

1-29-2016

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Recommended Citation

Gardner, Sarah and Albee, Dave, "Dominican Scholars share Oxford University experience" (2016). *News*. 13.
<http://scholar.dominican.edu/news-releases/13>

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Dominican Scholars share Oxford University experience

For Dominican Scholars Kylie Walsh '16, Donovan Hernandez '16, and Alex Pollok '17, the opportunity to study at Oxford University during the fall 2015 semester was an once-in-a-lifetime occasion to grow academically, intellectually and spiritually.

“I would have to describe my experience as magical. Every day at Oxford was a new adventure,” says Kylie, an English major who studied Irish novelist James Joyce and Victorian Literature at Oxford. “I was given the opportunity to travel across the world and learn so much, especially about myself. It's renewed my confidence and has refocused my goals. The entire experience was just so intense and wonderful.”

The students were afforded the privilege of attending Oxford for a semester as part of a new agreement between Dominican and [St. Catherine's College](#), one of the University of Oxford's 44 autonomous colleges and permanent private halls.

The program was launched by [a gift from Marin residents Thomas and Joanne Peterson](#) in support of The Thomas and Joanne Peterson Endowed Scholarship for Dominican Scholars at Oxford.

Dominican President Mary B. Marcy in 2011 embarked on a plan to expand the University's international programming by involving students with meaningful study abroad opportunities. Having earned both her Doctorate of Philosophy and Master of Philosophy from Oxford, President Marcy is aware of the unique educational experience that studying at Oxford will provide Dominican's students.

“I was able to gain a much greater confidence in myself academically,” says Alex, who is majoring in history with a minor in business within the [School of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences](#) and the [Barowsky School of Business](#). “I enjoyed the new experience and challenges that came with this different method that Oxford uses. It instilled a greater sense of independence in conducting my research and formulating my own opinions rather than of my professors or the authors whose books I am reading.”

Alex, Kylie, and Donovan were all impressed and challenged by the unique and highly personalized tutorial method of instruction at Oxford and discussions that followed.

“I got so much out of the experience academically and it made me remember why I love learning so much,” Kylie explains.

The Dominican Scholars did manage to find time to explore and embrace the history and tradition of Oxford. They shared their experiences with peers and the diverse international student population.

“The most important aspect I learned at Oxford was to truly live everything I possibly can before I leave my university. Given that I had only a few months in Oxford, I had to go to as many events as possible and be with everyone as many times as possible,” says Donovan, who is majoring in humanities and cultural studies with two minors in Spanish and business within the School of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences and the Barowsky School of Business. “At Dominican, I will try to do the same because it is my last few months as an undergraduate and this last semester can be crucial to how I will develop further as an adult.”

At Oxford, Donovan, Kylie and Alex were all engaged in the Oxford ideal of learning. For example, Kylie reveled in sharing perspectives with fellow students and Donovan was amazed to experience Oxford as “an equal rather than a foreigner.” Alex spent an inordinate amount of time doing research in libraries on and off campus as he was required to write a 3,000-word paper every week, sometimes twice a week.

“Being able to go to these old libraries and take in all of this knowledge and then discuss and argue the finer details as well as the broader points with someone who has dedicated their entire area of study around this topic was such a real treat,” Alex says.

At Oxford, Alex studied the fall of the Byzantine Empire and the history of Ancient Rome. Kylie focused on creative writing and modern short stories. Donovan explored ancient Greek art and archaeology and anthropological and sociological studies.

Another Dominican Scholar, [Victor Chan '17](#) in the [School of Health and Natural Sciences](#), studied organic and biological chemistry at Oxford during the spring 2016 semester. His fellow Dominican Scholars already knew what challenges and rewards awaited him.

“Oxford gave me the ability to get comfortable with the idea that certain situations require different approaches,” says Donovan, who recently served as internship with CoDA -- the Center for Digital Archaeology. “The career I choose will most definitely require me to be able to multi task and Oxford, even though indirectly, prepared and helped me understand the need for balance and order.”

January 29, 2016