Lasting Lessons

Following up with Recipients of the Forum’s Undergraduate Research Award
Brian Hoyer, Middlebury College (2004)*

“Nike Nikupe: Dependency, Reciprocity, and Paradoxes of Food Aid in Lugufu Refugee Camp in Kigoma, Tanzania”

Program: The School for International Training, Uganda and Kigoma, Tanzania (independent research)

“From my experience as an undergraduate, I am actually surprised to say that I am more or less right where I expected to be—living a highly unpredictable life working in Public Health and Humanitarian Relief. Although I did not expect to be drafting this brief bio while literally bouncing around in traffic in Port-au-Prince, I am not really too surprised as I’m sure quite a few students affiliated with the Forum would say of their own ongoing international work.

“My path has meandered a bit in and out of a few general topics and geographic points, but I have (almost) always enjoyed taking bits and pieces from each of these experiences. Starting with my undergraduate work (and focus of my Forum research award), my geographic anchor was East Africa and focus remained mainly on humanitarian issues through a more political/anthropological lens. I continued on this general path for the next few years and not too long after graduation from Middlebury College I began work with an international health NGO working primarily with partner organizations in Africa. After a year, I transitioned to the emergency response department where my experiences quickly grew in both geographic diversity and responsibility. I found myself working post-emergency settings from Liberia to Pakistan, Hurricane Katrina Mississippi to post-earthquake Sichuan, China. I was happy to learn more about the health sector, especially in humanitarian response, and kept this focus in graduate school. I attended the School for International and Public Affairs at Columbia University with a focus in economic and political development. I quickly came to realize that I needed more technical skills, and continued with a second masters at Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health with a Forced Migration track. During these few years I of course had plenty of jobs as a server, entrepreneur, a.k.a. “unemployed” and consultant, a.k.a. “slightly employed.” With several experiences in complex humanitarian emergency work and especially earthquake response, I made the quick decision to work in Haiti following the January 2010 earthquake. Within a few days of the earthquake I began work in Haiti and am still here two years later. Currently, I am the Country Director for AmeriCares and happy to say that I am very proud of the ongoing work our team does throughout the country supporting the health sector, responding to the ongoing cholera emergency and material assistance to health institutions throughout the country. I learn more and more every day and am very thankful for this current experience working in one of the more complicated corners of the globe.”

Brian learned to be flexible, and humble, as an outsider in a host country. “In my undergraduate research I faced some very difficult bureaucratic hurdles that are very similar to the types of things I navigate every day in my job. I try to keep the fatigue out, keep my standards high and stay focused on what really matters at the end of the project,” he says. “Getting access to information was difficult and being clear as well as appreciative in my requests for help was important. This remains true in my current international professional life.”

* year of award

The Forum on Education Abroad’s Undergraduate Research Award

The annual Forum on Education Abroad Undergraduate Research Award showcases rigorous and significant undergraduate research that occurs as part of education abroad programs. Every year, the award recipients present their research at a plenary luncheon at the Forum’s Annual Conference.

The Forum granted the first Undergraduate Research Awards in 2004, and has since honored 23 students whose projects span a wide variety of academic disciplines, program lengths and locations, and project types. The impact of education abroad on these students, however, has continued long after their undergraduate research was concluded.

The Forum recently contacted all of the past Undergraduate Research Award winners, and many of them shared how their lives have unfolded since the award and how they have been shaped by their experience abroad as an undergraduate. Their responses are insightful, amusing, and sometimes surprising.

“I draw on my past international experiences daily. I use techniques of communication, research methodology, networks of contacts and lessons of failure as well as success all the time.”

Brian Hoyer. 2004
Kevin McAdam, Boston College (2004)*

“The Human Right to Water: Market Allocations in a World of Scarcity”
Program: Kent State University, Geneva, Switzerland

“I graduated from Boston College in May 2004. I spent 2005 in Valparaíso, Chile, as a Rotary Ambassadorial School and earned a “Diplomado” in Poverty and Development Studies from La Universidad Alberto Hurtado. I entered law school at the University of Colorado in 2007, shortly after marrying my wonderful wife, Christine. I graduated in May of 2010 and was sworn in later that year after passing the bar exam. I worked for one year as a law clerk to the Honorable John R. Webb on the Colorado Court of Appeals and recently began a two-year clerkship with the Honorable Christine M. Arguello at the United States District Court for the District of Colorado. My wife and I have two delightful children, ages three and one.”

