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33 Townshend Hall
1885 Neil Avenue
Columbus, OH 43210-1222 USA
(614) 292-9657
internationalstudies.osu.edu

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FROM OHIO TO AFGHANISTAN

Meredith Leal



Meredith Leal is pictured standing on Bibi Mahru Hill overlooking TV Hill in Kabul, Afghanistan. "The traffic in Kabul can be quite impressive. There is no such thing as a proper lane; crossing a street is a feat in and of itself, as there are no lights or stop signs."

Meredith Leal is a senior majoring in Middle East Studies. She visited Afghanistan over the summer. Here is her story.

"Write a story about my trip to Afghanistan, they told me. It would be easy, they told me. To be honest, capturing one of the most life-changing three weeks of my 25 years with words has been anything but easy. The sights, the sounds, the smells of Kabul and Herat are ingrained in me now. My perspectives on things are more developed, and my heart is more sensitive to the struggles and the victories of the Afghan people. I see pictures and I read stories from countries all over the Middle East—all over the world—and I "get

it" better now. So, what drew me to Afghanistan in the first place? It's not just that it's a world away and foreign to me in more ways than I can count. It's also because very few other people want to go. Very few other people care to know about the country, its history and its people. Several years ago I read a book that changed my life. I have been captivated by Afghanistan ever since, and always sadly had to say "no" when people asked if I had been over there. That all began to change this past February. Friends moved back to Kabul, and we began to discuss a visit. Finally, tickets were purchased, packing lists were written, and details on how to navigate the Afghan consulate in Dubai and the Kabul airport

were in my hands. On May 31, my adventure to Central Asia began.

I quickly learned a little bit of the layout of Kabul on our way home from the airport. The city is split in half by a mountain. Embassies, ISAF HQ, NATO HQ, Afghan government buildings and the airport are all located in the northern region. Parliament is on the south side with many neighborhoods, and several NGOs. Driving the streets of downtown Kabul my friend, Ken*, who has been living in country for over 10 years, would give little history lessons. Before 2002 there were very few buildings that were over two stories tall, he mentioned once. Lack of structural security, and bombs kept them from

being able to sustain more construction. Now, if you look around at Kabul, there are a plethora of buildings over two stories tall—some even with 12 stories! We would turn down streets and his wife and my best friend, Kim*, would say excitedly, "Oh! They paved this road!" Having not been back to Afghanistan for several years, she was seeing some things new for the first time. Their stories helped me connect with the city. Having them with me was incredibly special.

I remember my first weekend there quite clearly. Saturday was a normal

were together, as hardware stores are near one another. So, I found myself following my friends and our Afghan counterparts into one appliance store after another to look for the ideal refrigerator. Once again, the men talked price, quality, warranties and I accepted not being in the middle of everything—a reality I do not typically live in. The walk to the car after our search was extremely crowded. Every man in Kabul seemed to be on Electric Street with us. I walked arm in arm with Kim, navigating our way through the throngs of men, boys and carts on dusty sidewalks, in the heat of Kabul at

One night, on the way to dinner at the Kabul Health Club, we passed the house of General Rashid Dostum. Last semester I took a class on the rise of the Taliban and for a few weeks we focused on the men in Afghanistan who opposed the Soviets, who became warlords and who have led the different ethnicities in Afghanistan over the last 30 years. Seeing the house of a man I have only read about in books or on the news was one of those moments when I thought to myself, "What the heck, is this real life?! Mind-blown."



The Citadel of Herat was built in 330 BC. by Alexander the Great. It has been used for over 2,000 years, and now houses the National Museum of Herat.

workday for Afghans. My friends, two of their Afghan friends and I ran errands in central Kabul. To the bank we went. I could feel everyone's eyes on me, despite my headscarf, long pants and long sleeved shirt. This was one of my first experiences not being able to hold eye contact with men, and being sidelined from being in the thick of things. While bank accounts were attempted to be opened, I stood quietly and drank it all in. One of the Afghan guys with us quizzed me on my Dari reading skills—which I impressed him with, I might add! But, I didn't understand much unless someone translated for me. Kim apologized after our two and a half hour visit because she felt like I must have been bored. I was quick to reassure her that "mundane errands" were still exciting to me, having never attempted anything in Kabul before! Later, we did something I wouldn't be excited for typically: refrigerator shopping! I learned that stores are grouped by the type(s) of good(s) they sell. Appliance stores

midday.

During the drive home I sat back and watched from under my hijab and behind my sunglasses as we drove from north Kabul to the other side of TV Hill to south Kabul. Women in blue burqas, boys on bikes, girls holding hands and men piled into cars and "buses," and onto motorbikes were close by. At times I could have reached my arm out of the car and into the one next to me to tap someone's shoulder. I never would have done that, but I could have, we were that close. The traffic in Kabul can be quite impressive. There is no such thing as a proper lane; crossing a street is a feat in and of itself, as there are no lights or stop signs. Basically, you just go whenever it seems like you have time, and you just assume no one will hit you. It seemed like a jumbled mess, but somehow it made enough sense to the drivers. Experiencing Kabul traffic never ceased to amaze me.

A couple of days later, Ken took me to Lake Qargha, with our Afghan driver and friend. It's a man-made lake a bit north-west of the city. On our drive, the guys pointed out that we were passing a former Al-Qaeda training camp. The land is now used by the Afghan military. Another moment of having absolutely nothing to say. Books and news stories were running through my head as I tried to process the reality of what I was seeing—what had been there and who had been there. I was driving on a road that Osama bin Laden had driven on, probably multiple times. I just stared out of the window trying to comprehend what I was seeing. When we arrived at the lake we drove around it, past the hotel/restaurant that had been attacked by the Taliban a year earlier, past boys selling cold treats and lunch, as well as men who were just staring at the two westerners in the car. When my friend saw Lake Qargha the first time, years ago, it was puddles, he said. Today it is at least five stories deep. On one end there is



Meredith sits on an old rusty anti-aircraft gun, leftover from the Soviet / Afghan war of the 1980's.

a Ferris wheel, a merry-go-round, food tents and paddle boats. I never would have expected to see any of this in Afghanistan. It was beautiful and helped to make the city, and the country, a place that was easier to relate to. I love water and beaches. They calm me down, they bring me peace and considering I was in a landlocked country, I really had not been prepared for the beauty that is Lake Qargha. I count that as a really special day with my friends.

