

Prospective LLM/JD 2013  
School of Oriental and African Studies

During my final year at UC Hastings, I had the opportunity to participate in the joint LLM/JD program at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in London, UK. At SOAS, I attained an LLM in Law, Development, and Governance and wrote my dissertation on *potential criminal liability for resource exploitation in conflict zones under the Rome Statute*. My experience at SOAS was very rewarding and I am happy I to have taken part in this unique program.

One of the unique things about SOAS is the opportunities to learn from both peers and professors alike. Similar to Hastings, at the beginning of the course the professor will ask students to introduce themselves. All of the students had interesting backgrounds, for example, one was a judge from Djibouti, and another was a prosecutor from Germany. This classroom dynamic resulted in unique discussions where I was able to learn about the law from various perspectives. I found this to be a major attribute that SOAS has to offer.

The coursework at SOAS differs significantly from UC Hastings. Most courses have a paper component. I found the papers to be similar to the seminar papers at UC Hastings. Some of my courses had an exam and paper component, while others just required a final paper. The exams are all in long hand, which took a little adjusting after the racehorse typing exams at Hastings. None of the papers or exams were difficult and the stress of the curve does not exist. Nevertheless, the papers do take some time to write and are often due around the same time during the semester, so time management is essential.

Another interesting thing about SOAS is the yearlong courses. These courses allow you to explore interesting topics. I mixed up my courses, taking both year and half-year courses.

Importantly, for prospective students, it is important to note the "theoretical" side to SOAS courses. I was a little taken back by how theoretical the coursework was. Compared to UC Hastings and the hard law approach of US law schools, it took some time to adjust to the theoretical concepts. For

some, it may seem a little much, but the coursework is only a part of the learning process here.

Another thing to note is the speed in which courses progress. At Hastings, students are often on the same level as far as learning the material for the course. At SOAS, students are at various stages of their academic careers. In addition, for many students, English is not their first language. As a result, students should expect certain aspects of the course to take a little longer than what they are used to at Hastings.

Another thing to note is that for most of the students doing the LLM program, this is their first time conducting graduate level courses. As a result, many students are stressed-out, very similar to the unnecessary stress that comes along with 1L year. Considering this was my third year of law school, I think I was better prepared than some of my peers were to take on hard legal concepts, read copious amounts of material, and write thought out exams and papers. In short, Hastings students are at a massive advantage here at SOAS; we have survived two years at Hastings.

SOAS did not have a human rights clinic this year, however, it does have a program called Banyan Advocates, a student led initiative where organizations contact the school ask students for with projects they are conducting. It is a great way to build connections and work with various organizations. I helped draft a status report on the use of Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives in upholding human and labor rights in the garment industry. I wrote two major sections on minority stakeholder involvement in the Fair Labor Association. This is just one example of the opportunities available here at SOAS.

Overall, my time at SOAS was extremely educational and rewarding. I have been able to make great connections, meet amazing people, and live in an amazing city. London is so close to the rest of Europe as well as North Africa. I had the opportunity to visit Morocco, Norway, Iceland, and France while living here. I am happy I participated in the program and I highly recommend it to any student interested in expanding their knowledge of international law.

## **Fall 2012 at SOAS, London: My Thoughts and Observations**

My fall in London was packed with some high highs and some low lows, but overall was a great experience that I think I will later look back on as critical to my personal and intellectual development. The following are my thoughts on the experience.

### **The Highs: SOAS, the classes, and the student body**

SOAS itself was the highlight of the fall semester. Prior to arriving, I assumed that, like Hastings, there would be a small group of international students at SOAS and I would otherwise be taking classes with people from the UK. I was caught off-guard the first day of school when I learned that about half of the students at SOAS are international, and in the LLM program, the number is more like seventy-five percent. Given the number of international students, I was extremely impressed at SOAS' organization: my registration was smooth, my emails were promptly responded to, and I generally did not feel lost in the mix.

Academically, I feel like the semester at SOAS was in some ways more rigorous than taking twelve units at Hastings. A big reason for this was class size. Of my four classes, three of them had fewer than twenty people. One of them only had five students. This meant that, unlike a standard Hastings class where one's participation is usually limited to the few times in the semester he or she is called on during class, I was expected to have mastered the material and been ready to participate during class at SOAS. Unlike other Hastings study abroad students doing other programs, who seemed to be traveling every weekend to some exotic locale, I stayed put in London and studied because I knew that if I flaked out on my schoolwork and went to Italy for the weekend, my professors would notice.

