

2023-24 Oak Fellow

The 2023-24 Oak Human Right Fellow is Khosro Kalbasi Isfahani, an Iranian journalist, activist, and researcher. Currently, Isfahani writes for BBC Monitoring, the Atlantic Council, and ARTICLE 19, focusing especially on health and human rights violations. He was based in Tehran during the bloody November 2019 protests in Iran, in which security forces were estimated to have murdered more than 1,500 protesters. During the internet shutdown, not only was he able to give a voice to the people of Iran, but he did so at the risk of his own life.

His work includes articles on Iran's violence against protestors, persecution of ethnic, religious, and LGBTQ minorities, response to Covid-19, and other health crises, like medicine shortages and the lack of medical care for minority groups. Isfahani, who identifies as queer and non-binary (using he or they), has focused most recently on LGBTQ+ issues in Iran. In the past and under different pen names, he has created materials for young LGBTQ adults on health, gender, and sexual orientation and was involved in suicide prevention work for the LGBTQ community. Despite all the obstacles he has faced, he continues to be one of the main voices highlighting human rights issues in Iran.

During the recent and ongoing Iranian protests, Isfahani has played a crucial role not only reporting the protests, but also identifying Iranians killed in the demonstrations. He helped verify the identity of 75 slain Iranians for the BBC, a work that has been referenced by international human rights organizations. He still documents the continued repression and brutal execution of protestors. This scrupulous work is but one



2023-24 Oak Human Rights Fellow
Khosro Kalbasi Isfahani

Previous Oak Fellows

2022: Ana Lucía Ixchiú Hernandez, an Indigenous K'iche woman from Totonicapacán, Guatemala, journalist, artist, and activist focused on the rights of Indigenous peoples.

2022: Michelle Cook, enrolled member of the Navajo Nation, born of the Honághááhnii (One Who Walks Around You) clan, founder of Divest Invest Project and the Indigenous Women's Divestment Delegations.

2021: Olga Sadovskaya, a Russian human rights lawyer working as the vice chair of the Committee Against Torture, the largest and most notable anti-torture organization in Russia, which she and three other activists launched in 2000.

2020: Nasim Lomani, a human rights defender and migrants' rights activist, worked in Greece and the EU for more than a decade. Lomani, together with others in solidarity, founded and served as a key organizers of City Plaza-Refugees Accommodation Solidarity Space in Athens.

Spring 2020: Venuste Kubwimana, a water-rights activist, cofounded International Transformation Foundation—a youth-led NGO in Kenya and Rwanda providing programs to facilitate communities' development.

2019: Jamila Bargach is an activist and scholar who has dedicated her life to serving under-resourced communities in southwest Morocco and creating sustainable initiatives through education and scientific innovation. She is cofounder of Dar Si Hmad, which operates the world's largest functioning fog-collection project.

2018: Bassam Khabieh, a freelance photojournalist and activist, has documented war crimes and other ongoing human rights violations in the Syrian conflict. His photographs have been featured by UNICEF, the World Health Organization, Reuters, and *The Atlantic*.



2022 Oak Fellow
Ana Lucía Ixchiú Hernández



2022 Oak Fellow
Michelle Cook

What We Do

The Oak Institute for Human Rights, established in 1997 by a generous grant from the Oak Foundation, champions the struggles for dignity, freedom, and justice for people throughout the world. Each fall the institute hosts a front-line human rights activist operating in difficult or dangerous circumstances as the Oak Human Rights Fellow. The fellow teaches, relaxes, and reflects while residing at the College. Lectures and other events are organized with the Oak Student Committee to educate the campus and extended community about the fellow's area of expertise and to encourage participation in research, internships, and activism on behalf of human rights. The institute also provides internship grants and research opportunities to students.



Students with 2018 Oak Human Rights Fellow Bassam Khabieh

About Colby

Colby College, founded in 1813, is one of America's outstanding and most prestigious liberal arts colleges, offering a rigorous academic program that fosters transformational relationships between students and faculty. Located on one of the most beautiful campuses in the nation, Colby overlooks a small New England town in Maine's Kennebec River valley.



Oak Human Rights Fellowship



2023-24 Oak Fellow

The 2023-24 Oak Human Right Fellow is Khosro Kalbasi Isfahani, an Iranian journalist, activist, and researcher. Currently, Isfahani writes for BBC Monitoring, the Atlantic Council, and ARTICLE 19, focusing especially on health and human rights violations. He was based in Tehran during the bloody November 2019 protests in Iran, in which security forces were estimated to have murdered more than 1,500 protesters. During the internet shutdown, not only was he able to give a voice to the people of Iran, but he did so at the risk of his own life.

His work includes articles on Iran's violence against protestors, persecution of ethnic, religious, and LGBTQ minorities, response to Covid-19, and other health crises, like medicine shortages and the lack of medical care for minority groups. Isfahani, who identifies as queer and non-binary (using he or they), has focused most recently on LGBTQ+ issues in Iran. In the past and under different pen names, he has created materials for young LGBTQ adults on health, gender, and sexual orientation and was involved in suicide prevention work for the LGBTQ community. Despite all the obstacles he has faced, he continues to be one of the main voices highlighting human rights issues in Iran.

During the recent and ongoing Iranian protests, Isfahani has played a crucial role not only reporting the protests, but also identifying Iranians killed in the demonstrations. He helped verify the identity of 75 slain Iranians for the BBC, a work that has been referenced by international human rights organizations. He still documents the continued repression and brutal execution of protesters. This scrupulous work is but one



2023-24 Oak Human Rights Fellow
Khosro Kalbasi Isfahani

Previous Oak Fellows

2022: Ana Lucía Ixchiú Hernandez, an Indigenous K'iche woman from Totonicapacán, Guatemala, journalist, artist, and activist focused on the rights of Indigenous peoples.

