

ONIS Newsletter Vol. I, no. 3 (February 1, 2020)

The ONIS newsletter is a monthly record of news concerning applications for nationally and internationally competitive scholarships, primarily for undergraduates and primarily for the Twin Cities campus of the University of Minnesota. If you would like to have a copy emailed directly to you, please send a request to natschol@umn.edu.

Scholar Profile:

Lucas Paulson of Mercer, Wisconsin graduated in 2017 with majors in English and Global Studies. He spent spring of his junior year studying abroad in Chile, where he conducted human rights research among the Mapuche people, and he worked on campus as a research intern and content manager with openGlobalRights. He served as a writing consultant in the University Center for Writing and was awarded a Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship in Colombia, which he was able to extend for a second year.



1. What scholarships did you apply for and what did they allow you to do?

I ambitiously applied to several, including the Rhodes and Marshall scholarships, a Fulbright award, and a program called Princeton in Latin America. Fulbright worked out, and I left for Colombia after graduating to teach English at a university. It's been two years now, and I'm still here.

2. How did being awarded a scholarship change your academic and/or professional development? What other opportunities has it opened for you?

For me, Fulbright is definitely one of those moments I'll point to as signaling a shift in my trajectory. It's been huge across the whole range of personal to professional. It gave me space from academics, space from the US, space to write more, the wonderfully fulfilling opportunity of teaching at a university. I'm fluent in Spanish now, I can salsa without making a fool of myself . . . the list goes on. More tangibly, Fulbright is a 10-month grant, but the commission in Colombia allows for fellows to apply to complete a second year. So one year with Fulbright became two. I reached out to some Minnesota contacts and ended up connecting with a human rights NGO/think-tank called Dejusticia, and the cards fell in a way that allowed me to work as a research fellow with them my second year. In a roundabout way that opened up another door at another NGO, where I was recently hired full-time.

3. What did you learn about yourself through the application process? What particular skills or knowledge did you develop?

How has the experience continued to be valuable?

Rhodes/Marshall was the hardest application I've ever done. I knew it was a huge stretch for me, but the process ended up being really important. Writing the essays helped me to clarify my own narrative, to figure out how I could tie the different pieces of what I'd done into some kind of arc that made sense with who I was (still am, I think) and where I hoped to go.

Pieces of that made their way into other scholarship applications and eventually my Fulbright application. I'm sure it's made me better at writing cover letters as well. When it comes to applications, there's really no substitute for doing them. And the higher the stakes, the more you learn. But the challenge of a thing like Rhodes is that that narrative needs to be focused on an idea that you really live and breathe. I didn't have that degree of specialization or focus when I applied—I still don't. I got my a-- kicked in the interview, and that was that.

But after that, well, big applications became less intimidating, and I became more—for lack of a better word—realistic. Going into senior year I was deciding between pitching a human rights research project with Fulbright or applying to the English Teaching Program. The research position was attractive, but I was simply more competitive for the latter, and I think it ultimately fit better with what I was trying to achieve. It took a nudge from Tim, but I rolled with the English teaching and after a painfully long wait (seriously, it's like at least 6 months from final submission) was accepted.

Rejections like the one from Rhodes suck. They really do. But sometimes when you're not right for a program or a position, that position also isn't right for you. That's not always the case, and we (I) do a lot to rationalize disappointment, but since coming to Colombia I've never once wished I could change it to be sitting in a classroom in Oxford.

4. What are you working on now?

The hardest part of my new job is describing it. I work for a human rights organization in Colombia called [JustLabs](#). It's a sort of clearing house for creativity and innovation in fields of social change. In practice, that means we organize workshops ("labs") with organizations around the world working on human rights or other social issues. We invite representatives from the organizations as well as experts in entirely unrelated fields (design, psychology, journalism, etc.), and put them all in a room so that they can put their heads together and come up with creative pilot projects related to a specific challenge that they're facing. My job is to help organize these labs, from logistical planning to background research. I've spent the last month writing background guides and video scripts on the situation of civil society in Eurasia. I'll be in Kazakhstan and Armenia in September, which is something I'm still wrapping my head around. I also do comms work, report writing, interviews, filming . . . basically whatever they need.

5. You have accomplished a lot. Really, how much do you sleep at night and what do you do to unwind?

Oh, man. Probably around six hours a night. Sometimes more, sometimes less. I've always been the work-till-you-drop kind of person, and the last thing I tend to prioritize is my sleep. But I'm slowly learning that I'm much more efficient when I'm well rested, so we're trying to push that number up a bit. Especially when I have to spend my day reading and writing at a computer. As for unwinding . . . I entered the job at a busy time for the organization, and I'm still settling in here and trying to establish routines and boundaries. Exercise has always been a big de-stressor for me. I like to run outside though, which was a lot easier in Minneapolis than in Bogotá. Reading, Netflix, music . . . they all help. The *On Being* podcast. I've gained a newfound appreciation for cooking as well. Baby steps.

6. Is there anything that you wish someone had told you at the beginning of your college career?

I'm not sure where the phrase came from (a Google search came up with [this Washington Post article](#)), but I remember hearing about someone who said we need to move away from exhaustion as a status symbol. That has really resonated with me recently. I don't think I ever really learned to balance my time. Granted, it's hard to do in college, and college is (and should be) hard. But I never learned to set my own boundaries. Work/Life-That-Isn't-Work came in these weird, desperate waves rather than a consistent, healthy balance. It meant I didn't work efficiently, I didn't disconnect when it was time to disconnect, and it definitely held me back from getting more involved in things that weren't school. I always kind of figured the pressures were unique to college and that I'd get better at it after. But habits develop whether you're intentional about them or not. And they stick, good or bad. Now I'm in a job with flexible hours and a lot of work, and I'm trying to figure out how to do that well and still exist as a person outside of those responsibilities. Do I still judge people who claim to have graduated without pulling an all-nighter? Yeah. But I also envy them. They figured something out early on that I still haven't.

That, and spend more time doing things you think you might be interested in and less time being worried about not knowing what the big picture is.

Events:

February 7, 3:00, 240 Northrop – Post-graduate scholarships information session: learn about how to apply for Rhodes, Marshall, Gates-Cambridge, Yenching, Knight-Hennessey and other awards for graduate study in the US and abroad

March 27, 12:00, 240 Northrop – Fulbright Kick-Off: learn about how to apply for a Fulbright award to support study, research, or teaching abroad. Junior, seniors, grad students and recent alumni are all welcome.

Scholarship Deadlines:

[Foreign Affairs Information Technology Fellowship](#): up to \$75K for Sophomores in IT majors or Seniors applying to graduate programs with an interest in international affairs and desire to work for the State Department. Deadline: February 14.

[NIH Undergraduate Scholarship](#): up to \$20K/year and paid research training at NIH labs for students with exceptional financial need and interests in biomedical, behavioral, or health-related social science research. Deadline: March 18.

[Truman Scholarship Campus Deadline](#): \$30K for graduate study for active, engaged student leaders who plan careers of public service. Apply as a sophomores for a campus nomination by April 1.

UK Scholarships Campus Deadline: [Rhodes](#), [Marshall](#) and [Churchill](#) scholarships cover the full cost of 1-3 years of graduate study at Oxford, Cambridge and other British universities. Juniors, seniors or recent grads must apply for a campus nomination by April 1.