

GOVERNMENT  
DEPARTMENT  
NEWSLETTER

SKIDMORE COLLEGE

Spring 2014

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## WELCOMING NEW F

I was born in Babruysk, a city in Belarus. As a child, I experienced the chaotic dissolution of the Soviet Union, after which my family and I moved to Albany. While growing up in the Soviet Union, I was discouraged from thinking and talking about politics because it was not safe to do so. I would never have guessed that, one day, I would become a political scientist.

I majored in International Relations at Wellesley College, and studied politics and philosophy during my year abroad in the United Kingdom at Oxford University. After completing my Master's degree at Harvard University, I was awarded the Fulbright Fellowship to study the first post-Soviet generation of Russian diplomats. Among the most memorable experiences of my life was presenting my research at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. This was the very same U.S. Embassy where, a decade earlier, I was granted asylum.

After completing my research, I stayed in Moscow and worked as a journalist. The experience made me want to "dig deeper," to better understand the issues I was covering. I decided to get better equipped with the tools and methods of the social sciences, which led to my doctoral studies at Brown University.

The sharp contrast between my old life in Belarus and new life in the United States instilled in me deep appreciation and curiosity about why, as Johannes Kepler eloquently put it, . Over the course of my dissertation research, I discovered that contexts that are very different historically and culturally can display remarkably similar patterns of human behavior. For example, what my interviewees in Kashmir and Bangladesh told me about their experiences with conflict and violence was eerily similar to what I had witnessed as a child in Belarus.

My passion for understanding the causes of insecurity inspired my research on "state outsourcing of violence." I study the illicit practice of states using civilians, ex-rebels, and criminals in military operations rather than, or in addition to, regular soldiers. My region of expertise is South Asia, more specifically Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh. However, state outsourcing of violence to nonstate actors is widespread around the world, from Colombia and Guatemala, to Iran and Iraq, to the United Kingdom and the United States. My work addresses the questions of and it happens.

I am thrilled to be teaching at Skidmore during the 2014-15 academic year!

