

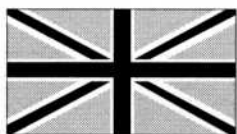
Study abroad is nothing unusual, but four Sooners pursuing graduate degrees at the London School of Economics—and finding some OU connections there—makes for an interesting year.

AT LARGE IN LONDON

by Lynn Grigsby



Four native Sooners and an adoptee don OU sweatshirts at The School, from left, David Wise, Melissa Barnes, Victor Mayer-Schonberger, Lynn Grigsby and Gene Frieda.



In September 1991 four graduates of the University of Oklahoma—all native Oklahomans—ventured across the Atlantic to begin master's courses at the internationally-renowned London School of Economics (LSE) in London, England. We felt we were making Sooner history. Attending a foreign university was not exactly

novel to any of us, as we each had experienced some travel and study abroad. However, we really did not know what awaited us academically at the legendary LSE, nor was there any way to prepare for the challenges, struggles and finally, the sense of accomplishment of that year.

Even with all our similarities, our academic backgrounds were quite different, as would be our academic careers at the LSE. My three colleagues had received their B.A.s from OU in May 1991. Melissa Barnes, a letters major from Lawton, was pursuing her master of science in European studies; David Wise, an Oklahoma City economics major, a M.Sc. in industrial relations; Gene Frieda, of Duncan, an economics and political science major, a diploma and M.Sc. in economics; and finally, a Bartlesville native, I had graduated from OU in May 1986 with a B.A. in journalism/public relations and a minor in political science and was pursuing a M.Sc. in international relations.

Upon our arrival, we were informed by an Oxford graduate that in London, the LSE (a branch of the University of London) is known as "The School." Sadly, "The School" is not famous for the Cotswold stone architecture, the splendid green grass, neatly planted flower gardens and rolling rivers one finds at Oxford or Cambridge. The LSE is crammed into six 1950/1960-style buildings in the heart of the financial center of Europe known as "the City" (one square mile in central London that ironically, in Dickens' time, was one of the poorest and most crime-ridden areas in London). An innocent passerby easily could overlook the LSE in its present location. Founded in 1895, the LSE does not compare in age

to the 700/800-year-old history of its academic competitors.

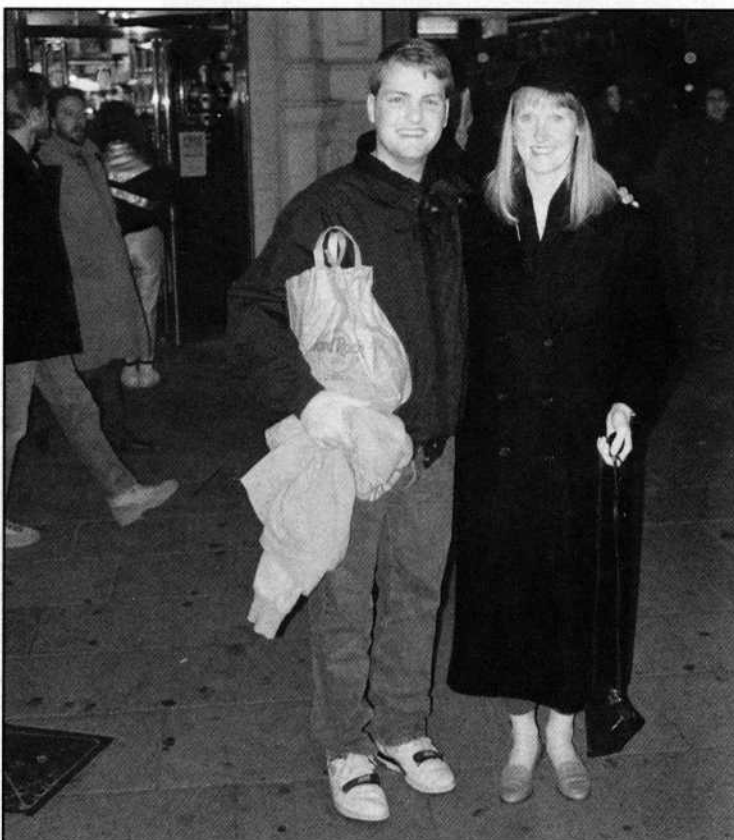
While not resembling Oxford or Cambridge in appearance, the LSE indeed carries the aura of academic excellence and ancient tradition associated with the "Old English School" of thought and teaching. And the LSE has its own sense of history and uniqueness. As Jacques Delors, president of the

