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Fall 2010

YEAR IN EGYPT REINFORCES DESIRE TO CONTINUE MID EAST STUDIES

UNH junior Jeanna Diorio spent last academic year on a Boren Scholarship studying Arabic language and culture at the American University in Cairo, Egypt. While abroad, she also had opportunities to teach English and travel.



*Jeanna Diorio '12 at the Blue Mosque
in Istanbul, Turkey*

If you had told me this time last year that I would be spending the summer before my junior year preparing arts and crafts materials for my Egyptian first grade class at AMIDEAST, a private non-profit organization aimed at promoting cooperation between the Middle East and the United States, I would never have believed you.

Rewind a little over a year ago and I was peering over a stack of Egypt travel guide books at Barnes and Noble. Having been recently awarded a National Security Education Program (NSEP) undergraduate Boren Scholarship, I flipped through glossy pages of camels, pyramids, and far-away lands. Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Defense, NSEP Boren Scholarships provide funding to undergraduates to study abroad in regions of the world deemed critical to U.S. interests abroad in exchange for a year of government service. I first heard about the Boren Awards from the University of New Hampshire Center for International Education website at the end of my senior year of high school. By October of my freshman year at UNH, with the generous support of the CIE staff, I had begun the application process, consisting of short

essays, transcripts, recommendation letters, and culminating in an on-campus interview.

Within months, I was applying for my first passport and shortly found myself on a plane to Cairo, Egypt, to begin my studies at the Arabic Language Institute at the American University in Cairo. Taking five classes in both Modern Standard and Egyptian Colloquial Arabic, I went from learning the alphabet in the early weeks of September to being able to converse freely with my Egyptian neighbors by the end of May. In the evenings, I had the privilege of teaching an intermediate-level English class to a class of Iraqi and Sudanese refugees through the Student Action for Refugee Program. During Islamic holidays I used my breaks to travel throughout the region, from climbing Mt. Sinai under the stars to watch sunrise, to exploring the ancient ruins of Petra, Jordan, to traveling back in time wandering around Souq al-Hamidiyya in Damascus, Syria, and spending a week in and around Lebanon's bustling Beirut.



Jeanna getting ready for a camel ride

And now, back in New Hampshire, I will begin my junior year thousands of miles away from daily call to prayers, weekends playing in the desert, and roadside vendors selling falafel for under a dollar. Continuing my Arabic language studies at UNH, I anticipate completing a dual major in international affairs and political science with a minor in history.

Upon graduation, I intend to complete my compulsory year of service with the U.S. State Department before continuing to graduate school to concentrate on Middle Eastern studies. Ideally, I intend to work for the United Nations or for an NGO, either through the political or human rights sector. More specifically, I hope to focus on Middle Eastern peace, security, and political reform and become part of the international effort to promote a peaceful and prosperous Middle East. One political perception that has been reaffirmed during my year abroad is that, as a nation, the United States continues to lack understanding of Middle Eastern culture and the Islamic religion, which is essential to furthering multilateral ties within the region.

While my year in Cairo has confirmed my academic and professional objective to focus on Middle Eastern affairs, it has also offered me invaluable experiences. From renting my first apartment from an Egyptian landlord with whom I conversed only with hand motions for the first few months, to setting off on a two-week backpacking adventure with nine friends and a travel guidebook, I went from having never left the United States to venturing across four continents in a matter of months.

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