



OU Cousins, a program started by President and Mrs. Boren, fosters friendships between American students and those studying at the university from around the globe. Each academic year culminates with the annual Barbecue and Western Party at the local Winery Ranch.

International Studies graduates *at home in the world*

BY WHITNEY BRYEN

Reforestation efforts are under way in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil. Future doctors and nurses are training at hospitals in Puebla, Mexico. Internships and culture collide at a former monastery in Arezzo, Italy. The university's newest college is sending Sooners around the world to study abroad and expand their perspectives.

The School of International and Area Studies combined with other international programs in 2008, and in 2011 were officially named the College of International Studies — a move inspired by OU President David L. Boren.

“He understood that we’re operating in a global environment economically and otherwise,” says Suzette Grillot, who has been dean of the college since 2012.

The college boasts nearly 800 students across three graduate programs, 10 undergraduate majors, 12 minors and the Global Engagement Undergraduate Certification program. The majority, about 450, are majoring or minoring in International and Area Studies, Grillot says. The college also oversees about 2,000 international students and 1,700 students studying abroad each year.

OU recently launched two new international study centers in Puebla and Rio De Janeiro says Grillot, with unmatched community engagement and a focus on bringing international students to Norman.

In Rio, OU students work with humanitarian and non-profit groups while studying reforestation and environmental impacts. Classes in Latin American politics, Modern Brazil, Portuguese and international activism are offered as part of the semester program.

Mexico has quickly gained popularity among students in the medical field with its medical, pre-medical and nursing programs. Education majors appreciate the Spanish language component as they prepare to enter bilingual classrooms.

Grillot says the study abroad program in Arezzo remains a popular choice for students, especially in the fields of engineering, chemistry and marketing. The college’s immigration services help students navigate international travel, visa requirements and other logistics that are increasingly challenging, she adds.

The Diplomat-in-Residence Program brings senior Foreign Service officers from the U.S. Department of State to campus to teach, mentor and advise students. The college is currently hosting Kristin Stewart, who has held foreign posts in Iraq, Panama, Senegal, Nicaragua, Mexico and Colombia.

“Even though President Boren set us up as an individual college, our mission is to work with people across the campus,” Grillot says. “Study abroad on the OU campus is a team effort.”

Recent IS graduate finds foreign service fascinating

Before graduating from OU with a degree in International Studies, participating in the Model United Nations in high school was the closest Lester Asamoah came to an international experience. Now he is on assignment with the U.S. Foreign Service in Mexico with plans to visit at least three new countries in the coming year.

Asamoah, 24, will wrap up training this summer for the position of vice consul at the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City, his first foreign post. Supporting American citizens who are detained, arrested, require welfare checks, have a baby or lose a passport are among Asamoah's responsibilities, but most of his work is aimed at securing the U.S. border.

"My primary role is interviewing applicants who are trying to obtain visas to travel to the U.S.," Asamoah says. "It's an important position for national security, of course, making sure people traveling to the U.S. are doing it correctly and fairly."

Asamoah was raised in Oklahoma City learning about Ghana, where his parents are from, and other cultures through his parents' experiences. But growing up in the era of the Iraq War planted a seed that cultivated a fascination, even a self-proclaimed obsession, with the Middle East.

High school debates and news coverage highlighted Asamoah's unfamiliarity with a culture that was shaping his generation.

"I realized I didn't know what was going on, but I did know that it was affecting our politics and I needed to learn more," he says.

Enter Middle Eastern Studies Professor Joshua Landis, director of OU's Center of Middle East Studies.

"He piqued my interest in Islam," Asamoah says. "He was a great professor and he was a big reason that I took Arabic. I obviously learned a language, but I learned about

the culture and the politics and Islam as a whole, too."

While he was at OU Asamoah studied abroad in Italy and Jordan, participated in the Washington and the World program, which led to his first internship working on public policy in D.C., and was chosen for the International Leadership Fellows Program where he worked on a research project with local state department professionals about Caribbean policing guidelines and improving relations with the region's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgen-



Earning a degree in international security from the OU College of International Studies led Lester Asamoah to a career with the U.S. Foreign Service in Mexico City.

der community.

In 2015, Asamoah graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in international security studies, and a minor in Middle Eastern studies.

Asamoah hopes to eventually work in the Middle East, but says he also is excited about studying and working in other regions of the world. Right now, he is fascinated by economic and trade issues in Latin America.

"The college taught me how to learn," Asamoah says. "I took history, literature, language and culture classes that helped me piece together how these countries work and to appreciate the culture and history of the area you're working in. The quality of classes I had at OU really helped me appreciate all those aspects of the places I'm going."

OU degree leads to career in law and international banking

Ten years after graduating from OU's College of International Studies, Sarah Steece still credits OU for broadening her world view and helping guide her to a job 5,000 miles from home.

Steece, 32, is an attorney at Credit Suisse bank in Zurich, Switzerland, where she feels at home surrounded by a diverse group of colleagues and clients.

"International Studies attracts people from all different backgrounds," Steece says. "Those class discussions were the most varied because everyone had different backgrounds and perceptions and that really added to the depth of our conversations. I learned a lot from that."

Steece still chuckles as she recalls her first day in German class. Language is a requirement for all OU students and Steece thought she was learning German from a native until her teacher explained, in German, that she was from Thackerville, Okla. That was the first time Steece could hear her teacher's native Oklahoma accent.

"I thought she was German until then," Steece says. "It made me realize that it didn't matter where I was from. I could travel and speak German like that, too."

Steece spent her senior year studying abroad in Austria, where she later taught English as a Fulbright teaching assistant. She says being abroad improved her language skills and helped her gain confidence and independence, while learning to adapt to different customs. Steece lived in an international student dorm with roommates from Turkey and Mexico who expanded her horizons and filled "gaps" in her understanding of history and the world, she says.

International Studies Dean Suzette Grillo was a role model and favorite professor of Steece, who points to Grillo's "awareness of the world" and guidance as an integral part of her education. Grillo encouraged students to unearth opposing viewpoints, but always helped them find common ground across diverse perspectives, Steece says.

Steece joined the German club and debate team at OU and graduated in 2008 with a double major in European Studies and German just as the new college was just beginning to form. She went on to receive her master's degree in European law from Humboldt University of Berlin and her Juris Doctorate from Cornell Law School. Looking back, Steece says it was in Norman, in Grillo's "EU, NATO and European Security"

class, that she realized how big the world is.

"OU really started me on the path to where I am today," Steece says. "I wouldn't be in Switzerland or working at an international bank without that exposure at OU. It was instrumental in making me aware of opportunities throughout the world."



Whitney Bryen is a freelance journalist living in Norman.



Now an attorney in Zurich, Sarah Steece delved into the German language and studied abroad in Austria while a student in the OU College of International Studies. "OU really started me on the path to where I am today," she says.