Kevin’s work on water scarcity in Kenya and Switzerland provided him with a blend of theoretical and practical learning that now benefits him professionally. “My time studying abroad taught me the importance of first-hand experience combined with disciplined academic reflection. I spent part of a summer working on a water irrigation project in Kenya after my freshman year in

“MY TIME STUDYING ABROAD TAUGHT ME THE IMPORTANCE OF FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE COMBINED WITH DISCIPLINED ACADEMIC REFLECTION.”
Kevin McAdam, 2004
Emily Kanstroom, Brown University (2005)*

“Justifying Torture: Explaining Democratic States’ Noncompliance with International Humanitarian Law”

Program: Institut d’Etudes Politique (Sciences Po), Paris, France

After graduation, Emily returned to Paris for a year, teaching English to elementary school students and interning at the International Federation on Human Rights in the North Africa/Middle East Division (FIDH), where she conducted further research on captured suspected terrorists and human rights violations. She next interned for an executive search company working with the fashion/luxury and legal industries, sponsored by the French-American Chamber of Commerce. She entered Boston College Law School in the fall of 2007, where she was able to continue her research in student groups, volunteer in detention centers near the Mexican border, and return to Paris through the International Arbitration group of an American law firm as an international trainee. She was elected managing editor of the International and Comparative Law Review (ICLR) where she published a student Note entitled “Sans-Papiers, Sans Recourse? Challenging Recent Immigration Laws in France.”

As a summer associate at a Boston law firm, Emily used her skills in French on a pro bono political asylum case for a client from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Of this experience, she says, “I translated between the client and the attorneys; although our French was not entirely the same, as the months went by, we learned each other’s vocabulary and accents. The moment came, after an enormous effort by the firm’s attorneys, when the final hearing drew to a close. As we all held our breath, the immigration judge granted the client asylum in the United States. As everyone looked stunned and some began to cry, one of the attorneys realized the client did not understand what had happened – she asked the judge for permission for me to approach and explain...that is how I had the honor of telling this true survivor that he would never again face torture, that he and his family would be safe – that he could stay.”

Emily graduated from law school in 2010, and has passed the bar in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. She has completed clerkships at the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court and the United States District Court for the District of Massachusetts, and joined Mintz Levin as an Associate in January 2012.

Emily writes: “I think my research and experience studying abroad changed my path personally and professionally in some ways that are evident and some that are less obvious. Of course, I would never have returned to Paris and had the formative cultural and professional opportunities I did. But the experience of studying abroad also changed my perspective on the opportunities available to me even when my feet are firmly planted in Boston; I don’t know that I would have gone to Harlingen, Texas during my first year to see for myself the detention facilities, for example. I certainly know I wouldn’t have been able to write the law review Note that I did, or have been able to speak for a traumatized client who needed help. I think even learning to research the way I did in Paris has helped my legal research skills – though I rarely work on international law topics these days, I enjoy the process of research as problem-solving in ways I certainly didn’t before studying abroad.”

Colin Smith, Brigham Young University (2005)*

“Telling Stories: Past and Present Heroes;” and “Rainbow Nation’s Ubuntu: Discovering Distinctness as a Spectrum Through South African Literature”

Program: Brigham Young University, East London, South Africa

“Since graduation I became a teacher, an assistant principal, and now am a principal of a public charter school that I designed and have opened to our first class of kindergartners! I am living and working in New Orleans, Louisiana, and enjoying my staff and students very much,” Colin writes.

The most transformative aspect of his time in South Africa was the opportunity to form meaningful relationships with its people, from translators to local students. “My studies in South Africa—and mostly the people in South Africa—left me with the conviction that expectations are prophecy and never more so than in the classroom,” he explains. “Whether high or low, the things we expect of our children most often come true.” Colin makes a concerted effort to remember that all decisions he makes "must have children’s best interests in mind.”

“MY TIME IN SOUTH AFRICA LEFT ME WITH THE MORAL IMPERATIVE TO ENSURE THAT ONE DAY, ALL CHILDREN WILL HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO ATTAIN AN EXCELLENT EDUCATION.”

Colin Smith, 2005

Emily Kanstroom, 2005

“STUDYING ABROAD AND THE RESEARCH I DID DURING THAT TIME TAUGHT ME TO PERSEVERE THROUGH FRUstration, I THINK IT TAUGHT ME TENACITY IN MY APPROACH, AND I THINK IT TAUGHT ME TO FEEL CHALLENGED BUT NOT FRIGHTENED OR DISHEARTENED WHEN I COME ACROSS SOMETHING I DON’T UNDERSTAND.”

Emily Kanstroom, 2005
Hannah Arem, Cornell University (2006)*

“The Faces of Globalization”  
Program: IFSA-Butler, Buenos Aires, Argentina

Hannah spent the first year after graduating from college working at The Foundation for International Medical Relief of Children (FIMRC), where she helped to start a fully functioning primary care clinic in El Salvador. Hannah then attended Johns Hopkins University for a Masters in Public Health, incorporating an internship at the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta and thesis research in Uganda. Following her return, she interned at the National Cancer Institute's Division of Cancer Epidemiology and Genetics, and is currently completing a program of study at Yale University’s School of Public Health and researching nutritional risk factors for pancreatic cancer at the National Cancer Institute's Nutritional Epidemiology branch.

