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Ambassadorial Scholar 09-10

The University of Aberdeen, Scotland

Final Report

The Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship and the experiences that I have gained from it have changed my life for the better. Not only have I had so much fun living and studying in Scotland, but I have furthered my academic and professional interests, made many contacts and friends, and have established a connection with Rotary. These nine months have been some of the greatest times of my life, and I am only too sad to see them have gone by so quickly. These friends, experiences, and lessons, however, will stay with me for the rest of my life.

In terms of my academic achievements, I have not gained a degree at this point in time. During my time abroad I have completed all the core modules to gain a Master's of Science in Strategic Studies. I have passed International Organizations and the Use of Force with a score of 16 out of 20 (a 9 is passing, 15 and above is considered exemplary). I also took Strategic Theory and scored 17 out of 20. These two scores placed me in the top 20 percent of my class. In the spring semester I completed all the work for European Security and Global Security. I am still awaiting the results of our exams. During the summer I will complete a 15,000 word dissertation on the topic of Hezbollah. If I pass this I will finally receive my degree in November. This experience will further my pursuits in that I will be in a better position to obtain a job in the field of international relations, hopefully focusing on terrorism and/or human rights. The knowledge I have gained from the courses is immense and has helped make me more educated in the field. Working with the great professors who are well established in this area has also been incredible. They have tried to help me get jobs and internships upon my return to the United States and will be great references in the future.

My academic experience hasn't necessarily changed my outlook on my host country or sponsor country but has given me many more perspectives to consider in terms of the international community as a whole. As a student of politics and international relations I feel it is vital to

understand the outlook of other nationalities. I've tried to live my life around this idea and have tried to partake in experiences that allow me to gain different perspectives. The experience I have gained through this scholarship has been fundamental in helping me achieve this. My course in Aberdeen focuses on war and the use of force. If I had studied this in the United States I would have never gained the unique perspective on war that comes from a classroom filled with international students. My class was comprised of only 5 or 6 Scottish people. The rest of the students were from countries such as Zimbabwe, Greece, India, China, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Latvia, and Germany, to name a few. I learned from them and they learned from me. Had I been in the United States, I feel I would have gained a very pro-US idea of war. I am so glad that I was able to have discussions with and read papers from all the varied perspectives that I did. This will be monumental in shaping how I view international relations in the future.

My experience here in terms of Rotary has definitely enhanced my outlook on my sponsor country. I had never been to Scotland before so most of my impressions of it were all based on stereotype. Being able to come here and interact with the local people allowed me to see their society and culture and all their wonderful traditions that they still maintain. My host counselor and his wife were very welcoming and showed me a side of Scotland I would have never seen had I just been here as a student on my own. We went to plays, concerts, and art shows. We also traveled around the country and saw castles, fields of flowers, beaches, and mountains. My host counselor tried to teach me Scottish Dialect and his wife answered all my questions about Scottish cuisine. Other members of the club were just as welcoming and showed me the sites when they could. Everyone answered my endless questions and didn't laugh at my ignorance of things such as rugby or the Eurovision Song Contest. Outside of Rotary I was able to attend Ceilidhs at my university and learn some traditional Scottish dances. I came to Scotland not knowing too much about the culture, but I've come away with a much broader perspective and an admiration for the culture and society.

I think my being here has definitely contributed to The Rotary Foundation's vision to advance world understanding, goodwill, and peace. As one of the only American's in my course I was able to field many questions on American foreign policy. Outside of class, I think I helped break American stereotypes through my actions. I conducted myself in a very friendly, outgoing manner and was eager to learn about other people and their cultures. I think I definitely helped to dissuade the "Ignorant American" stereotype and showed people that many Americans are

trying to better the situation of our country and how we're acting in the world. I feel these all tie into how I serve as an ambassador of goodwill. I came to Scotland with the best intentions and have tried to share my goodwill with everyone I've met. I've learned from my peers and the Rotarians I've met and will take back their thoughts of goodwill to my peers and the Rotarians from my sponsor clubs and other clubs I will visit.

