

4/26/12

To the Cornell Class of 1955:

This year I was selected to receive a \$500 Class of '55 Award that allowed me to study abroad in Oman for a semester. I am writing to thank you for your generous contributions to this award and to let you know how much this experience has impacted my life.

At Cornell, I have had the opportunity to create a B.S.S. major in *Women and International Public Policy*, including substantial coursework in Modern Standard Arabic. Studying abroad through SIT Study Abroad's program *Oman: Political Culture and Economic Development in the Gulf* reinforced and built on my Cornell coursework. The Arabic component of the program was particularly important to me, as I'd already completed the Arabic sequence offered at Cornell and wanted to continue studying. I also attended classes on political culture and research methods.

The final month of the program was dedicated to independent field research. My research culminated in a 50-page research paper entitled *Women's Representation in Oman's Majlis A'Shura: Implications of the Fall 2011 Election*. The Majlis A'Shura is the equivalent of Parliament. Through my research I was privileged to interview a number of important public figures, including Oman's former ambassador to the Netherlands (the first woman to be appointed ambassador by an Arab nation), recent women candidates for parliament, and Oman's first woman parliamentarian. This experience was the perfect culmination to my coursework, fusing my focuses in international politics and women's studies.

Learning extended beyond the classroom in the form of a homestay, bi-weekly excursions, and trips to Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Doha. My homestay family adopted me as one of their own – from sharing a room with my three host sisters and the housekeeper from Ethiopia, to visiting relatives for Islamic holidays – my family integrated me into their lives, sharing with me their culture and forcing me to practice my Arabic. The excursions and trips added a new dimension to the experience. Some highlights were racing up and down sand dunes in Sharqiya, watching sea turtles lay eggs on the coast, and visiting Al-Jazeera headquarters in Doha.

The skills that I gained from my experience in Oman will undoubtedly benefit my education and career goals. I graduated from Cornell in December of 2011. I am currently an AmeriCorps VISTA member working at Big Thought, a non-profit organization in Dallas, Texas that provides high quality after-school programming in low-income communities. Following my year of AmeriCorps service, I hope to pursue a graduate degree in international development. Eventually I hope to be a Foreign Service Officer, a study abroad advisor at a post-secondary institution, or work for a non-profit organization focusing on women's rights in developing countries. Although these pursuits are diverse, the skills I gained from studying in Oman – proficiency in Arabic, intercultural competency, familiarity with Arab culture, and the resourcefulness and flexibility that is necessary to live in a culture and environment drastically different from your home – will be valuable to each of these pursuits.

As the globe becomes increasingly interdependent, so too will the importance of intercultural competence; studying in Oman has allowed me to further develop this quality in myself. Going forward, I hope to instill this quality in others, both in my daily interactions and in a professional setting.

Thank you once again for your generosity.

Sincerely,

Annie Armatage