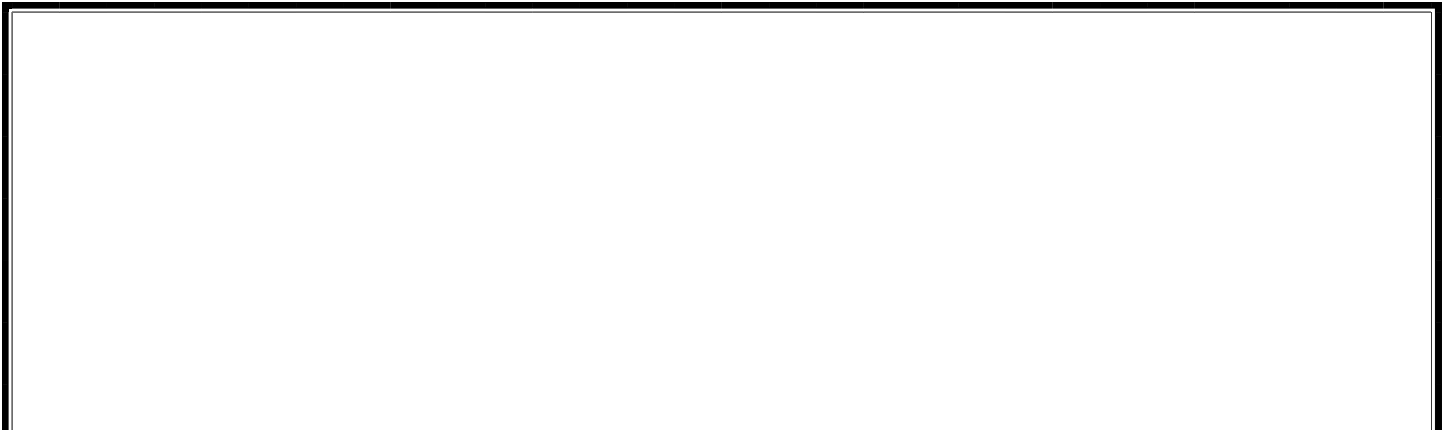




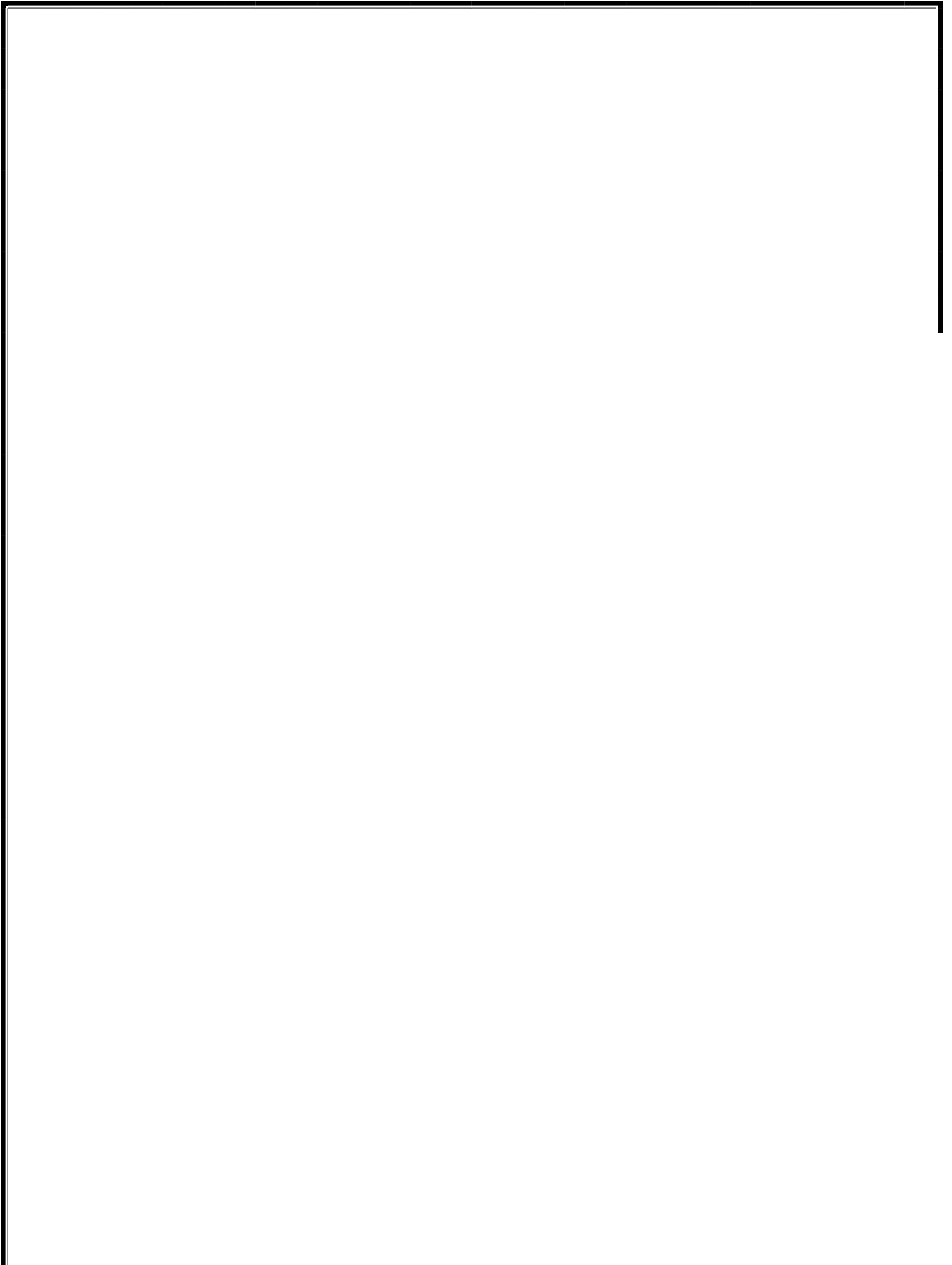
Upon arrival at West Point neither I, nor my colleague Matt Choi '14, had any idea what to expect. We had already been immediately wowed by the Army's showmanship. As soon as we set foot on West Point's campus, we had seen a helicopter land in the middle of a grassy lawn, similar to a president disembarking on his way to the West Wing. That casual yet impressive display was but a taste of what was to come during West Point's 65<sup>th</sup> annual Student Conference on United States Affairs.