“Studying abroad furthered my undergraduate path by starting me off on independent research,” she says. “It helped me develop language skills and independence, as well as building my sense of adventure. It also played into my later interest to get a masters degree in international health and helped me define where I saw myself for my career.”

When asked about the most pivotal learning experience as an undergraduate abroad, Hannah said: “Living with a host family and trying to immerse myself in the culture was quite a challenge. The intercultural differences were striking. I think that the most useful thing has been my Spanish language skills- my fluency in Spanish allowed me to take opportunities to travel abroad on behalf of FIMRC and to better communicate with locals.”

Demetri Blanas, Columbia University (2006)*

“The Cultural Implications of Primary Healthcare and the Declaration of Alma-Ata: The Health District of Kédougou, Senegal”

Program: School for International Training, Kédougou and Dakar, Senegal

“I returned to Senegal 7 times after studying abroad there in 2006. I completed an undergraduate thesis in comparative literature analyzing the only Wolof novel ever written (one of the national languages), and another thesis examining the effects of agriculture on a population of endangered trees (*Pterocarpus erinaceus*) in Senegal. I subsequently returned to work with a Senegalese doctor, Youssoupha Ndiaye, at a government health clinic in Saraya (southeastern Senegal) for a year. During that year, Dr Ndiaye and I created a non-profit organization, The Kendeya Community Health Partnership, that aims to support primary care in Senegal. We have raised approximately 60,000 dollars since that time through grants from the Hesperian Foundation, Columbia University, private donations, and a student practicum program which brought approximately 30 students to do practicum projects in Senegal. This funding has supported installation of solar power at the health center in Saraya, increased vaccination coverage, the construction of a medical laboratory, the construction of housing for health staff, HIV/AIDS outreach and screening, and we recently opened a new primary care clinic in Bargny, a peri-urban town near Dakar. In 2008, I began medical school at Mount Sinai School of Medicine, and in 2010 I completed an MPH examining a home-based malaria management program in southeastern Senegal and wrote my thesis on this topic. I will be returning to Senegal in January to initiate a research project through a grant from the Mount Sinai Department of Global Health. I am currently completing a research year through the Doris Duke Clinical Research Fellowship and am between my third and fourth year of medical school.”
Several aspects of Jason’s experience as an undergraduate abroad continue to inform his day-to-day work. “First,” he says, “the experience of learning to communicate across cultures as I did studying with teachers and students from around the world at Sciences Po has been absolutely invaluable in my career. Studying abroad teaches you to be able to not only think about an issue or problem from a friend’s, client’s or colleague’s perspective, but actually be curious about and comfortable with the idea of getting deeper to ask WHY they would think about an issue in a given way. The other key insight I got from studying abroad is the importance of curiosity in everything you do. Learning to analyze, appreciate and question things that are foreign and unfamiliar in my academic research has definitely made me more engaged and willing to take on new responsibilities and challenges in my career.”

Lauren Gersbach, Butler University (2007)*

“Resistance vs. Resilience: Alternative Mechanisms to Survive Severe Cyclones in Mabi Type 5b Rainforest Tree Species of North Queensland, Australia”

Program: The School for Field Studies, Queensland, Australia

“After graduating from Butler University in Indianapolis in May 2007, I worked for the Bureau of Land Management in Grand Junction, CO as a Conservation and Land Management Intern. I returned to Indiana in the fall of 2008 to attend graduate school at Indiana University’s School of Public and Environmental Affairs. As a dual degree student, my graduate studies focused on applied ecology and sustainable development, and I graduated in December 2010 with both a Master of Science in Environmental Science and a Master of Public Affairs. While at IU, I served as the Communications Fellow for the IU Office of Sustainability… I also held a teaching assistantship and worked as a research assistant in Morgan-Monroe State Forest. Following the completion of my graduate program, I began a one-year fellowship for the City of Hamilton, Ohio (my hometown), specifically with the City’s municipally-owned utilities. I am excited to see what the future has in store following the completion of my fellowship program later this year.

“My goal in studying abroad with the School for Field Studies (SFS) was to conduct ecological research abroad while contributing to something much greater than the narrow scope of my single project,” Lauren says. “However, as a biology and chemistry undergrad student, the only answer I could see to helping local communities address environmental issues was to provide the science. The most valuable lesson I gained from conducting research abroad with SFS was a deeper appreciation and understanding of the broad, interdisciplinary solutions needed to address environmental problems. My SFS experience allowed me to become immersed in understanding the ecological processes of my surroundings, but also exposed me to the socioeconomic, policy, managerial, and community outreach and educational aspects of environmental work. It is no small testament to the value of that lesson when I say it has influenced all of my academic and professional decisions since leaving Australia.”

