

University Honors Program News

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Georgia Southern University

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Honors Abroad: Emily Krout Visits Saudi Arabia

March 30, 2018



Saudi Arabia is a country filled with expansive, bone-dry deserts, broken-up by sprawling cities. The country exists in a section of the world that appears to U.S. news audiences to be in constant unrest and turmoil. However, Emily Krout (political science and Arabic '19) sees Saudi Arabia as a land of opportunity. Krout envisions a country ripe with diplomatic exploration. She wishes to travel and to give back to the country through professional service at the national embassies. Krout's dream became a reality this semester when Emily Bless, Secretary for the National Council on US-Arab Relations, offered to support Krout on an academic and cultural trip to Saudi Arabia.

Krout's participation in Model United Nations (UN) and Model Arab League, both mock world-diplomacy organizations, allowed her to meet and network with important people, such as Emily Bless and Sidney Jones. Both women attend Model Arab League conferences around the United States. Krout worked closely with Bless and Jones with events on campus, including the forty-seventh annual High School Model United Nations Conference at Georgia Southern University.

"I was applying for a scholarship to study in Oman this summer for an intensive Arabic learning program, and asked Emily Bless personally for a letter of recommendation. She was happy to write the recommendation, and then offered to sponsor me on a study visit to experience Saudi Arabia," she said.

In February, Krout spent two weeks in Saudi Arabia traveling in the country, exploring Damman, Riyadh, Al-'Ula and Jeddah. Each city focused on different aspects of economics, such as oil and tourism. The purpose of this trip was to improve American students' understanding of Saudi Arabia through authentic experiences of the country's rich culture.

"While in Saudi Arabia, we were expected to be open-minded about the experience and behave in a professional and diplomatic manner. The goal of the program was to experience the 'real' Saudi Arabia, and to dispel the ideas that we saw in the media during the trip. We were being filmed as representatives of the National Council on US-Arab Relations representatives for a one-hour documentary run by the Saudi news channel, Rotana. We were encouraged to reflect upon our ideas during the trip and were interviewed during the two weeks for the film about our academic thoughts and personal experiences during the trip," she said.

Being a part of the Saudi Arabian documentary provided Krout with the opportunity to meet influential people in the country. Krout met and conversed with Prince Turki Bin Faisal, the former Saudi Diplomat to the US and the UK and Prince Saud Bin Nayef, the Governor of eastern Saudi Arabia. Krout and the other participants were pushed to ask the princes difficult questions about their roles in Saudi Arabia.

Krout said, "I was privileged to spend personal time with Prince Turki Bin Faisal, as he invited us to dinner at his home and sat and talked with me about his diplomatic abilities, his relationship with former presidents, and the Camel Beauty contests that were recently held in Saudi Arabia. He had very many positive things to say about the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States and handled questions about Iran and Turkey charismatically. This was a special moment for me, because I was able to speak one on one with someone who had lived their life as a diplomat, and has created an unforgettable legacy for himself, for Saudi-US relations, and for the Saudi people."

Krout is currently working on her proposal for her Honors Thesis as well as presenting a poster at the Middle Eastern Symposium in Augusta, Georgia. Her research focuses on the possibility that economic diversity in economies driven by oil can affect strict religious and conservative societies. Krout wishes to continue this research in graduate school continuing her focus on Middle Eastern culture.

"I plan to obtain my Ph.D. in International Studies with a focus on the Arab region and economics. I am hoping to attend graduate school in Lebanon, Jordan, or Qatar, as this will provide an opportunity to learn Arabic and obtain a degree from an American accredited university. I hope to find a researcher at a university that resonates with my studies and go from there," Krout said.

Krout's plans for her future began with her involvement the moment she stepped on campus at Georgia Southern. Her participation in Model United Nations (UN) and Model Arab League helped grow her passion for Arabic as well as her interest in diplomatic policies in the Middle East. Her time as a student in her first-year Global Citizens course allowed her to see beyond Statesboro and instead at a global scale. Krout's travels to the Middle East, while a student, provided her with experiences of a new culture and language.

"There is so much to experience by studying abroad that cannot be learned otherwise, and that can help a student to further solidify career goals. Not only will it make any application stronger, but it will also encourage you to work harder to achieve your career goals, as it makes them more attainable. Traveling abroad is about the experience, and it is an opportunity to provide yourself with the needed skill sets for life after college," Krout said.

