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Working Abroad
The focus of this year’s Blair Review is the international dimension of Blair life, the many ways in which the interests and activities of community members range beyond the borders of the United States. A sizable portion of our student body hails from all corners of the globe; the faculty’s educational experience includes travel, study and work abroad, and members of the alumni constituency have forged careers in the business and foreign policy arenas. It’s a heady brew that enriches the potentially insular world of a Warren County prep school, a rich mixture that impacts the learning experience of Blair’s young men and women. The authors showcased in this annual publication have made their mark across the world and, in some way or form, impart a global sensitivity to this campus.

Faculty member Quint Clarke ’87 takes us to Kenya, describing the much-needed construction of two village schools, not to mention the creation of microfinance, medical and nutritional programs. It’s a stunning project in terms of distance and scope, conjured up by a wonderfully motivated history teacher. And Quint the visionary has company. A boarding school serving a rural area of beleaguered Haiti has been the long-held dream of Edwidge Dorelien, a veteran language teacher who retired from Blair to direct the construction of this project. Latta Browse, chairman of the mathematics department, revisits his two-year spell as a teacher in Belgium and the return to ol’ Blair. Former faculty member Steven Kampmann muses about a magical post-graduate high school year abroad, a stint that shaped his life as a screen-writer, actor, director and, yes, boarding school teacher. Drs. Carl Christianson and Jolene Schuster of the Blair science department discuss a research stint in Germany at the famed Max Planck Institute, and challenge readers to grasp relatively complex scientific terms, as well as simple truths about the American tourist abroad. The Mexican border is novelist Sergio Troncoso’s domain, an area rife with narco-violence, as well as rich cultural diversity. Journalist Stu Loory ’50 remembers his Moscow reporting days during the Soviet period, and his grandson, Konstantin Tarasov ’13, comments on life as a student in the post-USSR world. Professional staff member with the House Armed Services committee Alex Gallo ’96, lays out Al Qaeda’s operational blueprint, at least in general terms. Finally, Ambassadors Steve Steiner ’58 and Ray Burghardt ’63 write about two topics dear to their hearts: the problematic condition of women in Afghanistan and the unlikely development of Vietnam as a strategic partner of the United States.

Martin Miller, PhD, Editor and History Department
Ann Williams, Director of Timken Library
Blair in Kenya: students queue up for school.
Quint Clarke ’87 has a long history at Blair Academy, first arriving on campus in 1972 at the age of three when his father, Dr. Rick Clarke, took a job teaching physics and chairing the science department. Following his graduation from Blair in 1987, “Q” worked as an attorney before returning as a faculty member in 2001. He currently teaches global issues and constitutional law, and coaches the School’s nationally ranked girls’ basketball team. Additionally, he runs the nonprofit Blair in Kenya, Inc., where he leads a student community service trip to Africa every June. Blair in Kenya also raises funds for the construction of two schools, supports microfinance lending, sponsors the educational fees of over 100 Kenyan students, and hosts an annual medical clinic. Current projects include the construction of a library and computer center at each of the schools. More information about his projects abroad can be obtained by visiting his website at www.blairinkenya.com.
I stare at my phone in frustration. After a day taking pictures and videos of the construction site of our new Blair in Kenya school, the battery on my iPhone has gone dead. I tried to charge it last night, but the unreliable Kenyan electricity went out (again) and now, high up in the western Kenyan hills, miles from any source of electricity, my one connection to the outside world was gone.

I am with Kelvin Serem ’13 in his village of Sergoit, about 10 miles from the regional capital of Iten. Given the absence of electricity in the village, I am resigned to having no cell phone for the rest of the day, but Serem just laughs and, in typical relaxed fashion, says, “No problem—just give it to Michael.”

I look doubtfully at the shoeless boy, his hand out for my now dead cell phone. “But, we are leaving soon…” I suggested, thinking that my phone was worth more than the annual wages of most in this village and I didn’t want to let it out of my sight.

He laughed again. “Don’t worry,” he said, “Michael will go charge it and then find us.”

I thought to ask where he would take my phone, but before I could get the question out, the boy grabbed it from my hand and bounded away through the cornfields.

The school we were building in Sergoit had its origins in a conversation between Serem and I the previous spring. He had approached me about the desperate need for quality education in his rural village. There were few schools in Sergoit, and the ones they did have were terrible. He described overcrowded classrooms, under-qualified teachers, and a lack of basic supplies such as pencils and books. As the first from his village to travel to America, he wanted to give something back; to blaze a path to a better future for those that he left behind. He asked that I help him to construct a school that would serve the children of Sergoit, and I readily agreed.

We began our planning that spring before travelling together with a group of Blair students and faculty in June. As with my original school—The Blair Educational Center located three hours to the south—our program was to be a partnership with the local people. The village would donate the land and form a volunteer committee to plan and facilitate the construction. I would raise the money for construction and, working together, we would operate the school in an economically sustainable manner—using
school fees to cover teacher salaries and other operating expenses. The school would be private, both to stay far away from the government bureaucracy, as well as to create incentives to provide a superior education to that of the public system.

Happily, in the weeks that followed, both America and Kenya rallied enthusiastically around our plan. A beautiful one-acre plot of land was donated and I was able to raise $10,000—enough to build four brick classrooms, a well, toilets and a simple kitchen. We were all motivated to try to get the school ready in time for opening at the beginning of the next school year, January 2014. Our plan is to continue expanding this school each year until it includes eighth grade.

Four short months after our initial meeting, I was in Sergoit inspecting the construction site of our new school. One of my main roles with Blair in Kenya was to make sure that donors’ money was being used properly. I prided our organization on its fiscal accountability and I wanted to make sure we lived up to our promise that 100% of all donated money went to the projects.

Looking around the village that July day, I knew that we were facing a daunting challenge in trying to construct this school. While the village was exceptionally beautiful, its people were subsistence farmers with no disposable income. The average villager lived in a mud hut with dirt floors, pit latrines, and thatched roofs (the wealthy were distinguished by the sheet metal roofs of their homes). Water was obtained from a stream, nobody had electricity, there were no doctors and government services were virtually non-existent.

And, the education system was a mess. The Kenyan government boasts of its free primary education, but it doesn’t take long to figure out that this is wishful thinking. The government either can’t or won’t fully fund rural schools, and parents therefore must bear much of that cost. In addition to school uniforms and books, they must contribute to the hiring of the teachers and staff that the government won’t fund. Despite these extra fees, classes are overcrowded; the privilege of
meaning that these problems were magnified for the girls of Sergoit. Kids in these rural schools really had no chance to escape the grinding poverty of subsistence farming.

I first met Serem two years earlier in Kenya as part of our Blair in Kenya trip. I visited him in his family’s home to discuss Blair Academy with the leaders from his village. As I gazed at the beautiful, rural landscape, they asked if Blairstown was similar to this village. I stumbled in my answer: well, yes; we too had trees, rolling hills, corn fields and cows, but on the other hand, no; it was nothing like this. Looking at the shy Serem that day, I remember being worried about whether he could make it at Blair. It was hard to imagine that a boy who grew up without running water or electricity could fit in at one of the most rigor-
ous boarding schools in America.

But I needn’t have worried. He did far more than just fit in; he excelled in all areas at Blair with his positive attitude and his ever-pres-}

ent smile. He finished his Blair career with a B-plus average, he was captain of his cross-country team, he won the cross-country and track prizes, he was the winner of both the Marcial Prize (most outstanding international student) and the Kelley prize (biggest improvement at Blair), he gave a moving Chapel speech about his life and he became one of the most beloved members of his class. One illustration of his status among his peers at Blair: his roommate his first year was Brooks Black ’13, at 260 pounds, nearly twice Serem’s weight, and the number-one heavyweight wrestler in the country. An odder pair has rarely been seen at Blair, but the two became such good friends that when Brooks was chosen as a prefect, he said that he wouldn’t do it unless Serem remained his roommate. Which he did, helping to mentor the younger boys of East Hall. Serem was then awarded a full scholarship to Lafayette College, where he now runs for the cross-country team (and continues to work to raise money for this school).

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Earlier that morning, I had ridden out to the construction site from Iten on the back of a small motorcycle, wedged between Serem and the driver. It is rare when a white person enters Sergoit (Serem claimed I was the first ever, surely an exaggeration, but one that shows how unusual it is), and people were staring and waving intensely at me as I passed. I tried to smile and wave back despite the overwhelming pit of fear in my stomach as the driver sped around the potholes on the rutted and dusty road.

The construction site itself was remarkable in its primitiveness—not
a power tool to be seen, just large piles of rocks, bricks and sand being manipulated by young men making slightly less than $3 per day. The pit latrines were being dug by an alternating pair; the first loosened the earth with his pickax before climbing out of the hole (15-feet deep when I left) to be replaced by the shovel guy who would throw the earth out of the hole into an ever increasing pile. Then, back to the pick-ax guy.

The foundation was similarly being dug by hand, with six men alternating with the three pick-axes in the rocky soil. The goal for the day was to dig a trench 2 feet deep along every wall of the school—the corners being marked by sticks stuck into the ground. Nearby, several men were making gravel in the traditional Kenyan way: They grabbed a large stone from the rock pile to their left, looped a strip of discarded car tire around it, smashed the rock repeatedly with a hammer until the pieces were small enough to be considered gravel, at which point, they went into the pile to their right. Then, they moved onto the next stone.

Other men were moving the large piles of sand and bricks into position. There were no written plans, yet the leader of our committee—a local school-teacher named Raymond Omonei—was excitedly showing me exactly where in the corn field everything would even-

Blair students and faculty after a run at St. Patricks's.
tually be: “Over here, we will dig the well; this will be the kitchen; the next block of classrooms will go there; we are hoping to build a dormitory here…” Over and over, he stressed the overwhelming need for education and, in particular, the need to provide a safe place for local girls to study. As we talked, a crowd gathered to stare at me; the adults shaking my hand while some children rubbed my skin and felt my hair.

Despite the enormous physical exertion, there was a steady stream of talk and peals of laughter from the workers. People from Iten—the Kalenjin tribe—certainly laughed a lot and seemed remarkably happy. When I asked Serem why they were so happy to be doing such difficult work, he replied, “First of all, we are a happy people who try to make the best of any situation—but, also, $3 for a day of work means that they can feed their families for the next few days.” As I took pictures and showed them what they looked like on film, my battery crept lower and lower. (One remarkable aspect of all of this—particularly to those who have struggled with cell service in Blairstown—is that my cell phone worked perfectly in Sergoit and I could instantly text to the states, something not always possible on campus).

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This region of Kenya would seemingly be anonymous to the outside world just another poor corner of the world; however, that is not the case. Upon entering Iten on the only paved road in the region, one is confronted with a giant arch reading, “Welcome to Iten, Home of Champions.” The “champions” are the vast number of middle and long distance runners—both men and women—who have dominated the international scene over the past three decades. In his current best-selling book, The Sports Gene, David Epstein mentions the following curious fact:

“Seventeen American men in
history have run a marathon faster than 2:10; thirty-two Kalenjin men did it just in October 2011. The statistics that describe Kalenjin distance running dominance are endless, and often so outlandish as to be laughable. For example: five American high-schoolers have run under four minutes in the mile in history; St. Patrick’s High School in the Kalenjin training town of Iten once had four sub-four milers in the school at the same time.”

St. Patrick’s is renowned throughout the world and its alumni are among the most famous runners in history. Its most notable current graduate is 800-meter world record holder David Rudisha, who trains at the school and can frequently be seen running through town. St. Patrick’s is also where Blair found Serem, and, each year, a group of Blair students tour the school, attend classes, speak to the student body, and get to run with some of the fastest boys. This past June, we also met with legendary Irish coach Brother Colm O’Connell (and former Headmaster of St. Patrick’s pictured below), and were able to discuss his theories on why Kenyan runners are the fastest in the world.

The scope of Kalenjin running success is hard to overstate. There are an estimated 4.4 million Kalenjins worldwide, .06% of the world population, yet, they have dominated the world running scene for the past quarter century to a mind-boggling extent. Twenty of the last twenty-five first-place men in the Boston Marathon have been Kenyan, while Kenyan women have won nine of the last thirteen. Eighteen of the fastest 25 times in the 3,000-meter steeplechase are Kenyan. Seven of the last eight London marathons

Brother Colm O’Connell, Serem and Q. Clarke at St. Patrick’s.
Clarke

were won by Kenyans. In the 2013 Berlin marathon, Wilson Kipsang set a world record of 2:03:22—an average of 4:42 per mile—and Kenyan men also took second, third, fourth and fifth places. On the woman’s side, Kenyan Florence Kiplagat won, with Kenyans taking eight of the top 10 places. And on and on.

It is certainly not true that every Kalenjin is a great runner, but the incredible success of this one tribe in Kenya puzzles scientists. There are many possible explanations that are bandied about: it’s their diet of Ugali and vegetables, it’s because they run to school as kids, it’s because they live at altitude, it’s being barefoot so much, it’s an evolutionary benefit of living in the highlands, etc. The debate on why the Kalenjins are such fantastic distance runners is far from over, but that they are the best distance runners in the world is unquestioned.

Earlier that day, I spent several hours on the famous dirt track of Kamariny Stadium with English running coach Gavin Smith. Sitting on the precipice of the Great Rift Valley, the location of the track couldn’t be more spectacular—it seems to hang right on the edge of a giant cliff and the valley floor is barely visible below. The “stadium” consists of a dirt track (unofficially eight meters too long) with decrepit wooden bleachers that seat about 500 people. Yet, it has to be the most amazing place in the world to watch running (and the only place that Brother Colm would ever train; when we asked whether he was hoping for a new track, he scoffed, “my runners don’t train on those modern tracks; we train on dirt”).

For the Kenyans of Iten, Tuesday is track day. Virtually every runner from the area came to the track that morning; perhaps 1,000 in all. Most runners tried to run in a group led by one of Kenya’s international stars, and the workouts were prodigious and spectacular (example: one group was doing fifteen intervals of 1,000 meters). It was awe-inspiring and more than a little intimidating. An aspiring American distance runner would be excused for feeling like he/she had entered the wrong sport.

Through it all, Smith provided a running commentary: “The woman in the red won the New York City Marathon in 2010, the guy in the blue shorts was once the world re-
cord holder in the 5,000, the guy without a shirt was third in Boston...” and on and on. Other than our conversation, the track was eerily silent, with the only sounds being the footfalls on the dirt track and the breathing as they went by. There were no coaches, no trainers, no taped ankles, no ice, no water and virtually no talking.

As thrilling as it was to see such talent, it was also a bit sad. As Smith noted of one runner, “that guy recently ran a sub-30-minute 10K on a hilly course; in America or Great Britain, that’s an unbelievable time; here it means nothing”. Or, as he explained it, “there are no recreational runners here—you are trying to become one of the world’s best or you are home tending to your crops; this area is full of farmers who can run a 2:15 marathon.” It became clear that much like the inner city boxer or the aspiring shortstop in the Dominican Republic, running was the only ticket out of grinding poverty. Either become a world-class runner or break stone into gravel for $3/day. The ones who reach the pinnacle have worldwide fame and incredible wealth; the rest head back to the farm. Sadly, most of the runners I watched are chasing a dream that will never come true. But what else can they do? What would any of us do in that situation?
Which leads us back to education. Perhaps education could be another way off the farm? The people of Sergoit certainly seemed to think so. Talk to any Kalenjin, and they will tell you that education is the only way that they can hope to escape the life of subsistence farming that has defined the region for generations.

Later that evening and still without my phone, I had dinner with Serem and the volunteer committee in a mud hut without electricity or running water. They spoke with passion about the importance of providing a quality education to the community and about the hopes for the future of their people. As we drank endless cups of tea, they stressed their disdain for the Kenyan educational model; the overcrowded classrooms, the rote memorization, and the fact that many families couldn’t afford to send their kids to public school. In short, they confirmed what James Tooley wrote about in his book *The Beautiful Tree*; that the world’s poor are thirsting for a quality education that public schools just can’t provide. Professor Tooley argues that low-cost private schools are incentivized to respond effectively to parent’s wishes, and the parents I met agreed that they were willing to pay for a quality education for their kids. However, given the dysfunctional and underfunded Kenyan government, they told me that the public school system was broken and couldn’t be fixed. There is clearly both a passion and a need for the service that Blair in Kenya would provide, and their eyes glowed in the darkness as they spoke of the way that our school would change the landscape in this village forever.