“While studying abroad, my sister sent me a card with a quote from M. A. Radmacher on the front: I am not the same having seen the moon shine on the other side of the world. I remember reading the quote for the first time and thinking I couldn’t have put my experiences in Australia any more simply than that. Now, more than five years removed from my semester abroad, I still feel the exact same.” Lauren Gersbach, 2007
Brittany Murlas, University of California, Berkeley (2007)*

“Mother Tongue Literacy in Ghana: A Sociolinguistic Approach”
Program: University of California Education Abroad Program (EAP), Ghana

Brittany has lived, worked, and traveled in many new places and projects since her undergraduate years. Prior to graduation, she went to Honduras, working at a non-profit education organization while helping a University of California at Berkeley professor with a large-scale study. During an elected fifth year of college, she completed a thesis on her work in Honduras, and after graduating, volunteered and later worked as the Development Director at a non-profit disability organization in Guatemala, the Transitions Association, until June of 2010. After a road trip around the United States with her partner, Brittany worked on a small organic farm in the Argentine Patagonia before moving to London to work for World Emergency Relief (now called Emerge Poverty Free), a for-benefit funding organization. Currently, she is living in Jena, Germany, with her partner, who plays professional wheelchair basketball. She is considering starting a business or entering the education abroad field.

Brittany says that her most valuable learning experience from her time abroad was the realization that, while abroad, one is “always in the student’s seat. It is not possible to equitably study (or teach in) a foreign place without realizing that you are the one that’s foreign, and that you’re there to learn... Rather than passing judgment, our job as travelers is to take it all in,” she says. Her time in Ghana taught her how essential it is to leave room for the unexpected, in large tasks like research as well as in smaller aspects of everyday life. Going abroad her third year of college, she says, “showed me constant planning and anticipating of the future can be a detriment. Now I know the importance of leaving space for my own personal development.”

“I will always remember the advice of an education abroad advisor before I took off for Ghana: “The top three characteristics of a successful study abroad student are (1) a sense of humor, (2) low task and goal orientation, and (3) ability to fail.”
Brittany Murlas, 2007

Ryan Eley, Worcester Polytechnic Institute (2008)*

“Two Sides to Every Story: A Case of Environmental Communication in Mae Moh, Thailand”
Program: Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Mae Moh, Thailand

Ryan completed a second project as a student at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) in Costa Rica. He spent the first several years after graduation working for a heavy construction company, Kiewit Infrastructure, contributing to estimates and proposals for new construction projects throughout the United States, working as a field engineer for a rehabilitation project for the Long Island Railroad, and estimating power plant construction across the country. He is currently enrolled part-time in a Suffolk University MBA program, while working full-time for Sleeping Dog Properties, a high-end property developer in downtown Boston.

Ryan’s most valuable learning experience abroad was seeing how other people lived and interacted with each other. He says, “As I lived and worked within those cultures, ate the food, and observed the religions I became a little wiser. I think I’m a much more open minded and easy going person now than I was prior to my 2008 study abroad trip to Thailand. I recognize now that a lot of the day to day problems that arise at work, school or in my personal life really are not so bad in the grander scheme of things.”

"I reflect back on my college experience in interviews and in my personal life and the shining star that I always discuss is my time in Thailand and Costa Rica.”
Ryan Eley, 2008
**Timothy Grant, Worcester Polytechnic Institute (2008)**

**“Two Sides to Every Story: A Case of Environmental Communication in Mae Moh, Thailand”**

**Program: Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Mae Moh, Thailand**

Timothy had begun graduate school at Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) when he accepted a position at Shawmut Design and Construction’s Virtual Design and Construction Department, a branch of the Field Operations, in Boston, MA. “Currently, I work on various construction projects, offering virtual construction and administrative services to the project team,” he tells us. “I plan on returning to grad school for night classes in the near future to finish off my master’s degree in construction management.”

For Timothy, “the opportunity to study abroad was a wakeup call to get in gear and prepare for a career path. Studying abroad removed me from that isolated academic setting and allowed me to shift my focus from ‘getting the grade’ to ‘doing the work.’ I never felt like I was a scholarly type and the chance to apply my education in a real world setting gave me the drive to go out and establish my career path.” Studying abroad taught him, first and foremost, that “even the seemingly simplest problem has an incredible amount of factors influencing it. Regardless of which side may be right or wrong, my experiences have taught me to approach every situation from a more holistic viewpoint.”

**Alexandra Kulinkina, Worcester Polytechnic Institute (2008)**

**“Two Sides to Every Story: A Case of Environmental Communication in Mae Moh, Thailand”**

**Program: Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Mae Moh, Thailand**

“After graduating from Worcester Polytechnic Institute in the spring of 2009, I assumed a full-time environmental engineering position at Woodward & Curran, an environmental consulting firm where I had been an intern for 2 years. After working full-time for two years on primarily municipal drinking water/wastewater/stormwater projects, I decided to take my career in a slightly different direction. I am currently in my first year at Tufts University, pursuing a Masters of Science degree in Environmental Health, funded in part by the American Association of University Women (AAUW) fellowship. I hope to continue working in a water related field applying my engineering knowledge to alleviate some of the health burdens of unsafe water at home and abroad.”

