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## Student earns prestigious fellowship



Kylius M. Wilkins '12 has been awarded the prestigious Claudia Cartwright Fellowship by the International Services (IS) division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). Wilkins will receive \$25,000 in scholarship funds for each remaining year of his veterinary studies, and opportunities for paid employment with APHIS-IS over summers and other school breaks. Following graduation, he may have the opportunity to join the ranks of APHIS-IS with an initial three-year international deployment. Graduate students in agriculture and veterinary studies with U.S. Citizenship were eligible to apply for the award.

Over 300 IS employees stationed in 34 foreign countries work to reduce the risk posed to U.S. agriculture by foreign pests and diseases, such as screwworm and the Mediterranean fruit fly. In addition to strengthening national animal and plant health infrastructures in those nations, IS personnel also work with government agriculture personnel to expand export opportunities for U.S. agricultural producers, opening up new markets for everything from meat to asparagus.

Despite the highly competitive selection process for the Fellowship (due to funding constraints, there was only one recipient in 2009), it is not altogether surprising that Wilkins was the student selected for this honor. While Wilkins credits Cornell's reputation and the mentorship of Dr. Alfonso Torres, Associate Dean for Public Policy, with his being chosen, he entered the application process with an already impressive background in the areas of veterinary public health and international service.

Following graduation from The Ohio State University in 2000 with a degree in Biology and a minor in Physical Anthropology, Wilkins spent two years in Guinea, West Africa, with the Peace Corps, working with veterinary, health, and agricultural officials to create environmental education classes for village schools. One of his colleagues in this program was a Guinean veterinarian, and Wilkins was struck by the critical role of the veterinarian in developing societies. "Seeing the interdependence, the way people rely on their animals for survival and realizing the opportunity for zoonotic diseases to spread when people and animals live in such close quarters, you also realize how much people depend on the vet's expertise," said Wilkins.

From 2003-2006, Wilkins taught English in Japan. "While I was living in Japan, they cut beef imports from the U.S.," said Wilkins. "I became aware of the importance of international markets to U.S. agriculture and the importance of the veterinarian in shaping international law and policy in this area." Wilkins is now married to a Japanese woman named Eriko. They have a two-year-old son named Kai and are expecting a second child in January.

Prior to enrolling in Cornell's veterinary program, Wilkins received his Masters of Public Health degree from The Ohio State University, a member of only the second class to go through OSU's curriculum in Veterinary Public Health. He also spent time riding along with USDA veterinarians in Ohio who were testing sheep for susceptibility to Scrapie.

Long-term, Wilkins can see himself living in Japan and working for either the USDA or U.S. exporters in crafting agricultural trade policy and testing standards. Alternately, he could envision providing technical training, inspection services, and disease surveillance in developing nations. "To me, technical exchange and the training of foreign veterinarians are among some of the most important and interesting work that IS does," said Wilkins. He looks forward to living abroad again and encourages other veterinary students to explore careers in public health. "It's a good field for people who don't need lots of hands-on time with animals, and who have an ability to transmit their scientific expertise to laypeople."

This year, the IS Fellowship Program was renamed for Claudia Cartwright, DVM, one of the award's first recipients. According to the USDA, "After being assigned to her first foreign post in the Caribbean, she was diagnosed with cancer. Following an aggressive surgery and treatment plan she volunteered to go on a temporary assignment to Italy, intent on beating the disease and becoming a Foreign Service Officer." Tragically, Dr. Cartwright succumbed to her illness in September 2008, leaving behind a husband and daughter.

"I am very pleased that the USDA has re-instituted this fellowship," said Torres. "Having known Claudia Cartwright, a superb young veterinarian, on a personal basis, it gives me a great deal of satisfaction that her name and legacy will be carried on by one of our remarkable Cornell students."