



**PHILADELPHIA**  
UNIVERSITY

## News

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### Philadelphia University Pre-Medical Student and LAX Star Libby Nichols Receives Prestigious Fulbright Research Fellowship

**PHILADELPHIA**, May 15, 2014—As a varsity lacrosse player and pre-medical student, Elizabeth Nichols had long been interested in the neurological effect that concussions can have on athletes. Now, as the recipient of a prestigious Fulbright U.S. Student Award, she will have the opportunity to conduct research on this very topical issue during a 10-month stay in Germany.

Nichols will travel to Munich this September to investigate the cognitive effects of heading – when soccer players field balls with their heads—on youth soccer players. For six months, she will observe the number of headers attempted by specific players and test their information processing both before and after they attempt the headers. Then, she will analyze her findings in collaboration with a team of top researchers from Ludwig Maximillians University in Munich and Harvard University.

Nichols, who goes by Libby, said her reaction to learning she had received the Fulbright award is “incredible.” Nichols, who will graduate from Philadelphia University on May 17, said the University helped her achieve this honor because it “encourages students to pursue innovative research, and my education here has fostered this particular project.”

“Elizabeth Nichols



stands out as one of the top 10 students I have ever taught in terms of academic ability and all-around ability in both leadership and athletic prowess,” said Diana Cundell, pre-medical studies program director and clinical coordinator. “Libby is one of our future leaders and we are proud to call her one of our own.”

Nichols also is a standout on the lacrosse field. She is the 2014 Central Atlantic Collegiate Conference Women’s Lacrosse Player of the Year and is a two-time all-conference first-team selection. She was named the Rams’ most valuable lacrosse player for this year and was a CACC student-athlete of the month for March 2014.

Nichols, of Ellicott City, Md., is the third PhilaU Fulbright award winner in the last five years and the second student-athlete to achieve this honor. Tyler Fleming ‘12, a pre-medical student who is now in medical school, taught in Vietnam under the program and Malcolm Ingram ‘10, an international business major and star basketball player, studied intellectual property law and pharmaceutical piracy in Argentina during his Fulbright year.

As a competitive athlete who has suffered a concussion herself, Nichols’ chosen topic of study is close to her heart. “I’ve always been interested in traumatic brain injury,” she said. “The brain is the most interesting organ in the human body. There’s still so much research to be done on how it works.”

Her research on neurocognitive deficits in soccer players began in March when she received one of Philadelphia University’s inaugural Eileen Martinson Research Grants to conduct a study in collaboration with engineering students. Using special headbands to monitor results, she studied the impact of heading the soccer ball on players from the Philadelphia Union Academy, the professional team’s youth development program. She found that players who headed the ball more than 100 times during a practice session had more errors on the neurocognitive assessment she used.

Although the issue of head injuries for athletes—particularly in soccer and football—has been receiving more attention in recent years, Nichols hopes her research will spark further conversation and influence policymakers to emphasize the protection of young athletes.

Nichols’ passion for community health is evident in her involvement in campus activities. As chapter president of PhilaU’s Global Medical Brigades, she will lead a 10-day trip to Ghana in May to provide a free medical clinic for those without access to quality health care in that African country.

“Libby is an amazing person and athlete,” said George Chis-Luca, PhilaU head lacrosse coach. “Her incredible work ethic on and off the field is inspiring.”

*Philadelphia University, founded in 1884, is a private university with 3,600 students enrolled in more than 60 undergraduate and graduate programs. As the model for professional university education, the University prepares students to be leaders in their professions in an active, collaborative and real-world learning environment infused with the liberal arts. Philadelphia University includes the innovative Kanbar College of Design, Engineering and*

*Commerce; the College of Architecture and the Built Environment; and the College of Science, Health and the Liberal Arts. For more information, go to [www.PhilaU.edu](http://www.PhilaU.edu).*