

## NEWSROOM

[Home](#) / [News](#) / [2024](#) / [April](#) / Pre-Med Scholar Receives Coveted Fulbright AwardPRE-MED SCHOLAR RECEIVES COVETED FULBRIGHT  
AWARD**SENIOR MARISSA FERLAND WILL TEACH IN SPAIN BEFORE HEADING TO MEDICAL SCHOOL.**by [Kelli Caplan](#) | April 12, 2024*Read time: about 3 min*

Marissa Ferland '24 has been named a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant. The prestigious award will provide Ferland the opportunity to work with school-aged children in Spain for a year on her path to becoming a doctor, a goal inspired by childhood visits to a hospital.

Ferland, a Pre-Med Scholar majoring in Cellular, Molecular and Physiological Biology, was selected from a large, nationwide pool of highly-qualified students.

"I was shocked," said Ferland, who is striving to become a trauma or pediatric surgeon. "I know what an honor it is to get it. I am so incredibly thankful I have been given the opportunity to do this."

Ferland plans to take the MCAT in June, and then travel to Spain. She will spend the year teaching English to Spanish-speaking students.

"I can't wait," she said. "I am so excited."

The Fulbright Program is the flagship academic exchange program sponsored by the U.S. government. Each year, only 8,000 students, scholars, teachers, artists, and professionals from the United States and 160 countries are selected.

Fulbright alumni have used their experience as a foundation for success. Among Fulbright scholars are 62 Nobel Peace recipients, 78 MacArthur Foundation Fellows, 89 Pulitzer Prize winners, and 41 current or former heads of state or government.

“This is one of those rare opportunities that doesn’t come often,” said Dr. Bill Connell, who was a Fulbright Scholar himself and is also on CNU’s Fulbright Committee.

Connell, a history professor, worked with Ferland on a research project focused on Mexican court documents, and has seen firsthand what she is capable of achieving.

“Marissa has an incredible aptitude for picking things up quickly. She is very proficient at anything you put in front of her. She has the intelligence, drive and resoluteness necessary to successfully live in another country. She is a great candidate for Fulbright,” he said. “She is an amazing student.”

The Fulbright experience will offer Ferland, a Spanish and Leadership minor, the chance to achieve the longtime goal of being able to converse fluently in Spanish in order to help her to become a doctor who can serve different populations. She wants to one day be able to treat Spanish-speaking patients with ease, enabling her to break down communication barriers that often foster fear and stand in the way of treatment.

Being named a Fulbright scholar is the pinnacle of her academic journey. Ferland is graduating from CNU in only three years, but has spent that abbreviated time working tirelessly to position herself to become a doctor, taking advantage of a variety of academic and extracurricular activities on and off campus that have pushed her to discover her strengths and passions. She is part of the President’s Leadership Program and the Honors Program.

Dr. Sarah Chace, who has worked with Ferland as her core advisor, said she has been a hugely positive force on campus.

“She is an excellent student who is one-pointed on her intention to attain her goal of going to medical school and serving society. She is a delightful combination of professional, friendly, and—in the largest sense of the word—kind,” said Chace, associate professor in the Department of Leadership and American Studies. “When she served as the peer mentor for my first-year students, she made all the difference to them. She also made all the difference to me as a core advisor. Wherever she goes, that place will be lucky to have her.”

From Marion, Va., Ferland earned her associate degree while in high school in hopes that it would accelerate her journey to medical school. In addition, she also acquired her EMT certification while in high school.

All of these achievements were by design, part of Ferland’s effort to become a medical doctor sooner rather than later. College was no different. She was on a mission to choose a school that would position her for success.

When Ferland first visited Christopher Newport, she knew had found her new home. The day she came to campus, her tour guide was a Pre-Med Scholar who was doing exactly what Ferland hoped to do one day. She was inspired by what she heard, impressed by her tour guide, and energized and excited to start her own journey at CNU.

“It felt so right,” she said. “When I left that day, I knew I was going to come here.”

Her experience at CNU has opened her mind and heart to new possibilities. [She has achieved all four pillars of a CNU education: research, internship, service and study abroad.](#)

“I love this place,” she said. “It has instilled confidence in me. I have learned so much from being in PLP and the Honors Program. PLP taught me how to maximize my strengths and weaknesses. I have learned how to be on a team, and maximize teamwork.”

The resume she built at CNU includes undergraduate research for Dr. Connell, being a Riverside Medical Group Scholar, and completing an internship at an OB/GYN office in Newport News. She volunteers at a local elementary school, helping English as a Second Language students. Ferland has also traveled to Costa Rica for a [study abroad](#) program, which allowed her to learn medical Spanish.

Becoming a doctor has been Ferland’s radar since she was little. Her twin sisters were born prematurely, so she witnessed firsthand how doctors cared for them and protected their fragile health. As a child, she remembers staying in Ronald McDonald houses near hospitals so her family could be close to the twins.

She was in awe then of the doctors' expertise, and now she is on a trajectory to join their ranks.

"I have known what I have wanted to do since seeing doctors help my sisters and family," she said. "I feel like this is what I am meant to do."

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