Commission of the European Communities, said, "For years it has been a house of economic thought with its doors open to the whole of Europe and the world."

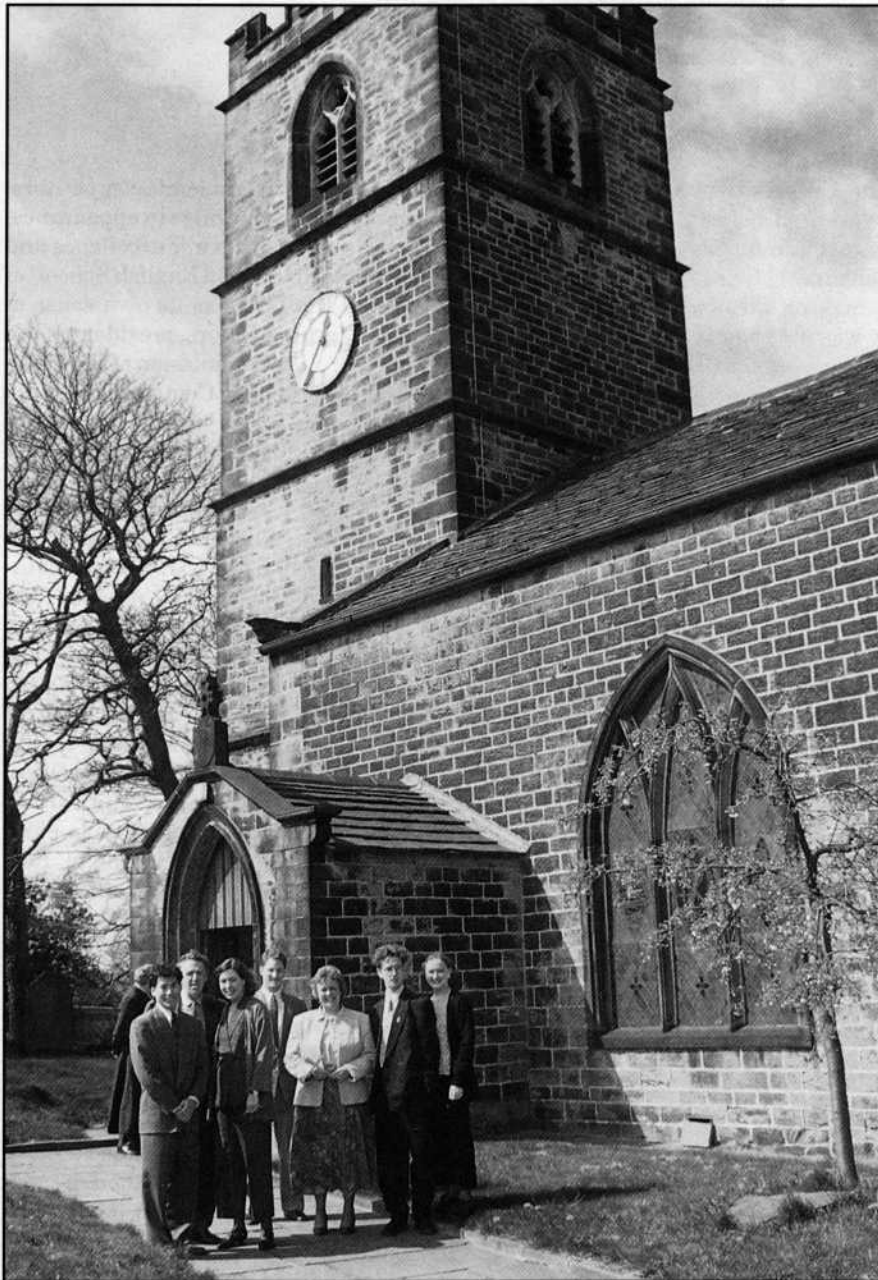
The LSE first was situated at 10 Adelphi Terrace, later the home of playwright George Bernard Shaw. In 1900, the University of London reorganized and established a Faculty of Economics and Political Science, hence the name The London School of Economics and Political Science. Today it is truly a multi-disciplinary institution. Much of the Western World's development in the social sciences has come from research carried out at the LSE. Ideologically, The School always has leaned a bit to the left. Although more mainstream today, during the late 1960s, the institution was home to some of Europe's largest protests and anti-war demonstrations.

