

Window on



Robert Taylor

the World

Through a weekly public radio show, OU Dean Suzette Grillot gets behind the headlines to discuss global news with the people who are shaping it.

BY LYNETTE LOBBAN

The day after the Egyptian military removed President Mohammed Morsi from office during the country's protracted Arab Spring, the University of Oklahoma's Dean of the College of International Studies, Suzette Grillot, interrupted Georgetown scholar Samer Shehata in the middle of a Fourth of July barbecue. Would Shehata like to join her on her weekly radio show the next morning to discuss implications of the coup?

Shehata, who has been sought for his expertise on Arab politics everywhere from BBC's *World News* to *The New York Times*, agreed. "He was joining our faculty in the fall, so why not bring him in a little early?" Grillot says. She called her producer, and they scrapped their planned show to bring listeners an analysis of the hottest topic in the Middle East.

Grillot, by her own admission, is not a trained journalist. Rather it is her gut instincts, political acumen and curiosity that give her broadcast cred as host of *World Views*, a fast-paced and analytical take on current events as they unfold. The show airs each Friday afternoon at 4 and 6:30, and again at 6 a.m. Saturday, on the University of Oklahoma's public radio station KGOU, part of OU Outreach in the College of Continuing Education.

Brian Hardzinski, the show's producer and KGOU's operations director, says Grillot is a natural interviewer and has a way of putting people at ease. He says of her interviews, "It's like two friends chatting over coffee." Which is true, if your coffee klatch includes people like Richard Clarke, the counter-intelligence czar for the Bush administration, or if you and friends discuss the ramifications of a Soviet bailout for Ukraine over hazelnut lattes. If not, a weekly dose of *World Views* will fill you in. *continued*

World Views producer Brian Hardzinski looks on as International Studies Dean Suzette Grillot prepares to interview environmental scientist Erle Ellis. Ellis was invited to campus by the Anthropocene Learning Community, an interdisciplinary group of OU faculty who meet to study and discuss the new geological epoch. *World Views* regularly pulls its guests from the wide variety of experts and newsmakers who visit the University.



Photo Provided

One of the most memorable broadcasts for Brian Hardzinski, center, was when U.S. Senator and 1972 Democrat party presidential nominee George McGovern sat down with former International Studies Dean Zach Messitte in May 2012, for one of McGovern's last interviews.

Grillot says she never saw herself as a talk show host. “But, as a teacher, my job is to educate, and as a researcher, my job is to ask questions. And I’m naturally curious. I just want to know stuff,” she says. Often the hardest part for her is stopping within the show’s time frame.

Grillot’s style combines the best from two popular public radio hosts—part Diane Rehm, part Terry Gross. For the first half of *World Views*, Grillot is joined by International Studies Assistant Dean Rebecca Cruise, who specializes in security studies and comparative politics, and Joshua Landis, professor and director for OU’s Center of Middle East Studies. The lively roundtable discussions bring insight to the week’s top stories.

“In today’s media, you don’t get a lot of analysis, so we try to bring in a little more depth,” says Grillot. “We say, ‘OK, here’s what happened. Now, what are the implications?’ ”

On November 15, for example, the panel turned a spotlight on the troubling trend of wealthy private donors in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia funding Islamist extremists in Syria. Landis noted that the militias were making YouTube presentations to raise funds for anyone willing to take down Assad.

“They are publicizing donor campaigns like, ‘Buy bullets for snipers!’ ” interjects Grillot. “You buy mortar rounds, and you can earn points . . . it’s almost like getting frequent flier miles.”

“Kuwait, Saudi Arabia—who are the pillars of our policy in the Middle East—that’s the conundrum,” adds Landis, pointing out the diplomatic nightmare for the United States. While the governments of the U.S., Kuwait and Saudi Arabia all agree in theory on the ouster of Assad, the means of arming al-Qaeda to do the job is not equally embraced by all three.

On another broadcast, Grillot couldn’t help but notice that when nations began sending millions of dollars in aid to the Philippines in the wake of Typhoon Haiyan, China’s contribution of \$200,000 seemed, in her words, “a bit stingy.”

“I think China is showing that if you want China to be on your side, you’ve got to be nice to China,” offered Landis. Describing the complexities of geopolitics in terms of a kick starter for jihadists and a playground bully stiffing the skinny kid is completely refreshing, not to mention understandable.

After the roundtable has explored the day’s headlines, Grillot goes one-on-one with a special guest, largely a visitor to the OU



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TOP - Hardzinski works behind the scenes to make sure things run smoothly before, during and after the taping. He adds music, archived clips, and scripting to give listeners a complete package. BOTTOM - Grillot calls herself an “organic” interviewer. “I do a lot of research beforehand, and then just let the questions and answers flow.”



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KGOU’s *Oklahoma Voices*. With tandem degrees in broadcast journalism and history, Hardzinski sets the tone for each show—handpicking music, archived clips and writing scripts and promos—that are value added in terms of education and entertainment.

