

The Fulbrighter

A U S T R A L I A

The 2006 Fulbright East Asia Pacific Regional Conference

The Australian-American Fulbright Commission had the pleasure of hosting the 2006 Fulbright East Asia Pacific Regional Conference in Sydney, 27 February – 2 March. The Conference is held every two to three years and brings together all the people involved in facilitating the Fulbright Program between countries of the East Asia Pacific Region and the United States.

Seventeen countries and areas were represented including Cambodia, China, East Timor, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos, Mongolia, Malaysia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam, and Australia. The group of 86 delegates included staff from Fulbright Commissions and U.S. Foreign Service Officers who manage the Program through the local U.S. Embassy. America-based representatives included delegates from the U.S. Department of State, the Fulbright Scholarship Board, the Institute of International Education (IIE) and Council of International Exchange of Scholars (CIES).

The four-day conference focused on policy, processes, new initiatives and the exchange of ideas and best practices. The binational nature of the Fulbright Program ensures it operates in very different ways in different countries, reflecting the binational needs and relationships between the United States and each country. The exchange of ideas and practices helped us appreciate the diversity

of the Fulbright Program, while collectively working to maintain its profile and vitality in the region.

Stephen Uhlfelder, Chair of the J. William Fulbright Scholarship Board and Thomas Farrell, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Academic Programs, Bureau for Educational and Cultural Affairs, U.S. Department of State gave presentations on the policy and mission of the Fulbright Program.

Mr Grahame Cook, Deputy Secretary, Department of Education, Science & Training and Dr Bill Stanton, Chargé d'Affaires, a.i., U.S. Embassy and Honorary Co-Chair of the Australian-American Fulbright Commission welcomed the delegates at an evening reception at The American Club.

At the reception delegates were entertained by an aboriginal dance and musical performance by Nalkuma Burarrwanga and Djakapurra Munyarryun, from Arnhem Land who are colleagues of Randy Graves, U.S. Fulbright Scholar 2004. Djakapurra is a former member of the Bangarra Dance Company and featured in the opening ceremony of the Sydney Olympic Games.

In keeping with the Fulbright mission of cultural exchange, conference delegates also visited the Opera House, the Harbour Bridge Climb, Taronga Zoo and the NSW Art Gallery.

The conference was a productive professional and social exchange that will continue to build the strength of the Fulbright Program in the East Asia Pacific region.

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Inside

ED News	Pg 2
Mrs Fulbright & Scholars at Stanford	Pg 3
Australian Alumni	Pg 4
FSB Chair & Sydney Uni Scholars	Pg 5
American Alumni	Pg 6
Fulbright Events	Pg 7
Australian Fulbright Association	Pg 8
Events/Dates	Pg 8

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Conference delegates in Sydney for the Fulbright East Asia Pacific Regional Conference

American Alumni

ROBERT E. ACCORDINO

U.S. Postgraduate Scholar 2004
Co-founder, Music for Autism

Robert Accordino conducted research at the School of Psychology at the University of Queensland on the auditory processing of individuals with autism, on a Fulbright Postgraduate Scholarship in 2004. **Through the Pratt Foundation, Robert was invited to Melbourne to meet with various autism researchers and organisations that have a connection to the Pratt Foundation.**

"I met with a group from Learning for Life and Autism Behavioural Intervention Association (ABIA) and I presented some of my recent research on auditory processing and autism and its potential clinical and educational ramifications," Robert discussed.

"I spoke about some of my recent autism advocacy work where I have given workshops on autism spectrum disorders. The workshops have been very successful and served as excellent fund raisers for autism organisations, such as Autism Queensland and Autism Support Group Gold Coast."

As part of the trip Robert also went to Port Phillip Specialist School. Port Phillip caters for a diverse population of students with mild to severe intellectual disabilities from 2.5 to 18

years of age and has a visual and performing arts curriculum to assist students in learning traditional curriculum areas.

"Given my research interest in the musical abilities of those with autism, I was particularly keen to hear about this innovative curriculum, which aims to teach all subject matter through the arts."

Robert's research seems to show that musical processing in those with autism may be similar to that of typically developing children.

"I do think such a curriculum is a wise choice for children with developmental delays such as autism. The curriculum taps into an area that may not be affected by the child's disability. With spectacular facilities and a tremendous staff, this very special school has undertaken a curriculum that could re-shape how we understand and carry out special education."

Robert also spoke with Dr. Carl Parsons, Director of Integrated Services and the therapy services, including music therapy, drama therapy, and art therapy, offered in the school. Dr. Parson's has a background in research and coordinates research projects being carried out in the school. He invited Robert to carry out research with children in the school in the future. "This opportunity would certainly be most exciting," Robert exclaimed.

On his final day, Robert met with Professor Bruce Tonge, Monash Medical Centre to discuss research issues in autism.

"I heard about his many areas of active research in autism, including molecular genetics, neuropsychology, classification of autistic behaviors, intervention, and eye tracking. **We had a very interesting discussion on the similarities and differences of those classified as having Asperger's syndrome or high functioning autism.**"

"I am enormously grateful to Sam Lipski and the Pratt Foundation for making this enormously beneficial trip to Melbourne possible. During my two enriching days of meetings, I made important contacts and learned a lot. I was also inspired and invigorated."



Bella Irlight, Principal of Port Phillip Specialist School and Robert Accordino

ROBIN PRICHARD

U.S. Postgraduate Scholar 2001
Visiting Assistant Professor, Smith College

Robin studied at the Department of Performance Studies at the University of Sydney in 2002. **"I had a full body response, I started jumping up and down on my chair and whooping," said Robin about hearing the news of her award.**

Robin is a professional dancer and choreographer and is currently a Visiting Assistant Professor and Graduate Advisor in the Dance Department at Smith College, a private liberal arts college for women located in Northampton, Massachusetts.

In Australia, Robin embraced many fields within the dance industry. Her first experience was performing two dances at the Bodies Dance Festival – NSW's largest festival for dance.

"I did two performances; the first was a text-based autobiographical dance, and the other a danced based on Native American themes entitled "When Sandstone Sings", Robin explained.

"These performances generated a lot of press

and I was overwhelmed with the contacts made from this performance.

The Sydney dance community was eager for me to contribute my own knowledge and talents and I subsequently taught at Sydney Dance Company, Omeo, University of Western Sydney, and the National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association (NAISDA). I also performed for Opera Australia as well as completing my own choreographic projects."

Through her Native American heritage Robin had the great privilege of working with Indigenous communities.

"I found Australian Aborigines very interested in comparing our Australian and American indigenous experiences. Their interest and desire allowed me to work with Indigenous communities and learn dances I wouldn't have been privy to otherwise."

Back in the U.S. Robin is planning to restage a piece she created as part of her Fulbright project and tour it through the States.

"The Fulbright scholarship has helped people perceive me as a scholar as well as an artist. It has given me external validation in a field practically absent of it."

