The world is their office

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International studies graduates go to work around the globe
by Ann Friou

When Dennis Dunn started Texas State’s International Studies program in 1984, his goal was to create a first-rate, interdisciplinary international studies degree that combined rigorous courses, multiple perspectives, top faculty and talented students.

The program’s success was recognized in 2005 when an academic review team from Florida International University called it “the best international studies degree between the University of Kentucky and the University of Arizona.”

The praise didn’t surprise Dunn, who continues to direct the program.

“We wanted to educate leaders for an increasingly interdependent world,” he said. “Today, our graduates are working around the world or pursuing additional educational opportunities. We have graduates at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow (Victoria Wolf, B.S. interdisciplinary studies, 1991), the U.S. Consulate in Johannesburg (William Steuer, B.A. international studies, 1989), the Central Intelligence Agency, the U.S. Department of State, many businesses, numerous non-governmental offices, and various law schools, M.B.A. and Ph.D. programs around the globe. Two students have received the prestigious Presidential Management Internship in the U.S. White House (Sarah Binion, B.A. mass communication, 2001; M.A. international studies, 2004; and Jeff Kile, B.A. international studies and French, 1997; M.A. international studies, 2004).
“We have done what we set out to do,” Dunn said, “and we are pleased that our program, faculty and graduates are being noticed.” Hundreds of Texas State students now study abroad each year. Some 92 courses are offered in 13 foreign countries by Texas State faculty, and the university has exchange agreements with foreign universities through which students can study on a foreign campus, with foreign faculty, for a semester or longer, at roughly the same cost as studying on the Texas State campus.

Usually, international studies is offered as part of a political science program, but Texas State takes a broader approach. In addition to political science, students take courses in history, geography, economics and other subjects, gaining multiple perspectives on complex issues. This interdisciplinary training gives students the knowledge and skills they need to be competitive in the nation’s best graduate programs and in the job market.

Because of the program’s high profile, international studies degrees are in demand by high-achieving students. The program has more than 400 undergraduate majors who have an outstanding 3.0 grade point average and facility in a foreign language.

International studies graduates are having an impact in many areas of international relations. Some of the program’s recent graduates are featured here.

Martha Bitar, international studies major, anthropology minor, Torreon, Mexico

Program: 2007: Research Experience for Undergraduates in Guatemala, research team member; 2008: Research Experience for Undergraduates in Tulum, Mexico, program facilitator

Courses: Research Ethics and Research Methods

Why study abroad: This is not just a travel program. It was an opportunity to stay with a host family while I learned research methodology and performed field research. I was also interested in the opportunities this program offered to present my research at a conference and to publish it in a journal.

Favorite experiences: Upon applying to this program, students are warned about the tough living conditions in the Maya highlands — water shortages, freezing weather, limited food choices. But after a summer of eating beans and tortillas every day, I can say it was one of the best summers of my life. My host family was caring and supportive, and the Maya community was most welcoming. After two weeks in town, everyone was familiar with our research team. We were invited to town events such as birthday parties, school meetings and Sunday Mass.

What I learned: The Maya villagers facilitated my research on their culture by sharing their stories about domestic violence within their families and the discrimination and violence they have experienced from ladinos, Guatemalans of Spanish descent. I was surprised to realize how many human rights violations occur in such a small place.

When I started this program, I was a student, but when I left it I was an anthropologist. This program totally converted me through the exposure to a real community, real issues and real research. It made me more sensitive to other cultures’ beliefs, traditions and issues. I realized also that, through research and publication, anthropologists can affect others’ lives in a positive way.

The program also enhanced my professional and public speaking skills. At a conference, I presented my research to experts in the field. Then, as I worked with my mentor, Dr. Charise Pimentel, on developing an article for publication, I learned about the publishing process — from the never-ending editing to finding the right journal to publish the article and meeting its publication deadlines.

Tara Upchurch, earned master’s in geography in December, Houston

Program: Cork, Ireland

Courses: Problems in Language and Literature, Studies in Autobiography and Biography
Why study abroad: Study abroad was the next choice for me because I love to travel. I learn so much more about a place when I’m studying it firsthand. I have studied twice now in Cork, Ireland, with the English Department at Texas State. I believe my experiences in Ireland with study abroad will be some of the happiest memories of my life. Traveling is not so intimidating when you know that 15 other Texans are going to share the journey with you.

Favorite experiences: Our class took excursions every week to places such as Dublin, the Aran Islands and Gougane Barra. We got a private viewing of the illustrations by the artist Matisse that appear in a rare edition of James Joyce’s Ulysses at the Glucksman Gallery, University College-Cork. I studied art as a Texas State undergraduate, and Matisse is one of my favorite artists. To find out that he teamed up with Joyce to illustrate Ulysses blew my mind. I was thrilled to have the opportunity for a private viewing, and seeing this special copy of the book gave me hope that art and literature and other disciplines can meld to create more beautiful collaborations. I was truly inspired by the moment.

What I learned: I found it fascinating to read texts in class by Joyce, Synge, Yeats and others, and then to experience the places they wrote about. Having read stories from The Dubliners before we went to Dublin enriched my understanding of the history, context and attitudes of this city. I felt that the overall trip connected deeply to the fundamentals of cultural geography, identity and place.

Ana Puente, international studies major with a focus on Asia, Austin

Program: Nagoya, Japan

Courses: Japanese Language and Culture

Why study abroad: The cultural immersion gave me points of view on historical events that I could get only from people who grew up in Japanese culture. It’s my dream to become an interpreter and translator for multiple languages, and my visit gave me insight into cultural differences that I’ll need to understand for my work.

