

# Thunderbird at ASU launches fellowship focused on sustainable ocean governance

**O'Dowd Postdoctoral Fellowship to support research, teaching and collaboration at the intersection of ocean governance, diplomacy and the 'blue economy'**

By Nicole Almond Anderson, ASU News  
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The world's oceans cover more than 70% of the planet, driving weather, regulating climate, feeding billions and providing untapped economic potential. Yet they remain under increasing threat from climate change, pollution, overfishing and competing geopolitical claims.

Rising sea levels threaten coastal communities, disputes over deep-sea mining and fishing rights are intensifying, and medical researchers are looking to marine ecosystems for breakthroughs in health and biotechnology. Yet governance remains fragmented, with no single institution emerging as a global leader.

To fill that void, [Thunderbird School of Global Management](#) at Arizona State University has announced the establishment of the [O'Dowd Postdoctoral Fellowship in Ocean Diplomacy and Leadership](#), funded through the generosity of Thunderbird alumnus Joe O'Dowd ('81) and his wife, Diana Maria O'Dowd.

The O'Dowd Fellowship will address one of the most pressing global challenges of our time: how humanity governs and sustains the world's oceans. By advancing scholarship and preparing leaders in this critical area, the fellowship will help shape international frameworks for sustainable ocean use, protect ecosystems and unlock new opportunities in fields such as trade, security and biotechnology.

By advancing cutting-edge research and training a new generation of leaders, the O'Dowd Fellowship will position ASU at the forefront of shaping that cooperation. From influencing international treaties on maritime law to guiding policies on sustainable ocean industries, the fellowship aims to have a direct impact on both global decision-making and local communities

dependent on ocean resources.

“The O’Dowd Fellowship represents the very essence of Thunderbird’s mission: preparing global leaders to tackle humanity’s most complex challenges,” said [Charla Griffy-Brown](#), director general and dean of Thunderbird at ASU. “By focusing on ocean diplomacy and the blue economy, we are equipping the next generation to protect our planet’s most vital resource while advancing innovation, cooperation and sustainable prosperity for communities worldwide.”

Thunderbird’s global footprint and ASU’s research ecosystem make the school uniquely positioned to lead in this emerging field. The O’Dowd Fellowship will draw on Thunderbird’s strengths in global diplomacy and international trade, while connecting with the [School of Ocean Futures](#) at ASU’s [Rob Walton College of Global Futures](#) and broader sustainability initiatives.

“The O’Dowd Fellowship creates a powerful bridge between science, policy and leadership,” said [Susanne Neuer](#), founding director of the School of Ocean Futures at ASU’s Rob Walton College of Global Futures. “This fellowship will help shape the future of ocean governance, sustainability and the blue economy. We’re proud to collaborate with Thunderbird in advancing this vital work.”

“Thunderbirds have been changemakers around the world for generations,” O’Dowd said. “This fellowship ensures that the next generation will have the tools and knowledge to tackle challenges at the heart of environmental, economic and geopolitical issues.”

## Seeding a new field of leadership

The O’Dowds view their gift as catalytic — designed to spark investment and growth in an underdeveloped but vital area of global governance.

“This is seed funding,” O’Dowd explained. “It’s the beginning of something much bigger. Others can take this further, and that would be the best possible outcome.”

The O’Dowd Fellowship also directly advances ASU’s [Changing Futures](#) campaign, a bold initiative to transform global education, reshape humanity’s relationship with the planet and inspire tomorrow’s game changers. By embedding ocean diplomacy and leadership into Thunderbird’s academic and research portfolio, the fellowship stands at the crossroads of each campaign pillar.

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Learn more about the [Changing Futures campaign](#).

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It expands access to critical global knowledge, cultivates leaders prepared to safeguard the planet’s most vital resource and sparks innovation in areas from sustainability to biotechnology. Just as ASU seeks to equip more leaders with the tools and confidence to create meaningful change worldwide, the O’Dowd Fellowship exemplifies that mission in action.

## Inspiring future leaders

At its core, the fellowship equips students and emerging leaders to confront pressing challenges and engage with critical issues in ocean diplomacy and sustainability, ensuring Thunderbird graduates enter careers in business, government and international organizations with both the expertise and influence to drive meaningful impact.

[Hossain Ahmed Taufiq](#) has been selected as the inaugural O'Dowd Postdoctoral Fellow in Ocean Diplomacy and Leadership. In this role, he will help establish the Ocean Diplomacy Lab, a global research initiative dedicated to advancing practical and cooperative solutions for sustainable ocean governance. His work will also focus on building strategic partnerships across ASU and with external organizations — including Semester at Sea — to create impactful collaborations and expand opportunities for global experiential learning.

“I wish people knew how critical the blue economy is for all of our futures. The ocean will inevitably be used,” O'Dowd said, “but it must be within a framework that prevents further damage to the environment. That requires global cooperation between nations, industries and innovators. Without it, we face challenges even greater than climate change.

“The Earth is the only home our children and grandchildren will ever have. We need to build awareness and knowledge now, so the next generation of leaders can make better decisions for the future.”

For the O'Dowds, this initiative reflects a long-held desire to leave the world better than they found it. By investing in Thunderbird, they hope to witness immediate impact and inspire others to join them in shaping the future.

“Through this fellowship,” O'Dowd said, “Thunderbird can lead on an issue that affects every human being on the planet.”

*This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).*

**Main image**



Thunderbird School of Global Management at ASU has announced the establishment of the O'Dowd Postdoctoral Fellowship in Ocean Diplomacy and Leadership, funded through the generosity of Thunderbird alumnus Joe O'Dowd ('81, pictured above) and his wife, Diana Maria O'Dowd. ASU photo