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MANHATTAN -- A new partnership between the Australian-American Fulbright Commission in Australia and Kansas State University is making history.

The university will sponsor two Fulbright scholarships that give Australian scholars the opportunity to conduct research in Manhattan in collaboration with a university professor. This makes Kansas State University the first U.S. educational institutional partner of the Australian-American Fulbright Commission.

The Fulbright Program, which has run in Australia for more than 60 years, is the largest and most prestigious binational educational and cultural exchange program in the world.

"Internationalization is a common theme of our goals that will make us a Top 50 public research university by 2025," said President Kirk Schulz. "The investment in these Fulbright scholarships is an example of our commitment to advancing and broadening our ongoing international partnerships."

The university will sponsor a Fulbright Distinguished Chair in agriculture and life sciences -- the first Fulbright distinguished chair designated for an Australian -- and an Australian senior scholar, a position open to any academic specialty.

"A Fulbright is amongst the most prestigious awards you can win as an academic in Australia and is highly valued," said John Leslie, university distinguished professor and head of the department of plant pathology. Leslie traveled to Australia as a Fulbright senior scholar in 2002.

As the oldest operational land-grant university in the United States, Kansas State University has traditional strengths in agriculture and sciences. And Kansas has many similarities to Australia: Both regions have similar crops and weather conditions, and both have a dependence on agriculture for their economies. Because the regions are so alike, opportunities exist for many areas of collaboration.

A Fulbright Distinguished Chair is always established in a specific discipline. The university selected agriculture and life sciences because of their key importance to both regions and the university's traditional strengths in these areas.

"We wanted these scholarships to be as broadly available as possible," Leslie said.

The agreement between Kansas State University and the Australian-American Fulbright Commission will run for five years. During that time, each Fulbright Distinguished Chair and the Senior Scholar from Australia will conduct research in Manhattan for as long as six months. The scholarship will be

given to different Australian academics every year, with the first Australians arriving in Manhattan as early July 2014.

"Fulbrighters return home after their scholarships with an expanded worldview and increased professional and personal opportunities," said Tangerine Holt, executive director of the Australian-American Fulbright Program. "The experience often changes them and the direction of their work profoundly. Fulbright scholarships enrich lives personally and professionally."