

## Ep. 039: The Fulbright Experience with Erin Mikulec

We're back in 2018 to talk teaching, learning, and Fulbright awards with Dr. Erin Mikulec. She's offering a new workshop series at CTLT that explores the many Fulbright teaching and research options available to faculty. In addition to previewing the workshops, Jim and Erin explore her experiences with the Study Abroad program her recent, award-winning scholarship in the field of teaching and learning, and how all of this ties back to the classroom. Plus, the virtues of mushy peas as a teaching tool!

Podcast: <https://ProDev.illinoisstate.edu/podcast/2018/ep039.shtml>

### Transcript

JIM: Hi there. I'm Jim.

ERIN: And I'm Erin.

JIM: Let's Talk Teaching

JIM: Welcome to Let's Talk Teaching, a podcast from the Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology here at Illinois State University. I'm Jim Gee. Joining me today a special guest, Dr. Erin Mikulec is with our School of teaching and learning, and she's also, facilitating some exciting workshops here this spring at CTLT. Hi, Erin.

ERIN: Hi, how are you?

JIM: I'm fine. Thanks for coming on.

ERIN: Sure.

JIM: We kind of put this together fairly quickly. We are recording this podcast the same day because you have a workshop coming up.

ERIN: I do. I just did one yesterday as well.

JIM: You did. You've been here quite a lot this semester. So, we want to talk about all of that. The main focus today, though, we're talking about the Fulbright Program and how it relates to faculty here. And I didn't realize you called Fulbright awardees Fulbrighters.

ERIN: It's kind of the term I suppose... maybe there's there's a nomenclature.

ERIN: Yeah, no, I think that's great. So, we're talking about Fulbrighters today, and we're talking about opportunities for faculty. So, what was your interest in this? What was your interest getting into into doing this?

ERIN: So, I was a Fulbrighter in 2014; I had a Fulbright award to go to Finland and study education, which makes sense coming from College of Ed. And it was such a transformative experience for me both personally and professionally. I was stretched and challenged in ways I could never have imagined. So, just to give you an example, in Finland, they learn Finnish and Swedish. And there are Swedish schools. And one day, I was in a Swedish school and I was asked to help with math in Swedish. Okay, so, and I did, and I learned numbers one to 10 in Swedish, please don't ask me to recite them now. But I did. I helped younger students with math, simple addition and subtraction in Swedish, and that is something I had never thought I would do. And it was So, fun in such a challenge. And then coming back here to ISU. It has had such an impact on my teaching and my research and everything I do. And it's just such an amazing experience. And I really want others to have that opportunity as well.

JIM: Well, we should end before we're done today, we need to explore a little bit more about how it has impacted your teaching.

ERIN: Sure, absolutely.

JIM: But before we get to that maybe we're kind of assuming prior knowledge here, as you like to say on our little pokey teaching podcast. Explain to us what the Fulbright Program is.

ERIN: Sure. So, the Fulbright Program is sort of the flagship international exchange program sponsored by the US government. It was established in 1946 under legislation introduced by Senator J. William Fulbright from Arkansas. It's sponsored by the US Department of State under the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. And so, every year, Fulbright sends a number of people out into the world, approximately 8000 awards are granted every year throughout the world. 900 foreign Fulbrighters are coming into the United States and 1200 us Fulbrighters are going out into the world every year. It's quite a prestigious program and very competitive. So, some other notable numbers. Fulbright alumni are recipients of 53 Nobel Prizes, 78 Pulitzer Prizes, 28 MacArthur Foundation awards and 16 US Presidential Medal of Freedom.

JIM: Wow. So, obviously, as you said, it is very competitive, and it is very prestigious. But it's not beyond the grasp of people teaching at Illinois State or anywhere else.

ERIN: Absolutely not. And I think and I have to confess that when I first started thinking about it, it was something that's like, oh, I could never do that. And then the more I thought about it, and I talked to people as well, why not? And we actually have quite a few Fulbrighters here on campus, faculty and staff. So, whether they did complete a Fulbright as a graduate student or postdoc, or as a faculty member, we currently have around 30 folks here on campus that have done Fulbrights and we have some that have done multiple Fulbrights.