As we discussed this new school, I pondered some of the successes and obstacles of our first Blair in Ke-
nya experience. Our initial school was constructed one year earlier in June 2012 and we already had an operating school of four classrooms serving over 110 students. Further, we had connected the school to water (by digging a well) and built a kitchen to feed the students. We had also raised enough money to sponsor 50 students—including all school fees, uniforms, books, and a daily hot lunch prepared and cooked by volunteers. The previous month, we had started the construction of a computer room and library, and we were working on building an athletic field and connecting to electricity.

Further, in order to change the fortunes of the town, we operated a low-interest microfinance enterprise that was funding over 75 small business ventures, and we had been fortunate enough to bring Dr. Jane Ferry to treat villagers, none of whom had ever seen a doctor before. During the past nine years, over 80 Blair students had been to Kenya, delivered more than 7,000 pounds of computers, medicines, books, balls, shoes, clothes, and other equipment; and we had contributed over $50,000 toward various educational expenses.

And we are connecting Blair Academy with Kenya in ever more significant ways: our technology department donates computers, our library provides books, and science teachers give their old lab equipment. Further, Blair students are exploring the roots of global poverty in history class, they are examining methods of improving access to drinking water and electricity in science classes, they are donating arts supplies and developing an arts curriculum for our school, and they are collecting sports equipment and balls for the school. This winter, we have begun a program where our chaplain and environmental science teacher work with a group of seniors to implement a “Blair plan” to help the students at our school and in the village. Further, I am currently working with more than half a dozen Blair alumni on various projects in Kenya. We intend to continue to build this partnership in the coming years.

But, trying to raise funds and manage the one program was daunting enough. Could we do this in another village? At that moment—sitting in a dark and cold mud hut in the outskirts of Kenya—the challenge terrified me. I had pledged $10,000 to the committee, but I had run through my money and there was so much more to do. The project was huge, and, as I gazed around the room bubbling with happiness and optimism, I wondered if anyone had any idea of how difficult it would be to reach our ambitious goals.

I couldn’t understand the conversation as they moved to the more comfortable Kalenjin, but the mood was easy to feel—people
Clarke

Village children gather for school.

were happy and they were excited. The ever-present laughter punctuated most comments and there was animated discussion about the school. The volume rose and frequently they switched to English to ask me a question or explain their plans. There was clearly a sense of hope about the school and what it could provide.

They told me how determined they are to make this the best school in the area, how it will change the lives of their children, and how much they want to move on from the life of subsistence agriculture that has defined village life for centuries. They were convinced that this school would work and it was impossible for me to question their optimism. They smiled and they thanked me. They told me to thank everyone who had helped with this project. With tears in their eyes, they told me that they would do whatever was required to use this school to change the direction of their village. It was impossible in the face of this determination and optimism to do anything but promise to do my best.

After a while, as I sat there soaking up the scene, the door creaked open, letting in cold air from outside. Michael appeared out of the darkness carrying a huge grin and my fully charged cell phone. I reached in my pocket to give him some money, but when I looked up, he was gone, disappeared back into the cold night.
Update: March 2014:
The preceding article was written following my trip to Kenya in July 2013. This past March, I was finally able to return to the school along with a contingent of Blair faculty and students. While I knew that they had made incredible progress with very limited funding, I was still overwhelmed by how amazing the school looked. The speeches of thanks for the efforts of the Blair community brought tears to my eyes, as did the smiles of the children of our school.
The Blair-Serem school opened in January with four classrooms—three of these are brick, but due to a lack of funds, the fourth is of temporary construction. Further, they have four toilets, a temporary kitchen, and a water source. The school employs six people—four teachers and two helpers—and it serves both a mid-morning snack and lunch. It’s an amazing place and the community was extremely grateful to all who have helped.

Nevertheless, the work has just begun. The school walls need to be plastered and painted (Blair students will paint this summer); the kitchen needs to be made permanent; we need to build two new classrooms; there is still no electricity; and we need to add more land for future expansion (and for the athletic fields). Additionally, we want to repeat the success of the Blair Educational Center and construct a library/computer center (which would make us the only elementary school in the county to have this).

It’s all daunting and intimidating, but when I looked in the happy faces of the people of Iten, I have more determination than ever to see this project through.

Students assemble outside their brand new school.
Margie Fulton has been a Blair history teacher for two years following her graduation from Williams College. She was one of 16 people accompanying Q Clarke ’87 on his ninth annual summer trip to Kenya in June 2013. Blair students included Graham Merrifield ’14 and Paige Cordero ’14, and together they continued the construction of the Blair Educational Center in Lagonia, Kenya, overlooking the shores of Lake Victoria. That summer, they distributed 1,000 pounds of supplies they brought from the U.S.—including four computers from the School’s technology department. The group painted the school, taught the students, helped begin construction of two new classrooms, and prepared and served lunch to more than 50 students that “Blair in Kenya” currently sponsors in the town. Sponsored students receive the daily lunch, school fees, books, pens, paper, shoes and school uniforms.

Addressing the health needs of the surrounding local community, the group delivered more than 500 pounds of medical supplies to Kenya and participated in a medical clinic for the local residents. Dr. Jane Ferry, mother of Ted Peacock ’11 and chief medical officer at Grandview Hospital in Sellersville, Pa., led the clinic, which allowed many members of the small village to receive medical treatment from a doctor for the first time. Dr. Ferry also visited the town’s local health center and met with community leaders to discuss current health issues.

Another highlight of the trip was celebrating the return of Kelvin Serem ’13 to his home by hosting a party in his hometown. It was clear that Serem had certainly traveled far to come from his home to excel at Blair, another world away.

Throughout their two-week stay in Kenya, the Blair delegation also traveled to the Kibera slum in Nairobi, the largest slum in sub-Saharan Africa. They also explored safaris in various African national parks, met with President Barack Obama’s grandmother at her home for the second year in a row, and participated in discussions with various professionals working with Kenyans, including professors at Michigan and DePaul, as well as business leaders in energy and the environment.

“Mostly, we brought smiles to the faces of people who the world has largely forgotten,” Mr. Clarke said. “We made new friends, and we helped show that our similarities are more important than our differences.”
I n developing countries such as Kenya, poverty looks entirely different from the conditions in more affluent nations like the United States. Child mortality rates are high and malnutrition abounds, as the growth of about one-third of all Kenyan children has been stunted due to lack of adequate nutrition. The dearth of sanitation and running water makes the spread of disease and water-borne illnesses prevalent, despite the fact that vaccines have been developed to prevent the majority of these conditions. A constant drive to secure food means that income is spent not on furthering quality of life, but on assuring basic survival. In a country where the average income, according to the International Monetary Fund, is about $1,700, or about $4.65 per day, it’s vital to implement economic reform and improve living conditions. The good news is that Kenya is on the cusp of marked development, with better infrastructure and living standards than many African countries. My travels, though, were in relatively poor areas of Kenya.

Despite the best efforts of non-governmental organizations, foreign governments and other aid organizations, challenges still persist in enacting qualitative changes. The absence of paved roads makes the transportation of food, equipment, medical supplies and other materials difficult and time-consuming. Due to both geographic isolation and insufficient funds, the process of setting up electricity and running water in rural areas can be quite complex. Malaria, measles, typhoid fever and tuberculosis, easily preventable diseases, are still lethal issues in many parts of Kenya. High HIV rates, especially in the slum of Kibera, which hovers around 60 percent, present another serious epidemic. Poor building materials and inadequate funds mean that many families live in poorly ventilated and crowded homes, with up to 12 people living in shoddily constructed, windowless one-room shacks. Over half of the population is under the age of 15, compared to a figure of about 20 percent for the comparable demographic in the United States.

As one of three faculty chaplains on Blair’s service trip last June, I was unprepared for the mixed feelings that the journey evoked. The almost unfathomable level of poverty that we witnessed was deeply sobering, and led me to wonder on more than one occasion how people could possibly survive in such conditions. This despondence was countered by the overwhelming optimism and entrepreneurship that we encountered all across Kenya. In both the rural villages where we stayed, in which subsistence agriculture is the norm, and in Kibera, an area the size of Central Park that houses over one-million residents,
the smiles and unceasing positive energy of the people we met seemed to outweigh the dismal living conditions that would otherwise provide grounds for despondency.

Over the course of our 16-day trip, we saw signs of growth. New roads dug under the auspices of foreign managers, the occasional satellite dish perched atop a roof, and wind turbines in the process of construction were examples of progress. While these changes are taking place at an incremental pace, smaller programs like Blair in Kenya have made tangible strides over the past decade. Microfinance projects aimed at providing the starting funds for niche businesses has allowed for people like the inhabitants of Elly Odongo’s village to begin to earn an income beyond subsistence. The Blair in Kenya schools, which charge families a $3-annual tuition fee, provide an elementary school education to hundreds of children in rural southwestern Kenya. Of course, our trip to these remote areas is not representative of the entire country, which is a major financial and communications hub for East and Central Africa with a 5-percent GDP growth rate due to tourism, construction and telecommunications.

Programs such as Blair in Kenya, which foster a connection between students in the United States and residents of developing countries, create relationships and possibilities that might not otherwise exist. Despite the obvious need for large-scale development, localized projects such as the construction of a second Blair in Kenya school near Iten provide employment and income for local workers, as well as an opportunity for education for local children. The donation of school supplies, computers and clothing that we brought to villagers near Kisumu and Iten this summer in over 30 50-pound bags gave small, yet tangible, relief. With continued support and participation from the Blair community, Blair in Kenya will, hopefully, nurture and expand these projects in years to come.
Edwidge Dorelien is the founder of Haiti Sustainable Education (HSE). An electrical engineer by training and a proud father of three daughters, he switched to teaching after emigrating from Haiti over 20 years ago in order to focus on raising his children and shaping the young minds of tomorrow.

Edwidge began his career in education as a mathematics and foreign language substitute teacher in Connecticut public schools. After four great years at South Kent School, a residential school for boys in rural Connecticut, he accepted a position at Blair Academy in New Jersey, where he taught French and Spanish for 15 years. In addition to his teaching duties, Edwidge served as a dorm parent, an advisor, a sports coach and a coordinator for international students.

Edwidge’s experiences in Haiti and as an educator in the United States have reaffirmed his belief that education is the path to freedom. He sees the January 2010 earthquake as a chance for a new beginning for Haiti and believes that efforts to rebuild the country should provide hope and opportunity to Haiti’s young minds and future leaders. Now, at the sunset of his life, he has chosen to fully dedicate his time to a call to service and a lifelong dream: to build a full-service elementary and secondary boarding school in his father’s village in Grand-Bois, Haiti. Edwidge’s hope is that the HSE boarding school will plant the seed of education for the under-served children of Grand-Bois and surrounding villages.

Drawing upon his teaching and mentoring experience in the United States, he intends to be the first Head of School in order to manage the school’s development and oversee the initial implementation of the its mission and philosophy.
Cric…Crac. It is with this exchange that the griots (storytellers), my ancestors in Africa, began their storytelling. No records have been kept of my ancestors’ passage from Africa to the Americas, from freedom to slavery. Nonetheless, this tradition remains alive today in the Haitian countryside. At night, around a bonfire, before retiring for the night, the elders of the village are still telling the stories that their fathers learned from their grandfathers and their grandfathers from their great-grandfathers. It’s the way that ancestral traditions continue to be passed from generation to generation. One of my favorite moments as a child was to listen to these stories during summer nights at my grandmother’s home in Grand-Bois, a small village east of Haiti’s capital, Port-au-Prince.

Here is my story: Cric Crac
My journey and my motivation for founding Haiti Sustainable Education (HSE) are woven from three spools of thread, each representing a different phase of my life. The first phase begins with my father.

Phase I
I am fortunate that my father, the youngest of 11, was one of four children who my grandparents chose to send to Port-au-Prince to be educated. Otherwise, I would most likely have been born, raised and remained in my grandfather’s village of Grand Bois. It is unclear how my grandparents made this difficult decision, but in Haiti’s remote villages, it is not uncommon for parents who can’t afford to send all of their children to school to select just a few. So, out of the four children (three boys and one girl) who my grandparents sent to the city to be educated, the eldest became a priest; the second a lawyer; the third a teacher. My father, on the other hand, dropped out of high school during his senior year to marry my mother. Despite the sacrifices made by his family and the opportunities available, my father never returned to school or to Grand-Bois to help the siblings who were left behind.

My father would later on prove to be an absentee parent and a poor role model; therefore, it was my mother who was the pillar of our family. I was 10 years old when she passed away at the age of 36, leaving behind six children. The day my mother died, I lost my innocence and became, in essence, an orphan. My father’s brother, a devoted priest, took on the responsibility of providing for and educating my siblings and me. Growing up in his household, I became inspired by his dedication to serving, sharing and helping others. I learned the importance of compassion, community and humanity. He instilled in me a strong sense of service and empa-
Reflecting on my upbringing, I would not change my past, although I continue to feel the profound void of my mother’s absence.

**Phase II**

Growing up in a non-traditional family and with an absentee father, my goal was to be a better parent than my father. I wanted to be there for my three daughters, to provide for them, to educate them, to raise them to become independent and, most importantly, to be good citizens. On that front, my wife, Laure, and I feel that we have succeeded.

I am very proud of my daughters’ accomplishments. My eldest daughter, Audrey, recently received a PhD from Princeton University and is currently a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Health and Society Scholar at the University of Michigan. My second child, Astrid ’02 is currently working as a foreign affairs officer at the Department of State after earning a JD from the Georgetown University Law Center and an MPH from the Bloomberg School of Public Health. My youngest, Aurore ’06, is a program analyst at USAID and holds a BSc from the School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University and an MSc from Carnegie Mellon University. Although I have fulfilled my parental goals, my journey is not yet over.

**Phase III**

“It is the possibility of having a dream come true that makes life interesting” — Paulo Coelho.

It is now in my sunset years that I am starting the third and last leg of my journey. Four years ago, I went to my father’s village to reconnect with my extended family, and I was shocked by the deep contrast between their living conditions and mine. Under different circumstances I could have easily been in their shoes. I owe everything I have today to my uncle, who made it possible for me to receive an education. I began to dream about building a school that the village children could attend without placing a heavy financial burden on their families. My vision was to build a school modeled after the boarding schools where I have taught for the last 19 years.
In January 2012, I started Haiti Sustainable Education (HSE), a 501(c)3 organization dedicated to developing a state-of-the-art kindergarten-to-12th-grade boarding school in Grand-Bois, Haiti. While it is the first of its kind in the region and a challenging undertaking, I am determined to plant the seed and watch the project take root.

I have been asked by many: “Why a private boarding school?” While education is highly valued and is a means out of the vicious cycle of poverty, the majority of Haitians do not have access to it. One of the greatest barriers is cost. Although public education is technically free, the educational system is dominated by private schools. Even at the public schools, the supplemental fees to cover the cost of uniforms and school supplies render it out of reach for many. Furthermore, due to the lack of infrastructure, school-aged children often walk hours to go to the nearest school and without food. By the time they return home, the sun has already set, and they are lucky if they find a meal waiting for them at home. Classroom sizes frequently surge to more than 70 children, with only one teacher presiding. Teachers are paid low salaries of approximately $60 per month, resulting in a high teacher turnover rate. Additionally, most teachers have only completed nine years of schooling and only 20 percent are graduates of teacher training colleges. The low salary also makes it difficult to find qualified teachers to teach in a remote place like Grand-Bois.

The boarding school model would remove some of the educational barriers by providing students with a nurturing environment conducive to learning. The amenities and facilities would also help attract quality teachers and administrators. HSE’s boarding school model will be the first of its kind in the country and, hopefully, will be used by future generations.

HSE Partners

Bringing HSE to life and fruition is a team effort. I am fortunate to have the support of my family—my wife has taken on the burden of being the sole breadwinner, and my daughters are each helping in the best way they can. For instance, Audrey has joined me on the Board of Trustees.

