



TANYA GIVING A PRESENTATION AT ÁRMÚLI UPPER SECONDARY SCHOOL

# Newsletter Fulbright Commission Iceland



MAY 2014

## FULBRIGHT TIDBITS

- A new adviser joined the Commission in January 2014. Tanya Dimitrova holds an MA in American and English literature from the University of Iceland.
- Fulbrighter Guðmundur Kári Stefánsson, PhD astrophysics student at Penn State has been accepted into the research group that is developing the Habitable Zone Planet Finder (HPF), a new state-of-the-art precision spectrograph. He was also recently voted TA of the year!
- Fulbright alumna Thóra Arnórsdóttir will be returning to the US in August as a Yale World Fellow.
- Fulbright alumnus Hans T. Björnsson will receive the William K. Bowes Jr. award in June for his exceptional work in genetic research.
- 400 students attended College Day Reykjavik in April. 17 US colleges and universities were represented and were very pleased with the event. To quote a rep from Florida Tech: "Thank you for the amazing fair. I was thoroughly impressed with the students at the fair and Reykjavik in general." We call on all friends to please highlight this event to US recruitment officers and urge them to attend next year. Let's make the 2015 fair even better! For more info see [www.collegedayscandinavia.org](http://www.collegedayscandinavia.org).

## Fulbright focus on the Arctic

Message from Executive Director Belinda Theriault



Dear Fulbrighters and friends of Fulbright,

I am thrilled to announce a new cooperation agreement between the Commission and the Icelandic Ministry for Foreign Affairs. The agreement sets up a three-year US scholar grant in Arctic Studies, an area that has been prioritized both by the US and Iceland. The grant will allow a US scholar to come to Iceland for 3-5 months to teach and do research in a wide variety of fields related to the Arctic. I cannot overstate the significance of this initiative. For one, this is the first such formal agreement that the Commission has concluded with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Second, this is an important element to implementing the Arctic policy resolution adopted by Althingi, the Icelandic Parliament in 2011. It took two years of work to push this new grant through, but our perseverance paid off in the end. I am grateful to the Foreign Minister and his staff for recognizing the value that Fulbright can bring to Iceland's Arctic priorities and look very much forward to working on this issue with them in coming years.

I am counting on our alumni and other friends to get the word out about this exciting grant opportunity. All information is available in the CIES catalogue of awards,

[www.cies.org](http://www.cies.org). Applications for 2015-2016 must be submitted by 1 August 2014.

Fulbright is really starting to take on a role in academic debate about the Arctic. The Swedish Commission, along with the US Embassy in Sweden and a variety of other actors, held the first Fulbright Arctic meeting in Abisko Sweden last October. An impressive group of Arctic scholars from the US and Nordic countries got together and took the first steps to create a Fulbright Arctic dialogue. Fulbright is in a unique position to make a meaningful contribution, due to its ability to foster cross-disciplinary dialogue and cooperation among leading scholars who share a commitment to the Fulbright ideals. Stay tuned for updates and further news on these and other Fulbright Arctic initiatives.

On a different subject, check out our new YouTube channel, set up earlier this year, Fulbright Iceland. And don't forget to keep us updated on what is going on in your life, so we can share with the Fulbright family.

*Belinda Theriault*

## A scholar's Fulbright journey in Iceland

Dr. Robin Grenier, a professor at the University of Connecticut, has spent the last 5 months in Iceland as a visiting scholar at the University of Iceland, working in the Museum Studies Program. Robin was chosen from a number of applicants, and she has indeed been a great asset to the university. She and her family have seized the Fulbright opportunity with open arms, hearts and minds. We asked Robin to tell us a bit about her experiences as a Fulbright scholar in Iceland.

"My time in Iceland has re-energized me as a researcher, has made me rethink my teaching practice, and has expanded my mental models of those that live and work in a foreign country.

While here I have been teaching and conducting research. My primary research was a qualitative inquiry of museum practices in Iceland. I wanted to understand the role Icelandic museums play in supporting the learning needs of adults. I conducted interviews with museum professionals around Iceland, and gathered field notes through visits. The resulting data will be shared through a presentation at the New England Museum Association Conference this fall. I also conducted an auto-ethnography titled, "Hell and heaven in the land of Fire and Ice: An auto-ethnographic exploration of one professor's experience as Fulbright Scholar", which I will present in

June in Scotland at the International Conference on Human Resource Development. One final area of research that emerged from my teaching is a case study with Sigurjón Hafsteinsson, faculty in the Museum Studies Program. We are examining a service-learning course that was held in Djúpvogur, seeking to understand the experiences of the students and outcomes generated for supporting the growing cultural, social, and tourism needs of the town.

I taught two courses at the university: Museums and Communities, and Professional Practice in Museums. I value experiences in the classroom and sought to facilitate experiential learning where possible. For example, students created Wikipedia pages and infographics for one assignment as a way to introduce museums to both the local community and tourists. Another example comes from a SWOT assignment. Small groups worked directly with Icelandic museums to identify specific Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats that face the institutions and offered strategies for addressing the SWOT based on practical and scholarly research.

The time in the classroom here has helped me to reevaluate how I engage students, particularly those from other countries, and I am certain that my teaching experiences in Iceland will influence my pedagogical practices with respect to distance courses and "virtual" engagement.



One of the discoveries I made working with students and talking with museum staff is the lack of volunteers in Iceland's museums. In the US, volunteerism in museums is a strong and common practice, but in Iceland it is nearly nonexistent, despite the limited resources and staffing. I am planning to examine this phenomenon more in the future, and I hope to be able to return to work with Icelandic museums to build a volunteer corps that can support the needs of these institutions. In the future I would also like to bring students from my University in Connecticut to Iceland through a study abroad program.

The Fulbright experience is not just about the grant recipient, but the whole family. I was fortunate to be able to bring my husband Paul and my 11 year old daughter Catherine with me to Iceland. My husband tele-worked, while Catherine attended 5th grade at Vesturbæjarskóli. Experiencing Iceland together was very important to me. I believe traveling changes a person, and so it was critical that we had shared adventures that would shape and change our family together. We visited museums, took long walks, ventured to beautiful spots, and tried new food, music, and customs. As a result of our time in Iceland we have a new appreciation for the environment, language and family time."

## Alumna returns to Iceland on artistic journey with students

Dana Roes (Fulbright Student Program 1993, Fine Arts) returned to Iceland earlier this year with a couple of her current art students at Edison State College in Fort Meyers, Florida. We think it is pretty wonderful that she can use her Fulbright student experience to offer this type of enrichment to her

own students many years

later. It just goes to show that Fulbright remains a part of your life forever! Dana's students mounted an exhibition inspired by the Iceland trip upon their return home and here you can see some photos. We at the Commission love to reconnect, so if any other US alums are planning a trip to Iceland, please let us know!



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