JIM: Mm hmm. And you had mentioned before we started recording today that you're working with the folks over in university communication, and you'll be showcasing some of these throughout.

ERIN: Yes. And I have to say that the initiative for Fulbright here on campus, I do have a partner in crime with Dr. Leah Klein over in the School of Art, who did a Fulbright in Italy. So, she and I are working together to try and publicize the work of Fulbright here on campus, people who've gotten the awards. And so, we've been working with media relations. Rachel Hatch, who is amazing, and always so, wonderful. And we've been sending out to Fulbrighters a Q&A, just sort of you know a few questions about their experience and those are being sent out on media relations. So, this semester, there will be one story. It's called Focus on Fulbright approximately every two weeks.

JIM: Cool. Well, we can look forward to that. Speaking of stuff to look forward to, we have a workshop here in a couple days. Yes, that was kind of the impetus for doing this now, instead of waiting. So, tell us a little bit about the workshop. And it's actually it's actually in two parts, isn't it?

ERIN: It is, and possibly a third. Okay. So, one of the things as I've been talking to people that have expressed interest, and I've met with several people already, who are interested in knowing more is I thought, maybe a campus wide workshop would be helpful. And so, yes, right now, this semester, there are two parts. And the first workshop which is February 6, from 2 until 3:30. In the afternoon, over here at CTLT is an introduction to Fulbright, to help people who are interested, understand the different kinds of awards that there are, and there are so, many for this workshop focuses on faculty awards. And there are so, many options. So, I think one thing that happens is sometimes people think, oh, I can't go for a semester, I can't go for a year. And Fulbright has been very responsive to that. And there are a number of awards that are also, available. So, there is a Fulbright specialist Award, which our good friend Dr. Joseph Petty, will be off, I believe, next week as well to Kurdistan. And the Fulbright specialist award can go from 2/4/6 weeks. So, it's not an entire semester or a year. But even core programs. So, there's core awards, there's all different kinds. But Fulbright has developed other ones to be more flexible. So, for example, there is a flex award where you can propose a project and you might do it for one month over the next three summers or something along those lines. There's also, a new global award. So, you can work in two different world regions. And you may do that for at least one month per year in each region. So, you could do a project, say looking at something in Chile one year for at least a month, and then go to someplace else in the world and other regions such as Uganda, and study something there that's connected in your project. So, one of the things I really hope to do in this first workshop is let everyone know just about the whole array of awards that are available, and kind of help faculty who are interested over that initial, here's maybe why I can't go and yes, why you can and why you should.

JIM: So, that sounds exciting. And then the second workshop in April, I'm guessing is more kind of nuts and bolts, how to get the process rolling.

ERIN: Absolutely. So, the catalog of awards is quite extensive, as you can imagine, because we're working with over 155 countries around the world. And so, helping people identify the type of award they would like to do teaching, research, teaching and research, thinking about time, where they would want to go is very, very important. So, in that second workshop, sort of working through those who are very interested in

pursuing it, look, looking through that catalog and finding what you need, because each reward will have different requirements. For example, some awards require a letter of invitation. So, my award required a letter of invitation. And quite honestly, I didn't know anyone in Finland. And so, I just started contacting universities. And I got my letter of invitation. And also, recognizing that this will take some time. So, for example, for the core scholar Awards, the deadline is always August 1. However, like I was explaining to you earlier, my award was in the spring semester of 2014. I submitted my application in August 1 of 2012. And I had started making contacts and researching late 2011. So, it does take some time to sort of plan ahead and especially you know where you are here at ISU in terms of tenure and promotion and where you are in your career. And so, the second workshop is really designed to like you said, the nuts and bolts identifying which program which award you would like to submit to. And then looking at the things you need, how you can go about getting those and how you can start developing your application.

JIM: That's great. So, people can if you're interested in participating, I know the first workshop is has a lot of folks registered for it already. And of course, space is limited. But we will have links on our website on the Show page. But you can also, just go to CTLT.IllinoisState.edu. In addition to facilitating some workshops about the Fulbright awards, you've also, been working with the Office of International Studies and programs on the Study Abroad workshops that they do. Can you tell us a little bit about those?