Favorite experiences: Staying with a host family was a wonderful way to experience a new culture and make lifelong friends in a foreign country. I also developed strong friendships with the students I spent time with because we all shared the feeling of being across the world from everyone we knew.

The trip to Kyoto was magnificent and like stepping back in time. The great temples and the grounds are beautifully conserved. Visiting them gave me the feeling that one might get from ancient ruins in contemplating how many other people have stepped in the same place.

What I learned: Japan’s “past meets present meets future” environment is simply breathtaking, and it opened my eyes to the fact that the world is much bigger than many of us realize. But I also learned that humans experience certain feelings universally, such as happiness, awe and excitement. So, the trip made the world feel more accessible, as well.

Andrew Nelson, graduate student in political science, president of Texas State’s Middle East Culture Club, Spring, Texas

Program: Yemen College of Middle Eastern Studies in Sanaa, Yemen

Courses: Two classes in Arabic language

Why study abroad: I had been taking Arabic on the Texas State campus and wanted a more face-to-face experience with the language and culture. A friend in my class asked if I wanted to go to Yemen, and I said sure. We picked Yemen because it is one of the cheaper countries to travel to and it is very traditional compared to the United Arab Emirates or Jordan. The Arabic dialect there is also quite close to what we learn in class. And very few people in Yemen speak English, so it was easy to find people to practice Arabic with.

Favorite experiences: The best part of the trip was the people, who were very hospitable. For me, the trip dispelled a lot of
stereotypes about Arabs and the Middle East. We were there for a month, but I wish the trip had lasted longer because it took a few weeks to acclimate myself to a new setting.

We took several weekend trips, one to a beautiful beach in a town called al-Khowkha on the Red Sea. We also spent a night in al-Hodeidah, where we smoked hookah tobacco on the beach and spent one of our few nights in a room with air-conditioning, which I aimed directly at my face all night.

What I learned: I developed my abilities to travel and to interact with a wide array of people. The most crucial thing is that I developed my skills in Arabic, which are always in demand with government agencies.

I had studied in England during a previous summer, and while I had a lot of fun, that experience didn't match the experience of going to a place I was totally unfamiliar with. Every second was part of a learning experience, both academically and personally.

The learning experience can't be overstated. For a country that has so many ties overseas, the number of American students who study abroad lags way behind those of other countries. I would encourage both students and universities to put as much emphasis as possible on study and travel abroad.

Kailey Slone, communication studies major, Cuero, Texas

Program: South Africa

Courses: Topics in Social Work and Independent Study in Social Work

Why study abroad: I've always dreamed of going to Africa, and this program gave me the opportunity to experience the culture and serve the people of South Africa at the same time.

Favorite experiences: One of the most meaningful experiences was going to Robben Island, where black prisoners, including Nelson Mandela, were shipped during apartheid. The tour guides on the island are ex-prisoners who share their testimonies. Their stories of the cruelty they endured are heart-wrenching, yet they are hopeful and forgiving. I was encouraged to act in a spirit of forgiveness on a daily basis.

Another highlight was the time we spent in the township of Kayamundi, which means "Sweet Home." We painted a pre-school building and played with the neighborhood children. Playing with the children was my favorite part of the entire trip. They have nothing, but they live as if they have everything. They see no evil and just want to hug and be loved. Swarms of 20-25 children would wait outside our bus for us to get off and play with them. Their sense of community is exciting to see. Although they live in poverty, they were able to just be kids while they were with us.

What I learned: I am not a social work major, but through my experiences, I gained an appreciation for social work and a great respect for what social workers do.

This program included many areas of study. We learned about apartheid and saw its effects and evidence of social improvement since it was abolished. We were able to be with South Africans and to help out in poor townships, and we learned about Africa's incredible wildlife. I feel that we didn’t miss a thing while we were there. This experience will help me, as a communications studies major, to adapt my communication style to different cultural needs and expectations. The program was wonderful!

Floyd Dixon, math and computer science major, Japanese minor, San Antonio

Program: Nagoya, Japan

Course: World Literature, Japanese Language and Culture

Why study abroad: I hope to go to engineering school in Japan. I’m interested in the Japanese influence on technology — on car manufacturing and robotics, for example. Japan seems the place to be for technological advancement. You can’t evaluate a country unless you’ve been to it. And what better way to acclimate to the Japanese language than to study abroad?
Favorite experiences: Tea ceremonies, castle visits, breathtaking shrines, a gorgeous open-air pottery market, Japanese food, conversations in Japanese, Nagoya nightlife, the ambience, the pace of life. I thought I was home. On a trip to Tokyo, we students were homesick for Nagoya.

It was fun hanging out with Japanese students. They called me and two other American students “The Three Princes.” We were unusual: two blond, blue-eyed Americans and an African-American. We were stars. At a shrine in Kyoto, Japanese girls ran up to us and wanted to have their picture taken with us.

It was also fun living with a host family. I shared a room with the school-age sons who didn’t speak English very well, but we got along fine. I taught one of them to shoot rubberbands. A month wasn’t long enough to stay. I didn’t want to leave, and my host family was in tears.

What I learned: From a young age, Japanese children begin learning either English or Spanish, the languages that dominate the world economy. In the U.S., it’s a given that we will learn another language — any language — but in Japan, it’s either Spanish or English. Even the little kids can sing “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.” How many Japanese songs can we sing?

I noticed a lot of Western influence in Japan. The young people dress in hip-hop style, and the malls and other public places play American popular music sung by both Japanese and American artists. I was disappointed that I didn’t hear more Japanese music. It’s there, but no one pushes it. In my world literature class, I did a report on a Japanese writer, examining why Japan, which loves its traditions, is also interested in emulating Western ideals.