The Big Payoff: Presenting Research in Las Vegas

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Several Honors Program students traveled to Las Vegas for the Far West Popular Culture Association conference, and what happened in Vegas is something that will not stay in Vegas. They got experience presenting research and they met fellow students and faculty from colleges across the country. Dra. Leticia McGrath, a professor of Spanish who also teaches the Honors first-year seminar, Hispanic Culture through Film, took nine students to the interdisciplinary conference.

Two of the students had presented at conferences with Dra. McGrath before. Emily Pressler (Spanish and French '19) and Caleb Beatty (electrical engineering '20) had both attended the Popular Culture Association of the South/American Culture Association of the South Conference (PCAS/ACAS) in Savannah with Dra. McGrath in October of 2017, and they were excited to attend the conference in Las Vegas.

Pressler's presentation, "WTF?!: Cursing trends in Spain and the United States Through Film," assessed the varying uses of curse words in two similar Spanish and English films. Her project attempted to combat the long upheld stereotype that Spanish-speaking people curse more than English-speaking people.

"I analyzed the frequency of words/phrases, content, context, etc. to compare overall use in both cultures throughout the Spanish film *Ocho Apellidos Vascos* and the American film *Two Night Stand*, which have a similar release date, rating, plot and length.

My research suggested that Spaniards curse with more frequency, have more varied vocabulary and arguably use words/phrases with greater significance than their United States counterparts," she said. This project coincides with similar research that Pressler is doing for her Honors Thesis.

Beatty's presentation was on a much different topic. His presentation, titled "Ride of the Machines," discussed the increased and growing use of the neural network known as OpenAI in all forms of technology. In 2017, the technology was used in a gaming competition and successfully beat a human in the PC game Dota 2. "The game requires many human traits such as an intense amount of reflexes, strategy, and foresight," he said.

Beatty's presentation highlighted the significance that this technology has on industry, especially industries that we interact with daily, and discussed how these advances in Artificial Intelligence stand to drastically alter our society. "In my presentation, I talked about the ethical and societal impacts that this inevitable advancement could cause."

Both students agree that presenting at a conference may seem daunting, but they emphasize that presenting research in these public forums is a great way to build public speaking skills, research skills and overall confidence in academic abilities.

"Conferences are a great way to network with other conference attendees and learn new things! I have had nothing but great experiences at the conferences that I have attended. I have been able to get feedback on my research and meet people in my field working on similar research. It also serves as a good 'test run' before having to present your thesis project," Pressler said.

Other students who participated at the Far West Popular Culture Association Conference include Taylor Close (modern languages and international studies '20), Gracia Dardano (mechanical engineering '21), Bodie Fox (writing & linguistics '21), Jasmine Parker (Spanish, international studies, psychology '17), Rachel Rubio (psychology '21), Stephen Thomas (physics and mathematics '21) and Zachary Weiner (management/human resources '21).



Honors in Action: Meeting Local Business Leaders

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Students in Dr. Trey Denton's Honors Research Seminar for business majors find themselves leaving the classroom to meet local business leaders and entrepreneurs in their environment. On these trips, students have the opportunity see first-hand the inner-workings of a company and ask questions of the people who run those companies. During the fall semester, the class visited Crider Foods and its state-of-the-art meat canning facility.

"Not only did we tour the facility (after an extremely rigorous decontamination procedure!), but we had the chance to discuss business strategies with the Owner President and CEO Mr. Billy Crider and multiple members of his executive team. We discussed what it was like starting the business and stewarding its growth into the successful company it is today, what it is like operating a private family-owned business, the influence of automation, plans for international expansion and a host of other topics," Dr. Denton said.

The ability to witness the process of a functioning business allows these honors students to move beyond the classroom and into the professional world with tangible activities. This course provides advantages to the honors students pursuing careers in business after their time at Georgia Southern.

Dr. Denton also invites businesses at all stages of development to come and speak to the class. "Last year, Mr. Chuck Howell, Director of Sales for the new startup Big Kat Buggies, spoke to our class about the challenges of establishing a new product like their versatile wagon that slides onto a regular auto tow hitch. Just a few weeks ago, Ms. Margaret Hicks spoke to our class about her ideas for marketing a new line of dog beds and pet-related clothing,"

The course is designed to balance both academic research and professional experiences, in order to provide inspiration for students during their undergraduate career, but also for students to realize how they can use their degrees after college.