ERIN: Sure. I started working with that office a couple years ago, working with Samantha Potempa, who's the Assistant Director for study abroad here on campus for workshops for faculty who are interested in leading a study abroad program I've been leaving the University of Brighton program in Brighton, England for teacher education majors for the past seven or eight years. And it has been such an amazing experience because again, it has significant influence on my teaching, both in terms of academics, and then one thing I've been really interested in his out of class learning. And So, it's had just such an influence on my teaching and how I prepare my classes here on campus, and then that program as well. So, Samantha, and I do a workshop and help faculty figure out where they might like to go, why they would like to go there, which courses, they would be interested in teaching. And then I help think, help them think about how to adjust that course and how to adapt that course for the site that they're in. Right, because there's no point in flying across an ocean to simply teach the course exactly the same way. And so, helping faculty figure out how to use local resources, expanding the idea of what a classroom is expanding their idea of what a lesson is. So, an example that I always give, you know, you can't go to England without eating fish and chips, right. And a proper fish and chips always comes with a side of mushy peas, which is an English favorite leftover from World War II. And so, the rule is that you don't have to eat all of it. You don't have to like it, but you do have to try it. And, you know, I have to say that my students have all been wonderful. And there's varying degrees of how much we like mushy peas, and that's okay, but they tried it. And that is learning that is helping students go outside their comfort zone and try something new. And it seems like a very small thing. And students might not realize that it's an actual lesson that I've planned in my head. They don't need to know. But just those sorts of things are So,

unique to study abroad opportunities. And it's such a great opportunity for our students and our faculty as well.

JIM: So, I know that for this semester, at least, and this runs fairly regularly. I know it usually runs over the summer as well, this introductory workshop, but there's another one that was added this semester is coming up in February. Yes. And and what's that one about?

ERIN: So, in the time that Samantha and I have been doing this, we used to talk about choosing courses and course development and then developing the proposal and the budget all in one-two hour workshop. And we began to realize that that's a lot of information to process. And so, the first workshop that we did yesterday focused more on the course aspect, the teaching, choosing the course why and how you might adapt it. And then the next workshop, we're actually going to sit down and help faculty who are interested, create that budget, create the proposal, because those are, I love being a faculty member. But sometimes we try it we tend to think of you know, the big pie in the sky ideas and all the wonderful things about study abroad and we might not consider budget sheets in risk management. And so, the second workshop is really about again, nuts and bolts. Yeah, and but having support to do that from both Samantha and I and-

JIM: And a little more pragmatism, it sounds like that sometimes that comes into the equation.

ERIN: Yeah, that's always kind of a downer, isn't it?

JIM: Yeah. Well, I mean, you have to do it is-

ERIN: Yes, it is part of-

JIM: It is part of it. Also, part of your busy semester are your busy year thus far. You were named the Jasmine Ostrovsky award recipient. That's such as Martin Ostrowski award from the scout for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. So, first of all, congratulations. How do you do all this?

ERIN: I guess I just kind of do what I do. Okay. Don't stop and think about it too much. You know, my, my mantra has always sort of been I'll try anything twice. Okay, and that sounds like fun. I've never done that before. Okay, let's do it.

ERIN: Even the mushy peas. Yeah, absolutely. And I do model I, I model, I am the first one to take a bite of those mushy peas. And but you know, being here at ISU, there's So, many resources here on campus, and there's So, much support. My chair is wonderfully supportive. And my dean and the folks here at CTLT and Jen Frieberg, over and cross chair. So, it's it seems pretty, I don't want to say it's easy, but it's just, I guess I'm well supported. And I haven't yet stopped to think, oh, I'm doing too much right. Um, but I would like to give a shout out to just thinking about awards and connecting back to Fulbright. So, as I mentioned, my copartner, my partner in crime, Dr. Leah Klein, she, as I mentioned before, she did a Fulbright award to Italy, but she has also,

been working with her department chair Mike Willie and her colleague Lori Merriman, and they have received a Fulbright Scholar in Residence award for Illinois State University. And this program helps universities and expanding programs of academic exchange by supporting non-US scholars through grants for teaching institutions that might not have a strong international component. And they have applied for a scholar in residence with the goal of filling their void in their curriculum of our of non-Western traditions, okay. And particularly, the School of Art requested a scholar from South Africa with an expertise in African art. And they will be offering two courses per semester, which will be art 275, world arts and art 303 seminar and Art Beyond the Western tradition. And this is very exciting, because this is something that is not currently offered. And these classes will enroll approximately 200 of our students. Oh, wow. So, another wonderful thing about Fulbright is it doesn't only send people out, but it can also, bring people in we have five graduate students here on campus as Fulbrighters as well.