From her time in Thailand, Alexandra learned the importance of engaging the local community in one’s work. This relates to the significance of education as well as more concrete outcomes: “While the engineer in me wants to provide tangible technical solutions, I realize that they stand no chance without the more time consuming and more difficult to achieve education component,” she says.

“I think the most valuable learning experience of my research in Thailand was working with people. I have learned that it can be extremely challenging and frustrating but I have seen first hand on several occasions how important it is to engage the community in which you are working. I really believe that the best results are produced by living in the community and drawing on the local knowledge. I hope that in the future I am able to have a job that gives me a chance to live in the places I am working for several months, interact with the local people and understand the culture.”

**Jeremy Martin, Middlebury College (2008)**

**“Uruguay’s Choice: Boost the Economy or Bust the Environment – An Investigation of the Various Impacts of Botnia”**

**Program: Middlebury College, Montevideo, Uruguay**

Shortly after completing his undergraduate degree, Jeremy moved to Boston to work for Transparent Language, a software company specializing in online language products for the US government, educators, and other consumers. Since the summer of 2010, he has been living in San Francisco and working for Blackboard Mobile. At Blackboard, he and his team develop and implement mobile applications for higher education institutions.

Being out of his comfort zone for an extended amount of time was Jeremy’s most valuable learning experience from abroad. His time in Uruguay taught him the importance of intelligent risk-taking for professional success, a lesson he applies to technology and innovation in his current career path. “Travel research revolves around risk like the Earth orbiting the Sun,” he says. “I have always been a risk-taker and my abroad experience proved that there’s treasure to be found when you put yourself out there and give it everything you’ve got. I urge people to be careful about what kinds of risk they take, however; there’s an extended family of risks, some of which can flame global crises whereas others can just as easily extinguish as healthy solutions. Learning the difference will make anybody the owner of proud fingerprints.”

“I really believe that the best results are produced by living in the community and drawing on the local knowledge.”

Alexandra Kulinkina, 2008

“My abroad experience proved that there’s treasure to be found when you put yourself out there and give it everything you’ve got.”

Jeremy Martin, 2008
Alexandra Sanseverino, Worcester Polytechnic Institute (2008)*

“Two Sides to Every Story: A Case of Environmental Communication in Mae Moh, Thailand”
Program: Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Mae Moh, Thailand

“After graduating from WPI, I began medical school at Cornell in New York City. I am now a third year medical student… I also work for the New York Firefighters Skin Bank, harvesting donor skin for burn victims.”

Alex believes that her research abroad helped her in applying to medical school: “I was able to discuss a unique learning experience in Thailand that had truly become a passion for me. This became an avenue for showcasing not only the skills and tools I learned while doing my research, but also the excitement and interest that can be generated when involved in something that genuinely fascinates you.”

“When everyone has impressive, and sometimes padded, applications, often what can set you apart is the way in which you are able to talk about your experiences.”
ALEXANDRA SANSEVERINO, 2008

“My most valuable learned lesson is that of avoidance of premature closure,” she continues. “I went into the project with a preconceived notion of the situation… It became clear during our research, that while it was obvious now… I find this to be a skill relevant in medicine as well. Premature closure is one of the greatest risks of misdiagnosis.”

Reynolds Whalen, Washington University, St. Louis (2008)*

“Haba na Haba and the Use of Drama for Community Education and Development”
Program: Saint Lawrence University, Nairobi, Kenya

“Upon graduating, I lived and worked in Rwanda for seven months as a videographer and documentarian. My primary task was to capture the work of Millennium Congregations, an interfaith non-profit connecting communities in the United States with Millennium Village projects (a program of the Earth Institute at Columbia University). At the end of my time in Rwanda, I traveled around the country with a photographer from Brooklyn. We visited churches, memorials, refugee camps, large gatherings of mourners, and many other activities relating to the event. The most provocative moment of that experience was interviewing high-level security inmates at a prison for genocide perpetrators. During this time, I learned the true meaning of forgiveness and reconciliation. I will never forget the story of one repentant inmate who told me that the school fees for his children were now being paid by a priest whose entire family he had killed.”

“After my time in Rwanda, I spent two years teaching first grade in the South Bronx with Teach for America. This was the most challenging thing I have ever done, and probably ever will do. I learned an incredible amount during this experience, far more than can be summed up here.”

“I now run an organization called Performing Arts Abroad that offers study abroad, internships, and volunteer experiences in music, dance, and theater. This position transpired directly from contacts I made at the Forum on Education Abroad in 2009 when I presented as a recipient of the undergraduate research award!... My life now revolves around study abroad. I am now responsible for 36 different programs abroad in 10 different locations! Not only did my research and experience studying abroad catalyze my career, it catapulted it!”

