



Eastern Connecticut State University

NEWS

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Eastern Professor Named Fulbright Scholar

Willimantic—Richard Jones-Bamman, professor of performing arts at Eastern Connecticut State University, has been selected as a Fulbright Scholar for the Spring 2006 semester. The U.S. Scholar program, one of several grant programs administered by the Fulbright Program, distributes grants to approximately 1,000 American scholars and professionals each year who travel to more than 130 countries to lecture and/or conduct research in a wide variety of fields.

After waiting for a lengthy period to hear about the grant, Jones-Bamman admits that he had “given up on receiving the grant. The program has had some financial cutbacks and I was aware there were fewer positions available.”

However, he received a phone call early one morning from the director of the Fulbright Program in Sweden, which is out of the normal protocol, offering him the teaching position. “I was delighted,” said Jones-Bamman. “I thought to myself I don’t need to think about this for more than a second or two. Of course I’ll go.”

From January to July 2006, Jones-Bamman will teach and conduct research at the Sami Studies Department at Umea University in northern Sweden, where he conducted his doctoral research in 1991 and 1992. Jones-Bamman also won a Fulbright grant when he was in graduate school to do his research. In 1995, Jones-Bamman assisted in implementing a new graduate program at Umea University. “That was a real honor.”

“I have been working off and on for the past 15 years with a particular population of people who live in northern Norway, northern Sweden, northern Finland and even parts of Russia –they’re called the Sami,” said Jones-Bamman. “I’ve been fascinated with their culture, specifically their music, for at least 15 or 16 years.”

He describes Sami music as “vocal; it’s solo, it’s unaccompanied. That’s the traditional form of it at least.” He said the Sami stopped singing publicly because their music was viewed as being anti-Christian; therefore, it became a very private form of expression.

What sparked his interest was “seeing how the people grew and emerged again. We are talking about music that never has been recorded before, and yet in the space of a decade, roughly beginning in 1978, there were two record companies releasing this material, and between the two of them, they produced around 40 albums. Compared to American music, that doesn’t sound like much, but to go from the shame of a culture to a source of pride, that’s a very fast development.”

Jones-Bamman will teach in the Sami Studies Program again and continue his research on a local musicologist. “This is kind of an odd thing to do, but there was a man who traced all over that region of the world for about a 10-year period beginning in the 20th century, and what makes him interesting is that he hauled an incredible primitive recording device around and made recordings of the people there. Anybody who performs this music has to be aware of his influence. It’s as if he sits there like a ghost in the background, influencing how we think about the Sami.”

Although the musicologist is no longer alive, his accomplishments are still acknowledged, and in a previous trip to Sweden, Jones-Bamman had the opportunity to

speak with his grandson and great-grandson, and he looks forward to speaking with them again.

“To me it’s such a treat to be going back. I have strong familial roots there. My mother is from Sweden, and so are both of her parents. So I went there a lot when I was a young boy.”

One of Jones-Bamman’s future goals is to bring Eastern students to Sweden. “I want to try and solidify some sort of an exchange relationship with their university. Ideally, I would like to take some students from here for a summer course and introduce them to a different region of the world and see a very interesting culture.”

“In my experience, the best way to learn about yourself and where you come from is to go some place else. Just like any experience abroad, above and beyond the class work that a student does is the opportunity to really reflect on who we are, our own culture.”

The Fulbright Program is a flagship international educational exchange program sponsored by the U.S. government designed to increase understanding between the people of the United States and other countries.

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Eastern Connecticut State University is part of the Connecticut State University (CSU) system and is the state’s public liberal arts university. ECSU serves more than 5,000 students each year on its Willimantic campus.