3-22-2010

Morris experiences inspire and inform global citizenship for Maria Brun '08

University Relations

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/urel_news

Recommended Citation
University Relations, "Morris experiences inspire and inform global citizenship for Maria Brun '08" (2010). University Relations News Archive. Paper 1438.
http://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/urel_news/1438

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the External Relations at University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well. It has been accepted for inclusion in University Relations News Archive by an authorized administrator of University of Minnesota Morris Digital Well. For more information, please contact skulann@morris.umn.edu.
Morris experiences inspire and inform global citizenship for Maria Brun ’08

Summary: Graduating from the prestigious London School of Economics and Political Science, Brun received the Excellent Dissertation Prize for the Development Studies Institute.

(March 22, 2010)-Many young people voice countless wishes to travel, their destinations varying from European cities to exotic locales in Asia. Maria Brun ’08, Robbinsdale native, not only traveled where others dream, but has allowed knowledge and experience gained from her journeys to influence her life views and to open new doors. An undergraduate education at Morris, research in India, and an award-winning graduate school experience in England, inform and inspire global citizenship.

Undergraduate research in India
The trip that turned her life upside down—for the better—was a field research trip with Professor of Economics Pareena Lawrence to assist in collecting data in India. An opportunity to learn outside the classroom turned into the journey of a lifetime—to experience a different way of life and make a positive impact on marginalized people.

“Going to India more or less took everything I believed, took my perspective on life, took my goals for my life, and completely changed them,” says Brun. “Poverty is hard to understand until you see it in context. We see it here in the U.S., but not like how it exists in India or in many other parts of the world,” says Brun. “We can identify what poverty looks like, but we don’t know how it feels, what it does, or how it impacts even the simplest things we don’t examine on a day to day basis, like, for example, perishable foods. We can’t understand why perishable items are so expensive or hard to get in a village because of an inability to efficiently transport it due to poor roads until you’ve actually sat in a car and tried to pass a village road that has been washed out or poorly maintained.”

She continues, “People are the greatest resource in India, and although this may be true for us all, it is clear, especially to foreigners like myself, that life revolves around relationships in ways that we are not used to.”

Brun’s research with Lawrence was more than material for a journal or book, but a step in stopping injustice. This realization convinced Brun to go to graduate school.

Graduate school in London
As an undergraduate, Brun found that the University’s environment motivated her to work hard and focus ambition that had been “scattered” in high school. She credits being around creative and smart fellow students who challenged her views on different subjects in class and out, challenging her to stay up with the curve. With hard work and merit, Brun was not only accepted into graduate school, but to the prestigious London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). She says, “I know working for Pareena and being involved in a field research project related to development, as an undergraduate student, is what gave me the extra edge to get my application noticed.”

When in London, Brun encountered many pros and cons of being an international grad student.
“I had a lot of time to travel and more or less goof around between school obligations. However, getting used to the British school system on top of getting used to the more demanding level of graduate school was not easy. At LSE, classes meet at most twice a week and you can only take up to four at a time, and even that’s rare. I had no midterms. Final exams were all in May regardless of when the class started and ended, and there were very few graded homework assignments. The extra time makes it easy to get distracted. As a student, you have to be self-motivated to stay on top of studying,” Brun says.

Brun’s program material was extremely challenging. Her degree focused on problems facing lesser developed countries—problems that have no simple answer.

“Each country has a different economy and has a very different history that makes them interact with the global economy and grow in a different way,” says Brun. “There are millions of variables to consider, some which we know, some which we haven’t thought of yet, some which we can measure, and many of which are subjective and impossible to quantify and in some cases, even make a qualitative statement about. To even take a stab at this problem, the program is designed to cover theory across economics, political science, sociology, anthropology, geography, international relations, gender theory, and more, all of which rarely agree or consider each other when coming up with theory and thus the literature we covered was often disparate. It’s a lot to learn and a lot to connect together in a meaningful way. Even more challenging than absorbing it all is then to transform it into workable questions to research.”

LSE Excellent Dissertation Prize
Brun’s proudest accomplishment was receiving LSE’s Excellent Dissertation Prize for the Development Studies Institute. She attributes her success to the motto she adopted during her time at LSE, pulled from a quote read by a professor during lecture: “Render problematic that which is considered self-evident.”

“To me, doing this means taking a thorough and interdisciplinary knowledge of the subject and bringing something new and deeply analytical to it by identifying and re-examining the assumptions and givens. This is precisely aligned with what the liberal arts education at UMM is founded upon and what I was pushed to do in almost all of my courses, from economics, to political theory, to math, and even in my 8 a.m. general chemistry class when I was a freshman” says Brun.

The benefits from a liberal arts education became especially clear when writing her dissertation. “To do well in a dissertation, it’s not just about the research, but about conveying your argument well for if you don’t, any meaningful analysis is lost and your argument is no longer persuasive. Writing with a clear, well communicated argument is something I definitely developed and refined during my time at UMM.”

Due to British program timing, Brun couldn’t continue straight into a doctorate program, and so has taken a year off of school. She returned to the U.S. and works at Target headquarters in Minneapolis as an analyst on the strategic pricing team. In addition to gaining work experience as an analyst, she has been applying to various political science and development doctorate programs—her first choice: another trip across the Atlantic back to LSE.

Through personal and academic discovery, the University of Minnesota, Morris provides opportunities for students to grow intellectually, engage in community, experience environmental stewardship and celebrate diversity. A renewable and sustainable educational experience, Morris prepares graduates for careers, for advanced degrees, for lifelong learning, for work world flexibility in the future, and for global citizenship. Learn more about Morris at morris.umn.edu or call 888-866-3382.