I am also fortunate that after many years of teaching in boarding schools, I have earned the trust of individuals who believe in me and are ready to support me in achieving this dream. For instance, Shari Bunks Geller (mother of four Blair students) has been a fantastic help by bringing her legal perspective and knowledge of the requirements and processes for non-profits. And it was through a connection of Bob Neff ’49 (father of Will Neff ’08) that...
I eventually came into contact with David Hirsch, a tremendous help, and Ann Clark of Ann Clark Architects LLC in Chicago, who is now one of our Trustees and is developing the campus’ design. The firm has extensive experience in Haiti, including designing the Partners in Health hospital in Mirebalais. We are also working with Michelle Sakayan, who previously served as the U.S. architectural-liaison and project manager for the 26-building campus of the Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls in South Africa.

**Next Steps**

The 142,000 square-foot boarding school serving kindergarten through 12th grades (or 910 students at full capacity) will include two classrooms per grade, computer labs, music, drama and art studios, a wellness center, administration offices, a gymnasium, a cafeteria that will also serve as an auditorium, a track and soccer field, and dormitories and small efficiency apartments for full-time, on-site faculty. The project will be phased so that the early grades (kindergarten through third grade) may get underway as soon as possible. The dining hall and wellness center will be part of this first phase as well.

Consultants such as geotechnical engineers and hydrogeologists, architects, landscape architects and engineers have been brought together in collaboration to design a school environment which is respectful of the community, the land, the culture and, most of all, the students, faculty and staff who will live on this campus everyday. The students will learn about their environment and community through the philosophy of the school, which will also engage the community. Essentially, Haiti Sustainable Education’s goal is to become a beacon for learning for the Grand-Bois community.

As a complementary initiative and to help fund HSE, I will also operate an international leadership and community service program that exposes high school and college students to life in the developing world. This will help them develop their leadership skills and strengthen their penchant for volunteerism. I also hope that, during their service trips, the students will develop a first-hand understanding of and an appreciation for Haiti and every-day Haitians that they will bring back to their families and friends. Many may even become future ambassadors for greater U.S.–Haiti relations, such as Dr. Paul Farmer, and countless other American benefactors that have helped Haiti during the course of her history. My hope is that Blair students will be enchanted by Haiti and continue this philanthropic tradition. This initiative is a spin off of the service trips I have taken with 25 Blair students and 5 faculty members during the last few years.
To learn more about HSE, you can visit the project’s website at www.hsehaiti.org. While my hope is to place the building’s first stone in 2014, I know I will not be able to fulfill this dream alone.

As the project moves forward, I would greatly appreciate the opportunity to stay in touch with all of you to keep you abreast of our progress and possibly explore potential partnership opportunities. I will also be looking to add additional trustees to the organization in the future, in case you may be interested in becoming involved with our efforts or know of any qualified individuals with a keen interest in furthering education in Haiti.

To all of you whose paths I crossed during my 15 years at Blair, remember poet Ralph Waldo Emerson words: “do not go where the path may lead; go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.” What will matter at the end is not the destination, but the journey. I hope to see you one day in Grand-Bois, Haiti; to be a part of this journey and to help me turn this dream into reality.

God bless,

Edwidge Dorelien
HSE Chairman

Local children pose with Edwidge on a visit to the school’s site.
Sergio Troncoso, son of Mexican immigrants, was born in El Paso, Texas, and now lives in New York City. A Blair Summer School of Journalism student of the late 1970s, he graduated from Harvard College, and studied international relations and philosophy at Yale University. He won a Fulbright scholarship to Mexico, where he studied economics, politics and literature. Troncoso was inducted into the Hispanic Scholarship Fund’s Alumni Hall of Fame and the Texas Institute of Letters. He also received the Literary Legacy Award from the El Paso Community College. He is currently an instructor at the Hudson Valley Writers’ Center in Sleepy Hollow, New York, and a resident faculty member of the Yale Writers’ Conference in New Haven, Connecticut.

Troncoso is the author of five books. He co-edited Our Lost Border: Essays on Life amid the Narco-Violence, a collection of essays on how the unique bi-national and bi-cultural existence along the United States-Mexico border has been disrupted by recent drug violence. From This Wicked Patch of Dust is a story about the Martinez family, which begins life in a border shantytown, and struggles to stay together despite cultural clashes, different religions and politics after 9/11. The novel was named as one of the best books of 2012 by Kirkus Reviews, and won the Southwest Book Award from the Border Regional Library Association. Crossing Borders: Personal Essays is a collection of personal essays about fatherhood, interfaith marriage, breast cancer and families, poverty, literacy and education. The book won the Bronze Award for Essays from ForeWord Reviews. His first book, The Last Tortilla and Other Stories, won the Premio Aztlán Literary Prize and the Southwest Book Award. The Nature of Truth is a philosophical novel about a Yale research student who discovers that his boss, a renowned professor, hides a Nazi past.

Troncoso’s stories and essays have been featured in many anthologies and have also appeared in The El Paso Times, Front Porch Journal, The Packinghouse Review, Literal Magazine: Latin American Voices, Pembroke Magazine, Other Voices and many other newspapers and magazines.
Great teachers have made all the difference in the world in my life. I first came to Blair Academy during the summer of 1978, as part of a six-week program that trained high-school journalists, the Blair Summer School for Journalism (BSSJ). I was an ambitious, but somewhat intimidated seventeen-year-old from the U.S.-Mexico border who had grown up with an outhouse in the backyard and kerosene lamps and stoves instead of electricity. That summer at Blair, as I was guided by Ron Clemons who ran BSSJ, I took my love of writing to another level, I learned to live on my own and compete with students I believed were much better than me. I survived, and that summer I even got kissed by a hot blonde from New Jersey. Remember, I was seventeen. Now as the father of two boys, sixteen and eighteen, yes, I know exactly what is on their minds. Anyway, I never forgot that gray stone arch at Blair Academy, the beauty of the school, the intensity of that summer program, and how all of it seemed to be on another planet from Ysleta, the hamlet outside of El Paso, Texas where I lived in an adobe house with my family. The following year, I would be accepted to Harvard, an even greater cultural and academic leap from the border, but without Blair, without that summer of ’78, without that newfound belief in myself, I would have most likely crumpled under the pressure at Harvard Yard. So first and foremost, I want to thank Blair Academy for once having that wonderful summer program for high school journalists, and to let you know it was essential for me, as a person, as a fledgling writer, as the teacher I would become.

First I want to talk to you about what the effect was of bringing a kid from the border to a place like Blair or Harvard, and then also talk to you about how I want to bring attention to the U.S.-Mexico border in another way, and how that’s relevant to Blair. The point always is to demystify this faraway place, and its people, to find a relation to the border even if that place or someone from that place, seems foreign, an “other,” so to speak. That is the type of practical education I have always pursued in my life, not to assume what is right but to test it out, not to accept the norm but to determine why a norm is the norm through engagement. That’s also why I became a follower of Aristotle, philosophically: Because I lived on the border, between English and Spanish, between the United States and Mexico, neither completely here nor there, I was forced to find my own way, rather than simply to accept a prescribed way. I am the ultimate Blair Academy and the Border.
skeptic in this Society of Skeptics; I am a skeptic of ideologues, nationalists from both countries, and those purists too eager to find a home in assumptions and prejudices about people who look different from them, who might have funny accents. If you think about it, being a skeptic is really about not being so easily at home in a way. It is about living on philosophical and moral borders, so to speak. You need a strong character to survive this constant skepticism, and you need to find your home in practical reason. But try staying warm and dry under a rainstorm in this so-called ‘home.’ You will see how lonely and cold the life of a true skeptic can often be. But all of you should take heart: you will have great company around our skeptical bonfire on the levy.

When you bring a kid from the U.S.-Mexico border to a place like Blair, Harvard or Yale, how do you do it, and what can we learn from this experience? These questions become important as Latinos are becoming a bigger demographic part of the United States, and are enrolling in higher education in record numbers. The answers to these questions are also relevant to educating any student who strives to be the first in his or her family to achieve a college education, or to attend a wonderful prep school in preparation for college. In my mind, it is heartening that Blair Academy gives 38 percent of current students some financial aid; my sons’ prep school in New York, Collegiate, has a similar percentage of students on financial aid. John Bogle the founder of the Vanguard Group, and one of my investment heroes, was a scholarship boy at Blair, and has become one of its most important benefactors. So crossing this ‘social mobility border,’ so to speak, can bring benefits not only to those poor students but also to the institution that grants him or her that opportunity.

What I believe Harvard saw in me when they accepted me as a senior from Ysleta High School, the year after my summer at Blair, was a poor, but intelligent kid who was willing to work beyond exhaustion, who was willing to sacrifice dearly for his goals, and who had the capacity to adapt to a new environment. These immigrant values came from my Mexican parents, and these are the same values I teach to Aaron and Isaac on the Upper Westside of Manhattan. My older son Aaron, by the way, is a freshman at Yale. So when a place like Blair or Harvard is trying to identify that poor kid who might succeed in these rarefied environments, you have to start by understanding that student’s family, its discipline, its character, the values they practice. These family values—an old-fashioned term but still important today—helped my family in Ysleta stay away from the drugs in our neighborhood, the gangs on the streets, the easy excuses of not do-
ing your work, of not being responsible, of not taking responsibility. Of course, not all the families in Ysleta (which is less then half a mile from Mexico) shared or practiced these values. We were all poor, we had all started the same way on a dusty lot with nothing but a few rooms made of adobe. Many of my grade-school friends ended up dead from gang fights or other bad choices. But certain families created a separate culture within their homes, a culture enforced by a strong mother or father, or both, and those families crossed the border from Ysleta to higher plains of success. To identify those poor families who have the groundwork values necessary for success, well, that requires painstaking work, that requires understanding the nuances of a neighborhood, and that requires not prejudging places like Ysleta as lost causes simply by the shacks in the neighborhood, the Spanish spoken on the streets, or the dark brown faces of its children.

Ironically, in New York’s Upper Westside, I have learned our family has had to keep at arm’s length another culture not worth emulating: that culture of what I call too much materialism; that culture of doting parents who instead of being tough on their children excuse every failure and extol even mediocre accomplishments; that culture of well-to-do parents who do not read to their young toddlers, who think giving money is good parenting. It’s not. Even though I live at a much higher economic level than my parents ever did in Ysleta, I know that their values, adapted to my children in New York City, have helped my kids succeed academically and become responsible citizens. My sons call me “the toughest dad on the Upper Westside.” Every summer, instead of hanging out with their friends and wasting time, my sons immersed themselves in intensive foreign-language programs, or jumped ahead of their classes at Collegiate by taking extra math courses, or enrolled in grueling outdoor leadership courses to test their limits and hone skills not learned inside the classroom. Saturdays and Sundays? We work academically, on extra reading, on a project of their choosing. When family friends found out my son Aaron scored a 2400 on his SAT—yes, that’s right, a perfect score—they kidded me about being like a ‘Tiger Mom.’ I said, “No, I’m a ‘Jaguar Dad.’ A Mexican Jaguar dad.” So you see, Ysleta has as much to teach the Upper Westside, and places like Blair or Harvard or Yale, as those places have to teach Ysleta. Too often we think, from high atop our revered institutions, that we are giving an opportunity to these poor kids, that we are just the ones doing the ‘generous giving,’ so to speak. We forget that these poor kids from the border and beyond, those with the right
values, are reintroducing our revered institutions to what made them revered in the first place: hard work, sacrifice, real achievement, and risk mixed with adaptation. So when everything works out, a great school will be doing that scholarship boy or girl a favor by accepting them and giving them an opportunity; but in turn, he or she will be doing that school a favor by the character and fresh perspective they bring to that school.

Are any of your waiting for that last episode of *Breaking Bad*, for what happens to the character Walter White? I am a fan of the television series in part because it is so well done as storytelling, but also because it focuses on Albuquerque, even El Paso, and on a dramatized version of the drug wars that have been happening in my old stomping grounds for decades. While some of you may never visit the border, or these cities near the border, *Breaking Bad*, and shows like it, may be your only real exposure to the border. It’s a safe exposure, through a television screen, and you may think that what happens on the U.S.-Mexico border, in terms of the drug wars, is not really relevant to you at Blair Academy, except as entertainment. I see something similar in another favorite comedian I watch, Jon Stewart of the *Daily Show*. He often laughs about drug use and how oh-so-cool it is to smoke marijuana and do drugs, and so on. I laugh at him too, because he’s funny, but I also know that he doesn’t know what he’s talking about. He’s not supposed to; he’s a comedian. But I wonder how many watching him take his bong jokes at face value, and not think for a moment about what he is saying and what it might mean.

I’ll say it to you as bluntly as I told my own teenage sons: if you smoke pot, if you do drugs, you are killing Mexicans, you are destroying poor families along the border, you are part of the problem. In fact, what I told my sons was this exactly: “Whenever you light up a joint, you are decapitating a Mexican.” That equation is dramatic, for effect, but roughly true. Marijuana is the number-one cash crop of narco-traffickers along the border. Since Aaron and Isaac have been to Ysleta, since they love their abuelitos and know my neighborhood from years of Christmas gatherings and family vacations, since the Mexicans in question are not abstractions, but decent people with real lives, who send them gifts for their birthdays, who hug and kiss them every time we go back to Ysleta, the force of what I told my sons hit hard, hit them where they live. I want this equation to hit you as hard as it hit Aaron and Isaac, because this is so important now and for students’ future. A few weeks before Aaron went to Yale for freshman orientation in August, we received a pamphlet from Yale about how to talk...
to your son or daughter about alcohol and drug abuse, a severe problem at almost every university in this country, at many public high schools, at many prep schools. Yale now requires all incoming freshman to take a mandatory online course on alcohol and drug abuse before enrolling freshman year. A week after we received Yale’s pamphlet and I had my talk with Aaron and Isaac, a drug addict broke into my parents’ home in Ysleta by ripping open the back door with a crowbar while my 78-year-old parents were out shopping. Neighbors called the cops, and the idiot stumbled out of my parents’ house, got into his truck, and crashed into an electric pole down the block. The police arrested him, and my parents arrived to see the neighbors in their yard. They were lucky: this is the first time someone had broken into their home in forty years. But the point is that we are all connected. What we do at Blair, what we do at Yale, what we do in New York City, if we are doing drugs, if we are smoking what we think of as a harmless joint, then that action has ramifications on the border, that action affects poor families in places like Ysleta, that action takes the pleasures of the well-to-do and the conveniently ignorant and dumps the consequences on the poor, the dark-skinned, the Third World, the Third World in Texas and New Mexico and many places in between.

I proposed the idea for the book *Our Lost Border* because I wanted Americans to see their role in the drug wars that took a much more violent turn after 2008. I wanted them to see the families destroyed, the communities abandoned. The narco-traffickers are fighting for the billions and billions of dollars we provide to them when we buy their drugs. That’s the money they use to corrupt American FBI agents in El Paso; that’s the money they use to buy government and law enforcement officials in northern Mexico; that’s the money they use to buy their guns to kill other drug dealers and to kill innocents, and so turn Juárez (the city in Mexico opposite the city of El Paso) into a more dangerous place than Lebanon, Damascus, even Cairo. We are all connected. The point of the book *Our Lost Border* is to demystify this place, to bring the border and its drug wars to English-readers in America, and to take this place from a being a faraway place only for our TV entertainment, and make it instead part of our conversation and discussion. To make it real. Because if I’m about anything, I am about making it real.
Latta Browse, appointed to Blair's faculty in 1982, graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1978 from Middlebury College with a BA in mathematics. In 1989, he earned an MALS in Islamic studies at Columbia University and, in 1991, received his CAS in mathematics from Wesleyan University. Latta taught high school mathematics as a Peace Corps volunteer in Malaysia from 1978 to 1981. For two years, he taught at Antwerp International School as an international baccalaureate math teacher. Over the years, Latta has served Blair in a variety of capacities, including as house-master of Davies, West and Mason Halls, dorm resident in Locke Hall, and sophomore class monitor. He has also served as head or assistant coach for a myriad of sports teams, including JV soccer, JV baseball, varsity soccer, varsity baseball, winter track and boys’ cross country. Latta is currently head coach of the girls’ cross country team. He is married to Carolyn Conforti-Browse ’79, a veteran English teacher at Blair. They have two children: Tyler ’08 and Annelies ’13.
us hier zijn we in Vlaams-sprekende België .... Here we are in Flemish-speaking Belgium, in the small town of Ekeren, just outside of Antwerp. After nine years at Blair, my wife Carolyn Conforti, and our three-year-old son, Tyler, had moved in the summer of 1993 to Flanders where Carolyn and I had taken teaching jobs at The Antwerp International School (AIS). The choice of schools was serendipitous, the result of our future employer sitting forlornly under a hand-lettered poster advertising only one possible opening for a high school math position. Amid the chaos of hundreds of job-seekers in the large New York hotel ballroom leased by the International Schools Services for their annual job fair, the head of AIS, with his limited needs, sat alphabetically between the headmasters from Addis Abba and Athens. Apparently, Amsterdam wasn’t hiring that year. Both Addis Abba and Athens were advertising for numerous positions in their lower and upper schools and had long lines of applicants queuing for brief interviews to make their pitches to the respective schools. Knowing next to nothing about either Belgium in general or Antwerp in particular—weren’t an early Olympics held there?—but not looking forward to standing in yet another long line, we introduced ourselves and began the process that eventually landed us in Ekeren.