Michael Maher, M.B.A. with international emphasis, Austin

Program: Chile

Courses: Economics, Latin American Development and Management

Why study abroad: I have been on several study abroad trips, and they have all been worth more than the collective value of time and money. My love is Latin America — I’ve visited eight Latin American countries — and I had never been to Chile before. So, when the trip was announced, I decided to go.

Favorite experiences: Getting away from the classroom in San Marcos for a bit and going into an international classroom, if you will, was valuable. I love to travel and observe how others live and deal with their resources and surroundings.

Although I’ve traveled widely in Latin America, I have yet to see an infrastructure as developed as Chile’s. This infrastructure is a result of the free-market policies put in place by the former dictator Pinochet, under advice from a team of economics professors and students at the University of Chicago. I found the paradox of the many terrible things associated with this dictator and the economic success initiated by him to be fascinating.

I enjoyed and learned quite a bit from our 10 or so visits to various businesses in Chile, including a meat-packing plant, a forestry conglomerate and a winery. I learned a lot about the country’s business practices and about developing potential contacts and ideas for the future.

My favorite outing was to Valparaiso, a beautiful city on the coast and Chile’s prime seaport.

What I learned: Study abroad provides perspectives on both the other culture and on one’s own — perspectives that we need to think critically and to succeed in a global arena. I found Chile a terrific country in which to apply many of the lessons and theories I’ve learned in my MBA program. When I say that I’ve gained perspective, I also feel humility in realizing that there are many other people who are just as talented as we Americans and who sometimes have an even stronger drive to succeed. I feel that all students should go abroad during their schooling.

Stephanie Vincent, psychology major, social work minor, Austin

Program: Canterbury, England
Courses: Psychology of Persuasion, Independent Study in Social Work

Why study abroad: I love to travel, and I figured why not earn credits while traveling. The Canterbury program offered courses that I needed for both my major and minor.

Favorite experiences: A private, sunrise tour inside the rock circle at Stonehenge; a weekend trip to Cork, Ireland, where I kissed the famous Blarney Stone; the Beatles Magical Mystery Tour in Liverpool; a historical walking tour of Prague, in the Czech Republic. The greatest highlight was all of the friends I made from Texas State and from England.

What I learned: For my independent study, I obtained placement in Canterbury’s Porchlight Agency, which helps the homeless and works to prevent homelessness in Kent County. Once a week I would visit hostels where homeless people were housed, meeting the staff and residents and touring the facilities. I was able to compare the similarities and differences in the ways that Britain and America deal with the same social issue.

Currently, I am employed at the Austin Resource Center for the Homeless. Every day, I use the information I learned at Porchlight, comparing our policies with theirs and looking for ways to improve our services. I think we could improve our homeless situation by adopting some aspects of the British system which, for example, provides stable, long-term housing for the homeless while they get back on their feet and reliable procedures for maintaining and accessing medical and legal records. The British provide support services to the homeless once they find housing, such as instruction in how to pay bills and information on community activities, and they allow more personal interaction between staff and clients than we do. Their goal is to help the homeless to build self-esteem and to feel like members of the community so that they are less likely to become homeless again.

I came back from Canterbury inspired and with a more opened mind, and so did my classmates. Every time we see each other, our Canterbury experiences are the only thing we can talk about. I’ve noticed that we are more aware now of people’s different lifestyles, and we stop and think about how others would handle a certain situation. We realize there are more options than just our own.

Joie del Rio, history major, anthropology minor, Selma, Texas

Program: Canterbury, England

Courses: Physical Anthropology, Rise of Civilization

Why study abroad: I love to travel, so what could be better than earning credits toward my degree while also having a phenomenal life experience? The opportunity to study in Canterbury, the city in which the Roman mission of St. Augustine in 597 A.D. began converting the English to Christianity, was special in itself.

Favorite experiences: As part of the Physical Anthropology course, we visited Charles Darwin’s home and sat in his personal study where he spent much of his time writing. We walked his sand walk, the path around his home where he walked every day and did his thinking. In the Rise of Civilization course, we learned about the history of England and were able to visit many of the sites we were studying. For example, we went to Canterbury Cathedral and stood in the spot where Thomas Becket was martyred. We stood inside the circle of Stonehenge at sunrise, toured Dover Castle overlooking the English Channel, wandered through Anne Boleyn’s childhood home, Hever Castle, and its gardens and mazes. We walked through Salisbury Cathedral during choir practice, which was angelic, explored Westminster Abbey, and visited Roman ruins that dated back to 43 A.D.

What I learned: In addition to England, I was able to travel to Scotland, Paris, Venice, Florence, Rome and Tuscany. It was the trip of a lifetime, and it enhanced an already strong desire to travel and see more of the world, especially when it might be connected with my education. This type of learning experience is incomparable, giving one a new outlook on the world and our place in it.
Jordan Stewart, graduate student in geography, Holland, Texas

Program: Hannover, Germany
Courses: Regional Field Studies and Independent Study in Geography

Why study abroad: I’ve been self-supporting during college and never considered that I had the means to study abroad, but I promised myself that, during graduate school at Texas State, I would study abroad. I received a generous scholarship from Texas State’s Office of Study Abroad. Students considering foreign study should check out their options before deciding that it’s something they can’t afford to do.

