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Shea Stewart

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Go Forth and Prosper: Croft Alumni Take on the World

Six graduates reflect on their experience

MAY 8, 2018 BY SHEA STEWART

FaTvLiErCcSMPrSt



OXFORD, Miss. – On a Saturday afternoon in May 2001, the first five graduates of the **Croft Institute for International Studies** at the **University of Mississippi** received their diplomas. The group included the program's very first graduate, Lauren Michelle Gent, a Gulfport native who had completed her degree in May 2000.

The ceremony was short. The graduates and guests gathered in the Joseph C. Bancroft Conference Room in the newly renovated Croft building. There were congratulatory remarks. Then the five students – Gent, along with Julie Anna Newton, Martine Louise Schaefer, Jenny Christine Senften and Emily Melissa Sindelar – were presented their diplomas. A reception followed.

Two decades later, as the institute celebrates the 20th anniversary of its 1998 opening, Croft boasts 520 alumni, including 33 who are set to graduate Saturday (May 12).

Croft was established in 1997 by a generous gift and funded annually by the Joseph C. Bancroft Charitable and Educational Fund. Each class has fulfilled Croft's mission of broadening the international horizon, with students and alumni traveling around the world, from the Siberian pine forests of Russia to the shining metropolis of Accra, Ghana, to the towering skyscrapers in the financial heart of Hong Kong.

It is not easy to describe a "typical" Croft alumni, but the institute's selective admission, exceptional academic program, small classes and first-rate facilities – along with the requirement that Croft students study abroad for at least one semester – attract motivated and intelligent students who leave the institute prepared to succeed on the global stage.

"From the inception of Croft, the overarching goal of its curriculum for the international studies major was to educate students who knew how to navigate an increasingly interconnected world," said Oliver Dinius, Croft executive director and associate professor of history. "The pillars of the curriculum are learning a foreign language, studying one world region in depth and gaining a broad understanding of global dynamics.

"The foreign language is a tool for communication, but its study also provides an understanding of the cultural context. Taking courses in history, social science and economics about a region and beyond trains the ability to analyze problems from multiple perspectives, an essential skill in today's global market.

"The signature elements of our curriculum – the mandatory semester of study abroad and the writing of a senior thesis – reinforce the commitment to the foreign language and to research-based analysis, and they also serve as the proof that our students are ready to go out into the world as global citizens."

According to Croft, 55 percent of its graduates are employed in the private sector, with other alumni working in the public sector, nonprofits or education. Those in the private sector hold jobs in banking, finance, insurance and accounting; law, media, marketing and public relations; and other fields such as business and manufacturing, consulting and lobbying, and technology.

Public sector occupations include serving in the military, working for the U.S. Department of State or Congress, and being employed in various federal, state and local government agencies. Croft graduates working for nonprofits run the gamut, from the arts and education to international development and human rights.

About half of Croft alumni in the education field are professors, teachers and researchers, while the other half are administrators.

No two Croft alumni stories are alike. Here are six examples of what Croft alumni do:

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Students Learn 'Real Politics' in Washington, D.C., Winter Session

OXFORD, Miss. – Eleven University of Mississippi students spent their winter break learning about the people who work behind the scenes of the American government in Washington, D.C. Lead by Jonathan Klingler, assistant professor of political science, the students of Pol 391: Applied Politics met not with candidates, but with the people who make candidates'

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Young Alumna Gives Back to School of Accountancy

OXFORD, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy's new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying "thank you." "It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting

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Reuters: Keep an Eye on the Money Supply

U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to abate. The Federal Reserve's



Chris Lamont

Chris Lamont, Class of 2002

Associate professor of international relations at Tokyo International University in Tokyo

Originally from Houston, Texas, Lamont attended the Croft Institute because of “a strong interest in international affairs.”

“Given the program’s focus on languages and study abroad, I thought it was a perfect fit,” he said.

What he found at Croft was a strong interdisciplinary foundation in international studies and rigorous research training, and the opportunity to study abroad, which he did in Croatia. That study abroad experience led to a Fulbright Program scholarship that allowed him to spend a year in Zagreb, Croatia, researching post-conflict justice processes in the former Yugoslavia, which ultimately led him to continue working on the topic for years to come.

“Pretty much every member of the Croft faculty encouraged me to embrace research interests that would remain with me throughout my career,” Lamont said. “The interdisciplinary focus of the major helped give me a broader foundation in international relations that went far beyond the narrow discipline specific training that is offered elsewhere.

“Also, Croft provided me with an opportunity to begin to gain early experience conducting fieldwork and to carry out my own research that would later allow me to get a head start on my Ph.D. dissertation research.”

Daniel Booth, Class of 2005

Worldwide account manager at FedEx in Memphis

Booth, a native of Amory, does not hold back when talking about how Croft affected his life and career.

“Every class, professor and teacher had a positive impact on my life,” he said. “I truly believe the Croft Institute is one of the best undergraduate programs in the international studies field. Dr. Michael Metcalf, Dr. Peter Frost, Dr. Kees Gispens and Dr. Holly Reynolds all come to mind as being extremely impactful on my education and development.”

Also a licensed customs broker, Booth works for a global company that serves more than 220 countries and territories with more than 500,000 team members, moving more than 12 million packages a day.

Having a Croft degree positioned Booth for working on the international stage.

