

SYLFF: Financial Aid for Young Leaders

“REPARING FUTURE LEADERS AND CITIZENS for a highly interdependent world requires a higher education system where internationalization promotes cultural diversity and fosters intercultural understanding, respect, and tolerance among peoples. Such internationalization of higher education contributes to building more than economically competitive and politically powerful regional blocks; it represents a commitment to international solidarity, human security, and helps to build a climate of global peace.”¹ The truth and significance of those words are what drive many professionals in the field of international education and exchange, but ultimately they are held in check by the reality that many students do not have the financial means to benefit from international education, thereby limiting those students’ chances to join the next generation of leaders. That is where targeted financial aid comes in, and the Sasakawa Young Leaders Fellowship Fund (SYLFF) program is an example of how such aid facilitates reaching those goals.

Launched in 1987, SYLFF is funded by The Nippon Foundation and administered by The Tokyo Foundation, and spans 45 countries, with 69 SYLFF-endowed universities and consortia totaling 88 SYLFF institutions.² SYLFF’s main objective is to build a viable global association of young leaders committed to the exchange of ideas that cut across cultural barriers in establishing, through joint initiatives, a basic appreciation of diverse human natures, thereby elevating international education to new heights. But, ultimately, obtaining that objective will not occur unless individuals and institutions act upon their good intentions. It’s the difference between throwing a pebble in the pond to watch the ripples and actually being the pebble, jumping in the pond, and creating the ripples.

Making Pebbles

Each of the SYLFF endowed institutions are awarded \$1 million, which is invested, and only the earnings are used to provide fellowships to graduate students in the fields of social sciences and humanities. The Nippon Foundation provides the endowment on the belief that endowments and permanent funds help ensure sustainable educational development. And, specifically in the case of SYLFF, these endowments create the

chain reaction that begins with sustaining universities and consortia that can then, in turn, offer fellowships to recipients who actively help to foster the development of other people in their respective workplaces and communities.

SYLFF-endowed institutions provide opportunities to SYLFF fellows to present their work in open forums or conferences and seminars, on and off campus. Opportunities to travel abroad to conduct primary research in the country of their research project or to present at conferences provide SYLFF fellows with invaluable experiences to exchange ideas and interests with students from varied cultural and ethnic backgrounds. According to Ellen Mashiko, executive director of The Tokyo Foundation Scholarship Division, this helps build “scholarly perspectives and from the no-less-important vantage of social concern and responsibility, selfless, and generously shared energy focused on SYLFF and making the world better for all.”³

Creating Ripples

An example of creating a ripple effect that leads to exchanges and collaboration at the multi-institutional level is that of the SYLFF program at the Graduate School, Howard University in Washington, D.C. At Howard,

one of the early SYLFF institutions endowed in 1991, which focuses on doctoral education in the social sciences, various activities have provided its fellows with occasions not just to travel abroad but also to showcase their work at other SYLFF institutions. In 2001 a series of regional conferences at SYLFF institutions in South Africa, Brazil, Canada, and New Zealand, and a final international forum at Howard on “Perspectives on Social Inequalities: Issues of Race, Class and Gender,” brought together numerous SYLFF fellows from around the world. The papers presented were on topics ranging from education, cost of living, gender and development, juvenile literature, HIV/AIDS, tourism and segregation, women’s empowerment, race and sports, gender dialectics in the armed forces, rap music, and consolidating democracy.

From the connections established during this forum, the Howard Graduate School was able to bring together SYLFF-endowed and other institutions from the United States (Vanderbilt, non-SYLFF) and Brazil (University of Sao Paulo, SYLFF and University Federal da Bahia, non-SYLFF) to apply for a major FIPSE (Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education) grant. The grant was successfully secured and currently stu-

dents between these universities participate in semester-long exchange programs that focus on race and social inequality. In addition, the Graduate School also applied for and successfully secured The Tokyo Foundation-funded Program Development Awards to build collaborations with the SYLFF-endowed institutions of Utrecht University, The Netherlands; Chiang Mai University, Thailand; and Jadavpur University, India.