Favorite experiences: My class toured Berlin with the scholar who wrote the textbook we were using — a man who likely knows more about the city and its history than anyone else. Few cities have seen the history that Berlin has seen in just the last 100 years. We walked from West to East and freely passed through the Brandenburg Gate, a crossing that 30 years ago would have meant certain death. And near there, two American presidents — John F. Kennedy and Ronald Reagan — made two of the most famous speeches in Cold War history. [In his 1963 speech underlining U.S. support for democratic West Germany shortly after the erection of the Berlin Wall by Communist East Germany, Kennedy said, “Ich bin ein Berliner.” And in 1987, Reagan issued his famous challenge to Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev, to “Tear down this wall.”]

The class took a night train to Krakow, Poland. The excursion gave me a sense of Europe’s history and its geographic compactness, as we suddenly found ourselves in a completely different country, with a different language and history. We took a walking tour of the Auschwitz Concentration Camp, and while it was a difficult and sometimes disturbing experience, I feel that it is something the entire world needs to see.

On a trip to a little northern Bavarian town called Ochsenfurt, we were welcomed to a reception by the mayor and town’s historian in the centuries-old city hall. Later, we walked around the town, mapping its historic buildings and assessing their historic and aesthetic value. This exercise gave me a deeper appreciation for the historic grandeur of the architecture in Germany’s old towns.

What I learned: Someone once said that, to understand what is familiar to you, it is imperative to experience things that are unfamiliar. Coming from a background in which long-distance trips were a financial impossibility, it was an immeasurably important experience for me to go to another continent. My experiences helped me to broaden my outlook in a number of ways. It was challenging to see the ways in which things there are sometimes done better than they are here. But it was also refreshing to see that European nations have their problems, too, and that Americans aren’t as disliked there as we are led to believe here.

Ragan Aaron, psychology major, art and design minor, Houston

Program: Valladolid, Spain

Courses: Intermediate courses in written and spoken Spanish

Why study abroad: Study abroad gave me the chance to travel and learn, more than a vacation to a touristy area. Valladolid seemed like a smaller Spanish town off the beaten track, so I went for it!

Favorite experiences: Every moment was amazing. I enjoyed living with a host family rather than in a dorm or apartment. It was intimidating at first, but I was entirely immersed in foreign culture. Valladolid was very traditional — a nice small town that felt safe and comfortable compared to the larger cities. I also enjoyed the excursions offered during the program, to see cathedrals and castles in Salamanca and Segovia.

What I learned: In Seville and Barcelona, most people spoke English to me because I was American. But in Valladolid, I was forced to speak Spanish all day every day, which was a good thing. Being able to practice Spanish constantly really helped me to improve. The program changed my life, simply because I experienced an entirely different lifestyle than what I’m accustomed to. The experience also helped me to become more confident in myself. It was difficult to go so far away where no one was familiar. It was also hard to walk up to someone and start speaking another language!
Travis LeMoine, criminal justice major, Spring, Texas

Program: Florence, Italy

Courses: Intermediate Italian

Why study abroad: I was enjoying my Italian class on the Texas State campus. The instructor, Dr. Moira DiMauro-Jackson, suggested that, if I really wanted to learn Italian, I should study it in Italy. I thought that sounded like an excellent idea. I also wanted to travel.

Favorite experiences: The best part of the trip was the excursion to Rome. I had been dreaming about seeing the Coliseum since I can remember. When I got off the Metro and saw it, I almost cried. It was massive and humbling. At that moment, I felt like the World Extreme Cagefighter Jens Pulver must have felt when he won his first title, waiting his whole life for it. I didn’t know how my life could get any better.

Florence is a beautiful city, and I got to see a lot of it. Every morning, I ran near the Arno River, I saw gorgeous women every night, I ate great food — 3,000 variations of pasta and ravioli and pizza and panini and it always tasted good. I walked everywhere and didn’t have to worry about traffic. The other students and I became more than tourists because we lived there and talked with Italian people every day. I spoke to tourists from Estonia and Morocco and made a lot of friends. I saw Michelangelo’s and Dante’s tombs in Santa Croce, and some of the world’s most beautiful scenery in Tuscany. I went to bed every night after seeing stars in a clear sky.

What I learned: I had a wacky adventure when I got off the plane in Florence. A taxicab strike was going on, and my cell phone wouldn’t work. So I had to find my own way to the school where our program was being held. I got lost for hours, nearly got robbed by gypsies, and ran over a guy’s feet with my rolling suitcase, drawing the attention of the police. No one could tell me where my school was, and I was tired, hungry, anxious and lost. Finally, I found an American hotel whose staff helped me to find the school.

Having to find my way around Florence and Rome taught me to depend on myself, to develop self-confidence. In meeting Italians and realizing that I represent the U.S., I learned to speak up and to be proud of being a Texan. I learned better how to listen, I learned a different language, and I learned about a different culture by seeing one. I learned to budget my resources, and I came away with great stories that will last me the rest of my life.

I also discovered gelati, the best ice cream on the face of the earth.

Cody Clarke, geography, urban and regional planning major, Austin

Program: Hannover, Germany

Courses: Regional Field Studies and Independent Studies in Geography

Why study abroad: Both sides of my family have ancestry in Germany, most of it from my grandmother who was born in Potsdam, a suburb of Berlin. I wanted to see the places she has talked about and to experience German culture firsthand.

Favorite experiences: My grandmother’s description of the beauty of the Potsdam castle gardens was not exaggerated. In seeing the acres of brightly colored and carefully tended gardens, I felt that I was visiting the imaginary scene that my grandmother had painted for me. I also visited the old neighborhood in former East Berlin where my grandmother had attended social gatherings as a teenager. She had described it as a poverty-stricken area. But after the wall fell, the German government redeveloped the area into the city’s financial heart, with massive skyscrapers. It was hard to image her attending parties in these quarters.