Most of the student body at the LSE comes from abroad, literally the "crème de la crème" of their respective countries; upon returning home many former students go on to hold leadership posts in government and business. LSE alumni include five Nobel Prize winners in economics and 23 presidents and prime ministers from countries around the world. President John F. Kennedy was a LSE student for a brief period during 1935. At an international relations seminar I attended, the guest lecturer (a LSE alumnus) announced that he had been a classmate of rock star Mick Jagger in the 1960s!

Acclimating ourselves to our new academic environment was not easy. Comparing the LSE to OU or any other university in the States would be like comparing apples to



On his way home to Norman from a Rotary Business Team Exchange program, OU alumni staffer Tim Rasnic, left with Lynn Grigsby, stopped to visit the Sooner students at the London School of Economics.



On their breaks, the LSE international students headed for the countryside. Their British friends, the Wilson family, invited several of them, including Gene Frieda, center, to Easter services at old St. Leonard's Church in the village of Wortley.

oranges. The one-year master's and diploma courses consist of three 10-week terms beginning in October and ending in mid-June. The LSE catalog clearly states that the programs are quite intensive. Having come from the American system, the term "intensive" did not begin to describe what the year would entail.

At the beginning each of us was assigned to a "tutor" or "supervisor." This person came from the academic staff of

our respective departments and was there to guide us, answer questions and ultimately make sure we were progressing satisfactorily toward the dreaded examinations at the end of the academic year. The term "pass" carries a much weightier connotation at the LSE than that applied to testing in the States. The grading scale is simply pass or fail on one test for the entire term (although an occasional distinction may be awarded to the omniscient

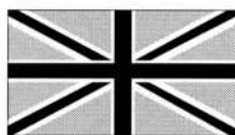
student). No midterm exams; no semester finals; basically no assessment until the very end.

With some help from our tutors, we had to develop a reading list—pages upon pages of books and articles chosen according to our interests and areas of concentration. One major difference we found was that while U.S. academics emphasize practical coursework, the LSE takes a more theoretical approach, emphasizing research. We all agreed that at OU (and perhaps in the American system in general) we were told specifically what we were responsible for reading and that is what we read. The English system is the complete opposite. No "spoon feeding" here. On more than one occasion, the frustrations of feeling as if we had no direction left us wondering if we would make it through the year.

There were no set lectures to attend. No one took roll, and no one checked up on us. It was entirely our responsibility to attend the lectures that we had determined were relevant to our courses or "papers," as they were known, always bearing in mind our examinations looming at the end. Each program is made up of a combination of mandatory core papers and optional papers chosen from a list of specific courses. In addition to core lectures for all papers, there are many related lectures. We could attend as many or as few as we desired.

In my case, "International Politics" was my core paper, and my options were "International Business" and "Asia and the Pacific." Because I also had other interests, however, I attended lectures on the global political economy and Russia. It was important not to attend too many lectures outside of our concentrations, since it was all too easy to fall behind. The truth was, we all fell behind from the very beginning, from the minute our reading lists had been distributed.