As one of Europe’s largest ports, Antwerp attracted numerous international companies—3M, GE, M&M Mars, Ricoh, De Beers—to set up production and sales facilities in Belgium and nearby Netherlands. Company executives settled in Brsschaat, Kapellen and other wealthy satellite towns and their children attended AIS during the three or four years they were posted to the area. As such, the student body had a very transient feel with only a few individuals staying for the entirety of their 9-12 high school years. In order to accommodate students from varied educational backgrounds, AIS offered the IGCSE (International General Certificate of Secondary Education—roughly speaking, the British O-level syllabi and exams) at 9th and 10th grades and the IB (International Baccalaureate) for 11th and 12th grades. European and Lebanese students would take the full programs in order to qualify for entrance into their home universities, whereas Americans and some Asian students chose from the various courses to create schedules, much as they would have done in the U.S. to prepare them for applications to American colleges.

I received the aforementioned math position, while Carolyn was hired to a part-time position to teach some English and a study skills course. Those needs came up
after we had landed in Ekeren, just days before school began. As we quickly came to learn, flexibility was the key, for teachers (and students) came and went with regularity based not on the school calendar but on the vagaries of companies’ transferring their people at a moment’s notice. When the primary breadwinner moved, so, too, did the children and the spouse, even if the spouse (generally, but not always the wife) were teaching at AIS. I once asked a friend of ours, who worked for GE, why GE did not give his colleagues advanced warning that they would be transferred in a few months time. His response was simple and direct: “When you kill the head, the body dies.” Ouch! A lame-duck was deemed useless to the company, so sudden departures with just a few days notice to the family to pack up and wrap up their financial affairs were common.

Such rootlessness made the school community superficially very accepting, for friendships needed to be formed quickly. Students, however, were slow to reach out to teachers in a way we had become accustomed to at Blair. On our very first day of lunch duty, Carolyn and I had the temerity to sit down at a table with a couple of students and introduce ourselves; they looked at us as if we had two heads and gobbled down the remains of their lunch as quickly as they could. It took almost a full year for any students to become comfortable enough to come to our house just 500 meters from
the school. Finally, team functions for the under-14 girls basketball team Carolyn coached, babysitting needs for our son and extra help in math brought a few students to our doorstep. We eventually developed relationships as at Blair, some that remain to this day, but the process was slow-going. Academically, however, the students were, for the most part, first-rate. The European students had little patience for homework, knowing that what really mattered was their performance on the IGCSE or IB exams; on the other hand, the Americans did not take the international exams, so they approached school in a manner more familiar to us. The mix led us to creative methods to keep both constituencies engaged, and the classroom benefitted from an eclectic student body with a multitude of backgrounds and approaches to a subject. Fortunately, the mathematics syllabus for the IGCSE was differentiated between “Regular Maths” and “Additional Maths,” just as the IB had three tiers: “Mathematical Studies,” “Subsidiary-Level Mathematics” and “Higher-Level Mathematics.” As a result, we had no problem accommodating all students in the high school, no matter what their proficiency in mathematics or the educational systems in their background.

The expatriate community centered around the school was not entirely self-contained, as local staff and a small number of local students provided access to the cultural and social milieu of Flemish Belgium. For the most part, however, the student body became part of what is termed “third culture kids.” Third culture kids grow up not fully immersed in the culture of their parents, nor in the culture of the country they happen to inhabit. Their values and behavior might be influenced to a degree by the “home” they would visit on vacations or by Belgium, but the insular world of the international schools they attended, many in different countries over 12 years of primary and secondary education, had the greatest influence. They formed their own, entirely separate, third culture: sophisticated, culturally aware and often multi-lingual, yet rootless and fundamentally without a “home country.” Some students came to embrace the reality that the world is their home, while others had a difficult time ever settling down to work and family life in any one country as adults.

I confess that none of us ever became conversant in Flemish, the version of Dutch spoken in what is known as Vlaanderen, the Dutch-speaking half Belgium. The language, with its proclivity for “v’s” and “z’s,” looks like no other language we’d ever studied, yet at times sounded almost like English. Every once in a while, I would overhear a quick phrase on the street and do a
double take, thinking someone was speaking English to me. Flemish, softened by the influences from the French spoken in Wallonie, the other half of Belgium, did not sound as guttural as the Dutch spoken over the border in the Netherlands. Yet, beyond ordering in a restaurant, memorizing about 100 key words or becoming comfortable with a few quick phrases “just to be polite,” there was no imperative for us to learn Flemish at any significant level. First and foremost, our school operated entirely in English. About 50 percent of the student body were native speakers of English from the U.S., Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand. Most of the rest were Belgian, Dutch, Lebanese or Scandinavian, students who had attended various international schools where English was the medium of instruction while their parents’ companies moved their families around the world. Second, the general level of second-language fluency amongst the Flemish was so high that all of our interactions outside of school—speaking with the landlord, buying a car, banking, dealing with the bureaucracy—were conducted in English. It always struck me that we were functionally illiterate, able to glean any and all information orally, but severely handicapped whenever we had to read or, worse, write. Handicapped also, in that there came a time when I began to be embarrassed not to speak Flemish after living there for over a year. My (American) colleague in the teachers’ room once told me the old joke: “Question. What do you call someone who speaks three languages? Answer. Trilingual. Q. What do you call someone who speaks two languages? A. Bilingual. Q. What do you call someone who speaks one language? A. American.” And yet, with no real imperative to
learn Flemish, language study in Belgium seemed no more relevant than it would be to the average American high school student in the U.S. Furthermore, every tentative foray into the language was met with a switch into English, initiated by someone more interested in communicating with me than in suffering through my attempts to form a few words in Flemish.

Had we seen our positions at AIS as permanent, it might have been different—but, in thinking we’d be there just for the short term, language acquisition just never took on that great a significance.

Had we received job offers in French-speaking Belgium or in France itself, the language issue might have been off the table for me. I had some familiarity with French from high school and college and enjoyed pushing myself to try to master the language. As attractive as the vaunted European “cafe lifestyle” was, however, the pull of Blair and the push of living in a region whose language I did not speak made it hard for me to commit to a future in Belgium. After two years abroad, we returned to Blair in the summer of 1995. Our daughter, Annelies, was born in Belgium and we remain friends with one Belgian family in particular, but 18 years later, that chapter of our lives is closed.
Steven Kampmann began his career as a comedic actor/writer at the legendary Second City Theater, appearing both in Chicago and Toronto. He wrote on and produced the hit television show *WKRP in Cincinnati* before co-starring on the successful *Newhart* show two years later in the role of Kirk Devane. He has appeared as an actor in eight movies, including a featured role in *Club Paradise* with Robin Williams, *For the Boys* with Bette Midler, and *Analyze That!* With Robert DeNiro and Billy Crystal. He co-wrote the hit comedy *Back to School* with Rodney Dangerfield and co-wrote and co-directed the film *Stealing Home* starring Jodie Foster and Mark Harmon. More recently, he co-wrote, directed and appeared in Second City’s first feature film in forty years, *BuzzKill*, featuring *Saturday Night Live*’s Darrell Hammond, which was released in 2012. He has just completed writing his first dramatic play entitled *Great Shame* and he’s currently authoring a guide to writing creative memoir. For 12 sensational years, he was on the faculty of Blair Academy teaching English, screenwriting, creative memoir and holding the title of Writer-in-Residence.
PG Year ’66

How do I begin to describe my postgraduate year in 1996 that has so nurtured and formed me over the years? I can honestly say no school experience ever brought me more joy, more adventures, more growth and more learning than my year at The American School in Switzerland (TASIS). Not even close. Forget about it. Game over. For starters, how about the stunning beauty of Lugano, Switzerland, with all of her resplendent seasons? Late fall with the comingling smells of acrid vineyards and unfiltered cigarettes; cold mornings that morphed into golden afternoons; the tall palm trees standing guard on Lake Lugano that swooshed and swayed in lazy afternoon breezes that you’d swear would never end and why would they?; or standing on the balcony of Villa Negroni in May, mesmerized by a lithesome girl sauntering by, her feet crunching on the pebble driveway, her beauty framed by snow-covered dustings on the peaks of distant hills and mountains. These treasured remembrances do not fade “gently into that good night” like so much of everything else, but still hum and haunt, soothe and inspire to this very day, to this very moment.

I think about the friends I made in that wondrous year. The #5 bus we all took from Vezia to Lugano every Friday night to see a foreign film at the local theater; the blooming romances; the myriad adventures we undertook, beginning with the cruise on the S.S. Atlantic from New York City to Africa. Even my dented memory can fondly recall standing on the bow of that good ship smoking Lucky Strikes with Steve Fuller (Yes, smoking was cool then), as we glided out of New York Harbor past the Statue of Liberty. How my body, mind, and soul ached with anticipation for all the unknown experiences and possibilities that awaited me in distant lands. But, in that moment, I didn’t care what those experiences would be. I just was so thrilled they were coming! For the first time in my life, I felt truly free. Free of my torturous, older brothers; free of the perils of high school with the countless burdens and anxieties of simply being a teenager on Planet Earth. Even the searing memory of my father’s tragic death some three years earlier (that later I would write about in the film Stealing Home) granted me a free pass that year. I don’t know why it did. But I was relieved. I was thankful.

By day, as our cruise made its way to Casablanca, we actually studied, prepping for SATs, learning Italian, attending lectures on modern Europe given by David Mellon, a brilliant teacher whose passion for
his subject matter became my very own model and mantra years later when I fell into teaching at Blair. But more on that later. At night, we watched foreign films, mostly Federico Fellini or Ingmar Bergman, followed by lively discussions, followed by beers (we were allowed to drink! Were these people nuts?), followed by sitting in deck chairs gazing up into the heavens counting our lucky stars that we were on such a grand adventure. Privileged? You’re damn right. But not just because it was an elitist education (which it was) but because it was the first time curiosity, the true engine of learning, awakened in us.

Mary Crist Fleming, who founded the school in the 1956, had a simple educational philosophy:

Find a beautiful property, both house and surroundings, for young people need and deserve to be surrounded with beauty. Fill this setting with young people from all over the world, because the world has become so very small. Fill all their waking hours with commitment to study, sports, the arts, and responsibility to others. Instruct—stretch them in all areas. They don’t know the amazing potential they have! Place in this ‘house’ very special human beings as teachers, friends, counselors, and role models, people who have a sense of the excitement of life and learning—of the huge challenge this world presents, and above all, great faith in their young charges. Sprinkle and cover the whole wonderful concoction, basting frequently with generous portions of TLC—tender loving care! Believe me, it’s a foolproof recipe!

And my-oh-my did her recipe work! My board scores soared 150 total points; I finished fourth in a class of 100; and I was accepted to the University of Pennsylvania. But, more importantly, my intellect came alive. My previous three years at a traditional boarding school (Lawrenceville) had suffocated then supplanted creative curiosity for the mind-numbing God of Achievement. Dread and fear of failure ruled there. My brain was dead. But, as it works out, it wasn’t dead at all! It had simply been put to sleep by the utter boredom of a rote memory education that was the way of learning in those days. TASIS changed all that. It engaged us, prodded our slumbering noggins, awakened and stretched our minds to “all the possibilities of our very existence.” We studied and then we traveled. We were exposed to new lands, new cultures, new everything. Like the bus tour through Italy; or the train trip to Russia, click-clacking our way over the gloomy, vast plains sipping black tea while reading Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky and figuring out clever ways to meet up with my girlfriend Carmel at the strictly supervised Soviet hotels; once we traveled to the opera in Venice on a foggy winter night to see and hear Mozart’s
Cosi fan tutte; we bused to the south of France in February, spending the night in Mrs. Fleming’s castle under a full moon; then rode horses at daybreak (I’m not making this stuff up); and later that same day came upon the artist Joan Miró, as he worked on a sculpture at the Foundation Maeght, which was but a stone’s throw away from the seaside enchantment of Nice on the Riviera. And, in the spring, on our Common Market sojourn, when most of us were in love or at least infatuated with someone, we made our way to Paris. How good was that you ask? Let’s just say “very” and leave it at that because what happens in Paris stays in Paris.

In those days, while most schools opened for business in September, we traveled through Italy experiencing the wonders of its ancient ruins, its ridiculously good food, and Rome’s traffic madness of speeding Vespas and honking horns. We didn’t actually arrive at school until early October. When our bus pulled into the school on that chilly October evening, there was the elegant Mrs. Fleming with her magnificently coiffed hair standing in the pebbled driveway of the historic Villa Negroni, welcoming us with open arms to our regal 18th-century home bathed in soft floodlights. Wait a minute. This palace was where we were to live? Was this a joke and the real school a fixed-up motel down the road? No joke. Somehow Mrs. Fleming convinced the Swiss to allow her to renovate this national treasure and turn it into a school! What incredible showmanship she possessed. In another life, I’m sure this remarkable woman could have made one hell of a theater or film producer or
anything else for that matter. She was that good. The last time I saw her was in July 2005, when my wife Judith and I visited her in Lugano. She was well into her 90s by then, but still had the same swagger and humor. When I first saw her, she said, “Hello, Steven. Look at me. I’m old. I’ve become the ‘remains of the day.’” She had style, energy, humor and financial resources—all powerful ingredients for sure. But it was her educational vision that set her apart, that made her truly special.

How sophisticated I felt drinking wine at dinner that first night at Villa Negroni. It felt like a communion, a rite of passage, gently guiding us toward adulthood, ushering in a significant chapter in our lives.

It proved to be a year when time seemed to have quickened as if it had places to get to, things to do or maybe we were too busy, too alive, to even notice time at all.

Years later, when I came to Blair after a career in film and television, I became aware of how the passion, humor and humaneness of the TA-SIS teachers affected me profoundly, allowing my enthusiasm for learning to seed and bloom, to be expressed in countless creative ways in my new role as a teacher. David Mellon, whom I previously mentioned, was an exceptional teacher. His love of history, politics, Italy, good wine, great films or anything that brought a good laugh infused me with curiosity about…well, ev-

...and yet I believe that a school like this one is not merely a campus and some classrooms, or a stop in the way between childhood and college. It is—it must be—a step on the inner journey which does not demand that we ever go anywhere, yet which makes us awaken, slowly or suddenly, to the fullest meaning of our own existence.

Mary Crist Fleming - founder
The American School in Switzerland
everything! He taught me to care for my work and my world. He was a mentor, who demonstrated every teaching day that passion for your material and a sense of humor are the two driving forces in becoming an impactful teacher. I am forever indebted to David Mellon and Mrs. Fleming for gracing my life. They proved that the powerful effects of teaching do not stop suddenly at graduation, but run deeper, unfolding miraculously over the course of a lifetime.