“The most valuable learning experience I had while conducting research was forming close relationships with performing artists in the slums of Nairobi, Kenya. This was the first time in my life I saw a clear merging of my dual interests in performing arts and Africa. Here were people living in unthinkable circumstances but striving every day to change the way people think about their lives, solely through the use of performance. When people hear the drums, they gather. When they are gathered, they receive clear and important messages about social issues of public health and safety. These messages are transmitted through characters that represent the audience members themselves. The actors playing the characters are members of the community, and they realistically portray the daily struggles of the local people. This was the first time I truly understood the power of theater and performance to tell a compelling story that could be used for positive change.”

“One month after receiving the undergraduate research award, I was able to bring a group of 9 artists from this organization to the United States for two weeks. We visited classes, performed on stages, attended and led lectures, collaborated with a prison performing arts group, participated in drum circles, and conducted impromptu performances in communal spaces. During this time, I became inspired by the incredible amount of knowledge and experience being shared amongst both parties. I began to recognize the potential of the performing arts to highlight cultural exchange and understanding.”

“Since that point, my life has been focused on sharing this vision with as many people as possible. I now strive to offer students and participants a unique window into their abroad experiences through the stories and performances of the local culture. Society is built on stories, and Performing Arts Abroad seeks to get students actively involved in telling those stories and understanding their own stories in a new way. My research abroad as an undergraduate has directly led me to where I am now.”

“THIS WAS THE FIRST TIME I TRULY UNDERSTOOD THE POWER OF THEATER AND PERFORMANCE TO TELL A COMPELLING STORY THAT COULD BE USED FOR POSITIVE CHANGE.”
REYNOLDS WHALEN, 2008
Sun Jin Lee, Yale University (2009)*

“Amazonian endophytes as a platform for discovery of novel antiinflammatory therapies to inhibit pathogenic processes relevant for preterm birth”

Program: Yale University Rainforest Expedition and Laboratory, Bolivia and Peru

“I took a year off after graduation, continuing on my research that I did during my undergraduate years, while at the same time applying for MD-PhD programs. At the end of the year off, I was lucky enough to start school again, pursuing my medical degree at Harvard and my PhD at the University of Cambridge and the NIH, through the NIH-Cambridge MD-PhD Graduate Partnership Program. I plan on continuing research similar to that which I did in college, and it will likewise have an international component.”

Her research abroad taught Sun that unique information, even the unexpected, can be found everywhere, and that there is no substitute for the in-person gleaning and absorbing this material.

“I learned that there is precious knowledge to be gathered from all corners of the world, in the most unlikely places, and it is only by going to these places and gathering the wealth of information that only these locales can offer that will allow us to synthesize new knowledge that will help all of us move forward.”

Beth Ann Saracco, University of Dayton (2009)*

“The Movement for Justice in Chile and Guatemala”

Program: The School for International Training, Valparaiso, Chile and the University of Dayton, Quetzaltenango, Guatemala

After graduating from the University of Dayton, Beth Ann relocated to Washington, D.C. to work for U.S. Congressman John Tanner, a former Member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Tennessee. “In November of 2010,” she writes, “I began my current work as a legislative assistant for Congressmen Ed Pastor from Arizona. I advise the Congressman on a range of issues, including immigration, labor and education, as well as international issues in Latin America and Africa. While my duties usually consist of monitoring legislation, researching policy positions, and assisting constituents, two particularly memorable encounters include meeting President Obama and the First Lady, as well as attending congressional addresses by Mexican President Felipe Calderon, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, and Korean President Lee Myung-bak.”

Beth Ann enjoys her current position because it gives her the opportunity to advocate on behalf of others, the importance of which she learned during her during her thesis research in Chile. “As I sought to compare the transitional justice movements in post-dictatorial Chile and Guatemala,” she says, “I came to recognize the importance of a transnational advocacy network—a group of activists throughout the world—focused on informing the world of human rights abuses and raising awareness on behalf of victims to punish those responsible...if given the means and agency, I too can be an effective and thoughtful advocate in my personal and professional roles.”

“While some of the testimonies are well documented in books and other publications, certain understandings are simply unobtainable through written word... In considering my research’s strengths, the contributions of these individuals are an undoubtedly an integral part.”

Beth Ann Saracco, 2009
“Dangerous Delays: Impediments to Pediatric Malaria Treatments in Ghana”
Program: University of California Education Abroad Program (EAP), Legon, Ghana

Presenting his research at the 7th Annual Forum on Education Abroad Conference was a highlight of college for Kenneth. “What a fun time,” he says. “I really appreciated the guidance from professors and advisers I met in Charlotte. I matriculated at Yale Medical School that August and am currently a second year student.”

As an undergraduate abroad, Kenneth learned the importance of being able to depend on interpersonal relationships to accomplish a task at hand. “When I had no idea about something in Ghana, I learned to laugh at myself and ask, ‘Could you point me towards the first step?’ In an unfamiliar environment, I had to trust and learn from people because Googling my question or destination wasn’t an option. My peers and mentors in Accra helped me to avoid many mistakes and dead-ends.”