One of the really interesting things I was able to do while in Kabul was volunteer with an NGO, Hagar International**, which works with women and children who are victims of human rights abuses. This organization rescues these women and children, hous-

es them, helps to educate them and eventually aids in assimilating them back into their societies. I worked several days in the office with the Afghan employees educating them on group activities they could do with their Afghan clients to help build and develop personal values and life skills. The value of relationships, self-worth, communication, honesty and conflict resolution were among our topics. These things are very important to me and I feel very strongly about them. Being able to share with the Afghan women the significance of those lessons and how they can affect lives was incredibly special. I was also given the task of interviewing some of the women who live in the shelter, writing up stories that describe their lives and maybe

their futures.

There are so many great things about Afghanistan, but there are also many hard things, as well. There were several moments of wondering how people live in this reality, and do I really want to take on that responsibility. One of those moments came my last week in Kabul. I went with a translator to a women's shelter and heard three women share about their lives. Lives I cannot even imagine. They were some of the most emotionally difficult hours of my time there. "Beauty in the midst of pain," is a phrase that comes to mind when I remember that morning. I would not trade it for anything.

One of the stories I heard was from a girl, several years younger than me, who was raped by a man who said he loved her, and whose family no longer accepts her. She talked about feeling intense shame from what happened, as if it had been her fault. She continues to deal with the scars of being saved from death just to be sent to prison, with that man, by her family as punishment. In order to lessen their sentence, they married. Yet, when he was released, he returned to a wife and children she did not know existed. Her family does not acknowledge or accept her, so she came to Kabul, to the shelter, and has been there for over a year. At 19 years old, she is trying to get a divorce, and prays every day that she will meet and marry a good man; a man who will treat her well. She knows if she does not then she will have to learn how to support herself. She told me that she would do absolutely anything-even sitting inside her parent's home and never leaving-if it meant her family would talk to her again. She had a really hard time accurately expressing how she was feeling. By the end, she had tears in her eyes. I was overcome with emotions but tried not to show them too much. Her face was beautiful and innocent, except she knows too much pain to be innocent. Her features reminded me of a very dear friend of mine, and her story of

rape brought to my mind a friend from college who also experienced this abuse. My heart was being torn in so many directions as I listened to her, and watched her struggle to share her aching heart with me. I was trying to hold back my tears, but I could not stop them from spilling over. Desiring nothing more than to hug her, I asked the translator if I was allowed; permission was granted. We both stood up and the girl wrapped her arms around me so tightly, and I hugged her back. We stood and cried together for several minutes. I asked the translator to tell her that she is beautiful, that she is important, that she is extremely valuable. Through the translator, she thanked me for listening to her and crying with her. She said being able to share her story with someone who showed compassion towards her made it easier for her to talk with me. My time with this precious girl is impossible to forget. Since returning home I have emailed with the translator and asked about my sweet friend. She said the girl asks about me all the time; she is doing well and taking classes. Listening to the stories she and the other women shared that day was incredibly heartbreaking. But, if I had to choose to do it all over again I would always choose to hear about their lives. Their stories are too important to miss.

My final contribution was also a huge joy for me-and the other women, too. I am a massage therapist here in the US. My friends have always joked about me doing massage in Afghanistan because it does not seem like something people are clamoring for. However, I was able to do just that. For most of the women I met with, none of them had ever been touched with much care, especially not a touch that was meant also to heal and restore. Being a massage therapist is my job, and I love it, but giving these women massages was rewarding in ways I had not expected. When the only words you can catch are "thank you" but you are able to understand the emotion behind them because of the awe in their voice that they are

being given such special attention, you cannot help but be overwhelmed. Giving my time to do something I always do might not seem like a lot, but for them, it was an enormous blessing. The smiles on their faces I will not soon forget.

I could share how safe and taken care of I felt there; I could try to explain how my life has changed forever because of my time there and what I saw and experienced. Maybe this will suffice; the family of one of our Afghan friends invited us to lunch one day. My friends have known this family for years and have a special bond with them. I was so excited to spend the day getting to know them. Once we arrived, we had all-star treatment. Afghans are incredibly hospitable and generous. The food was absolutely delicious, and there was so much laughter. This family did not have a separate room for the men and a separate room for women while we were there. Instead, they included everyone in one room. The adult sons took turns showing off tricks, and I taught one of the girls how to make paper snowflakes. I was included as one of their own. The father, who reminded me a little of Rafiki from the Lion King, told me I was like another daughter and I now had many new brothers and sisters. I spent mere hours with this family and already I was being adopted. It was one of the most special moments in my life, to be welcomed and loved, so openly and so quickly. I think about that day and I still get warm fuzzies remembering how wonderful that day was.

The first question people asked me when I told them I was headed to Afghanistan was, "Is it safe?" Well, "safe" is a relative term; one tends to find that out the more they travel and experience different situations. I have touched on the fact that I felt safe and well taken care of. But there is a reality that there were three incidents that took place while I was in Kabul. The first two made major headlines, the third had less news coverage. The first

was the attack by the Taliban on the military section of Kabul's international airport. Less than a week after arriving and I was reading news stories and looking at pictures on the BBC of what was happening only 40 minutes away and on the other side of the mountain from me. That might not necessarily sound like much, but it was. If I had not been reading news reports, I would have had no idea that anything was happening. The same thing happened with the suicide bomber at the Supreme Court building in Kabul. I was taking a nap when the attack happened. About thirty minutes later I was preparing to leave to meet with some friends of Kim's. We called a taxi, I got in and told them my destination and the driver's response was, "Are you sure you want to go there? There was an explosion there just recently." Well, I had never been asked a question like that. I had never been anywhere where my comings and goings had been hindered by explosions. I paid the driver for his time, and went back inside to talk to Kim and Ken. Several times throughout the rest of my time in Kabul we drove past the Supreme Court building, or at least within a couple of blocks. I remember sitting in the office at Kim's house and one of their Afghan friends walking in and showing Ken a picture of the scene at the courthouse. They refused to let me see it. I didn't even protest; and for me, that's saying a lot. I like to know and see everything. Knowing that I was in the same city as these events was another mind-blowing realization that I did not know how to process. I flew in and out of the Kabul airport, I knew people whose flights were delayed because of the gunfire. I know where the courthouse is, and I know that where I was headed after it happened was an extremely short drive away. I was never afraid for my life, but coming to understand a small iota of what it means to grow up in a country where war, violence, and bombs is your baseline for existing felt very heavy. However, I do not wish to have come and gone from Afghanistan without experiencing these, and other, difficult moments.