I had one class in particular that was the highlight of my time at SOAS. The class, called "Law, Psychology, and Morality: An Exploration Using Film as Text" was co-taught by a professor of psychiatry at Harvard and a young Member of Parliament. There were only seven students in the class: a Taiwanese lawyer-turned-judge, a Palestinian human rights lawyer, an Israeli law student, a Pakistani

lawyer, and (including myself) four American law students. The discussions were mind-expanding, and it was so interesting to hear the opinions from such a diverse group of people. I feel I was made a better writer and thinker by the class. I will definitely never forget discussing Spike Lee's "Do the Right Thing," a film about riots in 1990s America, with the Member of Parliament who represents Tottenham, the district in which England's summer 2011 riots started.

While it was extremely interesting having such a diverse student body, I did feel that SOAS' diversity was sometimes paralyzing, because everybody was on such a different wavelength. In another different class of about twenty students, there was a mix of people from all over the world: Nigeria, China, Italy, Brunei, Tanzania, and others. The problem was not that everybody came from such different places but that each were in different places in life: some were lawyers, some were twenty-year old kids seeking a masters in Development Studies and with no previous legal training. Whereas at Hastings almost everybody is on a similar academic and intellectual level, and where differences between students comes down to work ethic, at SOAS people were coming from such different places that discussions were almost always boring some people while completely over the head of other people. Because people were from so many different countries, I really felt pressure during class from professors to participate because I had a strong command of the English language and a general awareness of what was going on in class.

My only other criticism of staying at SOAS just for the fall is that it was not enough time to really engage in the material. Because the classes are a year long, the first two weeks of classes are really just addressing introductory and background materials necessary for the remainder of the year. Because we Hastings students had to write papers to get course credit, I had to start writing my papers about five weeks before the end of the Term. What this actually all meant is that I had basically two or three weeks of material in which I needed to find a topic, and then just immediately start writing. I think I would have gotten more out of the material and the classes if I had a little more time to settle into the reading and find a topic that really interested me. In this sense, staying at SOAS for an entire year makes more

sense than just staying the semester and I do regret not originally applying for the full year LLM.

### **The Hard Parts: Lodging/Finances**

While I thoroughly enjoyed my academic experience at SOAS, my time in London also had its rough patches. My ATM card was stolen the first day I arrived in London. Thieves stole around 600 pounds from my account. While my bank eventually reimbursed me for the funds, I was stuck for about three weeks without an ATM card, making settling in tougher.

The most trouble and stress I experienced while in London involved finding a place to live. After speaking with many people who had lived in London, I decided to forego my spot in the dorms and find my own studio in a nice part of town. Little did I know, every university in London starts on the same September date, so there are literally thousands of people just like me looking for roughly the type of same place on the same weekend before school starts. I saw probably twenty or thirty places before finding the place I ultimately would live in. I was living in a housing project with a drug-abusing landlord for three weeks before I found a permanent residence. I ultimately committed to signing a six-month lease on an apartment because it was the only way to live somewhere reasonably okay. I lived in this apartment for three months then I had to find a replacement in order to get my security deposit back. It took me about three weeks to find someone to find a replacement for my flat, and the first person I found ended up cancelling on me twelve hours before my flight back to the US, and I had to stay in London and miss the holidays. I ultimately found someone trustworthy, and I will hopefully get my security deposit back from the rental agency in the near future. In short, moving in and out of London very difficult, but a true learning experience. I do not regret deciding not to live in the dorms, because getting to live in a multicultural, exciting London neighborhood gave me a true London experience. At the same time, I will tell any Hastings students who plan on studying at SOAS next year that they need to really seriously consider how much stress that "true London experience" is worth to them.

Study Abroad Program Fall 2011  
SOAS- University of London

### **Study Abroad Reflection**

I am so grateful that I was able to study at the School of Oriental and Asian Studies (SOAS) in the University of London for the Fall 2011 semester. This experience added variety to my law school experience. I was able to study law in a different educational system. This allowed me to encounter the law and legal analysis in a new way and gave me the opportunity to see my legal education in the States with a different lens. I also had the opportunity to encounter different perspectives, since many of my classmates were international. Finally, I got a taste of living in Europe for a while and had some opportunities to travel, both of which enriched my law school and life experiences greatly.