2022: Michelle Cook, enrolled member of the Navajo Nation, born of the Honágháahnii (One Who Walks Around You) clan, founder of Divest Invest Project and the Indigenous Women's Divestment Delegations.

2021: Olga Sadovskaya, a Russian human rights lawyer working as the vice chair of the Committee Against Torture, the largest and most notable anti-torture organization in Russia, which she and three other activists launched in 2000.

2020: Nasim Lomani, a human rights defender and migrants' rights activist, worked in Greece and the EU for more than a decade. Lomani, together with others in solidarity, founded and served as a key organizers of City Plaza-Refugees Accommodation Solidarity Space in Athens.

Spring 2020: Venuste Kubwimana, a water-rights activist, cofounded International Transformation Foundation—a youth-led NGO in Kenya and Rwanda providing programs to facilitate communities' development.

2019: Jamila Bargach is an activist and scholar who has dedicated her life to serving under-resourced communities in southwest Morocco and creating sustainable initiatives through education and scientific innovation. She is cofounder of Dar Si Hmad, which operates the world's largest functioning fog-collection project.

2018: Bassam Khabieh, a freelance photojournalist and activist, has documented war crimes and other ongoing human rights violations in the Syrian conflict. His photographs have been featured by UNICEF, the World Health Organization, Reuters, and *The Atlantic*.



2022 Oak Fellow
Ana Lucía Ixchiú Hernández



2022 Oak Fellow
Michelle Cook

What We Do

The Oak Institute for Human Rights, established in 1997 by a generous grant from the Oak Foundation, champions the struggles for dignity, freedom, and justice for people throughout the world. Each fall the institute hosts a front-line human rights activist operating in difficult or dangerous circumstances as the Oak Human Rights Fellow. The fellow teaches, relaxes, and reflects while residing at the College. Lectures and other events are organized with the Oak Student Committee to educate the campus and extended community about the fellow's area of expertise and to encourage participation in research, internships, and activism on behalf of human rights. The institute also provides internship grants and research opportunities to students.



Students with 2018 Oak Human Rights Fellow Bassam Khabieh

About Colby

Colby College, founded in 1813, is one of America's outstanding and most prestigious liberal arts colleges, offering a rigorous academic program that fosters transformational relationships between students and faculty. Located on one of the most beautiful campuses in the nation, Colby overlooks a small New England town in Maine's Kennebec River valley.



Oak Human Rights FELLOWSHIP





The Oak Fellowship

The Oak Fellowship annually offers an opportunity for one prominent human rights activist to take a leave from frontline work and spend the fall semester (end of August through mid-December) in residence at Colby. This provides the fellow with time for respite, reflection, research, and writing. Following the period of the award, the fellow is expected to return home to continue their work in human rights.

The Oak Fellow's responsibilities include regular meetings with students through a small seminar and informal discussion groups. Additionally, the fellow works with Colby's faculty to share a lecture series or symposium on their human rights interests. The fellow participates in intellectual life on campus, providing Colby students the opportunity to work with an internationally recognized human rights activist.

In addition to a \$38,000 stipend, the fellowship includes health benefits, housing, a campus meal plan, and transportation. The fellowship provides an office, access to the College's computer and library resources, a student assistant to help with the seminar and research, and administrative support. To ensure that the fellow fully benefits from the extended respite and safety of the fellowship experience, the program is designed to allow dependent family members to join the fellow in residence at Colby. A limited budget is allocated to

help offset the cost of transportation, housing, and meals for family members who accompany the fellow.

Eligibility for the Oak Fellowship is restricted to those whose work takes place primarily outside of the United States. Selection criteria include achievements in the struggle for human rights, the need for respite and relief from danger, and the ability to contribute to the Colby community.



Students and visitors engage with the *States of Incarceration* exhibition in 2021-22.

2024 Theme: Environment and Living

The Oak Institute's 2024-25 theme is Environment and Living Rights. Protecting life inextricably binds human, animal, plant, water, and land lives together within fragile ecosystems. It is undeniable that the settler and capitalistic structures that have become increasingly global are causing harm: from warming waters and melting glaciers to the increasing frequency of catastrophic climate events, all life forms are suffering.

The Oak Institute is looking for a living rights activist who addresses environmental protection by challenging Western values, reimagining economic structures, questioning a utilitarian relation to the ecosystem, and fighting to respect nature's rights, among other approaches. This theme highlights shared, though uneven, precarities in the face of environmental degradation and our shared dependence on healthy ecosystems. We welcome practitioners who work to ensure that any use of nature is renewable and who challenge damaging processes such as industrial pollution, the meat and fashion industries, environmental racism, unsustainable agriculture, extractivism, overfishing, and other factors contributing to environmental destruction. We are looking for an activist who works to protect human and non-human life from the threat of environmental degradation.

For more information, please see oakinstitute.colby.edu.



Journalist Alia Malek, second from left, following an Oak lecture in 2018.

Application Information

Nominations for the 2024 Oak Fellowship should be sent to:

Tiffany Creegan Miller, Oak Director and Assistant Professor of Spanish and Latin American Studies

tmiller@colby.edu
phone: 207-859-5195

Complete applications must arrive no later than Dec. 15, 2023.

The selection of the 2024 Oak Fellow will be announced in June 2024.