Meredith sits among the glassware in the Herat Glass Shop. Glassware is still made in the traditional way, by hand. The industry dates back to the 15th century.

They may be hard to process, and understand, but they are real. People experience these moments day in and day out. I hope, one day, that there are generations of Afghans who do not have war as their baseline.

There are many random things I remember from my trip. How they use Kleenex for napkins, or the feeling of driving on roads that have never been touched with asphalt or concrete, for example. I remember the amazing beauty that is the mosque in Herat, and how much cleaner the air smelled in that city during my weekend there. I cannot forget how hard it was to not be able to hug some of the people I came to know well, because of our genders. And how putting my hand on my heart when I greeted people became second nature, in lieu of handshakes and hugs. I will always remember how great I feel about chicken kebabs and how they might be my favorite food. And the joy my friends got

when we discovered fro-yo had arrived in Kabul! I can still recall the first time I heard the call to prayer my first night there. I was sitting on the back patio eating pizza from Pizza Brasil. I assumed it was the call to prayer, but I asked Kim and Ken just to be sure. They chuckled as they realized, yet again, what was second nature to them, was brand new for me. I will never be able to forget the sounds of the ice cream carts that are pushed all around the city. They played jingles of three songs, including "Happy Birthday" that I could never fully block out! I could regale you with tales of airports with five security checkpoints before you even get IN to the airport, and several more once you get inside. But that would take forever.

I brought back some beautiful pieces of Herat glass, scarves, lapis lazuli and of course, photos. But, even more than all of those things, I have this: the incredible privilege to know some of the

country and people of Afghanistan personally. I know that, beyond militant attacks, despite the horrible treatment of some women, Afghanistan IS a beautiful place. There are men and women of courage, of strength, of good character, of deep moral convictions and with a genuine desire to make their country better than it is. They have hope and want to give hope to future Afghans. They are our brothers and sisters. My heart broke many times there, but even more often was I filled with joy and love for these people and this country. I hope to continue being a part of its growth.

I hope that as my senior year at The Ohio State University continues I will have more opportunities to share about my experiences, and one day, hopefully, make it back to Afghanistan!"

LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES FLAS FELLOWSHIP

Katie Drown



Katie Drown is a senior majoring in World Economy & Business and Portuguese. **She was awarded a Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship (FLAS) through the Center for Latin American Studies** at Ohio State.

Thank you for awarding me a 2012 Summer and 2013 Academic FLAS Fellowship. With the summer FLAS I traveled to Florianópolis, SC, Brazil and studied for seven weeks earning high marks and six transferable credits. I benefitted from the exposure to southern Brazilian culture and gained knowledge by familiarizing myself with the renowned cities of Blumenau and Curitiba. The academic year FLAS has also benefitted me greatly by allowing me to focus on school rather than financial burdens. Overall the FLAS fellowships have helped me to become a fluent Portuguese speaker, learn firsthand the culture of southern Brazil and fuel my passion and goal to work as a business woman between the USA and Brazil.

My passion for Brazil and the Portuguese language began while living in the city of Piracicaba, São Paulo from August 2009 until June 2010 as a Rotary Exchange Student. While there I attended high school and language school. I was involved in many extracurricular activities such as plays, dancing lessons, and multiple solo musical performances. In February of 2010 I got a job in a language school where I taught English for four months. I made many friends and developed lasting relationships that still continue today. Because of my success with the language and the culture I was inspired to continue to study Portuguese and to focus my academic career towards Brazil.

I am very committed to the region. I have spent the past three years studying the country's language, literature, economics and history. During spring quarter of 2012 I interned as a Portuguese teacher for the Mosaic Home-school Program teaching basic Portuguese and Brazilian culture to students

between the ages of four and ten. Outside of classes I stay updated with Brazilian current events. Learning as much as I can about Brazil and the language is crucial to my career goals. I am currently fluent in Portuguese and hope to reach a level near to native fluency so that I can be competitive in the international job market as well as qualify to be an interpreter or translator. I hope to reach this fluency level so that I may be hired to work at the Olympics in Rio de Janeiro in 2016.

I firmly believe that I am capable of nearing this level of fluency with hard work and by spending the fall semester of 2013 at the ESALQ branch of the University of São Paulo in Piracicaba, SP. While there I will study alongside my Brazilian peers. I plan to take business and economics classes in the hope that they will teach me the Brazilian business culture that I will need to know in the future. The classes I have taken here at OSU, especially those taught in Portuguese, have prepared me for this experience.



Jim Schnell

The U.S. Army Culture & Language Enterprise as Actionable Intelligence

Dr. Schnell teaches *Introduction to intelligence*. His new book describes the creation, development and management of the U.S. Army Culture & Foreign Language Enterprise from the vantage point of Dr. Jim Schnell, U.S. Army Culture & Foreign Language Management Office Lead Social Scientist at Headquarters TRADOC (Training

& Doctrine Command), Fort Eustis, Virginia. His role has focused on support via implementation of the U.S. Army Culture & Foreign Language Strategy from its beginnings as an Intelligence function and recruitment, hiring & management of the Culture & Foreign Language Advisors. As such, this has provided Schnell with relevant

insights regarding how attempts to operationalize cultural principles in support of mission accomplishment have evolved within the U.S. Army and how the Army bureaucracy has responded to this kind of innovation.



Daniel Zaas at Logan Pass, which intersects the Continental Divide, in Glacier Park, Montana.

Daniel Zaas is a senior majoring in Development Studies. Over the summer he biked across the U.S.! Here is his story.