The castles, Volkswagens and beer were wonderful, but riding the high-speed trains at 200 mph (or should I say 350 kilometers per hour?) across the German countryside were some of the best experiences of my life. They were so efficient, cheap and user-friendly. I hope the United States will follow Germany’s lead one day.
What I learned: I learned that my grandmother wasn't kidding when she said that being a German means never being late. When I was two minutes late to a class function, the German professor scolded me. I had a good laugh to myself and with my classmates.

As part of my coursework in Germany, I compiled a Power Point presentation on the German rail system. It was interesting to learn the history of the network within the old Franco-Prussian kingdoms, the railway's impact on World War II, and how the current system zips so fast across the countryside. I particularly enjoyed learning about the politics behind the German rail system and comparing the ways that Germany and the U.S. approach public transportation. Because of my experience with the German rail system, I’m considering a graduate degree in transportation planning.

Kellen Stanley, photography and sculpture major, North Richland Hills, Texas

Program: Florence, Italy

Courses: Renaissance Art History, Drawing

Why study abroad: After taking a high school trip to Greece, I knew I wanted to travel. When I became a studio art major and heard about the Florence trip, I knew I had to go. Sitting in art history classes and viewing projections of the artworks only goes so far, and a program that allows you to study the works in person and experience a different culture at the same time seemed like the best learning experience I could find.

Favorite experiences: It was an incredible experience each morning to learn in class about sculptures, paintings and churches, and then to visit and sketch them in the afternoons.

We lived in apartments in Florence for a month, a cool way to see a country and not come home to a hotel. Every day, my roommates and I would go to the market to buy fresh foods for a potluck dinner, unless we wanted to splurge on a restaurant. We were not only learning about Italian art in museums but also incorporating Italian customs into our lives.

The best day of the trip was when a small group of my peers and my drawing professor rented bikes and rode into the countryside, to get as lost as possible and to find typical Tuscan food. The countryside was incredibly picturesque and, because we weren’t in a car, I felt that I could take in the scenery better. At one point, two of my friends fell behind, and we stopped in front of a house to rest. An amiable Italian woman named Maria came out of the house to invite us in for water with fresh-squeezed lemon. She ended up inviting our group to dinner with her family a few days later, and she treated us like kin. We ate freshly picked olives and plums from her backyard, and she served a traditional four-course Tuscan meal that took more than three hours. While studying the art of Michelangelo, DaVinci and other masters was an experience I’ll keep close to my heart, biking through the countryside and meeting Maria and her family were experiences that we could never have had in a car or on the train. These experiences shaped me the most.

What I learned: The program is fantastic for those who want to see and learn about as much art as possible. We saw paintings in Gothic churches in small Tuscan towns, the Sistine Chapel's ceiling in Rome, the architecture of Brunelleschi's Duomo in Florence, contemporary art in the Peggy Guggenheim in Venice, and the list goes on of what we got to see and sketch. A month in Florence wasn’t enough time for me, so the trip reinforced my passion to travel and experience other cultures.

I took out a loan to go on the trip, and it was worth every single dime. My eyes were opened to how lucky I am to have an education, and I am now a more thankful student. I met people from different cultures, and I had to converse in another language, which helped me see how important the notion is of being a global citizen. I found a group of people who sit down with their loved ones and eat slowly, who care about their family and even strangers like myself. I ate dessert sometimes twice a day, which I rarely do in the States. Life was squeezed out like lemons and shared with friends over wine and talks about art. When you allow yourself to experience something completely new and to interface with another culture, the possibilities of how it can shape you are endless. If everyone took the initiative to study abroad, our world view would be deeper and richer, and we, as citizens of a planet, could work together more cooperatively.

Ana Sophia Berain and Ann-Kathrin Lossow: Texas State-Hannover University student exchange
Unlike Texas State students, German students turn off the television when they’re not watching it. Rather than drive a car, they walk or take public transportation, and they go to sleep early. These are some of the things that Texas State student Sophie Berain learned about German students during an exchange program between Texas State and Hannover University in Germany.

Each year in the program, 12 students from Hannover University spend the month of February on the Texas State campus, living in Jackson Hall, attending classes and getting to know 12 of their American counterparts. Then, in June, the Texas State students travel to Hannover to live with the German students and their families and to attend classes taught by Texas State faculty at Hannover University.

Last year, Ana Sophia “Sophie” Berain was partnered in the program with Hannover student Ann-Kathrin “Aki” Lossow. Here is what each of them said about the experience:

Sophie Berain, geography major, Eagle Pass

Program: Geography

Why study abroad: I believed this would be a great opportunity to travel, learn and gain college credit. I liked the fact that the program was an exchange and that I was able to show a foreign student around our university and our state and that she was able to provide the same experience for me in Germany.

Favorite experiences: The best thing is that you really live with a German student for a month and get to experience their lifestyle. Also, you make at least 24 close friends by the end of the program. My favorite memory has to be the crazy, high-speed train rides that transported us all across Germany.

I also enjoyed hanging out with the Hannover students in San Marcos and showing Aki around. We went everywhere together. She came to Eagle Pass to meet my family, and later we went with the other students across the border to eat dinner and shop, where the Hannover students bought hats and boots and CDs by Mexican artists.

What I learned: Germans are more energy-efficient than Americans. We’re wasteful by comparison. They don’t leave the TV on if they’re not in front of it. They turn lights off all the time. They don’t have air-conditioning, so they open the windows. They recycle everything. They ride the tram or walk, instead of driving. They go to sleep early (except on weekends) and wake up early. By contrast, Texas State students go to bed late and wake up early if we have to.

