




Hofburg Palace

Vienna, Austria



All the World's a Classroom



Last spring four University of Oklahoma students were selected to receive the Boren Award for International Study.

This is how two of them spent their summer vacation.

BY DANIEL MESCHTER — I'm Daniel Meschter, a Sooner studying Arabic and economics. Over the coming year I have a straightforward academic goal: to attain superior-level proficiency, according to American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages standards, in speaking, reading, writing and listening in Arabic. On a more personal level, I hope to experience becoming an adult in a foreign country. After living with a Moroccan family this summer, I plan to rent an apartment in Meknes with a few colleagues. It'll be my first time home-hunting and paying rent out of pocket—independent living, indeed.

Perhaps I should tell you more about where I'll be spending my time this year. Suffice it to say these things about Meknes and Arab-American Language Institute in Morocco: the former is a grimy, lively city where Peugeots and Toyotas buzz through mighty gates Sultan Moulay Ismail built three hundred years ago; the latter just happens to be a few classrooms in a magnificently tiled house an alley away from Bab Tizimi in the old city. Let me instead tell you about some of my adventures off-program, where I put my Arabic to the test while exploring the country.

June 26-28

I decided to be bold and travel on my first weekend in Morocco. I took a bus for 60 dirham (roughly six dollars) on a three-and-a-half hour journey heading southeast from Meknes towards Er-Rachidia that would stop in Midelt. With temperatures hovering around 100 degrees Fahrenheit in Meknes, I thought that Midelt's situation at the foot of a High Atlas mountain spine would bring some relief and give me a chance to hike the Cirque Jaffar, a rough unpaved

road (a piste, as the locals call it) known among adventure off-roaders for its spectacular scenery.

My way back to Midelt was considerably more exciting than the trip to Jaffar. Mustafa, a local pickup driver whom I hired to take me part of the way along the sixty-kilometer piste, took a different route back, maintaining that I should see all of the countryside around Midelt. However, neither of us had anticipated the presence of washouts and rock-falls that rendered the way virtually impassable. Mustafa groaned and said that an unseasonably severe storm in the spring had likely carried the mud, rocks and tree debris to block the watercourses (wadis) that normally pass over the piste. So we got out and together shifted rocks and cast away tree branches to create a navigable path through the rubble. I put my shoulder to the back of the pickup when the going got too hard. Eventually, we cleared the debris and continued on our way. I was sweaty, mud-spattered, and tired—yet still Mustafa and I grinned at each other. I had gotten myself into far more adventure than I had bargained for.

How much more could await me over the course of the coming months?

July 17-20

A lot, as it turned out—Ramadan's end gave my colleagues and me a long weekend to take a break from the intensive class load (four hours of instruction and two of homework per day) and head to the beach, along with thousands of other Moroccans looking to escape the crushing heat of the interior. So, over Eid al-Fitr (literally, "the holiday of fast-breaking"), we traveled to Asilah, a city on



An adventurer at heart, Daniel began exploring Morocco almost the moment he arrived. As a student at the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages in Meknes, he has made good use of his Arabic language skills, pleasantly surprising those he encounters on his travels.

Morocco's Atlantic coast. While my colleagues headed to the beach, I struck off on my own towards the walled, seaside fortress that housed the old city of Asilah.

The Portuguese had rebuilt the walls after conquering the city in the late 17th century, and while light restoration has kept them from falling into complete disrepair, the fortress stands as it did roughly three hundred years ago. I decided to skirt the seaside walls, lured by the prospect of cold waves and intrigued by fishermen perched on rocks protruding from the water.

Traversing the rocks at the foot of the wall proved difficult, dangerous and painful. I found myself stuck on an outcropping of sharp rocks, the route around the southernmost tower unclear. Crabs scurried about my feet, avoiding my sandals to get from pool to tidal pool. I had no stomach to brave the long, slippery route back to where I had started, but could see no way forward.

"Sidi! Ya sidi!"

As I turned my head to see who had called out, I saw one of the fishermen lay down his pole and jump nimbly from rock to rock until he had come to where I stood. He bade

me take off my shoes, so I did. Then I followed his footsteps to the base of Asilah's ramparts, where he used the wall's stones as hand and footholds. Ignoring my aching feet, I followed my guide and presently came to some dry rock around the base of the wall. The ground here abutted a larger expanse of rocky land, where more fishermen and their friends grouped and chatted. After catching my breath, I looked at the man who had showed me the way and grinned appreciatively. We exchanged a few words. "دوعتو دي عت," I said to him, greeting him with Eid al-Fitr's traditional salutation. "هللا كرابت" he responded. I pressed a coin into his palm, a meager thanks for his help. He grinned, and held his hand to his chest in Moroccans' automatic gesture of thanks. Then he pocketed the money, turned back to the sea, and dove into the waves to swim back to his fishing post.

After a weekend on the coast, we returned to the baking heat of Meknes and our studies. Already I had begun plotting my next escape to cooler climes and resolved to visit Chefchaouen, the blue city of Morocco.