“Laozi, a 6th Century BCE philosopher, said: “A journey of a thousand miles must begin with a single step.” Well, for my high school teammate Ethan and I, it was three thousand miles and instead of a step, it was a pedal. It all started the morning of June 12, 2012. We had just hopped off a train near Mt. Vernon, Washington, a few miles from the Pacific Ocean. After loading our bikes with about 50 pounds of gear we took our first shaky pedals on our journey home to Cleveland.

We averaged riding about 60 miles a day however days ranged anywhere from 20 to 90 miles depending on the terrain. We carried all of our food, which usually consisted of Pop-Tarts for breakfast, peanut butter on tortillas for lunch, and mac and cheese for dinner. We also carried a tent, sleeping bag, and our clothing which we washed maybe three times over the 57 days we

were gone. At first we slept in campgrounds but after a tip from a fellow cross-country biker we learned that many small towns would let us camp in their public parks for free. Our third option was to scout out a friendly looking local near the park and they would often let us sleep in the backyard. A few people even took pity on us, and allowed us to sleep in their homes and provided us with food.

Our route was to take us through the states along the Canadian border until we hit home in Cleveland. The highlights of the trip included riding through and hiking in the North Cascade National Park, Glacier National Park and Teddy Roosevelt National Park, traversing the Rockies (including a 30 mile, 4000 foot ascent followed by about a 15 mile, zero-pedal, descent one day), riding 90 miles in Montana to make it to a decent town for a surprisingly good 4th of July fireworks display and our traditional post ride ice cream treat which happened nearly every day. Honestly, the biggest highlight of

the trip was the incredible people that we met along the way. A surprising amount of people bike across the country every year, and it is great fun to ride with them for a few days or to unexpectedly run into them. The best example of this was when we ignored a detour sign in Minnesota. We ended up having to walk our bikes through a couple miles of sand only to run into another group of bikers, who we had first met and last seen struggling up a mountain pass in Washington. It was amazing to see the biking community that the cross-country route has created. There are so many people paying it forward because one day they were helped out on their bike trip. I wish I could tell all their stories but it would take volumes.

So, 57 days, 3162 miles, and many, many pedals later, we rode into our driveways as if coming back from any other ride. The ride took a toll, both physically and mentally but was worthwhile in every imaginable way. “

MIDDLE EAST STUDIES FLAS FELLOWSHIP

Brianna Baar



Brianna Baar is pictured above at the Dome of the Rock, in Jerusalem. “We got special permission to enter the al-Aqsa compound as most of us were non-Muslims.”

Brianna Baar is a senior majoring in Middle East Studies. She was awarded a *Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship through the Middle East Studies Center* for the 2013-14 Academic Year. She has shared her FLAS essay below.

“I have wanted to learn Arabic for years. When I was a sophomore in high school, I wanted to go into politics, and I thought a good way to stand out would be to learn Arabic. And from then on, though my goals and ambitions have changed, my desire to learn Arabic has remained. I love the language, and though it often frustrates me to the point of wanting to throw my textbook

across the room, I am not going to quit. I have had my heart set on knowing this language for years. I know that the road ahead of me is long, but I want to be fluent. And honestly, I take a fair amount of satisfaction from the impressed look on people's faces when I say I'm studying Arabic. I listen to Arabic pop music and Al Jazeera and YouTube videos, to both train my ear and try to pick out things I can understand. I think the language is beautiful, I love the rawness of the sounds, and I love its rich history. I love how I have to really focus and use my brain to read the script because of the similarity of the letters. I love how the structure of the verbs make so much sense and that I can play

with and twist the meanings of words. I anticipate that by Autumn 2013 I will be at an intermediate level. As far as language proficiency goes, I will have completed Arabic 2104.

I am attempting to graduate a year early so I can begin working on a Master's degree in Social Work and continue with my Arabic. I plan to focus my studies on helping immigrant and refugee populations here in the United States. After this, I would like to do the bulk of my work domestically working with immigrants and refugees from Arabic speaking countries. Whether they are Palestinian, Syrian, or Iraqi, I would like to help them. With all of the turmoil in the



Brianna (right) with a fellow traveler admiring a kitty mural during the “Living Jerusalem” study abroad program. “In Jerusalem cats are everywhere!”

Middle East, I can only imagine that the number of people fleeing their homes will increase. I would like to work for United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, or some private NGO, or even a small social work firm.

I understand that most of the FLAS Fellows are for people planning to work abroad, which of course is very important for national security as well as foreign relations. But I also believe that it is equally vital to have people in the U.S. who are capable of assisting immigrants and refugees with adapting and assimilating into life here. My assertions are supported by an encounter with a coworker I had in the past year. One day

last fall as I was working in the MESC office, a woman who works somewhere in Oxley Hall came in and asked to speak to the Assistant Director. She was wondering if we could donate some Arabic dictionaries to a woman in her church who volunteered to help a group of Arab immigrants. She didn't speak a word of Arabic herself and she was struggling to help them with the many obstacles they faced as new immigrants and teach them English. While this is extremely admirable of her, I had to wonder if there was no one else who was better equipped to assist these people. Even if my career takes a different turn and it is only something I am able to do on a volunteer basis, I want to be able to use

my Arabic to help people.

Learning Arabic is not easy. I struggle with it every day. It is something that I do not have a natural aptitude for, but if anything, the challenge makes me want to continue with it even more, because the more difficult it is, the more I will feel I have achieved.

TEACHING IN HAIFA, ISRAEL

Jason Silverman

Jason pictured in Merom Golan, an Israeli settlement and a kibbutz in the northern Golan Heights.

Jason Silverman is a senior majoring in Middle East Studies and Hebrew. He had the opportunity to teach English in Israel. Here is his story.