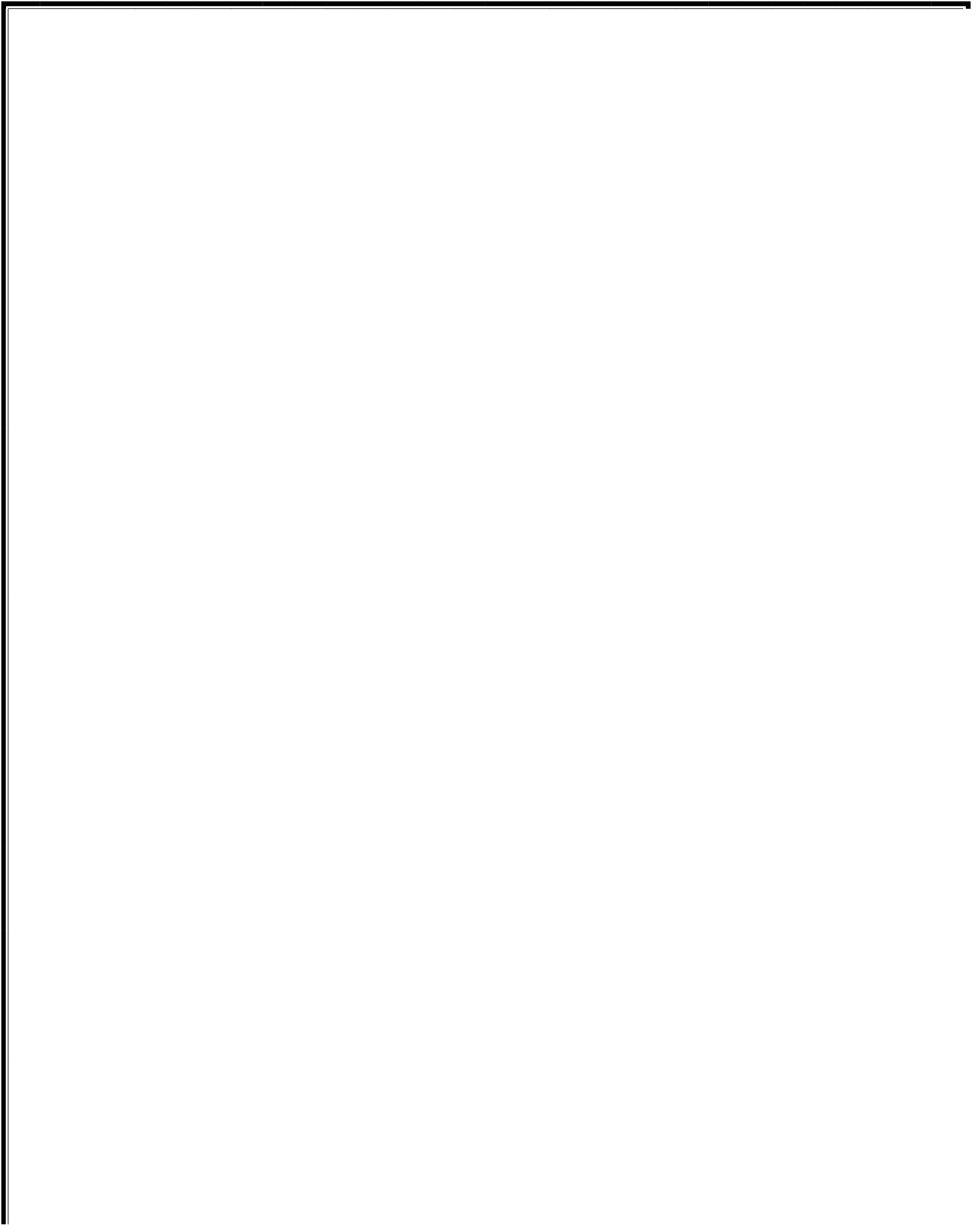
Fortunately, my SCUSA experience was and is greatly relevant to my studies. As I finish up my time here at Skidmore, I am in the process of writing an honors thesis regarding the political, social, and economic implications of Brazil hosting FIFA's 2014 World Cup. The roundtable discussion I elected to participate in, as the hallmark activity of the conference, was entitled *Lula's Legacy* - a nod to the former Brazilian President of the same name. Lula was a union leader and a leftist who presided over the office for two full terms, and the changes that Brazil experienced under Lula's administration were tremendous. He lifted thousands of Brazilians out of poverty through his redistributive social welfare policies. In the process his administration created the largest middle class in South America, irrevocably changing the nation's demographic makeup. These demographic shifts were the basis of the roundtable discussion, which culminated with an essay detailing the potential implications of such changes.