The program helped me declare my major. At the beginning, I wasn’t sure that I liked geography enough to study it and make it my career, but by the end of the trip I loved it and declared my major as soon as I got back!

Aki Lossow, American studies major, religious science minor, Hamelin, Germany

Courses at Texas State: Interpersonal Communication, Cultural Anthropology, a geography course in preparation for a class trip to Big Bend, and visits to a graduate course in Old English poetry and a ballet class

Why study abroad: My highest goal is to see the whole world. Before I came to Texas, I had visited South Africa, most European countries, Minnesota and Iowa. When I heard about this program, I knew it would be a great chance to learn about an interesting part of the world. I wanted to find out if Texans really wear cowboy boots, listen to country music and have rodeos.

Favorite experiences: The trip to Big Bend. Awesome sights of nature. I went climbing a lot and met two people I hope will be friends for a lifetime.

Meeting my partner Sophie’s family was really nice. I learned a lot about Texas-Mexican culture. I had never had Mexican food before. We tried to visit a longhorn ranch, but our host’s car got stuck in the mud before we got to see the animals. We had a barbecue at Sophie’s uncle’s house and went over the border to Ciudad Acuña together. Sophie’s father accompanied us to make sure we didn’t get lost in Mexico. On our way back we even got Mexican stamps in our passports.

I saw Barack Obama when he visited Texas State. Now that he is president, I can tell all my German friends that I met the current
U.S. president when I was in Texas.

Other things I liked were Whataburger, Grins (San Marcos restaurant), Enchanted Rock, rodeo, trips with my partner Sophie, the San Marcos River, and the fact that temperatures in Texas are so much higher than in Germany. I was excited, too, to show my hometown and the German way of life and other European sights to our new friends from Texas. I really appreciated the big amount of time Sophie gave me in Texas, and I wanted to make her experience in Germany unique and exciting — a memory for a lifetime!

What I learned: Studying abroad is one of the greatest chances in life. If you have the chance, go for it! It will open your mind and might even teach you a different language.

Foreign service and the church
Ronald Angelo Johnson, B.A. international studies, 1997

Ron Johnson has been a political analyst in the CIA, he’s held diplomatic posts with the U.S. Department of State in Gabon and Luxembourg, he’s fluent in Italian and French, he holds three degrees, he is currently working on his Ph.D. in history at Purdue, and he is an ordained Baptist minister. Faith and public policy have intersected frequently in Johnson’s life, and one of those first intersections happened to him in a war zone.

After graduating from Lufkin High School in 1989, Johnson joined the Air Force and was posted in Saudi Arabia during Desert Storm. Because he was licensed to preach, he was assigned to serve as a chapel manager, organizing interfaith programs for troops on American air bases. It was shortly afterward that he says he received God’s call “as clear as day” to minister in the foreign service.

He loved being in the military. His friends and family thought he was crazy to leave a stable job in the Air Force, but he knew he had to have a college degree in order to enter diplomatic service. While he was stationed in San Antonio, he was accepted into the international studies programs at Wright State University, Baylor and Texas State. He made appointments to visit Texas State and Baylor, but he found Texas State to be such a beautiful campus and its faculty and students to be so welcoming that he called Baylor and said he wouldn’t be coming to visit their campus.

Johnson is the youngest of nine children and the first in his family to obtain a college degree. He said the welcome he received on the campus, particularly from Dennis Dunn, the director of the International Studies Program, made him feel that he could succeed at Texas State.

Johnson’s last semester at Texas State was especially eventful. After holding an internship at the CIA, he was offered a graduate fellowship with the agency as a political analyst, and he was simultaneously accepted to the American Foreign Policy program at Johns Hopkins to work on his master’s degree. And most important: On graduation day at Texas State, he proposed to his wife, Colette, a University of Texas graduate, and soon after they were married.

Johnson received his master’s degree with distinction from Johns Hopkins, and he left the CIA to work for the U.S. Department of State. He was stationed at U.S. embassies in Luxembourg and Gabon, experiencing again the intersection of faith and public policy. In both countries, he worked with churches in an effort to stop the trafficking of women and children.

In Gabon, Johnson says he began to feel a rumbling in his spirit to go into the ministry as a fulltime vocation. So, with Colette’s agreement, he left the certainty of a comfortable life in a picturesque country to go to Boston University to earn his master of divinity degree. He and Colette arrived in Boston with no jobs, no money, no furniture, and Colette was pregnant. But within a year, he was called as pastor to a church, Colette had found a job as a banker, they bought their first home, and they had a beautiful daughter, Soleil, who is now 5.

Johnson has served continuously as a church minister in his communities. He is now writing his dissertation on early American religion and diplomacy in the History Department at Purdue University, while pastoring Badger Grove Community Baptist Church in Brookston, Ind. When Johnson finishes his Ph.D., he hopes to become a college professor and do for his students what his professors at Texas State did for him: make students feel that they can do something good with their lives.
Ron and Colette have created a scholarship at Texas State — a foreign affairs scholarship in the Center for International Studies. Johnson knows firsthand that it’s stressful when you don’t know how you’re going to pay for tuition and books. If it hadn’t been for Texas State, Johnson says, “There’s no way the rest of the things on my resume would have happened."

**Colorado via Europe**

Michael Cude, B.A. international studies, 2006

Michael Cude enrolled in international studies because its interdisciplinary curriculum gave him the opportunity to explore a variety of academic subjects and a chance to work around the world.

In his senior year, Cude interned at the U.S. Consulate General in Leipzig, Germany, assisting foreign-service officers by listening to what German parliamentary candidates said about issues of importance to the United States. He also spoke to groups about American politics and culture, countering erroneous assumptions, for example, about U.S. foreign and domestic policies.