"In 2011, after making my first trip to the Middle East, I developed a great desire for learning and gaining an understanding of the region, its culture, and its people. I then decided to pursue a Bachelors degree in Middle East Studies and Hebrew with the hope of gaining experience and knowledge to make my interests my career as well. Studying abroad was a great interest of mine and I felt that it was necessary to acquire firsthand experience of my studies in order understand in a deeper way. Thanks to the program coordinators here at OSU I was able to find a perfect program for the pursuit of studying the Middle East and the Hebrew language. That program was in Israel, not in the frequently chosen city of Jerusalem, but Haifa, located on the northern Mediterranean coast. Haifa is a port city with a very diverse

population of Arabs and Jews, Christians, Muslims, Druze, secular and religious, and those belonging to the Bahai faith. The program took place on Mount Carmel at the University of Haifa where my studies consisted of Middle East studies, ranging from the politics of the region to the culture of the various social groups present in Israel and the Middle East. I also studied throughout the academic year in intensive Hebrew language courses called Ulpan that challenged me greatly and forced me to utilize my Hebrew skills daily.

I lived in the dorms of the university and had the privilege of being assigned to all Israeli roommates. They all came from different social groups within the country; one coming from an Arab Muslim background, another from an Arab Druze community, two from Russian Jewish families, and the last from a Tunisian German Jewish background. This allowed for great cultural experience and learning, and the unforgetta-

ble conversations we engaged in concerning issues within the society, politics, and discussing the various cultural norms that exist between us. This experience alone was invaluable and greatly attributed to my further understanding of Israel, that co-existence does exist and it can be obtained. Throughout the year there were educational trips and tours around all of Israel. These included the ancient city of Jerusalem, the Golan Heights, the desert in the Negev, the southern city of Eilat, and more. This year was full of unforgettable experiences and my horizons were broadened. I will be able to use this gained experience here at home and, therefore, am able to approach existing issues in the Middle East with a unique, and informed, perspective. Thus far, this was the most important and influential year of my academic career."

BENJAMIN A. GILMAN Scholarship to SENEGAL

Leslie Minney



Leslie Minney (back center) pictured with her host family the Diops, during her stay in Senegal.

Leslie Minney is a senior majoring in Development Studies and Anthropology. She was awarded a **Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship**. The Gilman Scholarship Program offers awards for undergraduate study abroad. She used her scholarship to fund her study abroad trip to Senegal.

“Through the Minnesota International Development in Senegal (MSID) and awarded funds through the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship, I was allowed the privilege to participate in a semester-long study abroad experience in the developing country of Senegal. The MSID program is a partnership be-

tween the Office of International Affairs at Ohio State University and the Twin Cities Learning Abroad Center of Minnesota University. I was the only representative from Ohio State along for this journey; the other nine students were coming from every corner of the nation to partake in a seven week in-classroom study of the development of Senegal and a six week fieldwork/internship experience. My experience greatly altered my perceptions of what it means to be an American in a developing country and especially a traditional village, but what I did not expect to experience was the profound shift in the way I define love, family, communication and appre-

ciation for other cultures.

When I had finally completed my 17-hour transit and was stepping off of my final flight, I immediately felt the coastal breeze from the West African Atlantic hit me and make me start to sweat in my purple cotton sweatpants I was wearing as I left Ohio’s January weather. The ten students and I quickly experienced West African’s definition of “time” (or lack thereof) as we waited for our ride for several hours at the airport. Once Waly, our program director, arrived to pick us up we were welcomed with open arms and hearts. Meeting my host family in Dakar was my first independent experience of speaking French, the national language of Senegal. I was so eager to speak and test my knowledge of French with my family I did not even unpack until the following night. My daily walk to school in the capital city of Dakar was filled with exhaust pipes, busy people on their way to work, and children asking for spare francs. I walked every morning to attend class and study at the West African Research Center (WARC) at 8am. At WARC, I met incredible professors who had much to say about the country in which they were raised, both in terms of the history of development and their hope for the future.

The MSID program is unique in that you get to choose an internship track based on five options including Cultural Studies, Environment/Ecology and Sustainable Agriculture, Microbusiness and Alternative Economies, Education and Literacy, and Public Health. All courses are taught in French, and one course is taught in Wolof, the tribal language spoken by the majority of the Senegalese. I chose to focus on Environmental/Agricultural Studies. I had an intensive six week classroom phase with our ever-so-patient and towering professor



Leslie gathering tomatoes at a women’s farm.

“I am forever thankful for my study abroad experience as it has absolutely defined my undergraduate career at Ohio State. There is no doubt it will open doors for my future studies and career aspirations..”

Diène, and expanded my French vocabulary on topics one does not usually learn in a basic French classroom, such as how to reduce domestic waste water from laundry or dishes, the problem of setting up waste management and trash pick-ups in rural areas, conserving fishing environments which are so vital to Senegal’s export economy, and finding sustainable solutions for flood-prone areas and the displaced Senegalese. Learning about specific development techniques while one is living and fully present in that country allows for an experience of the underlying cultural barriers to development. We also learned about traditional values, like the Wolof word “maasla,” which is the unspoken agreement between Senegalese people to keep peace and harmony in their society, which often means overlooking littering or other detrimental actions affecting the environment. Learning solely in French, picking up a little tribal language and adjusting to the culture all proved challenging and well worth the effort. And my French improved enormously!

Just as our group of ten American students were growing tired of the hustle and bustle of Dakar, it was time for our internship phase. We all piled into a van on the morning after saying goodbye to

our first host families, and made a five hour trip outside of Dakar. I was the first one to get dropped off to my new host family, the Diops, who lived in Sessène, Senegal. When I got out of the van, it was hard to distinguish which of the little kids and elders were part of my family; in fact, I initially thought they made up the majority of the village. In the next few days, I quickly realized how large my polygamous family truly was - an approximately 15-person group made up of 12 sisters and brothers! In this remote village, where my family had no electricity or running water, I was placed in an internship with AGRECOL AFRIQUE, or “Agriculture Ecologique,” an NGO represented in 14 regions of Senegal as well as Mali and Burkina Faso, that focuses on the agricultural ecosystem and the sustainability of organic farming within rural villages. Every morning around 8am, I either walked or rode on the back of my co-worker’s motorcycle (which was extremely difficult to stay balanced on and steer in the desert sand) to neighboring villages, touring the large families’ gardens and learning the methods of growing and selling organic food, which in many cases was the main source of income for the family. My family, the Diops, spoke Serrer, a tribal language I had not learned during the classroom phase.

