An Adventure in Turkey: Helen Marie Berg

This September, I will depart for Turkey to work for nine months as an Fulbright English Teaching Assistant (ETA). Although I do not currently know to which city I will be assigned, I will likely be working outside of Istanbul and the capital, Ankara in a smaller city where English teachers are in higher demand. I will likely be leading a discussion section for an English professor, helping grade homework and tests, as well as offering tutoring for students. The goal of all Fulbright scholars, however, is to be an ambassador on a personal level, so I will also hopefully (or insalaha--with God’s will--in Turkish) be forming friendships and promoting cultural understanding with the Turks I meet.

My interest in Turkey began at the Theology department at CUA. During the spring of my junior year, I took Intro to Islam with Zeynab Sayilgan. I met her husband, Salih, who is from Istanbul, during one of our field trips. He told me about a two-week language scholarship program to Turkey. Not wanting to pass up an opportunity for free travel, I applied. A mere two months later, I found myself sitting in an auditorium in Ankara with 150 other “Turkish scholars” at the opening of “Türkçe Yaz Okulu” or Turkish Summer School. I was one of only two Americans on the trip. The other students were from countries near Turkey--Iran, Syria, Macedonia, Kazakhstan; men and women from cultures with which I was not personally familiar and would have never met in the U.S. To put it most simply, the trip was incredible. I learned a ton from the historical and civic sites we visited but learned exponentially more from the three women I roomed with during our travels--women from Iran, Poland and Bosnia-Herzegovina. I came home hungry to learn more about Turkey and for another experience of cultural exchange.

When I returned to CUA in the fall and told Dr. Shoemaker about my experience, he encouraged me to apply for a Fulbright ETA grant. I was a little late to the application process--the first essays were due at the beginning of October--but with his and Sara Sefranek’s help, I was able to write the required essays and gather the letters of recommendation in time. In January, I found out I was a finalist but it was not until May 15th (after graduation!) that I was notified I had received the grant. During my senior year, I had studied Turkish language classes through the consortium at Georgetown University. I can now hold a basic conversation and I’m ready to be challenged by immersion next year.

I am both honored to have received this grant and thrilled with the idea of being in Turkey next year. I can’t wait to find out more about my assignment and for September to arrive.

~ Helen Marie Berg ('12)

Helen Marie graduated a University Scholar and a member of Phi Beta Kappa. She majored in History and minored in Spanish. She is one of two CUA undergraduates to win a Fulbright this year. The other student, Timothy J. Schmalz, will be studying in Austria.

This is the second time in two years that an Honors Senior has been awarded a Fulbright English Teaching Assistantship (ETA). Last year’s recipient, Katelyn Browher, recently completed her nine month period of service in Romania. The English Teaching Assistantship, “places a Fulbrighter in a classroom abroad to provide assistance to teachers of English to non-native English-speakers. English Teaching Assistants help teach English language while serving as a cultural ambassador for U.S. culture.” (Retrieved from: http://us.fulbrightonline.org/about/types-of-grants)

Mrs. Sarah Sefranek is the Coordinator for Grants and Fellowships here at CUA.
Hannah on Vienna