In November 2004, the Graduate School, with funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, organized an international conference in Bellagio, Italy, making yet more ripples. Participants—mostly from the SYLFF-endowed institutions of University of Western Cape, South Africa; University of Michigan; University of Texas at Austin; University of Sao Paulo, Brazil; Utrecht University, The Netherlands; and Massey University, New Zealand, as well as representatives from The Tokyo Foundation—discussed how to enhance inclusion of racial, ethnic, linguistic, and religious minorities in higher education.

New Waters

Building on its original goals, The Tokyo Foundation has also developed, over the years, a number of new initiatives, referred to as “follow-up” programs. Three recent ones include the Program Development Award, the SYLFF Prize, and the SYLFF Network Program. Each is designed to augment the SYLFF fellowship by encouraging graduate students, faculty, and administrators at SYLFF institutions to institute cooperative ventures and to nurture leadership potential to benefit individuals and institutions.

Program Development Award

Under this program, administrators and faculty are presented up to \$10,000 to visit one or more SYLFF institutions in another country to initiate new student exchange programs. “The focus on student exchange includes activity such as the development of joint degree and so-called sandwich programs at the master’s and doctoral levels within the parameters of the social sciences and humanities.”⁴ Ten such awards are given each year to SYLFF institutions on an open

competition basis. The award is like seed money for initial discussions and should be supplemented by funding from other organizations and foundations.

SYLFF Prize

This prize is awarded every three years to SYLFF fellows who have fulfilled the objectives of the SYLFF program. Up to three fellows will receive a prize of \$5,000 every three years, which includes, besides the award money, funds for travel to Japan to receive the prize and interact with individuals and institutions related to their professional and personal interests. In 2004, three fellows received the SYLFF Prize in the first round of applications: Amal Jadou, Ph.D. candidate at The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University; Eglá Martínez-Salazar, Ph.D. candidate in sociology at York University; and Goran Svilanovic, immediate past minister of foreign affairs of Serbia and Montenegro (2000–04) and a graduate of the University of Belgrade.

SYLFF Network Program

Under this program SYLFF fellows apply to start or reactivate existing SYLFF fellow associations. These associations then receive \$6,000 during a period of three years to initiate joint activities that lead to exchanges between SYLFF fellows around the world. “The fundamental idea of the SNP is to encourage SYLFF fellow-generated initiatives to draw upon this wealth of diversity to implement networking and collaboration on matters of mutual concern. The SNP will be implemented in two inter-linked phases: Phase I will support SYLFF fellows initiatives mobilized by SYLFF-institution based fellows associations, and Phase II will support activity that transcends SYLFF institutions.”⁵ At present, 15 SYLFF institution-based associations have received the SNP awards. The awarded SYLFF associations are organizing the currently enrolled fellows and alumni to meet regularly, to suggest ways of networking with other SYLFF associations, to organize seminars and conferences in areas of concern to the global community, and to create true *bonhomie* among all fellows

All three follow-up programs as established by The Tokyo Foundation have the potential to create a ripple effect for the fundamental goals of the SYLFF Program. By ensuring that current and alumni SYLFF fellows, faculty, and administrators are constantly engaged in a continuous flow of ideas, programs, and student exchanges, SYLFF transcends being just an initiator to being a generator of internationalization of education. It creates, in the process, foundational and multilayered individuals and programs dedicated to the growth of international education. While on the one hand it supports the widening of the individual’s intellectual and physical horizons through research, interactions and travels, on the other it also broadens SYLFF as a fellowship program with tremendous ramifications for global understanding through graduate education.⁶

From Shore to Shore

SYLFF has been encouraging and focusing on such educational and professional exchange for the past 17 years and is a leader in international education. It has made a special and commendable effort in reaching out to world populations with its message of global leadership and peace through respecting diversity. During the past decade it has expanded its original programs to ensure a continuation of its message. By endowing more and more institutions in places as diverse as Fiji, New Zealand, India, China, Thailand, Mongolia, Vietnam, Egypt, Kenya, Turkey, Bulgaria, France, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia, England, Canada, the United States, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico, it has endeavored to keep its message alive and proliferating. It has built strong and sustainable bridges for understanding diversity through joint initiatives in areas of race, gender, education, communications, environment, and economic institutions. It combines graduate research study with collaborative activity, thereby capturing one of the best practices of international education. As a financial aid opportunity, it has taken international education to new heights, contributing to human resource development

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turtle eggs are seen in many ways, including as a food source, aphrodisiac, and as a component of a local rite-of-passage), end- less pollution along the shoreline, feral dogs that prey on nests, beach erosion that destabilizes them, and, most surprising, garbage buried under the sand by the local population. Through this experience, students learned a disturbing truth: the factors now threatening the turtle's survival are more powerful than even its awe-inspiring natural instinct to survive.