The SCUSA experience was particularly enriching because I did not have a chance to study abroad, despite my disposition towards international studies, and this conference gave me schaferee Don









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## POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY FUELS PROBLEM SOLVING

“You’re studying government and computer science? That’s a strange combination.” “You know how to code? I would never have guessed.” Yes, I frequently fend off these questions. Depending on who asks, I give them a long-winded answer or smile, say yes, and move on with what I’m doing. Here, I will give you the long answer.

I read a piece on liberal education by Eva Braun la



Greetings from Copenhagen, Denmark! I am having a fantastic time in Copenhagen participating in the Danish Institute for Study Abroad's Global Economics program. My primary focus has been studying transition economies, especially Russia's economy.

In Copenhagen, I live in a very diverse neighborhood called Nordvest. I live on top of a Turkish Bazaar, near the best Pakistani food that I have ever had in my life, and near a large population of Greenlanders who migrated to Denmark. I live in Nordvest in a nice apartment with a Danish roommate who has been extremely helpful as I prepare for my Danish language oral exams!

Coming to Denmark has been such a perfect fit for me. There is something for everyone in Copenhagen! Since the University of Copenhagen has been trying to create its own Model UN team I have even been able to flex my Model EU and Model UN muscles. The University of Copenhagen team would like me to speak in April about how to follow Model UN parliamentary procedure in English language conferences.

My program was kind enough to pay for an educational trip to Moscow, Russia for me this past week. As we left the Moscow airport, our group's bus was immediately stopped by a spontaneous government sponsored pro-Ukrainian invasion rally. The excitement continued to build for the rest of the trip as we visited the Carnegie Moscow Center, The Royal Danish Embassy Moscow, The European Union's Delegation to Russia, and the Russian Central Bank. I met a Pussy Riot member (who was not present at the famous cathedral protest) at an opposition newspaper's headquarters; furthermore,

# **GOVERNMENT MAJORS STUDY ABROAD**



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Next year, I am starting a master's degree program at George Washington University in Washington, D.C. in Emergency Management. But first, I need to finish my thesis!

For the upcoming summer, I plan on returning to Israel to coach ultimate frisbee for the non profit organization Ultimate Peace. I teach ultimate frisbee to Arab and Jewish Israelis and youth from the Palestinian Territories in order to promote peace in the Middle East.

In my own personal season 8 of the West Wing, after graduation I will be working on the campaign field staff for Massachusetts gubernatorial candidate Don Berwick.

I have been exploring other career options as the color commentator for the Skidmore basketball program, and as a food writer for Skidmore News. I recently published an article on the best Burgers in Saratoga, and will soon be offering up myself as a human Guinea pig for an article on Saratoga Juice Bar by doing one of their four day juice diets.

I'm going to Guatemala for Spring break as part of a new alternative Spring break trip offered by the Latin American Studies department. Ten other Skidmore students and I are going to work with an organization called Camino Seguro (Safe Passage) that provides free education and other social services to institutionally disadvantaged Guatemalan children and their families in order to empower them to build self sustaining and safe communities.

My committee in the Environmental

I'm spending the semester in Washington, D.C. through the Washington Semester Program at American University. I'm in the International Law and Organizations seminar. So far, it's been an incredible experience. My class has visited and heard speakers from places such as The World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Israeli Embassy, Palestinian Liberation Organization, UN Security Council, Amnesty International, and much more. In March, we will be traveling to Europe, visiting Geneva, Strasbourg, The Hague, and Belgium. I also have an internship with Public Citizen, a national, nonprofit consumer advocacy organization. I've been working specially on their campaign finance reform reports. This is an amazing program for students who come from all around the world. I highly recommend this off-campus study option!

I spent most of this winter break studying for my pilot

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**Michael Goldsmith '10** passed the California Bar Exam on the first try and is actively looking for a job within the healthcare law field such as at the California Health Insurance Exchange and healthcare firms and hospitals.

**Alex Grossman '12** has been accepted into the Law School at Georgetown University

**Wyatt Erchak '12** traveled from Istanbul, Turkey to Stockholm, Sweden for nearly seven weeks last summer. *"It was so incredible, and educational -- I went to Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland, and Sweden, then back to New York City"* This March Wyatt made another trip to the Ukraine to witness firsthand history being made.