Going to Vienna, Austria for spring break with the Honors Program was undoubtedly a highlight of my freshman year at CUA. I had taken the course “Vienna in the Literature and the Arts”, taught by Dr. Claudia Bornholdt, head chair of the department of Modern Languages and Literature at CUA, professor of German, and faculty advisor of the trip, in the fall and I remotely fell in love with the city. This course was not mandatory for the trip, but I took it to learn a little more about the Vienna. I’m glad I did; Vienna’s rich history and diverse culture fascinated me, and I was fortunate enough to be able to sign up for the spring break program. There were seven other students on the trip and, with Dr. Bornholdt as our fearless leader, we spent eight days exploring and experiencing all that Vienna has to offer. For me, it was amazing to actually experience all that I had learned about in the fall course. We went to mass in St. Stephen’s, the famous Gothic cathedral, and were treated to panoramic views of the city from the top of its tower. We saw a performance of Mozart’s Così fan Tutte at the world famous Viennese Opera House. We wandered the expansive gardens of Schönbrunn and Belvedere, two of the Imperial family’s former summer palaces. We walked through the Imperial Treasure Chamber and the rooms of the Imperial Apartments at the Hofburg, the same rooms that the Holy Roman Emperors once lived in. We sipped coffee in the same café that Freud favored. We saw priceless works of art, including Gustav Klimt’s The Kiss and the Beethoven Frieze, located in the Secession Building, which was once headquarters of the Art Nouveau movement in Vienna. We had the chance to learn about and discuss Vienna with some residents, the wonderful people at the Austrian Fulbright Office. We stood on the Hel- denplatz just as thousands of Austrians did in 1938 when Hitler delivered his Anschluss speech. We visited the Holocaust memorial and remembered the thousands of Austrian victims. We also ate lots of delicious Viennese food and traveled through the city on streetcars and the U-Bahn, and couldn’t help but compare Vienna’s public transportation to our familiar Washington, D.C. Metro. By the end of our trip, we were exhausted but sad to leave the remarkable city that we had become accustomed to. It was truly incredible to experience the Vienna I learned so much about and fell in love with in the fall.

~Hannah Welz (’15)

Hannah was a recipient of a scholarship from the Dr. Ingrid Merkel Endowed Fund for student travel.

Tim McEvoy on Honors’ Symposia

The University Honors Program Symposia have been an excellent opportunity for me to enrich my experience within the UHP. Lindsay Puvel, a classmate, and I served as the Symposia coordinators for several semesters. Together we chose a professor (with some student input), planned a meal, and cooked it for our fellow students and hand-picked faculty. Working with Lindsay stemmed from our friendship and interest in the symposia, and we enjoyed the dinners as a way to foster community and make memories.

My favorite dinner has to be the one we planned for Dr. Gibbons, Dr. Okuma, and their older son, Simon. As the faculty-in-residence of Regan Hall, they have had a positive impact on the community, and it was an easy decision to invite them. The dinner was a celebration of all they have done for the community in Regan, and many of the past residents came back for this event. As Lindsay and I became increasingly involved with student life at CUA, it became evident that we had to find new students to take the reins of coordinating the dinners. Two freshmen, Andrew Krema and Amber Henry, volunteered to assist with the symposia. After passing on the baton to them, I began to reflect and realize the impact the symposia can have among the community of the UHP. Seeing the excitement and dedication of Andrew and Amber gave me hope that these would continue to be part of the UHP tradition. This is a program that will continue to bring students and professors into dialogue outside of a classroom and the chance to create a community of scholars.

~Tim McEvoy (’13, Mathematics), a rising senior in the University Honors Program.

A number of Honors Alumni have inquired about where to direct contributions to the program. We recommend that you consider one of two funds:

The Suziedelis Fund provides compensation for faculty invited to prepare new courses for the UHP, or, in the absence of such a program, any innovative courses for undergraduates.

The Dr. Ingrid Merkel Endowed Honors Program Fund is used to provide financial support to the University Honors Program. Distributions for the fund may cover costs of participation by UHP students in international educational programs, study abroad programs for academic credit, or other educational or enrichment travel conducted in conjunction with the Program; travel and other participation costs by Honors students in scholarly, academic, or professional conferences; costs of participation by Honors students in research projects; costs of faculty development in furtherance of the academic mission of the UHP; and other aspects of the Program as the Fund Manager’s discretion.
The Continued Legacy

For the past two years, Lisa Campbell, (’09) has served as the Graduate Fellow for the Honors Program. She recently completed a Master’s in Library and Information Science and was invited to give the student speech for the School of Library and Information Science graduation ceremony, held in the foyer of the Columbus School of Law. The following is an excerpt from that speech.

I am honestly a little abashed at being chosen to speak to you. I’m well aware that at 24, I am one of the youngest people graduating. These speeches are meant to be about sharing wisdom and giving encouragement. I do have lots of encouragement to give you. I don’t know that I have much wisdom, but I do have a little, and I’m glad to share what I have with you.