After graduating from Texas State, he received a master of arts degree in history from the University of Liverpool and interned with a nonprofit group in Austria working to democratize Central and Eastern Europe. He is now at the University of Colorado-Boulder, pursuing a Ph.D. in U.S. diplomatic history that he hopes to complete by 2012.

From his vantage point in Boulder, Cude says his Texas State degree gave him a “holistic view of the world,” making him competitive with graduate students from well-known schools around the country and able to converse with experts in the U.S. and abroad in a wide range of disciplines.

**Chef in Munich?**

Sarah Canterbury, B.A. international studies, 2005

Sarah Canterbury hopes that someday she can give her two weeks’ notice and head off to culinary school to become the next Rachael Ray. In the meantime, though, she’ll settle for the opportunity to travel the world.

As a member of the U.S. State Department’s foreign service branch, Canterbury’s primary responsibility is to provide support for the many services and programs offered abroad. In her three years with the department, Canterbury has already been stationed in Monrovia, Liberia, and now works in Munich, Germany.

“Living in a developing country for two years really taught me how lucky we are to have the opportunities we’ve been given in life,” she said.

Canterbury’s life will relocate every few years, but no matter where she is, she said she will never forget what her time at Texas State has taught her.

“Some of my fondest memories and best learning moments come from the four years I spent at Texas State,” she said, adding that her most meaningful accomplishments were re-establishing the German Club for students and obtaining an internship with the State Department. The time she spent at the U.S. Embassy in Switzerland only confirmed for Canterbury that she was on the right path.

“Without the mentoring I received from faculty and without that internship, things might have turned out very differently,” said Canterbury.

So what’s next for this young graduate who’s already accomplished so much in such a short amount of time? While she’s not completely abandoning her dreams of becoming a mother or a top chef, Canterbury has some more pressing goals in mind.

“I hope to change jobs at the State Department and become a foreign service officer, either focusing on management or...
consular issues. I also want to go back to school and obtain a graduate degree," she said.

**Focus on Africa**


Some of the world’s most serious human rights violations take place in Africa, where James Collins hopes to work professionally on social issues.

As an undergraduate at Texas State, Collins obtained an internship at the U.S. Embassy in Chad to practice his French and to see how U.S. policies and foreign aid were implemented in one of Africa’s poorer countries. He knew Chad would give him an interesting experience: Refugees from Darfur in Sudan were flooding into the country, and he wanted to see how American refugee policy was being implemented.

He ended up witnessing human rights abuses that profoundly affected him – a father selling his young daughter in a market and soldiers beating a man to death with rifles.

"Chad opened my eyes to the way people live in this world," Collins said. "I saw people in the worst of socioeconomic situations, really bottom. It showed me why policies and issues such as fair trade matter."

After graduating from Texas State in 2007, Collins went to the University of Minnesota’s Hubert Humphrey Institute to earn master’s degrees in public affairs and business administration to gain the management and fundraising skills for doing nonprofit work in foreign countries.

At the Humphrey Institute, a classmate was one of the “Lost Boys” of southern Sudan, more than 27,000 boys displaced or orphaned during the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005). Lost Boys were often recruited as child soldiers, trained as killers and forced into battle. After the war, most had no families to go back to and were resettled around the world with adoptive families. Experts say the Lost Boys are the most war-traumatized children ever examined.

When Collins’ class learned that the president of southern Sudan would be visiting the White House and Congress to discuss the unraveling peace in that region, the class decided to see what they could do to affect the issue of Sudan’s child abductions. The class launched a campaign to flood the Sudanese attaché’s office in Washington with letters and postcards protesting child abductions. Several class members went to Washington to hear the Sudanese president’s congressional testimony. They also worked with Rep. Betty McCollum of Minnesota, who before Congress asked the president what Sudan was doing about child abductions.

"Congress responded by making a portion of American aid to Sudan contingent on Sudan’s going after child abductors," Collins said. "It was neat that we were able to bring the issue to the attention of world leaders and to make something of a difference."

At home in St. Paul, Collins has worked on social issues related to a local community of Somalis who are refugees from the wars in Ethiopia. Through a nonprofit research foundation, he has consulted with St. Paul police on gang prevention among Somali youth and on outreach to Somali women, whose culture subjects them to domestic violence.

"I never thought I’d be working with Somali refugees in St. Paul, Minn.," Collins said, adding that the interdisciplinary training he received in Texas State’s international studies program taught him to be versatile in his approach to problems.

"When you’re looking at global issues, it helps to have interdisciplinary training," he said. "So many students graduate from international studies programs with a single focus — political science or business, for example. My Texas State education has made me competitive with students from well-known programs like the University of Chicago and Princeton."

When he graduates in 2010, Collins hopes to work for a nongovernmental organization or a pharmaceutical company on HIV/AIDS issues in Africa and around the world.
Celebrities and danger in Africa

William Steuer, B.A. international studies, 1989

William Steuer's career with the U.S. Department of State has brought him face to face with celebrities and with danger and human suffering.

Since he graduated from Texas State in 1989, Steuer has worked for the State Department in the Caribbean, eastern Europe and Africa. He has managed budgets of more than $10 million, built secure office buildings for U.S. Department of State operations abroad, coordinated the activities of presidents and other dignitaries visiting from the U.S. and Europe, and handled the emergency relocation of American refugees from a danger zone. He's also been held at gunpoint, had rocks thrown at him, and come to the aid of distressed people in the countries where he's worked.

In August 2008, Steuer became manager of the U.S. Consulate in Johannesburg in South Africa's Gauteng Province, where he oversees operations for five agencies and almost 100 personnel in the largest U.S. consulate in Africa.