Thankfully, my 15-year-old host sister Khady and 20-year-old host brother Malick understood and spoke French that they learn in their local school. They were my main source of communication, and as time progressed I grew to understand basic commands in the Serrer language. I am forever grateful to my family in Sessène, and sometimes when talking to the other nine American students on the trip, I preferred to be called by my granted Senegalese name, “Ndèye Diop.”

I am forever thankful for my study abroad experience as it has absolutely defined my undergraduate career at Ohio State. There is no doubt it will open doors for my future studies and career aspirations. I came to understand deeply what it means to live in a community and another culture. I grew closer to becoming a “global citizen.” I learned how to cook over an open fire (which takes hours upon hours), and I indulged in making and drinking “attaya” tea and eating couscous with my hand. What I was not prepared for was how the culture would cause my definition of love and sharing to alter so drastically, or who I would meet that would cause my heart to ache in joy for them every day since leaving.

The traditional classroom is important and often where a great deal of learning occurs in our society today, but what is more, in order to fully understand, is experiencing first-hand his/her passion. Although Senegal’s developing social, economic and political nation told a story that was sometimes difficult to hear or see, I cannot forget the many hearts I was fortunate enough to come to love.

No matter where your passion and dreams lie, whether it is in volunteering, traveling, cooking or starting a business, I fully encourage you to live courageously, always moving forward and following your heart, to be daring and to live only as you have imagined. It is truly through answering our fears of exploring into the unknown that we are able to experience living fully and to fulfill aspirations!”

SLAVIC & EAST EUROPEAN FLAS FELLOWSHIP

Eric Connelly



"There is a saying in Russian that goes, "Better to have 100 friends than 100 dollars". This is a photo of my friends and I from Tobolsk in the summer of 2010. Kneeling in front of me in the peach shirt is Zhenya. He is a self-taught English and Spanish speaker and an anti-drug and alcohol advocate who organizes classes dedicated to alcohol abuse awareness. Behind my left shoulder in red is Alexey, an aspiring rap artist who also speaks often through local media against the use of drugs. To my right is Denis, an English teacher. Above the group in black is Daur, and in red at the bottom is a friend I nicknamed "Crazy" Dinar."

As a Globalization and Russian Language major at Ohio State I get to study in an interdisciplinary fashion the many ways people all over the world are becoming connected. The emergence of a global society is particularly interesting to me, as are the differences that remain between nations. Language, as both a difference between cultures and as a communication tool, can be like a key to overcoming the hindrances of cultural misunderstanding. I have always admired those with the ability to understand foreign languages and my study of Russian has been a very enriching experience. Russian has consistently been my favorite course each term and my Slavic culture courses have also been enlightening and enjoyable.

Eric Connelly is a senior majoring in Globalization Studies and Russian. He was awarded a **Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship (FLAS)** from the Center for Slavic & East European Studies for the 2013-14 Academic Year! Here is his FLAS application statement.

"My academic interests have been shaped by those whom I have gotten to know over the past six years. After my freshman year at Columbus State I took some time away from school to teach Outdoor Education for the YMCA and other organizations around the country. As part of these experiences I lived and worked with individuals from many cultures and came to strongly value the diversity among people both at home and abroad. International exchange programs like CCUSA improved my knowledge of life abroad and honed my interest on the ways our lives continue to become more interdependent across borders. Greater awareness of this inter-dependency helped foster within me a passion to further understand the connections among people living in what is an in-

creasingly more connected world.

Several co-workers with whom I became closest are from Russia, and I became enraptured with the difference between their accounts of life there and my own preconceived notions. While continuing my work in Outdoor Education I studied Russian independently for two years before entering Ohio State. During that same time I traveled to Russia twice, each visit lasting two months and consisting of stays in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Tyumen, and Tobolsk. I was immersed in the language and culture, with few people to communicate with in English. I received very warm welcomes from many who had never met an American before, and I remain friends with those I met to this day. During my stay we often exchanged language lessons and for a short time ran a club which we called "English Alive!" within which those interested in English could practice with me alongside Russian conversation. My studies at Ohio State have allowed me to more strongly communicate with my friends abroad.

Upon graduation I hope to gain experience teaching English abroad through Fulbright or a similar program. I also plan to attend graduate school in pursuit of further studies in Slavic culture as well as a Master's of Education. Ultimately I would like to pursue a career which allows me to promote the type of cross-cultural exchanges I and my international colleagues were fortunate enough to experience. A Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship would allow me to further explore my interests in the process of globalization and improve my ability to communicate across cultural and national borders. As we become more connected we should be able to promote acceptance by improving our understanding of others. The support of a FLAS would allow me to continue striving for that ideal."

NATIONAL ITALIAN AMERICAN FOUNDATION

Christina Bittoni



Christina Bittoni is a sophomore majoring in International Relations and Diplomacy and Italian. She was awarded two \$5,000 scholarships from the **National Italian American Foundation (NIAF)**. Each summer the NIAF awards scholarships to outstanding students for use during the following academic year. The awards are made on the basis of academic merit and divided between two groups of students; those of Italian American background who demonstrate outstanding potential and high academic achievements, and students from any ethnic background ma-

joring or minoring in the Italian language, Italian studies, Italian American studies or a related field who demonstrate outstanding potential and high academic achievements.

Scholarship awards range from \$2,000-\$12,000 and are awarded to undergraduate, graduate, post-graduate, medical, dental, and legal students. Christina is using her scholarships to fund a study abroad program to Italy this Spring semester! She hopes to increase her Italian language fluency.

"My study abroad will take place at the American University of Rome from January 20 - May 14, 2014. I will be pursuing International Relations and Italian courses. I look forward to living in the university-appointed housing at the top of the Gianicolo hill in Rome! I am also very excited to travel to various parts of Europe throughout the trip!"

LIVING JERUSALEM

Noura Dabdoub



Students on the Living Jerusalem trip had the opportunity to tour the Western Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Dome of the Rock, and the Al Aqsa Mosques.