Many of us are well into our lives and our careers. We might be apprehensive, but it’s probably not because this is our first time taking on the big world. We’ve graduated at least twice before. Some of us will probably graduate again. And yet, this is still the start of something new. How do we approach that?

I have been at CUA for significantly longer than most SLIS students – this actually is the end of my 6th year. I did my undergraduate degree here, and my little sister just finished up undergrad here last year as well. Many of my classmates know this because I mysteriously knew the back entrances out of all of the buildings that can get you to the Metro more quickly. What you might not know is that I initially had no interest in attending CUA—for either degree. When I was a senior in high school, applying to college, CUA was my last choice. It also ended up being the least expensive choice, so I had to resign myself to coming here.

When I graduated from college, I most emphatically told my mother that, as much as I loved attending CUA as an undergraduate, I would not consider coming back for graduate school. Obviously, things did not work out as I had expected. Yet, despite my unwillingness, this was definitely right place for me both times. I have been extremely happy.

I do not want this to imply that you will always feel happy when you’re in the right place. Sometimes the right place feels miserable. You just have to slog through it, but it does always end up having a point.

I did an independent study this past semester doing oral history interviews for the University Honors Program. I interviewed four different professors that helped found this program, hearing about their background and about how each of them ended up at Catholic University and involved in building the program. Each of them spoke about how they had considered different fields of study and different career paths. One Classics professor had considered studying business. One almost became a parish priest. One followed a boyfriend from Germany to the US and one only ended up at CUA because it was the only school hiring in his field the year he finished up his PhD.

None of them had made any real plans to come to CUA. They all just sort of ended up here. Yet, I think that their choices were not just coincidence. They were all meant to come here. The program was meant to happen, and each of them made vital contributions to it. As an undergraduate at CUA, I participated in the Honors program and it had a profound impact on me. I have also worked for that program for the past two years. Twenty-five years ago, these people came and worked on building curricula, and they certainly had no way of knowing that I, and many others like myself, would be so deeply affected by what they were creating.

Lisa did a series of five interviews with four different professors involved in the founding of the University Honors Program. The final interview with Dr. Ingrid Merkel was filmed by Honors alumni, Ana L. Ka’ahanui (’93). The interview transcripts will be donated to the University archives an made available to researchers.
Dear Friends,

It has been an exciting and eventful spring in the Honors Program. We are delighted that two of our undergraduates received Fulbright grants for study and travel in Turkey and Austria. This is the CUA’s best showing in many years and we fully expect that there will be more to come in the future! Our other international initiative this year was a highly successful student trip to Vienna during spring break, organized by Associate Professor of German Claudia Bornholdt. (Unfortunately, I did not go along! For more details on both of these stories, see the related articles in this newsletter.)

On a more bittersweet note, we said goodbye this year to both the Class of 2012 and Father Frank Matera. Father Matera has anchored the Honors Theology curriculum since its inception in 2007 by teaching "God's Word in Human Words," the Honors introduction to scripture. We are sorry to lose Father Matera, but our loss will be a gain for the archdiocese of Hartford, where he is returning to do parish work.

We also said goodbye this spring to the Regan Hall Honors Residential Community. The Regan HRC has served as a physical and spiritual home for Honors students for most of the past decade. The incoming class of 2016 will be housed in a new in Centennial Village, and we are working hard to ensure the continued success of our residential programs.

Finally, on the curricular front, we have introduced a new track in "Liberal Studies" that allows students in Architecture, Engineering, Music, and Nursing to combine courses from multiple tracks in order to earn recognition at Honors Convocation. Despite these changes, the core values of the program—the liberal arts, intellectual inquiry, faith, and community—remain the same. If you are interested in supporting these values, there are many ways that you can help. We are currently looking for alumni in a wide range of professions to help mentor our students as they prepare for life after college. And if you are interested in providing financial support, we encourage you to donate to the Ingrid Merkel fund, which supports student travel for academic purposes.

Best wishes for a restful and productive summer!

Peter Shoemaker