Besides lectures, each course had required seminars or classes—also very different from OU's system. These seminars consisted of small groups (ap-



proximately 10-to-20) that gathered at least once a week per course for about an hour and a half to discuss key points being covered in lectures and readings. We were expected to have completed our readings, as we were often called upon in class.

At least one or two times per seminar, we took turns actually leading the class discussions, bringing up thought-provoking ideas and questions to our fellow M.Sc. students and learning to think quickly on our feet. The idea was to be inquisitive, understand constructive criticism and most importantly to learn that in the art of debate, there is no right or wrong answer as long as it can be supported. Ultimately, these seminars were preparing us for our final exams, teaching us the many ways to go about answering a question, but always with absolute clarity—no beating about the bush.

One of the greatest advantages The School offered was the opportunity to attend guest lectures by leading international figures. Not long after we arrived, Professor Richard Layard returned to speak (he was on leave from the LSE department of economics to advise President Boris Yeltsin on Russia's transition to a market economy). Most of us found him fascinating, and although only Gene was studying economics, we were all keen to hear Professor Layard lecture on the importance of Russia's stabilization program. Subsequently Jacques Delors was at the LSE for the first annual Jean Monnet Lecture Series (honoring one of the key founding fathers of the European Community). As Delors was lecturing on the importance of monetary cooperation, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) talks were nearing collapse over European oilseed subsidies.

We were awed by the many internationally distinguished professors at the LSE and the research and negotiations taking place that undoubtedly would have future global implications. Being so close to the European Continent, watching events change course by the minute, listening to and being a

part of debates occurring right at the LSE gave us a unique international insight into the collapse of communism, the opening of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and the international trade scene. It was an exciting time to be in London and in Europe as a whole.

As we each progressed through the year, our course loads did not get any easier. The semesters were broken down into three, 10-week terms—Michaelmas, Lent and Summer. In between, we had four weeks at Christmas and nearly five over the Easter/Lent holidays. At a first glance, this sounds unbelievable, fantastic even!

"We were awed by the internationally distinguished professors at the LSE."

However, it was unbelievable in an unimaginable way. We soon learned that even if we studied throughout the entire holidays, we would still be behind.

The positive aspect of the "Old English School" was that it forced us to study continually, and in the end, we all felt that we had never before been so academically challenged, nor had we ever learned so much. The "cramming" system did not work here. By the examination hour, we either knew it or we did not. On the other hand, the negative aspect was the tremendous amount of pressure this system puts on each student.

For those of us unfamiliar with the British system, the year proved to be a great test of ability, courage and confidence. We were surrounded by students from Ivy League institutions and their equivalents in other countries, most of whom spoke three or four languages. There were students who had worked for their nations' central banks in Peru and Japan. There was a Cana-

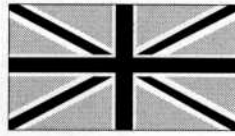
dian diplomat awaiting security clearance. We met a Russian who formerly worked for the Ministry of Propaganda and her husband who worked in a research institute in Moscow with Yegor Gaidar, the former acting Russian prime minister. There was a journalist from Taiwan who wrote for her country's leading political affairs magazine. The number of countries represented in the LSE's student body of approximately 5,200 was truly amazing.

In my international relations program, I met Viktor Mayer-Schonberger, an Austrian who had received a L.L.M. degree at Harvard in 1989. Ironically,

this led him to the University of Oklahoma law faculty, where he was sponsored by the Crowe and Dunlevy Visiting Professorship in International Law during the fall semester of 1990-91. Viktor spoke highly of his time in Oklahoma, where he remembered OU not as an "annex to the Sooners, but as a dedicated professional institution."

