

2018 RIFA Fellows Conference and Short Course



Participants from the 2018 RIFA Conference pose for a group photo.

From May 4-8 2018, graduate students selected for the Research and Innovation Fellowship for Agriculture program (RIFA) attended the third annual RIFA Conference and Project Planning Short Course in Point Reyes, California in preparation for their upcoming international projects in agriculture, food systems, and development.

The RIFA program has offered graduate students from the University of California system the opportunity to partner with host institutions on two to six-month-long international projects in developing countries. This year, Fellows will be traveling to 11 different countries on four different continents in hopes of collaborating with their host organizations in addressing global challenges. Each RIFA fellow will receive round trip airfare and a stipend for each month they are in country, with most leaving this summer and returning sometime in early fall.



Incoming fellows and RIFA alumni discuss challenges and opportunities outside the Red Barn during the RIFA Conference.

RIFA's third annual conference took place on May 4 from 2pm-6pm at the Red Barn Educational Annex near the Bear Valley Visitors Center. The day's activities consisted of discussion panels, presentations, and technical break-out sessions, with RIFA's Associate Director, Elana Peach-Fine, and Director, David Miller, hosting the events. Event highlights included an alumni panel, where past RIFA participants gave personal advice and insight into the logistics of completing research abroad, as well as a poster presentation session of past projects.

The annual RIFA conference is a joint event with RIFA's sister program, the Global Development Fellowship program at UC Berkeley. Several global development fellows joined the day's events accompanied by their program director, George Scharffenberger, who helped to host the program.

The four-day short course for RIFA Fellows, which ran from May 5 -8, allowed the new graduate cohort the chance to bond while refreshing and expanding their knowledge on project management concepts and additional topics. RIFA alumni also hosted sessions throughout the four days on topics such as including gender in project planning and communications while working abroad.



Jessamyn Wead explores protected waters near Halong Bay in Vietnam, before continuing on to Cambodia.

The RIFA Fellows for the 2018 cycle all differ in their past research experiences, programs of study, and interests. Jessamyn Wead, a first-year Master's student from UC Berkeley's Public Health and Nutrition program, was the first RIFA Fellow to leave for her project on May 15.

Wead's research will explore medicinal uses of local herbs and plants in four different rural Cambodian villages while working alongside Cambodia's Royal University of Agriculture (RUA). Through her work she hopes to narrow the knowledge gap between agriculture and health and help further the UC's continued partnership with RUA. She cites her past experiences completing research at a Creole reservation in Montana during her undergraduate years, and her 10 years working with a nonprofit nutritional supplement company, as inspirations for the project. During her interview, Wead expressed her excitement in getting to know Cambodian people, learning more about the traditional uses of plants, and visiting nearby countries.

Other 2018 RIFA Fellows leaving this May and June are Elizabeth Dyett (UC Riverside) and Leanna Kelly (UC Davis). Dyett is working towards her PhD in Genetics, Genomics, and Bioinformatics and will be studying the effects of green gas emissions in rice paddy soils at the Zhejiang University in China. She is particularly excited to be working alongside her long-time friend, and fellow RIFA participant, MengYuan Xi (UC Riverside).

Kelly is currently getting a dual Master's degree in International Agricultural Development and Animal Biology and will be researching farm management alternatives with the World Agroforestry Centre in Tanzania. During her three-month project, Kelly will be on the island of

Zanzibar looking at the effects of climate smart agricultural on poultry in hopes of reducing the climate impact of livestock.

The Global Food Initiative (GFI), created by the office of the president of the University of California, currently funds the RIFA program. The GFI, launched in 2014, has helped send UC graduate students abroad through RIFA since 2016 to develop, demonstrate and extend the work of the UC in food security, health and sustainability on a global scale.