On Campus

Thirteen New Global Projects Receive Seed Grants

Fall 2014

The University has announced the latest recipients of grants from the President's Global Innovation Fund, established last year to help faculty develop innovative research, teaching, and service projects overseas. This year's seed grants, which range from $25,000 to $225,000, were awarded to thirteen projects chosen from fifty-three proposals. All will make use of the University's network of Global Centers located in Amman, Beijing, Istanbul, Mumbai, Nairobi, Paris, Rio de Janeiro, and Santiago.

"The goal of the Global Centers has always been to make it easier for faculty and students to pursue academic projects that have a global character," says Safwan Masri, executive vice president for Global Centers and global development. "These grants will help new and particularly forward-thinking projects get off the ground."

This year's grant recipients include scholars working in astronomy, biology, ecology, law, pediatrics, theater, art history, architecture, psychology, archaeology, nursing, epidemiology, and soil management. Their awards follow an initial round of grants from the President's Global Innovation Fund last year that supported twenty equally diverse projects. "Collectively, these and future projects will play an essential role in realizing the potential of the Columbia Global Centers to create new opportunities for faculty and students, and in defining in tangible ways what it means for Columbia, the most global of universities, to explore new frontiers of knowledge in the twenty-first century," wrote Provost John Coatsworth in an e-mail announcing the awards. "It is gratifying to see such a high level of interest in this program from our faculty."

According to Masri, a panel of senior faculty who selected this year's grant recipients gave priority to applicants who will make use of multiple Global Centers, such as by conducting research in one part of the world that will benefit people in other regions.

For instance, Pedro Sanchez, a senior research scholar at the Earth Institute and one of the world's leading experts in soil management, received a grant to compare sustainable agriculture practices in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of China.

"The challenges in the two regions are contrasting: in Africa the soil tends to be depleted of nutrients, whereas in China farmers add too many nutrients, causing pollution," says Sanchez. "We thought that comparing these extremes could make for some interesting joint research projects and possibly help our collaborators in each area."

A team of researchers at the Mailman School of Public Health, meanwhile, received a grant to study the Chinese government's health-related assistance aid to Africa, which has ramped up dramatically in recent years. The researchers will use the Columbia Global Centers in Beijing and Nairobi as bases of operation, building partnerships with local academics in both regions to examine the characteristics and effectiveness of China's health assistance to African countries.

"This is an opportunity to open dialogue and establish relationships among international health leaders, officials, faculty, and students from Africa, China, and the United States," said Wafaa El-Sadr, a prominent epidemiologist and AIDS researcher who is leading the group. "We can make inroads toward greater cross-national understanding and collaborate to help inform future research and policies, and ultimately advance the health and well-being of communities in Africa."



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