The ancient walls, glittering domes and graceful spires are iconic symbols of the Old City of Jerusalem. Eleven Ohio State University students had the opportunity to visit Jerusalem this May for two weeks as part of the *Living Jerusalem Project study abroad tour*. The group, led by **Dr. Amy Horowitz and Noura Dabdoub**, toured the well-known sites: the Western Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and the Dome of the Rock and Al Aqsa mosques.

The students, however, were exposed to perspectives of Jerusalem rarely experienced by tourists. Before embarking on the trip, students of the International Studies Living Jerusalem course studied Jerusalem's religions, multiple histories, complex political issues, and intersecting cultural practices. Chandni Pawar, a senior in Chemistry, noted that "Despite our classroom preparation, this life-

changing trip surpassed all of my expectations...we met with activists, religious leaders, and families all with unique opinions and perspectives on life in this multifaceted city." Hannah Trate, a sophomore in Political Science and Middle Eastern Studies, echoed this sentiment, stating "a few weeks before arriving in Jerusalem, I remember casually remarking in a moment of arrogant ignorance that I suspected 'little would surprise me in Jerusalem'... As it turned out, no amount of secondhand knowledge could have fully prepared me for the coming two weeks." Tour participants were hosted and guided by Israeli, Palestinian, Muslim, Jewish and Christian scholars, artists, politicians, diplomats and religious practitioners on a program designed to present multiple--and at times conflicting--perspectives that keep Jerusalem at the center of imagination and inquiry.

The Living Jerusalem tour group spent the first week in West Jerusalem, the predominately Jewish Israeli section of the city, and the second week in the predominately Muslim and Christian Palestinian East Jerusalem. Trate described experiencing the multiple divisions of Jerusalem, saying "We had opportunities to meet incredible people, analyze conflicting narratives, and try to understand the impact that living within such tangible conflict has had on people's daily lives. At the same time, we were forced to recognize that life in Jerusalem is so much more than conflict. It's family and friends and food and shopping. You could have a protest on one side of a street, while the other side is filled with merchants, restaurants, and people going about their daily lives. And this, in Jerusalem, is normalcy."

The group met with several community activist groups, including the Jerusalem

Open House, one of the only Israeli LGBTQ rights organization located in Jerusalem. Students listened to deeply personal stories about how members of the organization came out to their families and how they address the difficulties of living in Jerusalem. The group also visited Beit Safafa, a neighborhood of Jerusalem located directly in the path of a planned Israeli highway that would divide the area in two, and met with local youth who organized legal opposition to the highway. Experiencing music was a highlight of the tour. The group visited the studio of Sabreen, a Palestinian band and non-profit organization that provides music education. Students were treated to a live jam session with Said Murad, singer and producer, using traditional instruments such as the Oud (lute), Shibabah (reed flute), and Tablah (skin drum). The group toured the Hand-in-Hand school, where kindergarten through high school students are taught using a model of bilingualism (Arabic and Hebrew), multiculturalism, and equality. The OSU students witnessed a music class where children sang songs in Arabic—but read the lyrics of songs in both Arabic and Hebrew.

Food and family were also memorable features of the trip. The group experienced a traditional Shabbat dinner with a Jewish family living in the Nachlaot neighborhood of Jerusalem—complete with fresh-baked Challah bread and beautifully chanted prayers. Later in the trip, students were invited to lunch at the homes of Palestinian families in Beit Sahour, close to Bethlehem, and tasted traditional foods such as Maftool and Hummous.

After the scheduled daily events, students were free to explore Jerusalem on their own. They navigated the crowded and hectic marketplace of the Old City, bartered with vendors, sampled local food, and met new people. In the evening, students spent time with local college students and engaged in thought-provoking discus-



Enjoying a traditional meal. Even French fries!

sions about the city. Dr. Amy Horowitz, Living Jerusalem Resident Director, summarized the experience of the trip, saying, "What I loved the most about this Living Jerusalem study tour was how much I learned from the students as they discovered the city. To say this was a sharp group of critical thinkers would be an understatement -- they relentlessly probed beneath surfaces, challenged conflicting narratives, and

confronted their own preconceived notions."

The Living Jerusalem class, International Studies 4200, is offered during Spring semester. The next Living Jerusalem study abroad tour will take place in 2015. More information regarding the course and tour may be found at <http://www.livingjerusalem.com/>.

ALUMNI Highlights



THIRD FEDERAL SAVINGS & LOAN Senior Modeling Analyst Kirk Harrington (1999)

learned R, and learned the programming language SQL (on multiple platforms).

The other thing I appreciated from my International Studies program is that it taught me to be a good world citizen and to give to my nation, community, and world whenever I had the chance. I have taken with me this spirit ever since I graduated. For example, I've served as a merit badge counselor for the Boy Scouts of America, Citizenship in the World merit badge. I have also done service for the Snow Leopard Trust which helps protect snow leopards in Mongolia (snowleopard.org). I have volunteered for many events (including international ones) through my various employers over the years and through my church. I've also had the opportunity to write for a trade and various business publications.

The International Studies program also help me enjoy the diversity of life which has boosted my desires to get more out of it. Thanks to this passion, I started an effort to promote the induction of Duran Duran (my favorite band) to the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (see www.ddttrh.info). Through this effort I have met people from all over the world, including professionals in the music and film industry. Further, I started a group called SAEG which stands for 'Statistical Analyst Effectiveness Group' which seeks to share with junior and intermediate-level analysts skills that they can use to advance in their careers. I have also been successful in networking with many business

professionals from all over the country (and recently out of the country in Sweden).

Thanks to my understanding of some international laws, I was able to marry a Canadian, help her become American, and had three really great children (ages are 8, 13, and 16). I have been able to help them enjoy life as well by being involved in activities such as music (my daughter plays the clarinet for Orchestra and Marching band and my son plays the French horn), science clubs, and many other unique activities (including international ones).

One other thing I've enjoyed since my graduation are travels to different US states (either with my family or by myself), including Boston, New Jersey, New York, Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, Illinois, Iowa and Pennsylvania. Along with these travels I have sought to appreciate the diversity of our nation and enjoyed the adventures I've had along the way.

I will always be grateful for my degree from Ohio State, and particularly my degree in International Studies. It has imprinted on me a passion for diversity, a love for research and writing, and the desires to enjoy life a little more every day."