“One of the most historical moments for me was having George McGovern on the show,” he says. “We had him in on May 2012, and he died that October. It was one of his last, if not the last, best interview. It was living history here in the studio.”

Grillot does not always wait for newsmakers to come to her, but often confronts them head-on during her global travels for the University. In the summer of 2013, she was walking down a street in Istanbul when she literally ran into protesters in Taksim Square. Amid riot police and tear gas canisters, Grillot calmly took photos and shot video.

From a hotel balcony, she and Landis recorded their weekly roundtable discussion with the sound of rioters in the background. Cruise joined them on their last day in Turkey, and the three continued on to Jordan to explore possible partner universities for OU’s Arabic language program. Almost on a whim, they decided to visit a Syrian refugee camp in Zaatari.

“When we finished our interviews, we asked our driver if he could take us to the refugee camp,” Grillot says. “We got there, and it’s just chaos—the guards and the gates and all the traffic going in and out. We saw young boys walking up to the gate, pushing all their belongings in a wheelbarrow, and it’s all tents, as far as you can see.”

The OU contingent made it through the first gate before they were turned away by guards for lack of paperwork. They also asked Grillot to delete the photos she had taken on her phone, a request with which she partially complied.

“You definitely got a feel for the tragedy, of humans fleeing war into an environment that was also chaotic. Maybe there weren’t bombs and bullets raining down on them, but it was still a situation that was terribly insecure.”

When asked if she felt that she might be getting too close to her topics, she answers: “I didn’t feel threatened. Maybe it’s a false sense of security, but as an academic, I study the arms trade.

campus. “I’m amazed at the number and quality of international guests who visit OU,” she says.

People like Eric Maddox, an OU alumnus and military interrogator, who orchestrated the capture of Saddam Hussein. Or Ambassador John Limbert, one of the 52 American hostages captured in 1979 in the U.S. Embassy in Tehran. Or Pamela Olson, a Stanford physics graduate who, on her first visit to the Middle East, became the foreign press coordinator for a Palestinian presidential candidate. Each guest brings a personal narrative to the often-faceless realm of international issues.

“Egyptian comedian Ahmed Ahmed was one of our favorite shows,” says Grillot. “The students wanted to bring him here, and I said, ‘The college can help you do that, but I get to interview him. We co-sponsor international programs all across campus. That’s our job—to promote and to enhance international programming and part of the deal is we want your guests on *World Views*.’”

At 27, award-winning producer Hardzinski is the old-timer of the *World Views* team. He started as a student intern when former International Studies Dean Zach Messitte began airing internationally focused interviews as an occasional segment of



Joe Wertz / StateImpact Oklahoma

Grillot's co-host and assistant dean in the College of International Studies is Rebecca Cruise, left. Cruise's research interests center on security studies and comparative politics, with a focus on security community development, international organizations, post-conflict resolution, political participation and gender. "She's a natural," says Grillot. "She filled in one time for us, and I said, 'You're staying.'"



Suzette Grillot

Boys are boys throughout the world, no matter what hardships they and their families may be facing. These two greet Grillot's camera in typical fashion, during her visit to a Syrian refugee camp in Zaatari this past summer.

I've studied post-conflict security environments. I go into places where a lot of people wouldn't, and I've never felt threatened."

With all their international news coverage, Hardzinski and Grillot both chuckle that in 2013, they won the Oklahoma Associated Press Broadcasters first-place award for sports reporting. "Here in a state where you have college football and Thunder basketball, and all these sports stories night after night, Suzette wins for a story on Bart Conner," Hardzinski says.

In a candid interview, Conner, an OU alumnus and Olympic gymnast, talks about the 1980 American boycott of the sum-

mer Olympics. "The athletes had been invited to the White House by President Carter," says Grillot, "and they're sitting in the East Room when [National Security Advisor Zbigniew] Brzezinski pulls out a map and begins pointing, and they are told they will not be going to the Olympics. It was devastating for them at the time."

In addition to her duties as dean and talk-show host, Grillot teaches on the Norman campus or abroad nearly every semester. This coming summer she will teach a President's Leadership Alumni Class called "International Organizations in Europe," that will visit five major European capitals, as well as "International Community and Renaissance Art" in Florence, Rome and Arezzo—OU's international study center in Italy.

Asked if she could pick a "dream guest," Grillot doesn't hesitate. "President Boren," she says. "I haven't even asked him because he's so busy, but I would really like to have a conversation about how did President Boren get to be President Boren? He is such a genuine down-to-earth guy, but he's so brilliant and gifted and caring about students. That type of person is not at all common."

Grillot says she tries to end each interview on a positive note. "We take on a lot of tough subjects, but I try not to be overpowered by gloom and doom. I always like to ask our guests, 'What can we be hopeful for?' It's motivating. Committing to a weekly show is time-consuming, but it's also a lot of fun."

Lynette Lobban is associate editor of Sooner Magazine.

Editor's Note: Visit *World Views* at <http://kgou.org/programs/world-views>.