I like to think I made a difference in how people view the US and our policies. I tried to show them that the United States is made up of millions of different people with different beliefs and ideas, and that when our country acts; there are always people who did not agree with it. I think it is vital, especially when dealing with international relations, to separate the government from the citizens when you're dealing with people on an everyday level. I really think I've worked to change their perspectives in that sense and not judge Americans by how the US government acts, or just Iranians by their government, or anyone for that matter. People are people everywhere, with the same ideas, desires, and needs. In my field of study this often gets lost and the people of countries are often not considered. I hope I changed some people's ideas in terms of this issue. Although I have not been able to do as much charity work as I had hoped, I think I made a difference in the lives of many of my friends and peers. I also do not think there was one particular experience that changed my life. Each day added something to my life that I hadn't experienced or hadn't considered before. Each day slowly changed my life and made me into the much more independent, thoughtful person that I am now.

In very general terms, I describe Rotary as a club of people who are dedicated to service and helping others. When I've talked about Rotary in the past I always discuss the incredible service projects of Rotary and all that Rotary has accomplished in its Polio Plus Campaign. The Polio Plus Campaign is probably my favorite Rotary projects because it shows just how much people can accomplish when they work together to achieve a common goal. I describe the Ambassadorial Scholarship as a huge international scholarship program for postgraduate study abroad. I tell people that the purpose of the Ambassadorial Scholarship is to further international understanding and goodwill amongst people of different countries. I would use the example that I give when I'm giving my presentations. It doesn't seem that unique for a person from the United States to go to Scotland and for them to learn from each other, but then a person from Scotland could go to South Africa, and a person from South Africa could go to China, and someone from China could go to Russia, and someone from Russia could go to Colombia, and

someone from Colombia could go to Ghana, and someone from Ghana could go to the United States. This endless cycle creates a huge web of relations in which people are learning about different cultures and creating an understanding. It is this grassroots level of understanding and interconnectedness that could help the world and make people understand each other.

The pre-departure orientation was great. There was an orientation on arrival in Scotland, but it was before my program started and therefore before I arrived. We did have a District meeting with the 5 Ambassadorial Scholars in our District in November which was nice. I think my host Rotary Club, especially my host counselor and his wife, did a great job in helping me acclimate to Scotland. I think this personal level of orientation was the most helpful for me at the time.

I think the advice I would give to future scholars would be to take advantage of everything while they are abroad. I know postgraduate study is extremely time consuming and difficult, and the types of people that are awarded Ambassadorial Scholars are the ones who want to excel in their studies. I think it is very important to take time away from studies to experience the country and meet local people. In my experience, my host Rotarians were very willing to take me around and show me parts of the country. I think I would advise other scholars to jump at these opportunities and really delve into the country and culture in which they are living. I would advise them to go to as many Rotary meetings as they can, especially at the beginning of the year as this will set up a solid relationship with the club. In terms of practical advice, I think Rotary does an amazing job at selecting candidates who will respect cultural differences and represent Rotary. From the other Ambassadorial Scholars I've met this year as well as the ones I know who have the scholarship next year, I don't think there is any practical advice about representing themselves and conducting themselves in a foreign country that they wouldn't already know. I think the only thing I would remind them is that everything they do (even if they are out at night) reflects not just on them, but also on Rotary and the scholarship as a whole.

When I return to the United States I hope to become a member of Rotary if I am invited. From all I've learned about Rotary through this process I think it is a worthwhile organization that I want to donate my time and effort to. Once I find a place where I know I will be settled for awhile I will try to talk to Rotarians of that area and see if their club could benefit from having me as a member. I have already recommended people to the scholarship (I have two friends who have been awarded the scholarship for the upcoming year). I would also like to participate in

orientations as I feel that I could help scholars and answer their questions and calm their nerves. Hopefully this scholarship is the start to a long and beneficial relationship between Rotary and myself.