Although he already had a Ph.D. and a law degree from the University of Salzburg in addition to his Harvard degree and his own computer company, Viktor was determined to pursue his M.Sc. from the LSE because of its respected reputation in the field of international relations.

After exchanging a few words with Naomi Mobed, who sat next to me during my very first lecture, we realized that we both had lived in Bartlesville at the same time and had studied ballet under the same instructor. She even knew some of my younger brothers! Naomi came to the LSE to pursue her Ph.D. in international relations after receiving her B.A. in poli-



tics and a diploma in international relations from Mount Holyoke College in May 1990 and doing research at Princeton during 1990-91.

So, in a sense, there were six Okies at the LSE. Talking to Viktor, Naomi and all the other international students made the world seem very small and, at the same time, extremely exciting. At one point we even ran into OU Assistant Alumni Affairs Director Tim Rasnic (now the OU College of Law's development officer), who was returning home after spending six weeks in Manchester as part of the Rotary Business Team Exchange from Southwest Oklahoma.

Regardless of our different academic backgrounds and nationalities, we approached our examinations with a common goal. Melissa and I had three, 3-hour written essay exams spread over a two-and-a-half-week period. In addition, we each had to submit a 10,000-

word thesis. Gene and David had no theses; instead they each "sat" four, 3-hour exams.

We four Sooners survived, but unfortunately, not everyone did. Approximately 35 percent of the economics M.Sc. candidates and 25 percent of the international relations M.Sc. candidates failed during 1991-92. My most frightening task was mustering the courage to phone the department in mid-July about three weeks after my exams, give my candidate number and meekly ask, "Did I pass?" The longest 10 seconds of my life.

Because the American system does not always prepare students mathematically for the M.Sc. in economics at the LSE, many Americans—usually *only* the Americans—must first do the diploma program. Most students from other countries come from strong quantitative backgrounds. After successfully completing the diploma program,

Gene now is completing his M.Sc.

Living in England not only meant acclimating ourselves to the LSE but also adjusting to the English lifestyle, not to mention the gloomy weather and the daily chance of the "odd shower"—although we did have two weeks of summer sun in early May! The cool, damp climate turned us all into enthusiastic tea drinkers.

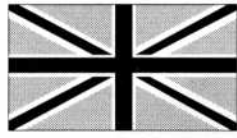
For most of us, the challenge of day-to-day living was a new experience in independence. There were no host families, nor were we all living together in a huge dormitory. Most students were spread literally from one end of London to the other, some in flats (apartments) and others in halls (similar to dormitories). We saw each other at school, but at the end of the day, we usually went our separate ways.

The cost of living was the greatest shock, especially after having lived in Norman, Oklahoma, and elsewhere in the United States. My one-room shared flat cost roughly \$1,000 a month, without central heating. I had to switch on a button and wait several hours before there was hot water, which, I add, was all electrically heated! According to *The New York Times* research published in the *Financial Times* in London last July, a pair of Levi 501 jeans costs roughly \$74 in London compared to \$35 in New York City; a Land's End mail order men's shirt is roughly \$50 in London and \$24 in NYC; a CD costs about \$22 in London and \$16 in NYC; and a Toyota Lexus sells for about \$74,000 in London and \$50,240 in NYC. To our dismay, as the year went by, the dollar became weaker against the pound, reaching an all-time low of around \$2 to £1 in late August.

Despite the living expense, London had many things to recommend it. There was the excitement of living in such a multi-national environment, having almost every type of ethnic food available to us (which was great, as traditional British cuisine tends to be a bit bland, usually consisting of meat, Brussels sprouts, carrots and potatoes).



Exams successfully completed, LSE students from India, Pakistan, England and the United States dine at Khans, their favorite Indian restaurant in Queensway, London. Flanking Lynn, third from right, are Sara, her sister from Bartlesville, and Gene Frieda.



A favorite was Indian food, very spicy and available on almost every street corner. Another was "Won Kei," the cheap Chinese restaurant known for its good food and the strong possibility of being ejected before the meal for any offense from poor manners to complaining about the service.