Kenneth’s time in Ghana was instructional on both personal and professional levels. He states, “Those five months of malaria research in Ghana taught me a lot about myself and healthcare. When I finish my medical training in 10 years, I’m going to be a different person and it’s tough to know what I’ll do exactly. However, the time abroad made me think deeply and I’ll still be applying those insights to life choices when I’m well into my career.”

“Because I had spent a semester living with and learning from community members with different perspectives, I knew how to present environmental issues in a way that wasn’t stifling, self-righteous, or inaccessible.”

Alyssa Irizarry, Tufts University (2010)*

“Imaging Conservation: Sea Turtle Murals and Their Effect on Communities’ Environmental Consciousness and Behaviors in Baja California Sur, Mexico”
Program: The School for Field Studies, Puerto San Carlos, Baja California Sur, Mexico

“Since graduating from Tufts, I’ve been lucky to find professional opportunities that have been both exciting and meaningful (you can find jobs where you get paid AND have fun!), as well as have some adventures along the way! During the summer after graduation, I worked with PUDDESTOMPERS Nature Exploration, based in the greater Boston area, and led groups of preschool aged children through outdoor exploration and hands-on environmental learning. I myself learned the immense value of excitement and curiosity in the classroom. I also became a much more creative educator.

“I also received word that a representative of The Monterey Bay Aquarium had been in touch with The School for Field Studies after coming across my research in a Google search. They were going to be commissioning works of environmental art to be featured in an exhibit about ocean traveling animals, such as sharks and sea turtles. The new gallery would exhibit works by well-known artists Chris Jordan, Bryant Austin, and Alison McDonald, and - oh! they wanted to know if they could feature my research on how the sea turtle murals in Baja were an effective means of communicating conservation messages to the public. No big deal - this was only the mecca of all aquariums that I had dreamt about visiting since I was a little girl (who, for fun, wrote book reports from the ZooBook fact sheets about marine animals)!

“In August of 2010, I packed my bags and moved to the island of Eleuthera in The Bahamas, which was to be my home for the next 4 months. I was joining the faculty at The Island School, a study abroad program for high school students that incorporates experiential learning, sustainability, and community into its education philosophy.

“Currently, I am back in Massachusetts and after a brief stint as a barista, I am now working at The School for Field Studies headquarters in Salem as the Enrollment Coordinator and Campus Alumni Coordinator.

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“When I returned from Mexico, I was like, “OKAY WORLD, HERE I AM!” Except everything was pretty much the same and, while I had had this life-jostling realization that the world was bigger than Tufts’ campus and Facebook, no one (my parents especially) was ready for me to come charging back with goals and ideas and a compost bucket. Because I felt that I had already contributed in some way to the betterment of small community in Mexico, I had lost my cynical outlook on the future of conservation and environmental movements; in fact, I was absolutely excited about where I could play a part. My field experience felt like an achievement in and of itself, and it made me more self-aware of my inner potential. I no longer asked myself what I was going to do when I graduated, because I knew it didn’t matter as long as I was passionate about it. It always sounds cheesy and definitely not lucrative, but that is how good work is done.”
"The study abroad experience should definitely be continued to be emphasized for students. I think that those locations that put the individual to a challenge are particularly helpful. It is great to help students set goals for what they want out of their abroad experience and then help them match the best way to get that experience. Whether goals include language, academic, or other things might greatly affect the type of program they should consider." Hannah Arendt

"You should explore more ways to allow pre-medical students to study abroad. It is currently very hard for them to do so." Demetri Blanas

"I appreciate your work for education abroad and appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts with you." Cryan Eley

"I think the professionals in the study abroad world should be doing everything they can to give students the opportunity to experience this form of education. I think it is extremely important, especially in our global economy for young people to experience the world outside of our national borders. I think education abroad professionals should also work hard to bring this opportunity to underprivileged students. I was fortunate enough to scrape together the means to take these trips but I recognize that some are not as lucky. Study abroad education, especially those that involve real world projects and work experience, should be strongly encouraged by all schools of higher education abroad programs, EAP). However, if a student (or upcoming graduate) isn’t finding an opportunity that fits, it is important to encourage students to make an opportunity for themselves. With a bit of preparation, you can get the right visa, and the right international health insurance. [After graduation] The Peace Corps and Fulbright Program aren’t the only ways to live abroad. With websites like idealist.org, you can apply for jobs perfect for you all over the world! And thanks to networks like couchsurfing.org, future homestays and friends await!" Brittany Murlas

"I would like to give a big THANK YOU to education abroad professionals. My semester abroad was a profound and positive experience, but only if they are addicted to doing it. We need to be challenged to be a little uncomfortable, where people do what they’re unbelievably good at... These are undergraduates, not children. They should be challenged to be a little uncomfortable, to be a little overwhelmed. By interacting with their local environment, they should be questioning their cultural norms and perspectives and returning home more informed and unbiased about the world around them. If we support education abroad - not just travel abroad - we should support programs were students are engaged both inside and outside of the classroom, and encouraged to participate in activities within the local community. These kinds of experiences often create the best outcomes, and will foster the confidence that young individuals need to be prepared for academic, personal, and professional challenges in the future.” Alyssa Irizarry

