

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Program
Fulbright Stories Project

AMANDA POPPE

*Interviewed by: Tom Selinger
Initial interview date: May 8, 2025
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INTERVIEW

Q: My name is Tom Sellinger. It's May 8, 2025. I'm here on behalf of ADST (Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training) and the Fulbright Association for an interview with Amanda Poppe. Amanda, can you say your name, spell it out, and tell us your current occupation and employer?

POPPE: Yes. Amanda Poppe. A-M-A-N-D-A P-O-P-P-E. I work for the Institute of International Education or IIE. I am the Senior Program Manager, for the NYU [New York University] Abu Dhabi program, in international student recruitment.

Q: Can you tell us, Amanda, where you grew up and what kind of international experience you had before you came to Fulbright?

POPPE: Yeah, absolutely. I grew up in a very small town in upstate New York. I was actually a first-generation college student. College was really my first real foray into international students and engaging in the international community. My hometown was pretty homogenous, but that's part of where I became curious about the “other” and what was outside my hometown.

Q: And what was your Fulbright project? Where and when did you do it?

POPPE: My Fulbright was in 2011–2012. I was a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant [ETA] in Madrid, Spain.

Q: What kinds of things did you do during your Fulbright? And what kind of extracurriculars did you also do?

POPPE: So actually, I realized I missed a piece here. When I was in college, I was a Spanish and Adolescent Education major. During that time, my friends were mostly international students, so that kind of added fuel to the fire. When I applied for the Fulbright, it was really the encouragement of others around me which shared that this was a unique opportunity that someone like me could do. Also, that I could be abroad for a year, even though I didn't really have the resources to do so and engage in the world in a different way. I had studied abroad in Valencia, Spain in my sophomore year for a

semester as a required component of my degree, but I thought this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that I would never have again. So, when I applied for the Fulbright, and ultimately got it, I was really excited.

I was placed in Madrid, which was kind of a shock to me to be in the capital, again, coming from a small town. I taught English and Theatre in a bilingual high school, and I co-taught Music and History with a local teacher. Part of that was running the Global Classrooms program, which was really modeled on the United Nations. We had about thirty-three students in my classes preparing them to model for the United Nations.

Ultimately, ten of them competed at the Assemblée in Madrid. One of them actually was chosen to compete in New York City, which was huge for her. She had the trip that she always dreamed of to the United States.

Another important part, for me anyways, was my community service engagement. That's not normally the biggest part of a Fulbright ETA. When you think of ETA, you think of English teaching, but a big part of the spark in those applications, or in those Fulbright ETAs, are the engagement with the community, right? You're not just going to teach a bunch of students. That's not what it's about. It's about engaging, and that's a big part of the Fulbright spirit. Cross cultural engagement and getting to learn different perspectives. I've been a dancer most of my life, actually tap dancing was my main dance form, which is actually a percussive dance form that originated in the United States. What I proposed was to teach tap workshops in Spain, and at the same time, engage with the Flamenco community. I got involved with a Flamenco group, which is also a percussive dance based in Spain, started and originated there. To be able to perform, teach workshops on the side, and engage with that community was kind of life-changing. Not an opportunity I ever would have had in my hometown of Jordan, New York.

Q: Now in these times, people like to talk about things that make America safer, stronger, and more prosperous. Can you tell us how your Fulbright experience did that?

POPPE: Absolutely. I've been thinking about this lately as the world changes. I have worked in international higher education, officially and unofficially, for the last ten to fifteen years. When I applied for the Fulbright, I was going to be a Spanish teacher, and then I thought, "Well [when I return from my Fulbright], I'll do my masters in TESOL [Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages] and teach English to speakers of other languages," which is a pretty traditional path for a lot of Fulbrighters.

But it was during my Fulbright experience where I really reflected on how I got to where I was. That wouldn't have happened if I didn't have some key players, and people advocating for me, in my corner. Some of that was faculty, staff, community members, and other people really looking out for me, able to point me in the right direction, and connect me to that opportunity. It was during my Fulbright I actually deferred my master's program, which was going to be in TESOL, and I started applying for Higher Education Administration programs for my masters. Then I went into Higher Education Administration, specifically International Education, where I've been able to be that

person for so many other international and American students. - to help them to study abroad, connect to partnerships, find international internships, and different grant opportunities. I also initiated programs like a professional development program for returning study abroad students and the global buddies program where we connected multiple groups of international and U.S. students based on interest, not just by culture and language, and really helped them to engage with one another as people.

I can pretty proudly say that I've impacted the lives of thousands of students, college age and high school students, over the years. I think that it's more my role as a bridge, connector, and an amplifier or multiplier for those students and people to go on and have an impact on the world making it safer, stronger, and more prosperous. Gaining those global perspectives in what they do because I was able to connect them to opportunities. All because someone connected me to these opportunities when I started.

Q: Would you recommend the Fulbright experience to other young people from small towns across America?

POPPE: Absolutely. I've been proudly doing so for a long time.

Q: Anything else you'd like to add?

POPPE: I would recommend the Fulbright Program to really anyone who has a curiosity about what else is out there. I think there are many opportunities to gain different perspectives, knowledge, and to come back much richer and better prepared for the world in a future where no one knows what is in store.

End of interview