JIM: Even the mushy peas do-

JIM: So, So, that's a very clear example of, of what exactly what you're talking about, about how this benefits us back here on campus who aren't leaving and whatnot. But all the other things that we've talked about today, whether it is your Fulbright experience, or your other study abroad experience or even your your research into into the scholarship, you know, doing scholarship in terms of teaching and learning. How did that all filter back into your into the classroom here? How does that all inform your teaching here? What are your students? What are your students see, or experience now that they didn't experience before you did all of this stuff?

ERIN: Ah, that's a very good question. Um, well, with my Solo work, one of the things that I did with my solo work was I looked at clinical experiences for our students. So, our preservice teachers go out into schools and observe and do things there. And a couple of my projects led us to some very different school sites. One of my projects, we went up to Milwaukee to the alliance school, just as amazing school, started by my dear friend, Tina Moore, who is now doing her Ph.D at Harvard and education. She started the school in 2004, because she recognized that LGBTQ youth were having a very hard time in school. And so, she began the school as a safe place for them to come to school and learn and be successful. Because one thing we know about LGBT youth is that they sometimes don't come to school, they drop out. And so, she wanted to try and remedy that. And the school is built on a very different model of education, there's no bells. There's, you know, for gym class, one day, we learned a line dance, and then we went downtown Milwaukee and did a flash mob together. Oh, really, and so, really different approaches. And so, I brought my students there, and we did some clinical work there. We also, worked a lot with YouthBuild of McLean County, which is a fantastic partner. And then some other work I've done, I've done a lot of research was study abroad. So, both with my program, and then I'm in a project right now with Dr. Klein, and then also, Dr. Katie Jasper from history, and we're looking at learning outcomes of study abroad for students campus wide. And so, that's really exciting. I guess I'm trying to find there's lots of ways that it's impacting my teaching in the class, I would have to say, you know, one of the things with my Fulbright and my study abroad, is I hope that I try to model for my students to just try it. Just go out and, and do something, and

don't be afraid. And let yourself be challenged. For example, I'm a former high school teacher, I'm Middle School, I'm secondary. When I was in Finland, I was invited to teach sixth grade at a school, I thought, okay, I can I can do that. Well, then it was the fifth graders, and the fourth graders, and the third graders, and they just kept getting smaller and smaller. I mean, it was good. I spent the most wonderful day teaching animal what animals say in English, because they don't say the same things. Again, that was another just amazing experience for me. And I try and tell my students that because I think sometimes what happens is, you know, and I have to admit, I was the same way. I'm secondary. I'm interested in secondary only. But what I try to tell my students is that by the time students get to you in high school, their ideas and attitudes about school were formed in primary. And so, spending some time in those grades is very helpful for you moving on with secondary, it also, challenges you're teaching in new ways. And again, I always like to try and model what I'm doing. I'm actually volunteering in Stevenson elementary school this semester on Thursday afternoons with a friend of mine has a third-grade class. So, she has some English language learners. So, I'm doing some work there.

JIM: That sounds exciting. So, you're even busier than I thought.

ERIN: I might have a clone.

JIM: Yeah, that could that well, you know that okay, that is, as we say another episode on how to clone yourself for successful teaching and learning. Erin, thank you So, much.

ERIN: Oh, thank you So, much for having me. This has been wonderful.

JIM: That's all the time we have for this week's episode of Let's Talk Teaching. You can find out more about the workshops Erin's doing and our pokey little podcast here by going to our website [CTLT.IllinoisState.edu](http://CTLT.IllinoisState.edu). For Dr. Erin Mikulec, for my colleagues here at the Center for Teaching, Learning and Technology until we talk again, Happy Teaching!