“For much of my life, I had a passion for all things international and different cultures,” he said. “I work with individuals inside of FedEx and customers all over the globe each and every day, and I have been afforded amazing travel opportunities. ... I believe my international studies education and study abroad experience through Croft created a great foundation for me to be successful in my career.”



Daniel Booth



Susan Hedglin

Susan Lawrence Hedglin, Class of 2009

Consultant for oncology research and development, and finance with Eli Lilly and Co. in Indianapolis

Growing up in Madison in the 1990s, Hedglin witnessed the daily headlines of a changing world, she said, from the post-Soviet economic transitions in Russia to China’s accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001.

She entered Croft because she was drawn to government and policy, had several friends who went through Croft and raved about it, and knew of the program’s sterling academic reputation.

After graduation, Hedglin gravitated toward business instead of government, but her Croft education is always with her. Her consulting position includes quickly processing data from current events to policy changes to large amounts of internal company information. Croft’s rigorous academics prepared her for that.

Plus, her studies gave her extra benefits.

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"I always love the look on people's faces when I tell them I speak Mandarin Chinese," she said. "They ask, 'Where did you learn that?' and the jaws drop when I say, 'the University of Mississippi.'"

"Even though I am based in the U.S., I work at a multinational company with business partners from around the world. Having knowledge of their background and culture helps me build effective relationships. Lots of people are curious about the world, but Croft helps students see it – and process it – in depth at a young age. It's a valuable foundation to build a career on."

Cooper Reves, Class of 2010

Digital director for the office of U.S. Sen. John McCain in Washington, D.C.

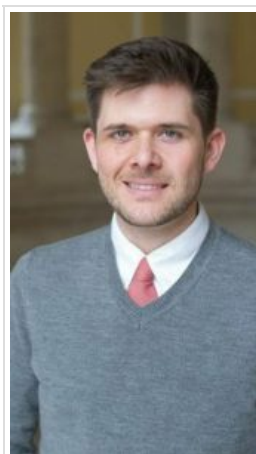
Reves' introduction to international studies started in high school in Madison, where he took a course on Chinese history and Mandarin.

"I learned a deep appreciation for cultures outside my own, and I wanted to continue exploring that curiosity into my college career," he said. "Thankfully, Ole Miss offered an incredible program in international relations at the Croft Institute that I was able to take advantage of."

But Reves' education at Croft went beyond the borders of China; he learned history, economics and how to appreciate differences among cultures.

"But most of all, the Croft Institute taught me analytical reasoning skills that I have been able to adapt into my career in campaign politics and digital organizing," he said. "No matter what you do after college, the skills you learn debating world issues with your fellow classmates in the Croft building will serve you in any capacity."

"At the Croft Institute, I developed the intellectual self-confidence necessary to thrive in the political world. I also know that the historical perspective on current world events that Croft teaches has been directly applicable to my work. Though I work in American politics, the historical echoes of our current political environment are undeniable, and being well-versed in recent world history has proven to be indispensable."



Cooper Reves



Deeneaus Polk, Class of 2011

Director of the Mississippi Apprenticeship Program for the Mississippi Community College Board in Jackson

While at Pascagoula High School, Polk spent time in Germany and decided there that he wanted to become ambassador to that country in the future. To reach that goal one day, Polk was drawn to Croft because he knew the strong interdisciplinary program would challenge him.

Still working toward his dream, Polk will begin working on a master's degree in public policy this fall at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government on a full scholarship. The Pascagoula native said the Croft Institute is a large reason why.

In 2015, **Polk became the first Mississippian** to land an exclusive German Chancellor Fellowship that took him to Germany for a year of study and research, during which he sought to contextualize the German Vocational Education System to fit within Mississippi.

Deeneaus Polk

"There are two individuals who are no longer part of Croft that I would love to express gratitude towards," he said. "I didn't grow up with much and was the first in my family to go to college, but Dr. Michael Metcalf saw past all of that and urged me to apply to the Croft Institute while I was still in high school."

"Similarly, Dr. Kees Gispen implored me to apply to Croft. ... He challenged me to dig deeper in expanding my academic capacity, because passion is only beneficial for others if it is refined and purposeful in its intent."

Elizabeth Romary, Class of 2017

English teacher with Peace Corps in Namibia

Only a year removed from her Croft studies, Romary is roughly 7,500 miles from her home of Hillsborough, North Carolina, teaching English and natural science at a primary school to sixth- and seventh-graders at a village in the southern African nation of Namibia.

Her teaching adventure in Namibia is partly because of Dinius, she said.

"Without Dr. Dinius' guidance, I wouldn't be here today," she said. "So I am grateful for everything he taught me during my four years at Croft. I hope that I'm making him proud."

Romary's interest in international studies is an equation that includes an interest in international events, politics, cultures and languages from an early age.

"When I learned about the Croft Institute, I instantly knew that this was the program for me," she said. "I loved the fact that we would be completely immersed in a language, get to broaden our global horizons on multiple levels and have the opportunity to study abroad in a different part of the world."

Croft's foreign language requirement came in handy when Romary was assigned by the Peace Corps to learn Khoekhoegowab, a local language that contains "clicking" sounds.

"It was an incredibly difficult yet rewarding process, and I feel that the language practice I had in Croft helped me to prepare for the classes I took here," she said.

To read more about Croft alumni, visit <http://www.croft.olemiss.edu/alumni/>.



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