In Action

The wall-less classroom model was assessed to determine how a field experience in Costa Rica contributed to student learning gains in conservation biology and environmental science through a combination of embedded assessment tools, surveys, and directed response assignments. Students were asked to keep field journals describing their learning each day. These journals were assessed using a rubric that examined the extent to which students demonstrated the ability to apply pre-trip learning in a field setting. The surveys asked students to rate the extent to which specific learning experiences in the field contributed to gains across specified biology knowledge domains. The directed response assignments required students to elaborate on field observations within a theoretical framework. Together these sources of data were used to triangulate the findings and demonstrated that students were able to apply and integrate knowledge gained in the pre-trip experience demonstrating deep learning of conservation biology and environmental science principles. Journal entries and open-ended responses in the survey provided evidence that students participating in the trip demonstrated attitudes consistent with persons who will become life-long advocates for conservation biology.

Given that, the next goal is to help translate the components of wall-less teaching to high school classrooms. To that end, I've established an international program called CHANCE (Connecting Humans and Nature in the Costa Rican Environment), in association with the Pennsylvania State University (PSU), Pennsylvania Department of Education, Minister of Education of the Republic of Costa Rica, Pennsylvania high school pre-service and in-service

teachers, researchers from the Caribbean Conservation Cooperation, Asociacion ANAI, the La Selva Biological Station managed by the Organization of Tropical Studies, as well as other conservation sites and established researchers around the world. CHANCE is designed to provide both in-service and pre-service Pennsylvania high school environmental science teachers with the background required to incorporate wall-less classroom components back at home—with their own back-yards serving as “the field.”

Early assessment data suggest that teachers participating in the experience perceive that student learning will increase as a result of implementing the wall-less model as part of their learning designs and that they find it difficult to imagine teaching conservation biology absent some field experience. That's definitely been the case for me—as I look forward to working with CHANCE educators and the PSU Royer Center for Learning and Academic Technologies to develop interactive Web-based “research” modules based on factual conservation biology fieldwork, all of which will be made available to anyone teaching high school biology or environmental science around the commonwealth—and ultimately the nation and Costa Rica. After that, we'll translate these modules into Spanish.

After that, who knows? Maybe one day soon, a student somewhere in the midst of a Costa Rican banana plantation will get her classmates' attention by singing “Big Yellow Taxi” in Spanish. **IE**

JACQUELINE MCLAUGHLIN is assistant professor of biology, The Pennsylvania State University/Berks-Lehigh Valley. She also directs the international program CHANCE (<https://royercenter.cwc.psu.edu/CHANCE>).

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and internationalization of education, and has been a spring board for a new generation of young leaders focused on global peace. **IE**

ORLANDO L. TAYLOR is vice provost for research, dean of Howard University Graduate School, and director of the SYLFF program at Howard University. **ANITA NAHAL** is associate professor of history, Sri Venkateswara College, University of Delhi, India, and is currently with the international affairs and women's studies programs at Howard's Graduate School and adviser, SYLFF program, Howard University.

Endnotes

1. *Toward a Century of Cooperation: Internationalization of Higher Education*, International Association of Universities Policy 2000, http://www.unesco.org/iau/tfi_statement.html.
2. For a list of SYLFF institutions, access: <http://www.tkfd.or.jp/eng/division/fellowship/sylff/institutions>.
3. “Editorial Note,” *The SYLFF Newsletter*, No.8, February 2004, p.16.
4. <http://www.tkfd.or.jp/eng/division/fellowship/sylff/announcements/pda.shtml>.
5. For a complete explanation of the different phases of SNP consult, <http://www.tkfd.or.jp/eng/division/fellowship/sylff/announcements/snp.shtml>.
6. For details of The Tokyo Foundation's programs and publications, access: <http://www.tkfd.or.jp/eng/division/fellowship>.