Luke Bartz is a Russian and international studies major who is working with the U.S. State Department in Vienna, Austria.

Luke Bartz looks across the Danube River to the Parliament House in Budapest, Hungary. This past summer, the OU Russian and international studies major has been taking advantage of his home base in Vienna to explore Europe.



BY LUKE BARTZ — I arrived in Vienna early in the afternoon on Sunday, May 31, jetlagged, excited and nervous as I've ever been. Work started for me in less than twenty-four hours, and though I've spent considerable time reading and writing about the State Department in my academic life, I didn't really know what to expect from life on the inside. As it turns out, unsurprisingly, working for the foreign policy arm of the world's most powerful country entails constant activity.

All in all, I found the work to be meaningful, fascinating, and, often, overwhelming. I would compare my first few weeks, with the torrent of names, acronyms, issues and events, to trying to drink from a firehose. I am interning at the U.S. Mission to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The OSCE is a multilateral organization consisting of 58 members (from Vancouver to Vladivostok, as they like to say) that focuses on promoting security and cooperation in Europe and the surrounding regions. Key issues range from

arms control and organized crime to free speech and the promotion of free and fair elections and financial stability. I spend most of my time researching, reading, writing statements/memos/briefings, attending multilateral sessions and taking notes, but scattered in among the everyday obligations were a few major events. One of these was the conclusion of the Iranian nuclear talks.

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I found out that Secretary of State John Kerry would be coming to Vienna a few days before he arrived on June 26, but we were instructed not to mention it outside of the office. The Iranian nuclear talks took place in Vienna both because of the scale of the diplomatic community here and because this city is home to the International Atomic Energy Agency. When the Secretary visits a city, he travels with a staff of about eighty. The embassy drops everything it's doing and moves to support where necessary.

Between wheels down and the actual agreement, I was warned probably a dozen times to remain alert and be ready

to help because the deal could be announced that morning/afternoon/evening. We were all set to jump on the train at 4 a.m. if we had to and rush to do whatever was needed. No one involved expected the visit to last as long as it did.

I awoke the morning of July 14 to a dozen emails, leading me at first to fear I had slept through everything. Luckily they were all just logistical messages instructing us to prepare for the announcement at the Vienna International Center at noon.

I arrived at the venue to find a mob of journalists jammed into the entryway like shoppers on Black Friday. Circling to a back entrance, I located the other embassy staff waiting for the bomb squad to clear the conference room. A number of delays held up events until eventually, forty minutes behind schedule, some of the world's most powerful politicians came out together and stood in front of their nations' flags. The photographers went wild—I would wager thousands of pictures were taken during the few minutes the ministers were on stage. The press was supposed to remain seated, but unable to control themselves, photographers kept jumping up, getting yelled at, dropping down, and then springing up again like a bunch of groundhogs.

After the ministers left the stage, EU minister Federica Mogherini and Iranian minister Mohammad Javad Zarif returned together and read a prepared joint statement, Mogherini in English and Zarif in Farsi. They left without taking questions.


A brief break occupied the time between the main statement and Kerry's press conference, during which I was amused to watch the majority of the U.S. delegation crowd around iPhones and laptops, five to a device, to listen to President Obama's live address. Then Secretary Kerry came out, present-



Meeting dignitaries is all part of a day's work for Luke Bartz, who is interning at the OSCE in Vienna, Austria. From left are Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, commander of U.S. Army Europe; Ambassador Daniel Baer, U.S. ambassador to the OSCE; an unidentified OSCE intern and Luke.

ed his speech, took three questions, and left. One of the questions was asked by the journalist sitting directly behind me and thanks to my proximity and Secretary Kerry's intense eye contact with the journalist, I ended up in a sudden staring contest with one of the most powerful men in the world. I don't know about him, but I'd call it a tie.

Only one outburst occurred, and that was from an Iranian journalist who was upset Kerry only took one question from the Iranian press. He was quickly shut down, however, and the conference was brought to a close. At that point, the other interns and I helped to take down the flags and seized the opportunity to take a few photos.

Despite only offering a bit of logistical support, it felt like I witnessed a meaningful piece of history that day. Throughout the experience, more than anything, I was inspired by how the embassy employees, many already doing the work of several people, somehow managed to add on the burden of a three-week visit by the Secretary of State and still keep everything running smoothly. I was also impressed and gratified that they made an effort to include us interns, and helped us understand that while support work may seem fairly basic, in the end it is one of the key tasks of every foreign service officer. 

Editor's note: *The Boren Award of International Study is named for OU President David L. Boren and funded by the National Security Education Program. The scholarship focuses on geographic areas, languages and fields of study deemed essential to U.S. national security. The four OU students were chosen from 750 applicants nationwide. In addition to Daniel Meschter and Luke Bartz, the other two 2015 OU Boren Scholars are Jeremy Allen and Barrett Shelley.*