



# YSEALI Academic Fellowship sparks growth and connections

Each year the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) Academic Fellowship brings 250 participants ages 18 to 25 to the United States for five-week institutes hosted by U.S. educational institutions across the country.

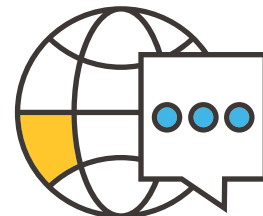
**A 2022 evaluation indicates that the YSEALI Academic Fellowship is meeting its objectives by fostering alumni growth and mutual understanding. The evaluation underscores the importance of strengthening post-program activities through resources and coordination support.**

“ This program has made us extend our solidarity... between me and my fellow Southeast Asian friends. We share our collective experience as Southeast Asians in which we face a similar challenge to uphold our democracy in our country. ”  
-Academic Fellow

## ✓ | Program outcomes



**+90%** agreed that the program prepared them for future leadership roles and improved their ability to collaborate with others in their field.



**+90%** agreed that the program helped them improve their intercultural communication skills.

Most alumni reported that the YSEALI Academic Fellowship contributed positively to their professional and academic goals. Alumni also said that the prestige of participating in the YSEALI program opened professional and academics doors in their lives.

“ After YSEALI I have gained more practical experience in the environment field so now I’m continuing, pursuing a master’s degree in Environment Development and Peace. But this time, we will study more about peace and the policy in the world so that in the future I hope that I can contribute to solving environmental problems in ASEAN and across the world as well. ”

-Academic Fellow

### ***More favorable perceptions of the United States***

**80%** of alumni expressed that the YSEALI program led to more favorable views of the U.S. government and the American people. Alumni reported that the program especially improved their understanding of:

- ↳ Democracy in the United States
- ↳ Free speech
- ↳ Religious and ethnic diversity
- ↳ Values and culture

The vast majority of alumni were supportive of forming a reciprocal exchange that would bring Americans to their home countries.

### ***Deepening the ASEAN community***

Alumni expressed that their participation in the YSEALI program resulted in their feeling closer connections to ASEAN and neighboring countries.



**93%** reported that they agreed that being a member of ASEAN is beneficial to their country.<sup>1</sup>



**92%** agreed that other ASEAN countries share similar challenges as their country.



**85%** strongly agreed that their participation in the YSEALI program increased their network of peers from ASEAN countries.

### **Life as an alumni**

**78%** of alumni reported implementing or continuing a community project related to their YSEALI experience in the last year. However, many also shared that their home country contexts and political environments presented challenges. Sustained engagement and ability to employ their new knowledge can be dependent on the level of support they receive when they return home.

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<sup>1</sup> Not asked of participants from Timor-Leste

## Alumni connections

Most alumni reported that relationships formed through YSEALI have contributed positively to their academic, professional, or personal outcomes. Data showed that alumni connections take place within, across, and outside of 19 formal and informal networking groups. All YSEALI stakeholders contributed to the health and maintenance of these groups in some way, but levels of involvement and coordination vary.

- **Many participants forged strong ties** with a small group of cohort-mates and those they interacted with during the program.
- **Home country-specific alumni associations** appeared to be particularly effective in connecting YSEALI alumni and furthering alumni professional and academic goals.

## Grants

Small grants from embassies, consulates, implementing partners, and other organizations contributed to post-program outcomes. Alumni reported that community projects provided an important opportunity to apply the lessons they learned during the program.

Alumni said they would welcome more formalized and sustained networking activities as well as increased grant funding.

## Learning through evaluation

The Monitoring Evaluation Learning and Innovation (MELI) Unit of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) is dedicated to enhancing the effectiveness of ECA's educational and cultural programs. The complexity-aware evaluation sought to understand the YSEALI Academic Fellowship's outcomes since its inception in 2013. It included:



A document and literature review



41 in-depth interviews with program stakeholders, alumni, and embassy personnel



A survey of more than 800 alumni



16 focus group discussions with alumni

To read the full report, visit [MELI's website](#).

Launched in 2013, YSEALI is the U.S. government's signature program to strengthen leadership development and networking in Southeast Asia. YSEALI Academic Fellowships focus on civic engagement, environmental issues, or social entrepreneurship and economic development. Participants are students or recent undergraduates who demonstrate leadership through academic work, community involvement, and extracurricular activities. Following the exchange, many alumni lead community projects and join alumni networks. Through these and other programs, YSEALI seeks to build the leadership capabilities of youth in Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam. This strengthens ties between the United States and Southeast Asia, and nurtures community among The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).