Steuer gained his first experience working with VIPs earlier as an officer in the U.S. Embassy in Pretoria, South Africa.

"Within weeks of starting my job," he said, "I was coordinating the hotels and offices for Rep. Dick Gephardt's delegation. Word gets around in my business, so I found myself handling hotel logistics for Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's delegation and later the motorcade for Secretary of State Colin Powell. I happily managed to avoid being stoned by students who were not excited with his appearance at the University of Witwatersrand. We had visits from several other Cabinet-level officials, and I was fortunate to work with Bono when he traveled with the secretary of the treasury. Then, when checking on President [George H.W.] Bush, who was traveling through South Africa, I was able to watch his interactions with South African icon Nelson Mandela. Later, on the airplane, I sat by Barbara Bush and chatted with her about her experiences as first lady. I finished this particular tour of duty by coordinating the ground logistics for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, making sure that things went well for the U.S. delegation to the largest United Nations summit to date (1999)."

Later, as deputy executive director of legislative affairs for the State Department in Washington, D.C., Steuer became involved with the official congressional delegations traveling abroad. His duties ranged from helping a congressman erroneously detained by customs in a foreign port to making arrangements on short notice for the delegations attending the pope’s funeral.

"The highlight," he said, "was taking my staff to Paris to coordinate the visits of the congressional delegations attending the 60th anniversary of D-Day in France. At one event for VIPs and World War II veterans, I was asked to attend as an interpreter [French-English]. I tried to make my Texas State French instructors Drs. Jean-Pierre Heudier and Robert Fischer proud."

Most recently, in 2008, Steuer coordinated the logistics for President George W. Bush and the American delegation that attended the U.S.-European Union Summit in Slovenia.

"It hasn't all been brushes with celebrity," he continued. His first assignment after graduating from Texas State was to the U.S. Embassy in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. When military mutinies forced the evacuation of 25,000 expatriates, Steuer was asked to remain at the embassy as one of 35 American staff members. "I was nervous about staying in a dangerous situation," he said, explaining that he was held at gunpoint several times by looters and at shady military roadblocks. "However, I tried to focus less on that and instead to enhance the French I had learned at Texas State so that I could assist in reporting on the local conditions."

Other assignments were perhaps less dangerous but no less difficult. In Pretoria, he led the team that received a plane filled with U.S. evacuees from Madagascar. In Niger, he served as an election observer deep in the Sahara Desert, where he said he lost 10 pounds, mostly to perspiration, and where his hotel room offered only a plastic mattress and a shower that was a dripping hose. In Bulgaria, his neighbors were so distrustful of foreigners that it was two years before they would converse with him. But when they finally spoke, he was able to give them a positive impression of the U.S. In Mali, poverty was so extreme that he led charity drives for the local population and study halls for the children of staff members in an effort to keep the children in school.
Recently, as Steuer was settling in to his new job in Johannesburg, he received some bad news.

“In visiting my old office in Pretoria,” Steuer said, “I learned that my former receptionist had recently been the victim of the ever-increasing home invasions. We agreed that she was fortunate that she was ‘only’ pistol-whipped and that her children were unharmed. However, the same robbers entered her uncle’s home down the street and gunned him down in front of his children. One of my worst moments was not being able to give her any reason why the South African justice system was letting them all down.”

Looking back at his experience in diplomatic service, Steuer said, “There have been many days when I wondered why I gave up Texas barbecue and tubing down the river. Then something completely unexpected and personally fulfilling will happen, whether it be helping an American in distress or lecturing to schoolchildren on politics or rodeos. It has been a great opportunity, and I would not have changed my career path for anything!”

Texas State students have studied in the following countries:

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Becoming aware of a world beyond Texas

Each of Texas State’s study abroad programs offers students formative and unforgettable experiences. Darryl Patrick, professor of art and design, shares these observations about his students’ experience in Texas State’s art program in Florence, Italy.

I believe most of the students would say just living in their own apartment in Florence would have to be among the program’s most significant experiences. When, every day, they walk past the house Raphael lived in; when they stand in the Piazza Signoria before the statues created for that spot by the great Renaissance artists including Michelangelo; when they walk across the 14th-century bridge, the Ponte Vecchio, and imagine the historical figures who have walked in those same tracks – those have to be life-changing experiences.

The huge statue of David by Michelangelo never fails to mesmerize our students as they consider the creative energies that the artist demonstrates in that singular piece.

And that is just Florence. Our visit to Rome is filled with art, as well. A memorable visit is to another Michelangelo masterpiece, the ceiling in the Sistine Chapel.

Every other year, the students are treated to the world-famous gathering of contemporary art from around the world, the Venice Biennale. While the Biennale and the churches and collections in Venice are splendid, unlike anywhere in the world, they only match the overall beauty of Venice itself. That experience does not fade from memory.
Italy's light is unique and the colors are so spectacular that when a student points a camera or lifts a paintbrush to the sketchbook, remarkable things occur. Italy has the ability to stir the creative juices of any visitor, partly because of the constant exposure to the finest Renaissance art. So match that with the exceptional Texas State teachers in the program and you have no better “classroom.” We turn away students every year, and the program fills so quickly that many students get on the waitlist a year in advance to ensure that they can go.

Daily life in Florence, walking the ancient streets of Rome, or sketching from a café table beside a canal in Venice fills the students with a longing. They become self-sufficient, confident in travel and language and aware of a world that exists beyond Texas. They bring back with them a new appreciation for the United States, an improved artistic ability, and a compendium of artistic masterworks they will never forget.

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