Puksta Fellows at UCD—2014/15 Report
Submitted on June 17, 2015, by Stephen J. Hartnett

The UC Denver Puksta Fellows Program is an innovative partnership with UC Denver’s Department of Communication, its Department of Ethnic Studies, the Dean’s Office of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, and the Puksta Foundation, a Denver-based organization committed to working for social justice and training civic leaders for the 21st Century. Our goal is to empower a new generation of young scholars and activists committed to building more equitable and humane modes of democratic life.

How the Program Works

WHAT IS IT? If selected as one of ten Puksta Fellows, students are awarded $2,000 to pay for two classes during their Senior Year and are designated a Puksta Fellow, an elite title. The goal of our program is to enable Puksta Fellows to graduate with stellar communication skills, professional experience, outstanding academic credentials, and intimate knowledge of social justice leadership. Recent Puksta Fellows have completed projects working as tutors in Colorado prisons, as an advocate for equity in education in Latino/a communities, as a web-designer merging new media and civic engagement, as practitioners of intercultural communication in
business communities, as a mediator in end-of-life health care situations, as a spokesperson for the Colorado Progressive Coalition, and others.

**WHAT DO STUDENTS DO?** Puksta Fellows complete a three-semester-long program consisting of three steps:

1. In the summer before their Senior year, Fellows complete a social-justice-based for-credit internship, thus both learning and practicing professional communication and leadership skills in real-world settings. Puksta Fellows choose their internships in collaboration with Departmental advisors, internship directors, and UC Denver’s Experiential Learning Center.

2. In the fall of the Senior year, Fellows take a senior-level, writing-intensive course wherein they spend the semester writing an essay discussing their social justice goals and practices. This class is meant to produce conference or publication-worthy work, thus driving the Fellow’s intellectual growth.

3. In the spring of the Senior year, Fellows complete a for-credit capstone project combining hands-on social justice work in the community and academic excellence.

**OUR PARTNERS:** In addition to the program outlined above, all Puksta Fellows participate in other Puksta Foundation activities, including two annual student leadership retreats, topic-specific public engagements, training sessions, celebratory meals, and other events attended by the Puksta Fellows from Colorado State University, the University of Denver, the University of Colorado Boulder, and Metro State University. These events create remarkable opportunities for networking with the state’s future leaders.

**MONEY:** Of the three courses outlined above, tuition for two will be paid in full (at the in-state rate).

**TO APPLY:** To be selected as a Puksta Fellow, students apply to either the Department of Communication (of which those students must be majors) or the Department of Ethnic Studies (of which those students may be majors or minors); in both Departments, students must have an overall UCD GPA of 3.0 or higher and a Departmental GPA of 3.5 or higher, and must be in the Junior or Senior year of study. Application packets must include a UCD transcript (students may use unofficial, online versions) and a 1-page letter of intent describing the student’s social justice goals and experiences; applicants will also submit one letter of recommendation, written by a faculty member, with that letter submitted directly by the faculty member to the Department. The application process is formally announced each March, with selections for the following academic year announced in April.

**MASTERS STUDENTS:** The Department of Communication considers applications from current MA students; each class of Puksta Fellows may include one Communication graduate student.
Mohamed Ahmed: addressing health disparities as influenced by economic class.
Zeinab Ali: addressing health disparities among international immigrants.
Kianna Crow: working on educational access and equity in Denver Public Schools.
Carly Fabian: addressing motherhood, child-rearing, and the politics of adoption.
Haoxiang Liu (U.S. name is Edward): working on and against China’s one-child policy.
William Mundo: exploring culturally responsible public health.
Amanda Parker: editing Captured Words/Free Thoughts, a prison-arts magazine.
Bryan Reckard: Puksta Media Intern, handling photographs, video, and web presence.
Andrew Sturt: addressing GLBTQ issues with CAP (the Colorado AIDS Project).
Akemi Tsutsui: tackling issues of immigration and labor.
## UCD’s Puksta Fellows, Classes of 2013/4 and 2014/5