Another advantage we had in London was the availability of student theater tickets to the West End shows in Covent Garden, Piccadilly Circus and Leicester Square, staging the "biggies" like "Phantom of the Opera" and "Miss Saigon"; Royal Shakespeare productions of "A Midsummer Night's

positioned in a circular fashion, each having its own lamp, a certain area of desks catches the eye. In rows "K to P," Karl Marx researched his famous *Das Kapital* in the 1860s.

The ancient architecture and history of London, and of the United Kingdom as a whole, was like traveling back in time. Compared to America, the United Kingdom is so old, especially noticeable when hopping a train and heading for the countryside. London has its own unique character, but like any country, it is in the countryside that the nation's real culture and the people's warmth and kindness are ex-

where she resides. The next weekend at the international relations conference, we were told that cameras absolutely were forbidden at the church because some "fool" had taken the Queen Mum's picture during a previous weekend, and as a result, it would be a long time before she would appear again at her own church service.

For each of us, 1991-92 was a growing experience, a happy time we will long remember—for the many hours of academic study crowded into each day and for the chance to broaden our horizons and stimulate our thoughts in a new and challenging direction. It did not matter that we were surrounded by Ivy Leaguers. As graduates of the University of Oklahoma, we always proudly represented our alma mater (Gene wore his Sooner sweatshirt almost every day). We had our doubts in the beginning because the system was so entirely different, but none of us ever gave up.

The international exposure gained from our studies at the LSE was priceless. Whether in government or the private sector, one day we will apply our knowledge and skills from that year to our respective careers.

This will not be the last time a Sooner ventures to the LSE, but having four Sooners (and two fellow-travelers) there at once may well be the modern record.



"We always proudly represented our alma mater. (Gene wore his Sooner sweatshirt almost every day.)"

Dream"; Royal Opera productions hosting stars like Georg Solti, Placido Domingo and Kiri Te Kanawa; and ballets performed by such world-renowned groups as the Bolshoi Ballet and the St. Petersburg Ballet Theatre. To our pleasant surprise OU alumnus Chris Merritt was the lead tenor, "Arnold," in the Royal Opera's "William Tell." Gene and I had purchased \$18 standing-room-only tickets for this production but, because it was not sold out, were able to sit in \$180 seats. What luck! Fringe theaters (similar to off-Broadway) staged many equally good productions.

There were more museums and art galleries than we could possibly visit in a year. The famous British Museum, which houses a public library, was a favorite place to study and an inspiration of the greatest kind. Entering the main part, consisting of a tall domed ceiling and wooden desks

perceived. The ancient stone walls of Ireland and Scotland that so long ago were used to divide land among family members whenever a chieftain died, the many castles and lochs (lakes) of Scotland, the quaint English towns with their slanted wooden buildings dating back 1,000 years or more, the thousands of pubs and the strong sense of tradition, all contribute to the mystique and beauty of this island nation.

We shared many laughs throughout the year, like the time Naomi rolled all the way down the steps of one of those red, London City, double-decker buses, and no one gave her a glance. (Not funny at the time!) Then at the annual M.Sc. European studies conference at Cumberland Lodge (now a learning center but formerly a royal residence dating back to the 18th Century), Melissa innocently took a picture of the Queen Mother at the Royal Chapel on the grounds of Windsor Great Park

Editor's Note: At last sighting, Sooner Magazine's peripatetic correspondent Lynn Grigsby was working as a "temp" for the London Transportation System, while her fiancé Gene Frieda completes his master's at LSE. They are planning a London wedding in July. Melissa Barnes, with an eye on a career in international banking, is living in Tulsa while on the job interview trail. David Wise was accepted into the Southwestern Bell Telephone leadership development program, first assigned to Cellular One in Boston, where he will spend the next year-and-a-half as a manager in the customer services department.