It was a year-long fairy tale that I deeply wished would never end, but of course it had to. Even now as I write these words, I am drawn back to 1966, remembering the agonizing departure in June of that year, the upbeat farewells to friends and teachers when future plans and gatherings were planned. But I knew something profound and special was ending, a door closing, that even the best of reunions could never recapture; and then later that final day, passing by the Villa Negroni on the train to Milano, on the way home, I caught a glimpse of workmen boarding up the Villa’s windows for the summer. It was over. As the train clicked-clacked on, the Villa Negroni fading from sight, I was left with that sinking empty feeling that would become a familiar inner visitor. Nothing is permanent. Nothing lasts. Dust to dust and all that. And, yet, as I write this, I am realizing the dust has never fully settled from my PG year because, after almost 50 years, this sweet breath of time continues to serve as my mentor as if the year itself were a best friend still bestowing wisdom—still stirring and resonating within.

Thank you, TASIS. I am grateful to you forever. And, to my dear mother “Binny,” who had the foresight to understand the significance that this year could have in my life and for making it happen. Then again, maybe she just wanted me out of the house.
Stuart Loory ’50 is a former vice president of Turner Broadcasting in Russia. A native of Pennsylvania, Mr. Loory was raised in Dover, New Jersey, and enrolled in Cornell University after graduating from Blair in 1950. He began his career as a journalist, first at the Cornell Daily Sun and then at the Newark News, later earning a master’s degree in the subject from Columbia University in 1958. He spent several years covering scientific, foreign and domestic beats for the New York Herald Tribune, The New York Times and the Los Angeles Times, before becoming a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C.

In the early 1970s, Mr. Loory moved to the Chicago-Sun Times, where he became associate editor, while also learning the ropes of the television industry as executive editor of WNBC-TV News. In 1975, he was promoted to managing editor of the Chicago-Sun Times, a position he held until 1980, when he joined Turner Broadcasting.

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Mr. Loory worked in Turner’s Washington and Moscow offices, holding a variety of positions, including as editor-in-chief of CNN World Report. He finished his career as executive vice-president of Turner International Broadcasting in Russia.

In 1997, he switched his focus to academia, accepting a position as the inaugural Lee Hills Chair in Free-Press Studies at the University of Missouri (UM). He also returned to his newspaper roots, serving as editor of the magazine Global Journalist and moderator of its corresponding radio program on KBIA-FM. He now teaches as professor emeritus at UM’s School of Journalism, as well as a Distinguished Fulbright Professor at the Centers for East Europe and American Studies at the University of Warsaw in Poland.

Over the years, he has co-authored several books, including The Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam (1968), Defeated: Inside America’s Military Machine (1973) and Seven Days That Shook the World: The Collapse of Soviet Communism (1991).
What is a Pectopah?

If You Didn’t Know, You Couldn’t Tell the Beginning from the End of the Soviet Union

In 1964, already 14 years out of Blair Academy where, as editor-in-chief of The Blair Breeze, I determined that journalism was my calling, I was working for the New York Herald Tribune. It was one of the great newspapers of the time, able to trace its roots back to Horace Greeley, who was instrumental in securing the nomination and election of an unknown Midwestern lawyer by the name of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency of the United States.

I had joined the Trib in 1958 and in those first years I became a science and medicine writer working for one of the legendary journalists of the day, Earl Ubell, the science editor who in 1957, covering the launch of the Soviet Union’s Sputnik, the world’s first human-launched orbiting satellite, wrote “Our planet has a new moon tonight.”

By 1963, Earl and I had covered all of the original Project Mercury American manned space flights. I also covered the launch of Telstar, the first communications satellite, and, surprisingly, the civil rights movement in the South. I interviewed the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; witnessed attacks on him and members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Montgomery, Alabama; was with him and hundreds of supporters in the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church of Montgomery for a prayer meeting and rally when it was attacked by white racists and he called Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy to urge the deployment of federal troops to protect the church and congregation; was with the Freedom Riders, as they were called, seeking desegregation of interstate buses, and saw King and his supporters arrested in Jackson, Mississippi, at the end of a ride from Montgomery.

How was it that a 31-year-old science writer could cover civil rights in the South, then one of the most important stories of the day, as well the launching of men into space?

At the Herald Tribune, we called it “social science.” (In 1969, the idea was reinforced when I was covering the Richard Nixon White House and attended a state dinner for the returning Apollo 11 astronauts who had flown to the moon. Werner von Braun, the space scientist who headed the Apollo Project and Billy Graham, the famous evangelical preacher, sat side by side during the dinner and afterword I approached them and asked:

“What did you two men talk about?” Without missing a beat,
von Braun answered:

“We talked about guidance—
divine and inertial.”

But back to 1964. That year, the
Moscow correspondent’s tour was
up and reporters interested in apply-
ing for the assignment were encour-
aged. I went to my boss, Richard C. Wald, managing editor, and said:
“You should send a science writer to
cover the Soviet Union.”

“Really? Why?”

“Because,” I replied, “science is
the most open part of Soviet society.
They are very proud of what they do
dand talk about it.”

“That’s a good idea,” Wald re-
plied. Six weeks later I was on my
way to Moscow with my wife and
three small children.

We arrived in the capital of the
Union of Soviet Socialist Repub-
lies—the USSR—late in the eve-
ning of a September day. I knew
almost nothing about my new as-
ignment, not even the Cyrillic al-
phabet of the new language.

On the ride in from the air-
port, the streets were poorly lighted
and the few automobiles were not
allowed to use headlights out of
concern that pedestrians would be
blinded. Entering the city center, I
saw one big neon sign in the dark-
ened city.

“What is a ‘Pectopah’?” I asked.

I learned that the Cyrillic letters
spelled “restaurant.”

I obviously had a lot to learn.
And quickly.

In 1964, the Cold War was at
its height. It was three years after
the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in
which the United States support-
ed a Cuban émigré force trying to
overthrow Fidel Castro. It was two
years after the Cuban Missiles Cri-
sis in which the Soviet government
tried to place nuclear missiles cap-
able of reaching Washington and
New York on the island. It was less
then a year after Lee Harvey Os-
wald assassinated President John F.
Kennedy in Dallas, Texas, and many
suspected the feared KGB, the So-
viet secret police, had put him up to
it.

Foreign correspondents in
Moscow could not travel more than
25 miles from the Kremlin without
getting permission from the Foreign
Ministry. It was assumed that ev-
everyone working for us—our trans-
lators, language teachers, maids,
drivers, handymen—either worked
for the KGB or reported to it. Or-
dinary Soviet citizens were afraid to
talk to foreigners.

It was assumed our apartments
and offices were bugged and our
phones were tapped. We said noth-
ing to our wives and children, as well
as those who worked for friends or
us, that we did not want the Soviets
to hear. Even large parts of Moscow
were closed to foreigners. There was
a serious problem with that. The
Soviets did not publish any maps
showing what territory was open
and what was closed in the city and
country. They only good maps were published by the CIA and made available to foreigners!

Life was not without humor in Moscow. We lived in an eight-story apartment house built by German prisoner-of-World-War-II labor. It was a fine building except that it was infested with cockroaches and mice. One day I went to the “kommandant” as the superintendent was called and asked him to do an extermination in our apartment.

"Gospodin (the term meaning “sir” was used to address foreigners. Soviet citizens used “comrade” when talking to each other), “we can do something about the mice but the “terracon,” (the roaches) “we cannot do because if we exterminate them in your apartment they will only move to another. And, besides, some people like the terracon.”

“I cannot imagine who likes terracon,” I said.

He nudged me in my ribs, smiled and said “the Hungarians like the terracon.”

There were satisfying moments professionally. About a month after I arrived, Nikita Khrushchev, the first secretary of the Communist Party and the real ruler of the country—was deposed in a Kremlin coup. I covered the first day of the story and late that night I said to my translator, “Anatoli, tomorrow we have to find out why this happened.”

“Certainly, gospodin” he said with the touch of a smile. I could see him thinking that American journalists had strange thoughts about news gathering in the Soviet Union.

But three hours later, he was in my apartment, waking me up.

“Gospodin, I want to tell you why Khrushchev was deposed.” Anatoli gave me 28 reasons.

“Anatoli, this is terrific stuff. Where did you get it?”

“Gospodin, I overheard some
people talking on a bus."

With some trepidation, I wrote the story. My colleagues all got “callbacks” from their offices. “The New York Herald Tribune is reporting xxx. What say you?” Callbacks were always fun when the other guy got them.

There were some dark moments as well. In 1965, the Trib bought the rights to a book called The Penkovsky Papers, serialized it and offered it for sales to customers of the Herald Tribune Syndicate. Oleg Penkovsky was a KGB colonel who defected to the United States and allegedly wrote an expose of the KGB. The Washington Post bought it and began publication. On Thanksgiving Day, Steve Rosenfeld, the Post correspondent was called to the Foreign Office and told that The Penkovsky Papers were a fabrication and the Post must cease publication. The paper refused, saying the book was true. Rosenfeld was expelled and the Post bureau was closed for many years.

About 10 years later, it was revealed that the CIA had actually forged The Penkovsky Papers.

Journalism in Cold War Moscow did have its ups and downs. Little did we know that we were, almost 50 years ago, covering the beginnings of final days of the communist world superpower.

Eight months later, the Herald Tribune went out of business. It failed in competition with The New York Times and expanding television news. I sold all of the Trib’s Moscow assets to The Christian Science Monitor, which was just opening a bureau. It was a sad end.

By 1983 I was working for the upstart in the news business, the first 24-hour television news service—CNN. In those days, it was called “Chicken Noodle News” and few in the TV news business thought it would last. I was sent to Moscow to cover what we thought would be the death of Leonid I. Brezhnev, the man who replaced Khrushchev during my first tour. Brezhnev did not die. CNN decided to open a bureau in Moscow and I became the first bureau chief.

It was an exciting beginning. Moscow had changed. It was an easier place to cover. People were more talkative. Travel, though still restricted, was easier. By 1986, Mikhail Gorbachev had come to power and there was a period of “glasnost” (openness) and “perestroika” (rebuilding). The dissident movement that started in the 1960s had grown to the point where we could openly meet with “refuseniks” (Jews who applied for emigration visa, were refused and fired from their jobs as well) and those who did not believe in the communist regime. We could invite Soviet citizens to our apartment and they came willingly.

In the Warsaw Pact countries of Eastern Europe, there were big-
ger changes—the growth of Solidarity, the Polish free labor union; the development of some capitalism in Hungary; the drive in East Germany toward reunification with West Germany; the ouster of the pro-Soviet communist government in Czechoslovakia. In 1986, I traveled with a camera crew through Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, a trip that resulted in a series titled “The Iron Curtain Rises” that won The Edwin M. Hood Award for Diplomatic Correspondence given by the National Press Club in 1986.

In August 1991, I was on a bike-riding vacation in Montana and Canada when members of the ruling Communist Party politburo mounted an ill-conceived coup against Gorbachev. They did not like “Gorby’s” attempts to reform Party rule. The coup was short-lived, but I was summoned from vacation to go to Moscow and help with the coverage. Using pictures from TASS, the official Soviet news agency, CNN produced a book titled Seven Days That Shook the World: The Collapse of Soviet Communism about the coup and the rise of Boris Yeltsin. I was the principal writer and editor of a book that was done by several CNN staff members. The book—a “quickie” in trade parlance—was finished and in print in three months. On Christmas night, 1991, I was in the Kremlin when Gorbachev announced his retirement and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In a sad commentary on everything that was wrong with the country, the pen he needed to sign the document dissolving a superpower did not work.

Tom Johnson, president of CNN, sitting near the new ex-president, handed him his Mont Blanc, and, in a few quick strokes, the Soviet Union was gone, thanks in no small part to Chicken Noodle News, which had learned the right way to pronounce “pectopah.”

What is a Pectopah?

from merlinandrebecca.blogspot.com (who also learned what it means on their travels)
Konstantin “Kostya” Tarasov ’13 is Stuart Loory’s grandson. Raised in Moscow, Kostya came to Blair for a postgraduate year. He now attends Fordham University where he can easily find more than one coffee shop or diner.
A Day in a Russian School

I went to Blair Academy for a postgraduate year, after having finished my 11 years of studying in a public school in Moscow, Russia. I will not be comparing the two schools, as Blair is a full-fledged institution that puts you in a certain educational environment, which is a very different experience from what I had before. Instead, I would like to share some differences between studying in Russia and the United States.

First of all, in Russia, there are no “elementary” or “high” schools. A student goes to the same school with the same people for 11 years. I remember someone at Blair telling me that four-year seniors are usually great friends, having spent so much time together. But 11 years together creates a much stronger bond. You come to school when you are six or seven years old, still a kid who is just about to start forming his character. You graduate, and you are already a person, ready to step into adulthood. And your classmates, who go through that with you, become very special people. To be honest, that is probably the best thing that my school gave me: my friends. “But what about education?” you ask. Well, that’s a whole different story.

When I first came to school, I was incredibly excited to learn. I wanted to know how to write properly, how to count, wanted to know more about our world, our history and so on. So, for the first four years, I was a perfect student. Then, I gradually started losing interest, and I am not the only person with a similar experience. The thing is, most teachers who I have crossed paths with were absolutely passionless about their subjects. They were dull, unprofessional (e.g., most of the classes, they would just make us read the textbook and answer questions from there, without giving any insight beyond the pages) and lacked creativity. It was hard to understand the purpose of going to classes, as you can read those textbooks at home or at a park, which would probably be a more pleasant experience. Also, the fact that you can’t choose what classes you take means that you have to deal with a lot of information that is irrelevant to you. Personally, I doubt that organic chemistry is something that I will ever need in life, but the teacher was convinced that everyone without exception had to know it.

In America, students always try to get good grades, as they have a strong impact on college admission. In Russia, however, admission is mostly based on the results of the State Exam, which is taken once at the end of the 11th grade. So, studying immediately seems “less important.” I say “studying,” not “learning,” because that’s what we did in my school. But when grades don’t matter, even studying
Tarasov

becomes rare. For example, at Blair, missing classes can get you in some serious trouble. In Russia, it’s a normal practice. Out of six or seven classes in a day, you can easily be late for one or two, and then leave before the last one if you feel like it. Sometimes the guard won’t let you, but jotting down a quick “note from parents” usually does the trick, and no one will really notice that you left. When you go into a class, which consists of about 40 people, you immediately notice a couple of usual things. The students who are there to study sit closer to the teacher, on the first row, while the others sit at the back, playing with iPads, reading random books or copying homework for the next class. Teachers can’t really do anything about it, except give bad grades, which, once again, don’t matter that much, so they don’t even do that.

When it comes to sports, unlike Blair, we didn’t have artificial turf soccer fields or state-of-the-art basketball courts. We would just play on the street, which was fun, but, of course, didn’t have any structure or real competitiveness. Plus, sharing one “cage” when half of the people want to play soccer and the others want to play basketball is not the most pleasant experience. But, again, it was good fun.

Another big difference between the schools, and probably one of the most important ones, is what we did after classes. Our teachers never really checked homework, so we had the rest of the day to ourselves. Now, at Blair, this wouldn’t make much of a difference, as there are a very limited number of things that you can do in Blairstown other than go to a rather below-average diner or an overpriced coffee shop. But when you live in one of the world’s biggest cities and have that much free

Moscow skyline from Google images.
time, every day can be a completely different experience. Good or bad, but an experience nonetheless. I will not get into detail about what we did, but believe me when I say that I learned much more useful things outside of school than I did inside it. And that was partly why I had so much trouble adapting to the Blair way of things, where it’s the other way around.

What you just read might sound horrible to you, at least from an educational standpoint, and it probably is, but I still love my school for some odd reason. I wouldn’t trade this experience for anything else, because as a person, that’s where I was formed. Yes, I didn’t learn much there, no one did, but somehow I ended up being accepted to Blair, one of the best schools in America, and then to college, so maybe the key to learning is not reading textbooks or listening to lectures, but having the inner desire to know more and taking the initiative to learn it yourself. Don’t take this as advice, though.
Ambassador Raymond Burghardt ’63 has lived for 22 years in Asia and five years in Latin America since 1963. His professional life focused on representing, protecting and advancing U.S. interests overseas as a career diplomat beginning in Vietnam during the war and ending as ambassador to Vietnam. From 2005 to 2012, he created a new division for the East-West Center in Honolulu, a leading educational non-profit organization, to promote Asian-American cooperation and understanding through exchange and seminar programs for journalists, politicians, business people and others. He continues to advance our interests in Asia in a part-time role as head of the office that manages the United States’ supposedly (but not really) “unofficial” relations with Taiwan. He also sits on boards of two companies that invest in Vietnam.