| Fellow            | Service To                                      | Project(s)                                      | Community Hours                                      | Graduated?
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------
| Amira Aletabi     | Muanjadi Organization                           | Educational empowerment for African girls        | 120 hours in 2013/4 academic year                    | YES                 |
| Mouath Baesho     | Middle East Center, University of Denver        | Public education about the Syrian civil war     | 120 hours in Spring 2014                             | YES                 |
| Alex Landau       | NAACP and Colorado Progressive Coalition        | End police brutality, build racial justice       | 90 hours in Summer 2014 Employed full-time in Spring 2015 | NO¹                |
| Alicia Lucero     | STRIVE Prep Schools                             | Education equity for Latinas                    | 320 hours in Fall 2014 320 hours in Spring 2015     | YES                 |
| Jeremy Make       | Life Quality Institute and Communication Workshop | End of life health care and Prison teaching     | LQI: 130 hours in Fall 2014 Prison: 80 hours in Spring 2015 | YES                |
| Shelby A. Nichols | Worldwide Partners                              | Culturally-sensitive advertising and teaching English to ELL students | 60 hours in Summer 2014 76 hours in Spring 2015     | YES                 |
| Misty Saribal     | Communication Workshop and Elephant Circle      | Women’s empowerment in prisons                   | 120 hours in Summer 2013 120 hours in Fall 2013      | YES                 |
| Benjamin Swales   | Puksta Foundation                               | Support Puksta’s web-design                      | 75 hours in Spring 2014                               | YES                 |

= Over 1,630 hours of community service.
= 88% graduation rate, with the one outlier graduating soon.
= 50% diversity rate (1 Saudi-American, 1 Libyan, 1 African American, 1 Latina).
= All awesome social justice projects!

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¹. Alex performed so well in his activism that the Colorado Progressive Coalition hired him full-time for the Spring 2015; he is just 6 credits shy of graduation and will graduate in the near future.

UCD Puksta Report, 2015, p. 4
The Puksta Foundation originally gave UCD $10,000 total for the 2013/4 and 2014/5 academic years; UC Denver matched that gift, giving us a $20,000 budget for our first two years.

We provide each Puksta Fellow with $2,000 to cover the tuition of two courses during their time as Puksta Fellows.

Because we funded only 8 students in the first two years, our expenses were $16,000, leaving us a balance of $4,000.

Puksta also granted UCD an initial $1,000 to support programming, of which $750 has been used, leaving us $250 in our existing programming budget.

As of Fall 2015, both Puksta and UC Denver have doubled their contributions to $10,000 p/year, giving us an annual budget of $20,000. This funding model is assured for the next five academic years.
years, giving us a total Puksta/UC Denver profile of $100,000 for the Fall 2015-Spring 2020 period

Using the $2,000 p/Fellow model, this means that in the Fall of 2015 we will fund 10 students (5 from the Department of Communication and 5 from the Department of Ethnic Studies).

Proposal: Given the balance remaining in our original funds ($4,000 remaining from the original budget and $250 in the programming budget) we propose to re-allocate funds as follows: Beginning in Fall 2015, we propose to give each Puksta Fellow a $400 development stipend; 10 fellows x $400 = $4,000 allocated to the development of our Fellows in 2015/6. That would leave $250 in our programming budget to cover events in the Fall of 2015. At the close of the 2015 Fall term, we then propose to revisit our model of professional development and programming.

Expectations for Fellows, 2015/6

- September 19, participate in the Fall Retreat.
- January 23-24, participate in the Winter Retreat.
- Complete monthly (at least!) check-ins with your Departmental advisors and mentors.
- Pursue at least one professional development activity each semester.
- Apply to the Clinton Global Initiative (application details TBA).
- Participate in UCD’s annual Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program.
- Work with other Puksta Fellows to form working teams and collaborations.
- Record video statements for use in our public outreach efforts.
- Model good citizenship at the internship site, in the classroom, and in the community.
- Be a UCD rock star!

For all UCD Puksta Fellows Program questions, please contact

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UCD Puksta Report, 2015, p. 6