missions, which obfuscates the dimensions of the contributions by countries with

binational Fulbright commissions. Furthermore, the most recent [2020 annual report](#) for the fiscal year 2019 has the traditional pie chart cited above (p. 25), but it lacks the country-by-country itemization of the contributions of foreign countries altogether. Therefore, most recent figures available on the contributions of foreign countries to the program are from the [2019 annual report](#) for fiscal year 2018 (p. 23-25).

U.S. diplomatic posts and binational Fulbright commissions are required to report on these numbers annually and punctually. However, ECA is either not providing the FFSB with this information for its reporting in a timely manner, or it is not providing the FFSB with the support necessary to cope with its reporting responsibilities. The lapses of ECA and the FFSB in reporting mean that accurate and up-to-date data on the numbers of incoming and outgoing grantees in individual countries are not available to the public on an annual or a cumulative basis.

Annual reports as a statutory requirement

Furthermore, ECA and the FFSB have a joint statutory mandate to produce FFSB annual reports, and their failure to do so is a violation of the current statute that provides the operational basis for the program in terms of federal law: [22 USC Ch. 33: Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Program](#). (22 USC Ch. 33 reflects the original Fulbright-Hays Act of 1961 as amended.)

In this context, three especially relevant passages of the statute are cited below. The first addresses the composition of the FFSB; the second states that the president (i.e. the executive branch in the form of the State Department and ECA) is required to provide the FFSB with the staff and support it needs to discharge its duties, and the third states the obligation of the FFSB to make annual public reports for dissemination in the US *and* abroad.

§2456. J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board

(a) Appointment; members; considerations for selection

1) For the purpose of selecting students, scholars, teachers, trainees, and other persons to participate in the programs authorized under section 2452(a)(1) of this title, and of supervising such programs and the programs authorized under section 2452(b)(4) and (6) of this title, there is continued the authority of the President to appoint a board of foreign scholarships which shall be known as the "J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board" (hereinafter referred to as the "Board") consisting of twelve members. In connection with appointments to such Board, due consideration shall be given to the selection of distinguished representatives of cultural, educational, student advisory, and war veterans groups, and representatives of the United States

Department of Education, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, public and private nonprofit educational institutions.

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(f) Secretarial and staff assistance

The President is authorized to provide for necessary secretarial and staff assistance for the Board and such committees as may be created under this section.

§2457. Reports by Board

The Board shall submit annual reports to the Congress and such other reports to the Congress as it deems appropriate, and shall make reports to the public in the United States and abroad to develop a better understanding of and support for the programs authorized by this chapter.

If ECA and the FFSB do not fulfill reporting requirements mandated by federal statute in a systematic and timely manner, Congress and the public at large in the U.S. and abroad do not have up-to-date information on the Fulbright Program at their disposal. The absence of this information deprives partner countries of the acknowledgement they deserve for their efforts and considerable contributions to the program as a binational enterprise. In the U.S. it complicates the task of advocating for the Fulbright Program with Congress, which is responsible for annually establishing the level of U.S. appropriations for the program.

The comprehensiveness of the Fulbright Program's historical narrative and the quality of the reporting mandated by federal statute warrant robust discussion, especially in light of the fact that 23 of the current 49 binational Fulbright commissions established between 1948 and 1952 will be celebrating their own 75th anniversaries in the coming four years. I share this information with the various stakeholders in the global Fulbright community in hopes that they seize an opportunity to address these issues in a constructive and timely manner.

Lonnie R. Johnson

April 28, 2023