"I would like education abroad professionals to know that my college experience, my professional and personal paths were altered in the best possible way by my time abroad. Studying abroad was one of the most important and pivotal experiences I have had thus far and I am so thankful for it.” Emily Kanstroom

"I want to thank them for all of their efforts in helping young students to open their eyes to the world. They change our lives." Sun Jin Lee

"Do what you love and be really real, really selfish about that. Please! …I want the world to be a place where people do what they’re unbelievably good at but only if they are addicted to doing it. We need teachers who can reinforce this notion over and over. Our planet will be full of really happy, honest, productive, and empowered people. And that will avalanche the most virtuous cycle.” Jeremy Martin

"It’s a bit of preaching to the choir, but the more students can be exposed to studying abroad, the better. I really don’t know anyone who studied abroad who was the worse for it. To the extent funding can be made available for those who would otherwise be unable to have this experience, it would be money well spent. I, for instance, have a special fondness—and commitment—to Rotary for funding my graduate work in Chile. Without Rotary’s support, I would not have been able to finish the academic journey I had started so many years before.” Kevin McAdams

"For a student’s first time abroad, I would highly recommend doing so through an organization (e.g. I went to Ghana with the University of California’s Education Abroad Programs, EAP). However, if a student (or upcoming graduate) isn’t finding an opportunity that fits, it is important to encourage students to make an opportunity for themselves. With a bit of preparation, you can get the right visa, and the right international health insurance. [After graduation] The Peace Corps and Fulbright Program aren’t the only ways to live abroad. With websites like idealist.org, you can apply for jobs perfect for you all over the world! And thanks to networks like couchsurfing.org, future homestays and friends await!” Brittany Murlas

"Studying abroad should be a mandatory component of any liberal arts degree in the 21st century. The experience brings to life lessons learned in the classroom in ways that simply can’t be achieved any other way. As we become ever more interconnected globally, it is vital that we learn to communicate across cultures and embrace thought and experience beyond our own borders. Study abroad programs are the vanguard for this and should be viewed as a cornerstone of the undergraduate experience.” Jason Nossetter

"I think it’s important to place more emphasis on project-based or research-based abroad experiences... In project or research abroad experiences, there is a mutual gain between the student and receiving community, in which the student gains immensely from the learning process and the receiving community receives the benefit of the student’s work. This type of study abroad also requires a greater depth of understanding of the topic (and therefore deeper learning) for the student, as well as intensiveness cultural learning, while the student also receives a unique sense of satisfaction from accomplishing a project/research goal that has the potential to aid the visited location.” Alexandra Sunseverino

"From the perspective of a student, I recognize how important academic mentorships have been throughout the various stages of my research. I was especially fortunate to work with knowledgeable individuals including my thesis advisor, Dr. Margaret Karns, a Professor Emerita of Political Science at the University of Dayton. My Chilean advisors from the School for International Training were also essential. In addition, I received a great deal of financial support from the University of Dayton, which made the entirety of my pursuits possible.” Beth Ann Saraco

"I’d like them to set up check-ins with the undergraduates while abroad. I look at the performance management that is a part of our work as educators and I would have appreciated the ongoing check-ins with my professors to help me synthesize and make sense of the work I was doing or needed to do.” Colin Smith

"If there were one thing I could say to education abroad professionals, it would be to foster creative thought. Do not be afraid to support the ideas of a motivated student, regardless of how strange or outlandish his/her ideas may seem at the time. I would not be in the incredible position I am today without the support and encouragement of a professor named Henry Schvey, who initially urged me to film a documentary and apply for funding through an undergraduate research grant. This seemed absurd at the time, even to me. But here I am today, having worked as a filmmaker in several different countries over the past few years, and running the only organization I know of that offers a wide diversity of abroad programs in all three performing arts disciplines. Please do not be stifled by the restrictions of standard thought or approach, as I do not believe either has made significant changes in our world.” Reynolds Whalen

"It’s a high standard, but students should think that their research topic is the MOST interesting topic in the world. If not, why? Students should be bluntly honest with themselves because research is tough...the literature review, the time-intensive data collection, the intricacies of statistical analysis... especially while abroad. Having a personally-inspiring topic makes it a win-win. Even if results are lackluster or the manuscript isn’t published, the student will come away knowledgeable and excited for their life’s work.” Kenneth Wong
Nominating Students for the Undergraduate Research Award

Nominating students for the Undergraduate Research Award is a Forum on Education Abroad member benefit. The annual deadline is usually the last day of June, with winners announced in the fall, and winning students presenting at the following Forum Annual Conference.

Details, nomination forms, and suggestions for developing nominations are available on the Forum website.