

FOUNDER REGION FELLOWSHIP, INC.

History 1948-2020

Founder Region Fellowship is a non-profit 501(c)3 program that provides awards to women in the final phase of their doctoral studies. It is entirely supported by the Soroptimist members and clubs within Founder Region. Founder Region Fellowship is Founder Region's identifying project and was started in 1948. All Founder Region Soroptimist clubs in good standing are voting members.

Founder Region Fellowship's mission is to advance the status of women through financial support in the final phase of their doctoral degree. A byproduct of this support is the affirmation of the importance of the recipient's work and value as an individual. Our hope is to support women who are working in fields of great social importance that are traditionally held by men or fields that have great social importance to the world. We hope that the recipient's work will reflect and further Soroptimist ideals by becoming a strong voice for all women.

The program began in 1948 as a committee in Pacific Region. In 1952, Pacific Region divided into three regions, one of which was the Southwestern Region. Southwestern Region administered the program until 1976. The program was originally developed to financially assist women in the last year of their post-graduate studies in political science, international relations, or allied fields only. In 1958 those restrictions were eliminated and applications are now accepted from all fields of study. These are just a few of the fields of study in which the candidates are seeking a doctorate degree: Clinical Psychology, Endocrinology, Sociology, Linguistics, Genetics, Immunology, Zoology, Digital Technology, Marine Biology, Civil Engineering, Nuclear Engineering, Bioengineering, Infectious Diseases, Agricultural Policy Reform, Law, Entomology, Social Science, Women's Studies, Medical Microbiology, and Special Education.

In 1976, Southwestern Region divided into three regions, Sierra Pacific, Sierra Nevada, and Founder with the Fellowship program staying with Founder Region. Applications are now accepted from schools within the bounds of Founder Region that offer doctoral programs. In 1986, Founder Region Fellowship, Inc. was formed by conference action, with an elected board of directors and all of the clubs as voting members.

Julia "Bess" Combs was the chairman of Fellowship when it was a committee and became the first President when Fellowship became incorporated. Presidents that followed her were:

1988-1992 Norma Rhoads

1992-1996 Del Nickerson

1996-1998 Dorothy Avila

1998-2000 Nancy Walker

2000-2002 Linda McDoniels

2002-2004 Linda Sue Hansen

2004-2006 Mary Ann Redden

2006-2008 Dion Weaver

2008-2010 Barbara Lanier
2010-2012 Joyce Strand
2012-2014 Linda Sue Hansen
2014-2016 Carol Steele
2016-2018 Bobbi Enderlin
2018-2020 Pam Parker
2020-2022 Cheryl Poncini

The first elected Directors in 1986 were District I - Dorothy Sarnes; District II - Del Nickerson; District III - Jacque Brown; District IV- Norma Rhoads and District V (which included Hawaii and Guam) - Agnes Conrad. *As a point of interest, in 1987, Jan Sadler of SI/El Cerrito designed the Fellowship logo. A special \$10,000 fellowship award was established in 2010 in Dorothy Sarnes name.*

Each year applications are accepted from doctoral students currently attending schools within the bounds of Founder Region. The students are natives of every state in the US and most countries in the world. The Fellowship Board meets to read the applications and conduct interviews. After completion of the interview process, the Board meets to select the honorees that are invited to attend the Founder Region Conference in May at which time the awards are presented.

The amount of the first Fellowship award in 1948 was \$1500. The first recipient was Eva Kulka, a native Czechoslovakian and a citizen of the United States. The award was enough to enable Ms. Kulka to complete her last year of graduate study at the University of Southern California. Her major was in international relations and her thesis was titled, "Intercultural Exchange and Education as a Basis for the Furthering of International Relations." She hoped to secure a position with the State Department or UNESCO in Washington, D.C. Ms. Kulka wrote, *"Since education is such a powerful force in international understanding, projects such as those of the Southwestern Region of Soroptimist Clubs, of giving fellowships to students in political science and related fields acquire great importance—for you are helping to lay the foundation of the national political order in the future."*

In 1950 Ms. Kulka wrote that she was stationed in the Library of Congress. She also wrote, *"With world conditions in turmoil and thoughts aimed toward better understanding and peace, education presents itself as the last hope. Therefore, what better service could be rendered by the international organization, the Soroptimist than to enable students to further their training in political science, economics, and international relations? It is truly a most worthwhile project, for you are thus helping to sow the future seeds of peace."*

Study grants (Grants in Aid) in amounts of less than \$1500 were also awarded, depending on the funds available. In 1948, the first study grant of \$500 was awarded to Sallie Mayock, who attended Stanford University majoring in history and government. She became Assistant in Charge of Foreign Exchanges at the Hoover Institute and Library on War, Revolution and Peace. Ms. Mayock wrote, *"I feel that I owe a great deal to the Soroptimists for their substantial aid to me which has been valuable in finding my present job. I only hope that your very*

worthwhile program to help women fit themselves to make contributions in these fields will continue as successfully as it has to date."

In 1971, at the Golden Anniversary Celebration in Oakland, a written presentation was placed in the Violet Richardson Ward bust. This is a partial quote of that writing, "In the year 2021, the vision of Soroptimist Fellowships must indeed turn to more than a token percentage of women engaged in the professions of medicine, science, law, and engineering, as is currently the case. With sights set to the winds of change, it can be envisioned that an enlightened era of professional women in 2021 will equal the number of men in many more professions than those in which they are presently engaged. Soroptimists will continue to encourage this growth in responsible young women leaders of the future in the next fifty years, just as they envision the fantastic growth of Soroptimism among women all over this world. Southwestern Regional Fellowship awards will assist this growth of equality for women in professional preparation."

Support for the grants has come primarily from Soroptimists, at first through a \$1.00/year voluntary contribution. This was later raised to a mandatory \$2.00/year in recognition of Fellowship as Founder Region's permanent identifying project. The Fellowship program encourages individuals, clubs, and districts to contribute \$1,000 in a biennium to become a "Fellow". A special pin and certificate are awarded to each Fellow. Clubs are encouraged to have "Fun for Fellowship" activities and February has been designated as Fellowship month.

Since the Fellowship program began, the amounts granted have increased from \$1500 for one recipient to a minimum \$20,000 yearly. However, in both 2005 and 2006, \$40,000 was awarded, and in 2007, the total was \$50,000 to six recipients.

In 2008 Founder Region Fellowship celebrated "60 Years of Success" with a deliberate total award of \$60,000.00. Since then the budget has remained at this level or higher, with an average of 6-10 women receiving between \$5-15,000 each, depending on need. Because of the increased support of all members in Founder Region, an approximate total of \$1.5 million has been awarded to 332 women between the years 1948 – 2020.

Under the guidance of the Founder Region Fellowship Board and with the continued financial support of all members of Founder Region, this project will continue to meet the goals of its mission by financially supporting women in the completion of their doctoral studies as well as advancing the status of women and furthering the Soroptimist ideals.