Ray and his wife, Susan, have been happily married and sharing adventures in Asia and elsewhere since 1969. One great pleasure has been their huge network of friends and colleagues, especially in the United States and Asia. They regularly visit with them on trips to Hong Kong, Vietnam, Taiwan, Korea, D.C., New York, and other far-flung locations; they also share an interest in art, Asian politics and business, cross country skiing, and golf. Their daughters, Helen (married to a Japanese man, living in Osaka) and Caroline (very much part of the New York art world), are great sources of pride and fun, as is their multiethnic and multicultural grandson, Martin (2-½-years old). Roy and Susan have enjoyed life in Honolulu since 2005, with part of the summer spent in Cape Cod, Massachusetts.

From Google images file.
New Strategic Partners
U.S. and Vietnam Begin Tough Trade Talks

Vietnamese and Americans joined together in Hanoi December, 2010 for a happy celebration, commemorating the tenth anniversary of the entrance into force of the US-Vietnam Bilateral Trade Agreement signed in December, 2001. The gathering of current and former trade negotiators, diplomats, and business leaders exchanged witty anecdotes about who had been the toughest negotiator. However, the main focus for both American and Vietnamese participants was on the positive prospects for future US-Vietnam relations across the spectrum of trade and strategic common interests.

For those of us who served in Vietnam during the war years, this celebration was the latest reminder of the remarkable transformation of a relationship from one of bitter foes to strategic partners. Ties between the United States and Vietnam have steadily improved since they were formally normalized in 1995, but the pace has accelerated during the past three years, motivated in part by shared concern over China’s aggressive maritime claims in the South China Sea.

Washington views Vietnam as a rapidly developing mid-sized country of some 90 million people, and Hanoi has been increasing its leadership role in Southeast Asia, a region that has America’s renewed attention. In turn, the Vietnamese leadership seeks regional stability, global integration, new foreign investment, and markets for its export industries, goals that require good relations with the United States.

America’s Asia-Pacific “Pivot”

The Hanoi commemoration of the Bilateral Trade Agreement came soon after President Barack Obama’s mid-November hosting of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in Honolulu, followed a few days later by his attendance at the East Asia Summit in Bali. President Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton used these summit meetings to announce America’s “pivot” back to Asia as the United States withdraws from its two long wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The administration has made clear that while the U.S. overall defense budget is reduced, it will not affect the U.S. forward deployment throughout the Asia-Pacific region.

An important component of the Obama administration’s Asia “pivot” policy has been its championing of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade agreement, which was a major topic of interest at the APEC summit. Nine Asia-Pacific countries, including the United States and Vietnam, are now engaged in negotiating this agree-
ment. A major objective for the United States has been to counter the trend of recent years in which China has signed trade agreements with its Asian neighbors that have excluded the United States.

**Vietnam Joins Trans-Pacific Partnership Talks**

In November 2010, the United States and other negotiating parties welcomed Hanoi’s decision to join the TPP negotiations, though both Vietnam’s interest and the welcome extended by other countries were somewhat surprising. Vietnam is the least developed economy among the prospective TPP members, and also by far the most “mixed” economy—market and non-market—among the nine. State-owned enterprises (SOE), are subsidized by generous loans from state-owned banks, and are an important feature of Vietnam’s economic system, which closely resembles China’s “state capitalism” model. One of Washington’s major goals for the TPP is a trade agreement in which private and state-owned companies compete on a level playing field. This goal reflects the serious American frustration with what it sees as unfair advantages that Chinese SOEs have in world trade.

This state enterprise issue will complicate Vietnam’s ability to negotiate successfully the country’s entrance into the TPP. Because of frustration with Chinese SOEs—and not just on the part of the Unit- ed States—there will be less tolerance than there might have been five years ago for Vietnam retaining the advantages it gives to its state companies.

**Our Strategic Partnership**

The administration’s “pivot” or “rebalancing” policy is fundamentally about giving the world’s most economically dynamic region the attention it deserves. But U.S. refocus on the Asia-Pacific region includes cooperation with China’s nervous neighbors in hedging against how Beijing might use its increased power and influence. With a long history of troubled relations with its huge neighbor, Vietnam is a logical partner. Many activities in the last three years, particularly naval, have signaled U.S.-Vietnamese strategic convergence.

This convergence between the United States and Vietnam, including welcoming Hanoi into the TPP negotiating group, is a significant piece of the “pivot” policy. During the 10th Anniversary Commemoration last December, both American and Vietnamese officials commented that Vietnam’s entrance into the TPP negotiations was a “strategic decision” by both Hanoi and Washington. While these are trade talks, they are made possible by joint strategic alignment and mutual trust.

A common interest in regional peace and security could help to smooth the way toward agreement, but tough negotiations lie ahead.
Vietnam’s negotiating partners will insist on a high-quality trade and investment agreement that will require transparency, protection of intellectual property rights, labor rights, and environmental protection as well as restraints on advantages given to SOEs.

For Vietnam, requirements to liberalize and modernize its economy come at a time of serious economic problems and heated internal political debate regarding the country’s direction. Inflation in Vietnam has repeatedly surged into double digits in the past few years, twice spiking well above 20 percent (currently the inflation rate is expected to run between 7-8%-editors’ note). Vietnam’s stock markets in 2011 were the worst performing in Asia, pledges of foreign direct investment declined, and all three major ratings agencies downgraded the country’s sovereign credit rating.

Vietnam’s top leaders recognize that these are serious problems, but have sharp disagreements about how to deal with them. A major issue of debate is how much to reform the system of SOEs. State banks are burdened by bad loans to these enterprises and many are performing poorly. The multi-billion dollar default of Vietnam’s shipbuilding industry group—Vinashin—in 2010 intensified the SOE debate.

Some are asking if Vietnam’s internal debates, along with U.S. concerns about Vietnamese SOEs, will prevent both countries from reaching agreement in the TPP talks. Vietnam’s successful conclusion of the TPP negotiations will require concessions by Hanoi as well as its negotiating partners, including the United States. Success will require that both give priority to the strategic partnership that has been forged in recent years.

The United States has identified Vietnam as one of its important new strategic partners in Asia. Vietnam sees America as the key to maintaining strategic balance in Southeast Asia. Many of us who have witnessed the bilateral relationship go from war to partnership within 35 years hope that this strategic shared vision will give trade negotiators the incentive needed to find common ground.
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Prior to joining the committee, Alex served as the deputy director of the Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (CTC) and a professor in the Department of Social Sciences at West Point. In this capacity, Alex’s research focus included the evolution of al-Qa’ida and U.S. strategy in Afghanistan.

Alex served in the U.S. Army as an infantry and military intelligence officer. While on active duty, he served in operational deployments to Kosovo (2002) and Iraq (2004-2005); and while in the U.S. Army Reserves, Alex was an assistant professor of military science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

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Alex at Blair’s Society of Skeptics.
Understanding Al-Qa`ida’s Business Model

During the past four years, two seemingly distinct and ostensibly contradictory narratives have emerged regarding the capability, positioning, and operational strategy of al-Qa`ida. On the one hand, many government leaders and counterterrorism experts have asserted that al-Qa`ida is weakening and too impotent to conduct large-scale attacks—as evidenced by the dearth of al-Qa`ida fighters in Afghanistan, its decreasing financial coffers, and its perceived operational incompetence in executing major attacks against the United States and the West. On the other hand, there are clear examples of al-Qa`ida’s ability to successfully influence and facilitate smaller scale attacks against the United States and around the world—as evidenced by Nidal Hasan’s attack at Fort Hood, the recent airliner packages plot, and Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab’s attempted attack on an airliner near Detroit on Christmas Day 2009.

How does one reconcile these seemingly paradoxical reflections of al-Qa`ida and gain greater conceptual clarity into how al-Qa`ida has evolved as an organization?

Understanding al-Qa`ida Today

Analysts and policymakers alike tend to use “yesterday’s metrics when trying to comprehend al-Qa`ida today,” which can lead to faulty assumptions and a flawed analysis that the al-Qa`ida-led global jihadist movement is weaker, ineffectual or less viable than it likely is. Analysts and policymakers often measure al-Qa`ida’s effectiveness through the number of attacks, number of fighters, and lethality of attacks. For example, many analysts argue that al-Qa`ida only has a couple hundred operatives in Afghanistan and Pakistan. While this may be true, al-Qa`ida does not have to fight in Afghanistan because it can rely on other militant groups to perform this role. Many policymakers argue that al-Qa`ida is receiving increasingly diminished financing from the global diaspora of jihadist sympathizers. Yet, al-Qa`ida has adapted its “business model” accordingly (thereby diminishing its cost structure) and no longer has to acquire as much money to fund operations. Still others contend that al-Qa`ida is contained in Pakistan due to the U.S. drone aircraft program. While this also may be true, these dynamics do not necessarily indicate that al-Qa`ida cannot facilitate the violence of its franchises, as well as other jihadist actors, to launch attacks against the United States. In short, all of these reflections of al-Qa`ida’s situational context are correct—yet to assert that al-Qa`ida no longer possesses...
the capacity to foment violence or lacks relevancy in the global jihadist movement suggests a fundamental misunderstanding of the strategic advantages associated with the group’s unique positioning within that movement today. Therefore, while these metrics can prove useful in understanding the capacity of al-Qa`ida to launch attacks independently, they do little in providing insight into al-Qa`ida’s senior leadership’s positioning within the global jihad, current organizational strategy, or consciousness of the exogenous environment in which they are operating today.

Unraveling the Paradox

These seemingly inconsistent and paradoxical understandings of al-Qa`ida today are, in part, due to a tendency to evaluate al-Qa`ida one-dimensionally and apart from a broader context, and an under-appreciation of the fact that al-Qa`ida has fundamentally shifted its organizational approach as well as its parochial/elitist goals within the global jihad. Rather than a one-dimensional, exclusively metric-based approach to understanding al-Qa`ida, the organization should be viewed as operating within a highly competitive environment vis-à-vis other jihadist groups—not to mention the United States. To remain relevant and to endure as a leading jihadist brand, al-Qa`ida must diversify to survive and evolve in order to thrive; it must diversify toward leveraging other groups to carry out its violent agenda against the United States and the West, and it must evolve toward focusing on its unique value within the global jihad given its history, branding, and increasingly constrained environment due to U.S. counterterrorism efforts.

In fact, al-Qa`ida’s senior leadership does not even evaluate itself through the threat-based metrics that Western analysts tend to use to evaluate them. Instead, al-Qa`ida’s senior leadership evaluates the exogenous environment in which they operate, and then dynamically looks inward to their organization to derive the most optimistic outcome given the reality of their constraining context. This multi-faceted and emotionally intelligent capability of al-Qa`ida’s senior leadership to understand the world around them and optimize the outcome within a given context exemplifies the very essence of al-Qa`ida’s aptitude to survive. To be sure, analysis of al-Qa`ida should begin via traditional, observable metrics; however, analysis cannot stop there. Analysts must situate al-Qa`ida within a broader competitive context and observe how al-Qa`ida is positioning itself within the highly competitive jihadist landscape in which it operates to gain insight into how al-Qa`ida’s senior leadership: 1) views itself internally, 2) operates within the milieu of global jihadist groups, and 3)
positions its unique and differentiated value to the overall global jihadist movement. One can begin to gain clarity in this manner by analyzing al-Qa`ida through the lens of a business and how it captures value for the overall global jihadist enterprise.

**Al-Qa`ida’s Business Model and its Positioning with the Value Chain Framework**

To gain greater conceptual clarity into al-Qa`ida today, one must assess al-Qa`ida’s unique value, differentiated role, and strategic positioning within the competitive landscape of the global jihadist enterprise as well as how it maintains its relevancy within the milieu of militant groups engaged in local, regional, and irredentist jihad. This analysis could provide a unique window of insight into how al-Qa`ida views itself and its unique value proposition to the global jihadist enterprise.

Ordinarily applied to business enterprises, Michael Porter conceptualized the value chain framework to describe the spectrum of activities in which value is captured and competitive advantage furthered. Porter’s framework presents a continuum of value-creating activities that an enterprise can be engaged in, including reception, production, and distribution of raw materials in addition to marketing and professional services. Porter argues that competitive advantage is ultimately realized through optimizing and coordinating these linked, value-creating activities.

In considering Porter’s framework, one can observe that al-Qa`ida continues to engage in all aspects of value-creating activity within the milieu of the violent jihadist enterprise—from recruiting “raw material” recruits for violence to marketing its brand and expertise to other jihadist actors. Due to constraints on al-Qa`ida’s freedom of movement imposed by the United States and Pakistan, al-Qa`ida’s leadership appears to have made a calculated decision to privilege its organizational branding and expertise and, thereby, move along the value chain toward almost exclusively engaging in professional consulting or advisory entrepreneurial activity. As a result, this positioning relieves al-Qa`ida from bearing the cost—opportunity or otherwise—of violent activity in Afghanistan, Pakistan, or around the world. Al-Qa`ida core has effectively deemphasized the resource-intensive portion of value-creating activity (training, equipping, and deploying fighters around the world) and is leveraging other violent movements to carry out these operational activities. Al-Qa`ida provides value as a consultancy in two critical ways: by serving as a financial advisor and facilitator to the global jihadist financial coffers, and by providing the ideological coherence within
the global jihadist movement. To that end, al-Qa’ida core appears to have largely abandoned investing its resources in the raw materials (or recruiting fighters), production (or training and indoctrination), and distribution (or global jihadist violence) portion of the value chain— for now.

To that end, al-Qa’ida’s approach to the Afghan jihad is a microcosm of how al-Qa’ida actualized its “professional services” role more broadly. Al-Qa`ida operatives have a small footprint in Afghanistan because they do not have to act on their own there: they can simply leverage and facilitate the violence of their jihadist brethren. In al-Qa`ida’s assessment, militant groups in Afghanistan still would be fighting the perceived U.S. occupation regardless of whether al-Qa`ida existed or not. To that end, al-Qa`ida is largely abdicating the responsibility of violently resisting the United States on the battlefield to other jihadist actors in Afghanistan, thereby promoting its expertise as a leading brand in the global jihad and solidifying its relevancy to, and underpinning the purpose of, violent defensive jihad. Al-Qa`ida is leveraging this critical dynamic to further part of its grand strategy and compel the United States to change its foreign policy and remove itself from traditional Muslim lands by providing train-the-trainer expertise, financial networks, strategic communication infrastructure, and ideological support to materially shape the very nature of the violence in Afghanistan as well as the manner in which the jihadist community understands the Afghan jihad. While al-Qa`ida’s presence appears to be small, the impact of its presence is reverberating across Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the West. Al-Qa`ida provides vital resiliency and ideological ammunition to the Afghan jihad through providing critical services that these groups could not provide as robustly themselves, while concurrently providing the ideological cohesion to the global jihadist movement. In other words, al-Qa`ida is actualizing its operational ends via a consultancy approach.

For example, Fazul Abdullah Mohammad (also known as Fadil Harun), believed to be a leading al-Qa`ida operative in East Africa, noted in his book War Against Islam that although he did not want to become a formal member of al-Shabab, he was nevertheless prepared to work with them. Fazul essentially saw himself as a consultant to al-Shabab on behalf of al-Qa`ida; someone who “helps every Muslim who desire jihad; we train him and offer him advice about the truth of jihad.” Fazul took it upon himself to consult with al-Shabab in establishing, among other things, advanced training courses for the elite forces, specialized courses to train...
snipers, a course in information technology and spying, as well as establishing a budget. Therefore, al-Qa`ida core leverages other militant actors, including affiliates, to conduct these efforts. Al-Qa`ida realizes that the resource intensive (or recruiting, training, equipping, and deploying) portion of the value chain does not embody its value proposition to the global jihadist movement—particularly because it no longer possesses the freedom to maneuver to conduct these efforts due to the U.S. drone campaign in Pakistan and global counterfinancing efforts. In short, al-Qa`ida understands that given the constrained context in which it exists today, it is able to provide more robust and enduring value (and solidify its long-term relevancy) to the global jihadist movement through its unique infrastructure and expertise in the marketing (media and fundraising) and services (provision of strategic vision, outreach, advising, and consulting services) portion of the value chain activities.