Kelley Nemece (information systems '19) said, "Dr. Denton has been most helpful in guiding us through the beginning stages of our research while incorporating a variety of speakers, which promotes different aspects of business. Afterwards, our discussions changed based on the new conversations with the professionals."

The students continually refer back to their experiences with Crider Foods and various guest speakers. A hands-on experiences allows students to use their knowledge from the classroom in a professional setting. "I loved seeing their excitement when they had the opportunity to see the principles they learned in their classes being put to great use in the real world," Dr. Denton said.

This class is designed specifically for students in their junior year, at the beginning stages of their research. Throughout these visits and meeting with guest speakers, students are exposed to different aspects of business and start to map out their plan for the thesis.

Dr. Denton has taught this course for the past four years and continues to enjoy working with the caliber of dedication and intelligence that honors students provide to the class. "The opportunity to interact with highly motivated and enthusiastic students who simply like learning is enjoyable for me as a professor. Also, I am thankful for the ability to talk about current events with students from every business major in the room. I love hearing the various perspectives on the issues of our day. Having a course with enough time to let conversations roam and explore these issues in depth is a luxury," he said.

Bailey Morris (operations management '19) appreciates the specialized guidance from Dr. Denton as well as the aspect of collaboration between his classmates. "The Honors research course has helped me greatly in starting my research project. Dr. Denton explains step-by-step how to complete your project and answers any questions we may have. More importantly, he helps calm everyone's nerves about completing the project. Working with other students outside my major is definitely a plus. It allows for the topics and conversations to include viewpoints from all the departments in the college rather than just my own particular major," Morris said.

The process of creating a topic, choosing a mentor, and writing a research paper can be extremely overwhelming. However, Dr. Denton created a means to prepare students. His course allows for the students' creativity to lead them to a subject for their thesis. One of Dr. Denton's students, Mitchel Mayes (logistics '18), relies on his guidance not only for the present but for future aspirations.

"This course has given me tools I need to use for my Honors Thesis, like learning how to conduct a proper survey. Dr. Denton also stressed the important aspects of creating a research paper at this level within the field of business. However, the friendly environment created by my peers allowed us to be open and express our genuine opinions on specific topics. Also, this research focused on skills that were applicable to our futures after graduation," Mayes said.



Honors Business Students at Crider Foods with Dr. Denton

Honors Students to the Rescue

March 30, 2018



In February, the University Honors Program students on the Armstrong Campus partnered with Coastal Pet Rescue to raise awareness about homeless, abused, and abandoned dogs and cats. Emily Dietrich (English '20) arranged to have four dogs from the rescue center visit campus—two Chihuahuas, Sheldon and Tootie, and two Stratford Shire Terriers, Chevey and Bess. The dogs were all on their best behavior and stole the hearts of everyone who walked by. Throughout the day the students handed out volunteer forms and pamphlets, took donations, and sold bracelets and tennis balls to raise funds.

Coastal Pet Rescue is a nonprofit animal rescue organization. They rescue homeless, abused, or neglected dogs and cats and also take in animals who would otherwise be euthanized. Once the animals are in Coastal's care, they receive veterinary care, sterilization, and a temporary home before their forever home. One of their main goals is to provide resources to pet owners to encourage their responsibility and commitment to their pets and prevent them from contributing to the homeless pet population, including spaying/neutering pets and microchipping.

Dietrich is very personally invested with this organization, and she and her sister Sara (communication sciences and disorders '20), help out at the shelter frequently. The two sisters are part of the Honors Program's student organization on the Armstrong Campus with Sara as the communications officer and Emily working as the community service officer.

Volunteering allows Sara to right the wrongs done to innocent lives. "The animals certainly didn't get to choose their situation," Dietrich says, "so it's up to us to save them....Every animal deserves the chance to leave paw prints on someone's heart."

The day was a huge success in terms of fundraising and recruiting other volunteers for the organization. Honors students raised more than \$70 for Coastal Pet Rescue and had over forty people fill out volunteer forms. By the following Monday, Sheldon, who had been with the organization for a year, Tootie and Chevey all found forever homes.

The Coastal Pet Rescue booth was the first of many community service events the Honors Program on the Armstrong campus will hold this semester. In late March, they and honors students from the Statesboro campus participated in a beach clean-up with Fight Dirty Tybee.