

Recent Report from Peace Scholar Laurie Smolenski

As I'd mentioned to Bob, I'm just wrapping up the second semester. I'm very happy with the courses I chose, and how the semester turned out overall. In terms of some highlights, outside of the core peace and conflict studies (P+CS) courses, I've been focusing on learning statistics, which is one of the goals I had for this master's (and not one my colleagues in the program share, so it's been a fun individual pursuit). I'm really interested in applying quantitative research to social issues. There is an organization called the Institute for Economics and Peace based in Sydney that does some fascinating indices, mapping, and other quantitative measures of peace throughout the world. Rotary here has a good relationship with them, and I'm working on setting up a research internship with that organization during my third semester, in order to put that stats work into practice as it pertains to peace. In short, my stats course this semester was one of the best courses I've ever taken, and I'm incredibly thankful for the professor who helped me along the way. I also took two solid gender courses (this and last semester, respectively) taught by the head of the P+CS program, and am really pleased with those as well.

We Fellows are now all looking ahead to our AFEs (Applied Fieldship Experience). This is a cornerstone of the program, in which we spend 2-3 months doing an internship/research outside of Australia. (My closest friends in the program are leaving this week for Costa Rica and East Timor, respectively, and it's been a bittersweet goodbye.) I'm doing mine in Mexico City, interning with the MacArthur Foundation - a global foundation whose mission includes the pursuit of peace. Their core areas in Mexico are human rights, population and reproductive rights, and immigration - three of my sweet spots! I'd worked in nonprofit fundraising in New York and became very curious about the philanthropic side of the grantee - grant-making organization relationship, so this is a stellar opportunity for me.

I also had an absolutely fantastic time at the Rotary Zone Institute in Cleveland in October, where I spoke on the final morning of the conference. I was so very grateful to have been able to attend!!! In particular, I felt incredibly welcomed and supported by the Rotarians there - many familiar faces, as well as new friends. The support and encouragement I received there was a real boost, which I brought back to share with my Peace Fellow (PF) cohort here. On that note, we've been working very well together as a cohort - I couldn't imagine a more diverse, intelligent, and collaborative group of Fellows! We meet biweekly and are currently planning our final seminar, which will take place in April after we return from our AFEs. That event will showcase to local Rotarians, university stakeholders and others present our projects abroad, as well as our experiences as PFs more generally.

I leave for Mexico at the end of the month, and will be traveling a bit before then. Since I've been in Australia, I've only left Queensland to briefly foray into neighboring New South Wales, so I'm really looking forward to checking out Sydney and Melbourne. You might be interested to know that the people I'll be traveling with are Spanish friends, one

of whom I met in Alicante, Spain about 14 years ago through my Rotary youth exchange year. Amazing the international connections fostered through Rotary, huh?

Spring here has been a gorgeous transition of animals emerging and flowers blooming at all turns, radiant sunsets, and warm breezes from the Brisbane River nearby. I will certainly miss Brisbane while I'm in Mexico! I've attached a photo from a hike this past weekend with some classmates and friends celebrating the semester at the top of Mount Warning. Catrina (blue pants) is also a Peace Fellow.

Thank you four for your support thus far. It was so special to see you all (minus Bob) in Cleveland - thank you again. I'll send word from Mexico!

Sincerely,
Laurie