Al-Qa`ida’s professional services business model extends beyond the Afghanistan context. Globally, al-Qa`ida core has been able to amplify, foment, and re-orient the violence of local and nationalist jihadist groups through consultation with and augmentation of other militant jihadist groups. Al-Qa`ida uniquely understands how to play this role effectively, even though these groups may not wholly share the same agenda due to their shared experiences and ideological vision from the anti-Soviet jihad in the 1980s. These local jihadist groups’ membership often includes veterans of the anti-Soviet jihad who serve as a bridge between al-Qa`ida core and the local jihadist groups. In other cases, these groups require augmentation for specialized skills and/or resources that they cannot provide for themselves. Yet, in all cases, al-Qa`ida core has been able to demonstrate the ability to provide value to these groups and, in doing so, nest the local, regional, or irredentist grievance of these groups within their global jihadist narrative.

The Efficacy of the Al-Qa`ida Consultancy Model

Advantages

By positioning itself as a professional services or consultancy entity, al-Qa`ida is able to be an effective player within the global jihad—even within the constrained security paradigm in Pakistan. Moreover, al-Qa`ida’s return on investment (given its limited freedom to invest in jihad) is higher than it would be anywhere else along the value chain because resource “costs” (financial and human capital) are generally lower due to the nature of the consulting business model.

Al-Qa`ida must continually ensure that it remains relevant to these local and regional jihadist groups; in exchange, these groups effectively
“are” the al-Qa`ida movement. Thus, al-Qa`ida’s consultancy approach allows it to credibly claim that it is actively engaged in waging violence against the “far enemy” across the globe, while remaining unburdened by the actual costs associated with waging the violence. Moreover, this approach ensures that a local face remains fully imprinted on violence in each theater, thereby increasing the resiliency and legitimacy of various insurgencies; this is a crucial lesson learned from al-Qa`ida’s experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. At present, al-Qa`ida core’s reliance on leveraging networked and affiliated organizations presents a strength, but also a potential weakness to ensuring the longevity of the movement.

Disadvantages

Today, al-Qa`ida cannot lead within the global jihadist movement without providing unique capacities to these groups (media and financial networks), remaining relevant to their grievances, and connected to the realities of their local or regional environment. Ultimately, local groups have the freedom to operate in the manner that they see fit. This can be detrimental to the integrity of al-Qa`ida’s brand if, like Abu Mus’ab al-Zarqawi in Iraq, their mismanagement damages al-Qa`ida’s global image.\textsuperscript{13} As a result, while al-Qa`ida core appears to be successful in inspiring, promoting, and re-orienting the violence of its jihadist brethren, actually remaining relevant continues to be a significant challenge and vulnerability for the group. In recognition of this challenging dynamic of their consultancy business model, al-Qa`ida’s speeches have taken on a more populist tone by lamenting the lack of aid for the floods in Pakistan and blaming the United States and other industrialized states for global warming.\textsuperscript{14} While this rhetorical approach has led to more diversity within the current ranks of jihadists, al-Qa`ida’s brand runs the risk of becoming adulterated as it tries to incorporate and cohere together the increasingly diverse and fragmented nature of the global jihad. In short, by trying to stand for everything and by appealing to populist jihadist sentiment, the al-Qa`ida-led jihadist movement may come to stand for nothing and implode due to conflicting interests and risky ideological rhetoric.

Conclusion

The fundamental consequence of al-Qa`ida’s evolution toward this consultancy business model is that the jihadist profile and the type of groups who attempt to attack the United States will increasingly become fragmented, diffuse, and unpredictable. In fact, Faisal Shahzad’s attempted attack in Times Square on behalf of the Pakistani Taliban arguably could be viewed as the ultimate manifestation of al-Qa`ida’s success as a consultancy because
the Pakistani Taliban’s violence was opportunistically and successfully reoriented toward the U.S. homeland for the first time. Hakimullah Mehsud validated this point in a statement released after the Times Square attack by situating the group’s fight against the Pakistani state within al-Qa`ida’s grievance narrative. As a result, the Times Square attack shows the increasingly global orientation of a local jihadist group, which can be attributed to al-Qa`ida’s positioning within the services portion of the value chain, allowing it to possess greater ideational influence over jihadist actors such as the Pakistani Taliban. In aggregate, the reorientation of local, regional, and irredentist jihadist actors could create a critical mass that overwhelms U.S. counterterrorism systems and, in al-Qa`ida’s view, a policy change that removes the United States from supporting regimes that jihadists have declared to be apostate in the Arab world.

At a micro-level, it is this shift by al-Qa`ida toward the services end of the value chain that, at a macro-level, has materially altered the very nature of the violence toward the United States as well as the strategic “feel” of the global jihadist movement. These micro and associated macro level shifts are, in part, a reflection of the success of the U.S. counterterrorism campaign, but it also embodies a paradigmatic evolution in jihadist violence that will offer unique challenges for law enforcement to precisely identify and target future threats to the homeland.

In the final analysis, this symbiotic co-evolution of al-Qa`ida, and the broader jihadist milieu in which it exists, exemplifies the dynamism and complexity of the challenge that U.S. law enforcement and counterterrorism professionals currently face. To combat against this continued disaggregated threat, counterterrorism and law enforcement practitioners in the United States must rigorously comprehend both al-Qa`ida’s grievance narrative as well as the grievance narratives and associated trajectories of a myriad of local, regional, and irredentist jihadist groups who are situating their violence within al-Qa`ida’s global jihadist vision.
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End Notes

1 Lieutenant Colonel Reid Sawyer conversation March 2010.
2 Ibid.
8 Ibid., p.69
9 Ibid., p.138.
10 Ibid., pp. 69-70.
11 Examples include al-Qa`ida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), al-Shabab, Lashkar-i-Tayyiba (LeT), Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the Haqqani network, the Islamic Jihad Union, and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) to name a few.
Ambassador Steven E. Steiner ’58 is a senior advisor in the Center for Gender and Peacebuilding at the United States Institute of Peace. He has served in the Department of State’s Office of Global Women’s Issues and the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons. He also was the director of the Department’s Iraqi Women’s Democracy Initiative. Ambassador Steiner served for 36 years in the United States Foreign Service. He completed tours of duty at the Embassy in Moscow and the State Department’s Offices of Soviet Union and West German Affairs and served as the deputy director of the Department’s Operations Center, its 24-hour crisis management facility. He served from 1983 to 1988 as director of defense programs on the National Security Council Staff. He was named by President Reagan as the U.S. Representative to the Special Verification Commission, the implementing body for the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF), and was named by President Bush in September 1991 to serve as the U.S. Representative to the Joint Compliance and Inspection Commission, the implementing body for the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START).

Ambassador Steiner received the Secretary of State’s Distinguished Service Award in 2002, Presidential Meritorious Service Awards in 1990 and 1992, and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency’s Superior Honor Award in 1993. In May 1983, he received the Department of State’s Superior Honor Award for his work on European security issues.

Born in Pennsylvania, Ambassador Steiner received a BA in political science from Yale University in 1963 and a master’s degree in international relations from Columbia University in 1966. He is a member of The Council on Foreign Relations, The Washington Institute on Foreign Affairs and the U.S.-Afghan Women’s Council, and serves on the Board of the Council for a Community of Democracies.

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Peacebuilding Efforts of Women from Afghanistan and Iraq
Lessons in Transition

Summary

• In transitioning countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq, women are increasingly finding their rights limited by state and religious leaders.
• Cultural and national stereotypes can be quickly overcome by the shared backgrounds, accomplishments, obstacles, and aspirations of women in transitioning countries.
• Women living in countries in transition value opportunities to network with women from other countries in similar situations.
• Women leaders from Afghanistan and Iraq have genuine concerns about the challenges facing women in the Arab Spring. Their valuable opinions are based on their own experiences of overcoming those challenges.
• It is essential that women work together and with men to further women’s rights.
• Women must plan for a transition before it happens and have a strategy of work going into the transition process.
• Laws empowering and protecting women do not work if they are not enforced.
• International donors need a long-term view of women’s programming, as much of the required work will take time.
• Donors should consider non-urban areas when working with women, and when possible nonelite partners, as these leaders understand the limitations of local conditions.
• It is possible for women's groups to find common ground with religious leaders.
• Political empowerment is extremely difficult if female political activists do not first achieve economic independence. Therefore, economic, social, and political empowerment are each crucial and intertwined.

Introduction

The political transitions in Afghanistan and Iraq pose numerous challenges and opportunities for women to engage in peacebuilding. In Iraq, the women’s rights movement has stagnated, and quotas protecting women’s political inclusion risk being eliminated.

In Afghanistan, women have made significant political, economic, and educational gains since 2001, though the question remains as to how to maintain and build upon those gains once the United States withdraws from Afghanistan in 2014. Advancing women’s empowerment is an essential priority for the transition in each country as it contributes to long-term stability.
Engaging and including women in peace processes brings to the table issues such as human rights, justice, national reconciliation, and economic renewal, which are key ingredients to enduring peace. The current political transition in the region offers an opportunity to assess lessons learned from U.S. engagement in both countries, particularly regarding women’s programming. Such an assessment is timely and important given the serious budget constraints facing the foreign affairs community, potential donor fatigue, and limited resources. By identifying common challenges and best practices, the lessons can be applied to future programming for women in conflict and postconflict zones, particularly in countries of the Arab Spring, which now face many unique, yet similar, challenges.

After interviewing numerous U.S. government officials and non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives, the U.S. Institute of Peace began convening individuals from U.S. government agencies and departments, U.S. military services, international and domestic NGOs, and civil society organizations working in support of women in Afghanistan and Iraq, bringing the expertise of each organization to bear in a community of practice.

Working group discussions have focused on the role of women in peacebuilding and on establishing a set of best practices to develop more effective programs to empower women in conflict or transitioning countries. Roundtables have included several dialogues with women leaders from Afghanistan and Iraq. In the past year, the working group has held a roundtable discussion with the leader of the Afghan Women’s Network (AWN), met with the International Women of Courage (IWOC) 2012 awardees from Afghanistan and Pakistan, held discussions with leading women activists from both the north and south of Iraq, and had an excellent exchange of views with the Assisting Marsh Arabs and Refugees (AMAR) Foundation’s president, Baroness Emma Nicholson.

In June 2012, the Institute brought together a diverse group of Afghan and Iraqi women leaders for an invitational expert dialogue in Istanbul, Turkey. This innovative dialogue dispelled mutual stereotypes between Afghan and Iraqi women as they shared their backgrounds, accomplishments, aspirations, and challenges. Effective ties were quickly established among counterparts—such as national members of parliament (MPs), whose comments in the dialogue often reflected parallel concerns—and the group mapped out practical steps forward for women in transitional countries.

The participants quickly established that women in Iraq and Afghanistan were enduring difficult transitions, at times facing the po-
Potential loss of previously guaranteed rights. Because Iraq had entered its transition earlier, the Afghans expressed interest in the Iraqis’ advice on how transition dynamics affect women. One of the Afghans stated that she hoped “to have action points to take home” regarding best practices for supporting women in a time of transition.

Finding Common Challenges

Women leaders in Iraq and Afghanistan face numerous common challenges. First among them is lack of security, which affects women’s sense of safety and their ability to contribute effectively to development efforts in their country. Women also suffer from a lack of educational opportunities; of awareness of their rights, particularly in rural areas; of equal access to justice; and of an understanding of women’s rights among predominantly male police forces. Armed militias in both countries threaten the rights of women, and militia members now hold positions in both national governments. As a result, these governments minimize the voices and participation of women. This report addresses the challenges of divisions among women, security, economic dependency, poor communication with religious leaders, lack of implementation of laws ensuring women’s rights, poor use of women’s programming funds, short program length, and choice of partners—just some of the challenges that Afghan and Iraqi women have faced in their struggle for empowerment.

Bridging Internal Divides

Competition and division among women in Afghanistan and Iraq is a common concern. It has been particularly difficult to bring together women parliamentarians and women civil society leaders, though Afghan participants felt that their work on the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) law was an exception, “where we managed to bridge that gap.” There is also a significant gap between religious and secular women leaders. In Iraq, it has proven very difficult to persuade secular and religious women to recognize common ground and to work together. Moreover, women in both countries frequently have been mobilized to speak out publicly against other women on rights issues, usually at the instigation of male opponents of women’s rights—which is used strategically to divide women and diminish their common concerns. Exacerbating this problem is a general lack of self-confidence as women underestimate themselves and accept the prevailing notion that they are inferior to men. As a consequence, women find themselves relinquishing decision making about their lives to their male counterparts.

Preparing for the Transition

With both countries facing difficult transitions, women’s rights
have been jeopardized by the absence of mechanisms to secure them during and after transition, as well as by governments’ and citizens’ lack of understanding of transitional and peace processes. In Afghanistan and Iraq, heavy emphasis continues to be placed on the military and security aspects of transition to the detriment of other national needs. In Afghanistan, women look to the 2014 Afghan presidential elections as an opportunity for a peaceful democratic transition. They also increasingly look to them both as an important marker of involvement and progress, and as ensuring that their hard-won gains are not lost. Women are thus working on obtaining better access to finance and education at every level, addressing peace and security issues, and much more, positioning themselves early to play an important role in the 2014 elections.

**Women’s Economic Access and Politics**

Women’s economic prospects figure significantly in the challenges women face in Afghanistan and Iraq. Political empowerment is extremely difficult if female political activists do not first achieve some measure of economic independence. MPs from both countries said they had obtained virtually no financial support for their campaigns other than family sources, and that female candidates often have had to jeopardize their families’ finances to conduct a campaign.

**Religious Leaders as Allies**

Women’s groups’ efforts to reach out to religious leaders have had shortcomings. Afghan participants noted with regret that the Afghan National Ulema Council has not supported women’s rights; in early spring 2012, the council passed a decree stating that women were subordinate to men, should not mix with men in work or education, and must be escorted by a male relative when they travel. However, opinions among religious leaders differ significantly on the role of women in society, and participants argued that women can reach out to religious leaders who potentially support women’s rights. In doing so, women need to choose their terminology cautiously; advocates have learned to approach the issue of child marriage by emphasizing the need for safe marriages and to characterize the issue of violence against women as forming healthy family relationships from an Islamic perspective.

Another problem is the low number of women religious leaders or scholars, especially in Afghanistan. Afghan participants requested assistance in reaching out to female Islamic clerics and scholars in countries such as Morocco.

**Enforcing Laws**

Both Iraqi and Afghan women have considerable rights enshrined in their countries’ constitutions, but these rights are often not imple-
mented effectively, particularly regarding violence against women. Afghan women worked hard to bring the 2009 EVAW law into practice. The law criminalizes child marriage, forced marriage, selling and buying women for the purpose or under the pretext of marriage, baad (giving away a woman or girl to settle a dispute), forced self-immolation, and seventeen other acts of violence against women, including rape and beating. It also specifies punishment for perpetrators. Despite the law, many cases of violence against Afghan women are withdrawn or mediated, including serious crimes that would require prosecution. Some murder cases and other serious crimes that the EVAW law would criminalize are instead prosecuted under the penal code or sharia. Iraqis still lack a law such as EVAW altogether.

**Resources for Women’s Programming**

The international community offers significant assistance in empowering women in Afghanistan and Iraq, which dialogue participants appreciated, despite their sense of several major shortcomings in the international approach. The most notable of these were a lack of coordination among international donors and between international and local partners, a lack of depth in some international programs, the failure of some donors to listen and absorb recommendations from local partners, and the absence of effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Resources spent on vocational training, for example, could be better used to position women to play an important role in the transition process in a myriad of ways, such as coalition building, capacity building in leadership, and higher education at the graduate-school level.

Both Afghans and Iraqis said international donors often focused on the short term, which occasionally led to prescriptive attitudes, a results-driven approach, and a lack of trust in local partners. This led to inadequate strategic planning on women’s longer-term needs, such as broader women’s access to higher education. In a time of major transition for both countries, the international community needs to stay engaged on issues of concern to women and to have a longer strategic vision. International donors also need to better understand the nature of transition and the difficulty of moving from authoritarian rule to democratic governance. One participant emphasized that “democracy is the friend of women,” but another stated that a successful transition requires the “breaking down of the old mentality,” which can take a great deal of time. Finally, international donors were slow to reach beyond urban elite partners and often confined their outreach to English speakers and civil society.
organizations based in city centers. This limited the choice of partners and tended to amplify and perpetuate internal divisions among women.