"The International Studies major from Ohio State taught me to write, to research, and analyze. These skills have been invaluable to me in my current career as senior statistical analyst in the banking industry. I have worked in Credit Risk and Marketing for several major Midwest banks, including National City, Fifth Third, Key, and Third Federal. Further, I enjoyed working in International Banking (Letters of Credit) for both Fifth Third and Huntington Banks.

After I received my degree at Ohio State and worked a couple of years at Huntington Banks in the International Department, I went back to school at the State University of New York to obtain my Masters of Economics. I also continued some international studies, including (for example) studies of Asian Economies. To advance in my chosen career I felt like I needed the additional schooling and I was right. It was only one year later after I received my Masters that I was promoted from within at Fifth Third to be a Senior Credit Risk Analyst. Here I learned the valuable statistical tool, SAS, which helped me in the next several years of my work. I have since used SPSS,

UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT Oghogho Igodan (2011)

"My upbringing in Nigeria and South Africa led me to major in International Studies and concentrate in International Relations and Diplomacy at the Ohio State University. While at Ohio State, I participated in the John Glenn Washington Academic Internship Program, studied abroad in Dijon, France and volunteered with Buck-I-Serv in Belize City, Belize. My plan after graduation was to pursue a graduate degree in International Development & Foreign Policy and then work in the Foreign Service. However, during the last quarter of my senior year, I took an Anthropology Women, Culture and Development course which required a final research project. I decided to write a research paper on tackling maternal mortality and morbidity in Nigeria. It was during this time period that I realized that I no longer wanted to pursue a career in diplomacy but in global health. Thus, after graduating in June 2011, I moved to Washington, DC.

During my time in DC, I had internships with various organizations, including the Georgetown University's Institute for Reproductive Health, International Medical Corps and also worked part-time with the Global Health and WASH Team at World Vision. My experiences at World Vision, Georgetown University's Institute for Reproductive Health and International Medical Corps enabled me to gain experience providing research assistance for Requests for Applications/Proposals, writing proposals, reviewing program narrative reports, and working on global health projects funded by donors such as DfID, the Global Fund, USAID and OCHA.

In April 2013, I was offered a position at the U.S. Agency for International Development in Washington, DC. I



work as a Program Assistant supporting the President's Malaria Initiative in the Global Health Bureau. The President's Malaria Initiative aims to reduce malaria-related mortality in 70% of at-risk populations in sub-Saharan Africa. I provide programmatic and operational support to the PMI headquarters team and also support the Democratic Republic of Congo country team.

In the future, I hope to pursue a Mas-

ters of Public Health from the John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and also become a midwife. I am an advocate for women's health locally and globally. I strongly believe that every woman despite her age, geographical location, socio-economic status and ethnic background should have access to quality and affordable maternal health services. I still have a heart for diplomacy—global health diplomacy!"

Payne Fellow, Princeton University, Woodrow Wilson Center for Public and International Affairs

Herve Thomas (2003)



Herve Thomas joined the Payne Program as part of its 2013 inaugural class. Born in Orange, New Jersey, Hervé grew up in Port-au-Prince, Haiti where his passion for public service and international affairs evolved. Hervé holds a BA in Arabic and Development Studies from The Ohio State University. As a Boren Scholar, Hervé studied at The American University in Cairo in 2002 – 2003.

In addition, Hervé spent academic summers in Syria and Jordan and has traveled extensively throughout the Middle East.

As a Payne Fellow, Hervé currently attends Princeton University's Wood-

row Wilson School for Public and International Affairs where he is pursuing a Master's in Public Affairs and a certificate in Science, Technology, and Environmental Policy. While at Woodrow Wilson, Hervé plans to further build on his international experiences and deepen his background in environmental policy and economic analysis. He is looking forward to a career in the USAID Foreign Service. Asked about his experience thus far, he said, "Over the last year, I learned a lot about our namesake and I am honored to be one of USAID's two inaugural Payne International Development Fellows. I am inspired by late Congressman Payne's advocacy against genocide and on behalf of poor communities. As a USAID

Foreign Service Officer, I hope to channel his passion for public service as I work to sustainably improve the livelihoods of poor and underserved communities."

Prior to joining the Payne Program, Hervé worked in Hohenfels, Germany where he developed training materials and supported various training events for the Joint Multinational Readiness Center. Before this he spent nearly two and a half years in Afghanistan with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). In his capacity as Acting Water Team Leader there, he led and coordinated the agency's water portfolio. Additionally, Hervé took on various duties including Lead Civilian Representative for Zormat District, a remote, dangerous, poverty-stricken area of Paktya province in Southeast Afghanistan.

Before serving in Afghanistan, Hervé spent three and a half years in Iraq as Principal Consultant for Displacement and Migration with the U.S. Department of State, Senior Program Officer for the National Democratic Institute, Deputy Country Director for International Medical Corps, and Director of Assessments and Evaluation at RTI International.

DEVELOPMENT FRONTIERS INTERNATIONAL (DFI), SOMALIA Education Project Manager

Muhamed Farah Abdulahi (2012)



Muhamed Farah Abdulahi graduated with a major in Development Studies.

"I work with a local humanitarian organization that works in Somalia called Development Frontiers International (DFI). This organization empowers communities against poverty. They have offices in Kenya and Somalia. After I graduated from The Ohio State University in the spring of 2012, I was offered a job by the DFI country director in Somalia as an Education Project Manager.

Children are offered the opportunity to go to school for the first time in their

lives with an education project that I am leading @Uunsi Primary School.

My responsibility is the coordination and completion of the education project. I set deadlines for the contractors who are building schools; I assign responsibilities to the staffs that closely work with the Education Officer. I monitor and summarize progress of the project. I also prepare reports for upper management regarding the status of the education project.

The education project that I lead constructed schools in the Gedo region in Southern Somalia. So far, we have con-

structed nine schools, one school in Dollow town and eight in remote villages that didn't have schools before. There are now 1432 students who are enrolled in these schools and we support and pay incentives to 42 teachers.

I also engage students and parents and encourage parents to send their children to the school which is free for all. Bringing parents into a collaborative environment gives students the support they need to perform at their highest levels."