

Introduction

Leigh Swigart

It was a great pleasure to lead the intensive writing seminar of the 2013 cohort of Sorensen Fellows. This group of six Brandeis students was selected through a rigorous competitive process in fall 2012. Those ultimately chosen to serve as Sorensen Fellows demonstrated a number of qualities seen as critical for their success “in the field” – maturity, ability to handle unforeseen challenges, real curiosity about their internship sites, respect for different cultures and viewpoints, and, perhaps above all, humility.

The 2013 cohort went their separate ways last May, having prepared during the spring to document their experiences in detail, open themselves to new ideas and experiences, and support each other through frequent group emails. Abie and Cynthia worked in Kenya – one as a newcomer to the country and the other as a “foreign local” – with organizations that help marginalized populations overcome barriers to social and economic well being. Nelly and Hannah’s internships were with NGOs dedicated to bettering the lives and educational outcomes of children in Senegal and Uganda, respectively. Hailey learned the inner workings of a large and well financed non-profit in New York City that aims to promote and protect reproductive justice. And Damiana faced the dual challenge of working in an under-resourced obstetrics clinic in Bulgaria while coming to terms with an adult perspective on her native country.

What impact can a summer internship by students from a private university in the United States make on the work of social justice-oriented organizations, whether at home or abroad? How much can the Fellows expect to contribute as young adults and scholars, often with a limited experience of “the real world”? What are the limits of their appropriate engagement in activities designed to effect change, especially when they are working in a society not their own?

And after their internships have ended, how can they take their summer experiences and use them both to round out their undergraduate education and prepare for what comes next in their lives?

These were just some of the questions the Sorensen Fellows discussed and grappled with over the course of their semester-long reflection and writing course. They read and analyzed the writings of fiction and non-fiction authors, taking note of how they approached difficult subjects – how to struggle against discrimination and poverty, when to acknowledge the benefits and responsibilities of privilege, how to come to terms with the status of “outsider” – and also of the literary techniques they used to express themselves. Exposure to a wide variety of expert writers helped the Fellows take their own field notes, carefully compiled during their internships, and transform them into the vivid and informative essays found here.

This anthology is the result of their many weeks of reflection, analysis, and tireless writing and rewriting. As reflected in the title, the 2013 Sorensen Fellows did indeed embark on parallel paths, not only in the dedication they showed to their respective internships, but also in their efforts to dig into their own and others’ experiences, ask hard questions, scrutinize interpretations, and critique each others’ writing.

It has been a privilege for me to join them on this journey. I have seen the Fellows evolve as thinkers and writers, and their sheer enthusiasm and warmth has also restored to me some of the confidence I used to feel in the world and its possibilities. Whatever the 2013 Sorensen Fellows do once they leave Brandeis, we can be sure it will be a tribute to the program that gave them the opportunity to engage in the summer internships described here.

Damiana Andonova ’15, from Chicago, Illinois, is an aspiring obstetrician majoring in Health: Science, Society and Policy. She explores her interests in obstetrics through many disciplines including art, literature, philanthropy, and research. She is the founder of the Brandeis University March of Dimes Council, is a research assistant at the Schuster Institute for Investigative Journalism, and has been involved with several women’s health NGOs. Damiana traveled to Bulgaria for an obstetrics internship at a hospital in Blagoevgrad, and collected health narratives of community

members, patients, health policy makers and health workers in an effort to generate discourse and explore the use of literature as a healing form of the arts.

Cynthia Wangui Charchi '14, from Nairobi, Kenya, is double majoring in Health: Science, Society and Policy and Economics with a minor in Environmental Studies. Having lived in several countries including Kenya, the U.S. and South Africa, she has become aware of the disparities in health care access and treatment. Her passion for sustainable and equitable distribution of resources, particularly in the slums of Kenya, led her to intern with Kenya Social Ventures, which supports local projects in the slums. She assisted the Power Women's Group, which provides HIV-positive women the technical skills, materials and market to sell craft items. Cynthia documented the stories of the women in order to humanize the experience of HIV, while also putting a face to their products.

Hailey Magee '15, from Stillwater, New Jersey, is double majoring in Politics and Women's and Gender Studies and minoring in Social Justice and Social Policy. She is the president of the Feminist Majority Leadership Alliance, was a member of the Ethics Center Leadership Council, and is a blog contributor for the non-profit organization About-Face. Hailey interned with NARAL Pro-Choice New York. She worked at the intersection of policy and grassroots organizing, advocating for the Women's Equality Agenda, an omnibus bill presented by New York Governor Cuomo to advance the status of women regarding health policy, sexual harassment, discrimination and more. Hailey also researched state representatives' and mayoral candidates' policy stances and wrote memos on current legislation.

Nelly Schläfereit '15 is originally from Germany but has lived in Geneva, Switzerland for most of her life. She is majoring in Anthropology and International

and Global Studies, and serves on the executive board of the Anthropology Club. Nelly works as a German BUGS (Brandeis Undergraduate Group Study) tutor and is involved with the Center for German and European Studies. Her passion for working with children brought her from Switzerland to Costa Rica to Senegal, where she spent a semester before beginning at Brandeis as a midyear. It was in Senegal, interning at a shelter for women and children, that she first discovered her interest in Africa. For her Sorensen internship, Nelly returned to Senegal and interned with *Pour Une Enfance*, a humanitarian organization that works with young street children and child beggars attending Koranic schools.

Abie Troen '14, from Jerusalem, Israel, is majoring in Film Studies. Abie studied at the Israeli Academy for Sciences and Arts together with Jews and Arabs, and became particularly interested in artistic creation within a politically and socially complex reality. After serving in the Israeli Defense Forces as a combat paramedic, he attended the Sam Spiegel Film Academy in Jerusalem where he worked as a photographer and cinematographer on projects that dealt with social inequalities within Israel. He interned this summer with KENASVIT, the Kenya National Alliance

of Street Vendors and Informal Traders, creating a documentary database of film, photos, interviews and clips of their projects on the ground.

Hannah Young '15, from Branford, Connecticut, is majoring in Anthropology and International and Global Studies with a minor in African and Afro-American Studies. She serves on the boards of the Brandeis African Students Organization and the Anthropology Club. After interning with Sports Helping Empower Women in South Africa (SheWinS) in 2011, Hannah became interested in community development and women's empowerment in southern Africa. She presently serves as the secretary of the SheWinS board. With the hope of gaining a broader view of the African continent, she traveled to Kampala, Uganda for her Sorensen Fellowship, and worked in the Education Centre of Uganda Youth and Women's Effort Fighting AIDS (UYWEFA), in an attempt to provide equal education opportunities to orphans and vulnerable children who have been impacted by HIV/AIDS.

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Sorensen Fellowship Program

The Ethics Center's Sorensen Fellowship program honors Theodore C. Sorensen (1928-2010) for his lifelong commitment to public service and for his 10 years as founding chair of the Center's International Advisory Board. Ted Sorensen was policy advisor, legal counsel, and speechwriter to President John F. Kennedy. He practiced international law for four decades, and was a widely published author on the presidency and foreign affairs. The Sorensen Fellowship seeks to engage Brandeis undergraduates with constructive social change on the international stage, an appropriate tribute to Theodore C. Sorensen.



Ted Sorensen with President Kennedy