The postgraduate law program at SOAS is primarily for students seeking to get their LLM degree or students seeking a Masters in a particular type of law. I didn't fall into either category; I was an exchange student enrolled in classes for half of the course term. The classes offered were extensive—from traditional law courses such as International Sale of Goods to more interdisciplinary law courses such as a Psychology, Law and Film course. Most of my classes were small and intimate, with around 15-20 people. Lecture was mixed with discussion as classes tended to be discussion-oriented, since they were largely theory-based. My classes included: Human Rights in the Developing World; Law and Society in the Middle East and North Africa; Environmental Law; and Psychology, Morality and the Law: An Exploration Through Film. The workload was intense. There was a long list of suggested readings for each class. Despite this, it was not required to read all of the assigned readings. Few of them were absolutely mandatory and we were able to choose the readings that interested us the most. The readings covered the same general topics but offered different perspectives on the subject matter. The fact that we had some control over what we wanted to read was refreshing, and it made for class discussions with more depth, since various perspectives from the readings were being brought to life.

There is a general focus on “self-learning” in my classes in London. This means that you are in control of your education and professors merely facilitate the learning that you have done on your own. Professors are there to guide you as you navigate your way through the course. American law school classes are much more professor-driven and structured. Classes meet for longer periods of time every week and have specific topics to cover at each class meeting. The freedom that I experienced in my London classes was mostly liberating but overwhelming at times. I was glad that I was able to take ownership of my education but at times, I felt a bit lost. It was particularly challenging since I was only there for one term. Classes are designed for the whole year, which is three terms. The first term is introductory, and it was awkward to write an in-depth paper about a topic as the final assessment at this juncture. Professors didn’t really know how to offer much guidance at this point partly because the paper was not something that they assigned. This is where the freedom became intimidating for me. Professors were somewhat helpful, but as a generalization, they were a bit impersonal. The classes are small and meet for a whole year, but the professors never really bothered to learn anyone’s name. I tend to like classes that connect with me personally, so this was challenging for me.

My favorite class was a class taught by a visiting American professor from Harvard Law School, Alan Stone. Alan is the oldest living law professor in Harvard’s history. He brought a law and film class to SOAS: Psychology, Morality and the Law: An Exploration Through Film. The course was co-taught by David Lammy and Martin Lau. David Lammy is the Member of Parliament for Tottenham, the district where the London riots broke out last summer, in August 2011. Martin is the director of the LLM program at SOAS and specializes in the law of South Asia. There were three professors and only seven students in the class. We sat in a circle and discussed films and film reviews that we wrote every week. I connected with this class because it tied the law with people. We analyzed the effect the law has on people and their lives. The class strongly contextualized the law. We did not read laws and practice applying laws in isolation—we discussed laws in context of the film and the characters in the film. It was fascinating to hear the interpretations and points of view of my three professors, who are each distinguished in their own right.

This class was very meaningful and it ranks as one of my favorite classes in law school, and of all time.

Part of studying abroad is, of course, actually living in a different country. Living in the United Kingdom is not as different from the United States, as most other countries, but I enjoyed feeling at home at a place that was different from home. I lived in Lillian Penson Hall, a graduate student building affiliated with the University of London. It was located near Paddington Station and Hyde Park, close to Kensington and Notting Hill. The neighborhood was beautiful and I liked living with so many other graduate students, all studying different things. I did some exploring of London during free afternoons and weekends and was introduced to London nightlife by locals that I befriended.

I am fortunate that I was able to travel a little bit during the months I was in the UK. I spent a couple days in Wales, right along the English border. I took the train to Tintern, a small town that is the home of Tintern Abbey. Tintern Abbey is a beautiful Cistercian Abbey founded in 1131. The ruins remain and it is a site to be seen. I went at a perfect time because the grass and trees that framed the abbey were so lush and green and the surrounding woods had the beautiful fall colors of reds, oranges and golds. It was such a calming place, a nice contrast from the bustling city. I also explored the gorgeous Chepstow Castle and nearby bridges. I sat on a cliff in Chepstow, Wales overlooking England on Bonfire Night. It was a night of breathtaking firework displays.

I was also able to visit Ireland during my stay in London. I have always wanted to go to Ireland. I had a great time there, enjoying the party life in Dublin as well as the serene Cliffs of Moher in the West of Ireland. I am grateful for the experience to travel around Ireland and the UK as well as for the chance to study law in a new place.