**Lessons Learned**

Considerable consensus still exists on the lessons learned from women's programming in Afghanistan and Iraq.

- Plan ahead for long-term positive peace. Women have to be prepared and ready for when a transition in their country provides an opening for greater empowerment. Women leaders and future leaders—both women and men—should fully understand the issues women face in their country, know their agendas, and have public statements and other initiatives prepared on key issues.

- Reach out and cooperate with other women, particularly those who are active in other sectors of society, such as business, academia, and health care. This remains a weak area in both Afghanistan and Iraq, not only across sectors, but also among the leaders of the wide spectrum of civil society organizations focused on women's issues.

- Reach out to women living in nonurban and rural areas. Part of the difficulty of this issue is the problem of safe access to remote areas in both Afghanistan and Iraq.

- Seek the support of men on women's rights. Women have successfully gathered support from men who were known to be defenders of human rights, “showing these men we could work shoulder to shoulder with them.” However, much more needs to be done to gain the support of male community and religious leaders.

**Best Practices**

Along with providing their sense of national and international lessons learned, participants identified effective actions women leaders had taken. The Afghan participants cited the following as accomplishments:

- Mobilizing early during the internal conflict rather than waiting for the postconflict period.

- Lobbying effectively to join the constitutional drafting process.

- Taking advantage of the political transition period in which the country’s laws were in question to advocate for legal reforms that benefit women (e.g., the successful advocacy in passing the EVAW law).

- Pulling women together from diverse sectors, provinces, ethnic groups, and backgrounds to support a common cause.

- Practicing timely advocacy on key issues.

- Reaching out to men to form partnerships, especially with religious leaders and tribal elders.

- Pressing early for participation in the political process. Quotas have been an instrumental tool in women's participation and need to be maintained at the national and international levels.
provincial levels.

The Iraqi participants cited as accomplishments after the Saddam Hussein regime:

• Working quickly to establish a broad spectrum of civil society groups focused on women’s empowerment.
  • Establishing effective internal and external communications and networking between women’s groups.
  • Establishing clear goals and developing effective lobbying and advocacy campaigns.
  • Effectively using mass media.
  • Reaching out to international and regional actors.
  • Building awareness campaigns around issues of concern to women.
  • Establishing parliamentary quotas at the provincial and national levels.

Women of the Transition Countries

Afghan and Iraqi participants unanimously expressed their strong interest in reaching out to and networking with women in other countries in transition, particularly Libya, Tunisia, Yemen and Egypt. They hope to not only offer their insights and best practices for helping women in other transition countries, but also to support women in these countries use the lessons they have learned from their own experiences. The Afghans and Iraqis encouraged women in the Arab transition countries to take action on specific challenges:

• Seize the opportunity afforded by a transition and develop a strategy as soon as possible to advance the role of women in their country.
• Establish strong political and economic participation among women at the outset of the transition.
• Consult as broadly as possible with both female and male stakeholders to create a sustainable, inclusive, and feasible strategy.
• Complete a practical, proactive, and comprehensive assessment of the needs facing women in their country.
• Understand the laws women wish to see removed or created and make an early effort to press for legal reforms.
• Partner with governments wherever possible to advance their agenda and show that they do not oppose the government.
• Seek and accept government funding in areas where mutual interest in cooperation, such as health care for women, is strong.
• Work with governments and other stakeholders to institute gender budgeting and mainstreaming in government programs.
• Institute in all key sectors capacity-building training for women to include strong internal accountability checks, effective monitoring and evaluation processes, and a rigorous effort to counter corruption.
• Seek full and continuing par-
ticipation in drawing up a new national constitution and ensure that the development of a constitution is a deliberative and inclusive process.

- Advocate for the establishment of national- and provincial-level quotas.
- Be inclusive and open to growth and new ideas, in part by reaching out to a broad range of national and international donors for advice, capacity building, and technical assistance.
- Build alliances and establish productive working relations with a broad range of stakeholders in country.
- Reach out to male defenders of human rights as well as other male leaders in government, political life, the business community, and civil society.
- When possible, establish a working relationship with religious leaders on issues of mutual interest.

In addition, Afghan and Iraqi participants advised women in the Arab transition countries against several approaches:

- Limiting programs to urban areas, women’s centers, and interaction with “well known personalities.”
- Limiting women’s programming to a special set of beneficiaries.
- Mixing women’s programming with military activities.

**Next Steps**

Afghan and Iraqi participants are determined to work together “to amplify the voice of women.” To do so, they plan to form a network among Afghan and Iraqi women leaders that will serve as a sounding board, a forum to exchange ideas, and a general resource pool for women leaders. It will also allow women to share insights on running for political office, compare research, and assess the effects of the implementation of their new constitutions. It is hoped that the network will grow to include women with experience in legislation on women’s rights and female Islamic scholars. The women wished to establish connections with Morocco in particular.

The Center for Gender and Peacebuilding at USIP intends to move quickly to build on the momentum that the successful dialogue among Afghan and Iraqi women experts has achieved. In the future, USIP will convene a second expert dialogue with Afghan and Iraqi women leaders, along with a small group of Libyan and Tunisian women leaders. The goals of the second dialogue will be to build on the findings from the June 2012 dialogue and share lessons learned from Afghanistan and Iraq with colleagues from Libya and Tunisia. In addition, the dialogue will consider certain other issues:

- The merits of a Global Women’s Peacebuilding Advisory Council, with women from Iraq and
Afghanistan playing a critical role. This group could advise women in countries around the world that are undergoing rapid transition, passing on lessons learned and best practices.

- Development of a series of papers that participants in the second dialogue will draft on key thematic issues in the role of women and peacebuilding in transition countries. USIP will commission papers to be widely disseminated to policymakers in Afghanistan, Iraq, the United States, and other countries.

USIP also intends to continue to work closely with the community of practice that it has put together to review lessons learned and best practices in women’s programming, and to continue the working group’s roundtable discussions. The working group will continue to engage with women leaders from countries in transition. A roundtable discussion is also planned on the subject of reaching out to men in Islamic contexts to support women’s rights.

Ambassador Steiner speaks at the Society of Skeptics.
Drs. Carl Christianson and Jolene Schuster both joined Blair’s science department in 2012. Carl teaches accelerated chemistry and advanced placement biology. Prior to coming to Blair, Carl taught at Boston College and worked as a biochemical researcher at the Max Planck Institute in Berlin. He received his PhD in chemistry from Boston College in 2008, where his work focused on the development of new antibiotic compounds. In 2003, he completed his undergraduate work in chemistry at the University of Connecticut. Carl coaches recreational golf and JV baseball and is the housemaster for Annie Hall together with Jolene and their dog, Cora.

Jolene teaches chemistry, biotechnology and marine science, as well as serving as the assistant coach of the girls’ cross country and track teams. She completed her undergraduate work in chemistry and biology at Penn State Behrend in 2004 and received a PhD in bioinorganic chemistry from Dartmouth College in 2009. Prior to coming to Blair, she worked as a graduate assistant in Dartmouth’s chemistry department and completed several postdoctoral research projects at the University of Potsdam in Germany and at Wellesley College in Massachusetts.

Carl writes of their experiences abroad in their respective fascinating fields of expertise and study.

Drs. Schuster and Christianson in Portugal.
Working Abroad

Working, living and learning abroad is a wonderful experience whose benefit can only be realized by going through the process yourself. Being teachers, we searched for lessons to impart through the sharing of our experience. The lesson here is that you need to travel, to be outside of your comfort zone, to listen and pay attention to your surroundings, to adapt and to challenge yourself. This is how an experience becomes meaningful. With the understanding that our stories are only meant to serve as an illustration of what one might encounter, we would love to share some of the meaningful experiences that happened as a result of living in Berlin, Germany, for three years.

We moved to Germany as post-doctoral researchers. I received my PhD in chemistry from Boston College and Jolene received her PhD in chemistry from Dartmouth College. We had the good fortune of both being awarded an invitation to travel to Germany for an international conference the year before we received our degrees. This experience allowed us to investigate Europe as a destination for our continued work in our scientific fields. After looking at several labs across the European continent, we chose positions in Berlin, Germany. I worked at the Max Planck Institute of Colloids and Interfaces researching the complex structure of carbohydrates on cell surfaces, while Jolene accepted a position in the biology department of the University of Potsdam investigating roles of metal ions in biological systems. We had always been cognizant of the power of our education to open doors and provide new learning opportunities, but we found that education was also a very valuable way of facilitating travel. This wasn’t a one-way street, either. Travel broadened our experiences and allowed us to gain a breadth of knowledge though the places we went and the scientists we met along the way. It also allowed us to share our culture and experience with others in our adopted homeland.

The scientific research community in Germany is composed of three primary branches, including academic institutions, industrial research and independent research institutes, including those of the Max Planck Society. There are over 80 individual institutes organized under the umbrella of the Max Planck Society. Each is tasked with looking at fundamental concepts of science in ways that would be more difficult through organizations that rely on governmental money and are embroiled in the politics associated with it. Max Planck was a German physicist working in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. He won a Nobel Prize for his work...
in discovering the field of quantum mechanics, giving humans a greater understanding of the subatomic world. During his time as a research scientist, he was president of Germany’s Kaiser Wilhelm Society. After Planck’s passing in 1947, the organization was renamed in his honor and stands today as an integral player on the global stage of scientific investigation. The directors of each institute are awarded sufficient funding to alleviate the challenges of acquiring funding that often complicate and slow the progress of research. Without this pressure, the institutes can focus on finding answers to important scientific problems that face society. My research at the Max Planck Institute for Colloids and Interfaces focused on the role of sugars in biochemistry. All cells are coated with a specific pattern of sugars, much like a unique fingerprint that identifies it. By learning to recognize which sugar patterns were on individual cell types, we could target specific cells in hope of treating different diseases. The focus of study during my time in Berlin was on malaria. A microbe named *Plasmodium falciparum* causes malaria in humans. We were able to isolate unique sugars on the surface of this microbe and to develop a vaccine against it. My individual work involved looking at the specific structure of this carbohydrate, as well as other sugars found on the surfaces of cells involved in diseases ranging from HIV to cancer. An understanding of these sugars should lead to specific drugs that target these diseased cells without the negative side effects that are typically associated with other chemotherapeutic methods.

Jolene’s research in the Division of Molecular Enzymology at the University of Potsdam’s biology department centered around the metal element molybdenum and its roles in biological organisms. Molybdenum is found in abundance in the ocean and, although it is rare in mammalian systems, it takes part in three essential enzymes. These biological catalysts facilitate important processes, including the breakdown of alcohol in the liver. Some types of bacteria employ molybdenum in higher quantities than we mammals and they provide ideal model species to track the pathways single atoms of molybdenum follow from outside a cell to their destination at the center of an enzyme. At each stage of the sub-cellular journey, ions of molybdenum are passed hand-to-hand between a series of molecular “chaperones” to assure that no atoms go astray where they may damage other cell parts. Today, some of the partners in this complex process are still unidentified and Jolene’s research was focused on locating a missing chaperone and elucidating the mechanism by which it collected its charge, traveled to its destination and passed it.
Working Abroad

This project allowed her to work closely with scientists in several departments within the University of Potsdam, as well as with labs in Lisbon, Portugal, and the U.S.

When we were about to move to Berlin, we had only just begun to look into learning German. Nearly everyone we would speak to said that it wasn’t important to learn the language, as “everyone speaks English.” We also were buoyed by the fact that the international language of science is English. No problems! The shortsightedness of this advice was realized nearly immediately upon landing at Tegel airport in Berlin. I moved six months ahead of Jolene, as she was still completing her degree. I realized, only then, that living in a foreign country and visiting a foreign country were two unrelated situations. If I had wanted to go to a hotel and visit museums, I certainly would not have had to learn the language. However, as a new resident, I needed to go to the town hall to register myself. I needed to go get a work visa. I had to get a bank account, a cell phone and groceries. It soon became apparent that most Germans who I encountered around town did not speak English with the fluency of university students. The frustration of this was acutely obvious when I went to the apartment that I had arranged to rent. It was advertised as “unfurnished.” I assumed, as most Americans would, that I would have
to purchase a bed, a couch and other creature comforts. Instead, I walked into the apartment and saw blank walls with water pipes sticking out, no kitchen sink, no cabinets, no lighting fixtures. As it turned out, unfurnished in Germany literally meant that nothing was in the apartment. I was actually lucky that there was a toilet already installed. The next week involved learning as much German as I needed to build a kitchen, a bathroom and other necessities. No problem, I thought. I went to Bauhaus (German Home Depot) and IKEA and started to load my cart with things. I lived about one kilometer away and had the idea that I would buy as much as I could carry home and then go back. I had a friend who had a car and would do the big trip with a counter top with him. I got up to the checkout and smiled, said “Ich spreche kein Deutch.” (I don’t speak German), and handed him my credit card. It took a moment, but I learned my next important lesson. Most shops and businesses don’t take credit cards in Germany. They are a more cash and bank-issued debit card based society. So, I’m in a foreign country, I don’t speak the language, I realized my apartment has bare walls, and I am unable to use a credit card. What do you do at a time like this? That’s right, go to McDonald’s. It was the only place around that had Internet. I was able to Skype to Jolene that she needed to wire me money. To make a long and convoluted story short, Jolene came one week later and we were able, over the course the next several weeks, to build an apartment, set up bank accounts in Germany, get cell phones, work visas and register with the local government. Each one of these small tasks was a monumental personal victory. Even going down the street to order a döner kebab was a victory. I would go over the German phrases I needed to place my order and pay. Then I would go. Invariably they would ask me something for which I was unprepared. No problem, I could prepare for the next time. Of course, the next time it would be something different. Though, it was this learning process and knowing that we could do it that was so rewarding.

One unique aspect of living abroad is the ability to gain perspective on the United States. It is hard to look critically at our country while living here and being surrounded by the omnipresent news sources. If you ever want to learn how America or Americans are perceived, simply live and work elsewhere. I worked in a lab of 75 scientists, including four Americans. Jolene worked in a lab of 15 scientists within a department of 100 more and she was the only American. It was very easy to learn about the perceptions of others in this type of situation. Here are a couple very interesting things that we learned while working and living...
abroad.
• Not everyone wants to be in America. We often feel that America is the land of the free, and everyone strives to make it here. Not surprisingly, many of the people we met had very little interest in America. Many wanted to visit New York or Los Angeles, but had no other thoughts on our country.
• Not everyone loves or hates America. We often think that if someone doesn’t love America then they must hate it. We found that many people were ambivalent to America. It is just another country. One to which they hadn’t given much thought.
• There are a lot of bad American stereotypes (due to popular music and television). We were asked questions about why Americans were so racist, about our love of guns, about why we eat unhealthy fast food all the time or why we don’t teach our kids about evolution. We would have to explain that these were not things that described most Americans.
• Many people had quite unnuanced ideas of what Americans are like and what we like. We came to understand this as similar to Americans’ view of many Europeans. It is nearly impossible to appreciate the variability within a culture without experiencing them firsthand. Just as we might have made the assump-
tion that Oktoberfest was a good representation of German culture, they felt that the Jersey Shore was representative of American lifestyles.
• Watching the healthcare debate from a country where the question of medical coverage is not a contentious topic was very educational. The entire debate that America was having did not make sense to our German, English, Spanish, Italian, Korean or Chinese friends. In addition to that, the debate started to make less sense to us as we lived in Germany, obtained health insurance and used the medical system as residents. All I could think about the attacks on such a medical system was that they must have been perpetuated by people who never lived under one.

These stories are our personal experiences. They mean a lot to us and might speak to others as well. One thing we hope to accomplish as Blair teachers and mentors is to have our students understand the power of education. Education facilitates so many things, and living abroad can be one of them. Many of the lessons learned through travel and living abroad cannot be learned in any other way. Each person’s experience will be different, but blissful, challenging or both—regardless, the experience will bring new perspective and untold rewards.
Carl and Jolene glacier hiking in Norway.