**David Solomon '13** has (again) been chosen by the United States Fulbright Commission for a Fulbright award for study and research in China. He is now awaiting word from the Chinese Fulbright Commission. Last year, David was selected but Congressional funding was slashed and he was designated as an alternate. Let's hope this year he prevails.

After graduating from Skidmore in May 2012, **Emma Kurs** has spent two exciting years working of the United States Department of Justice. This spring, she moves on to new adventures as a researcher and program assistant at the Urban Institute, a non-partisan social and economic research organization in Washington, DC. She and her roommates are also foster parents for dogs in DC. Woof, woof and way to go, Emma!

#### **What does your job entail?**

I'm in graduate school in London but I've continued doing much of the same work -- both in school and as a freelance researcher - - that I did before. I generally do research on East Asian issues but also do military and weapons analysis.

#### **What is your favorite part of your job?**

I love being paid to learn.

#### **How did you get to where you are now?**

I'm in school at the moment because I hit a ceiling for what jobs I could do without an advanced degree.

Before I got here I worked as a Research Associate at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York. I got there by working terribly long yet enjoyable hours as an intern/editorial researcher at Foreign Policy Magazine. I worked so hard at FP that the editor in chief called my prospective boss to recommend she hire me.

#### **What did you originally want to do after Skidmore?**

The Peace Corps -- that plan was quickly quashed once I met my wife. I also wanted to work in the State Department but that dream was similarly ruined once I learned what FSO work is actually like.

#### **How did your Skidmore education help you succeed?**

While the classes obviously helped me learn, it was the fact that I was able to go abroad three times that I think really gave me an advantage over others in the international relations field because I had already had pretty significant International experience.

#### **Which Government class(es) have helped/influenced you the most in your job now?**

Steven Hofmann's Nationalism and the Middle East helped me better understand a region I grew up in. Tim Burns' Thucydides taught me how to write clearly and concisely -- a skill that is rare yet critical to succeeding in today's job market.

#### **What advice would you give to Government students searching for jobs after graduation?**

Well before anyone graduates they should go abroad. I've literally never met anyone who regretted going abroad. The friends back at Skidmore aren't going anywhere and it'll only help job prospects.

After graduation I would suggest interning at a place in the field you're interesting in eventually working in and trying to be the best intern possible. It's exactly what I did. I was lucky enough to have a spouse who could support me while I took on an unpaid internship but otherwise I

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# Spring 2014 Topics Course Descriptions

## **GO 251D: Constitutionalism: Ancient and Modern (3 credits)**

**Instructor: Dustin Gish**

Study of the political concept of constitutionalism, in its ancient and modern forms. Students will be introduced to the history and philosophical principles of constitutionalism, the rule of law, and constitutional governance as the foundation and framework for political life. Readings will be drawn from a wide range of political thinkers and documents from ancient Greece and Rome, the medieval and early modern eras, and American political history from the colonial period through the founding, civil war, and early twentieth century. Students will develop a familiarity with the terms of constitutionalism, in order to reflect on the nature, form, and limits of constitutions; the historical and theoretical roots of ancient and modern constitutionalism; constitutional principles; and perennial questions and issues related to constitutional design and government.

## **GO 351B: Political Thought in Literature (4 credits)**

**Instructor: Dustin Gish**

Study of political thought as embodied or represented in works of literature. Students will read seminal works of literature (plays, novels, and short stories) and reflect upon political questions raised in and through the dramatic action and argument of plot, narrative, dialogue, theme, and characterization. Special attention is paid to the way literary works represent and examine the reciprocal relation between human character and political ways of life, or regimes, as well as political lessons to be drawn from such literary representations. Works of both ancient and modern authors (e.g. Sophocles, Aristophanes, Shakespeare, Bacon, Austen, Shelley, Melville, Twain, and O'Connor) will be considered.

## **GO 251C: Campaigns and Elections in the United States (3 credits)**

**Instructor: Ron Seyb**

While Barack Obama and George W. Bush sport more differences than similarities, they agree that "elections have consequences," with the most importance of these ostensibly being the generation of the "political capital" presidents need to shape political debate and realize legislative priorities. But even if one concedes that our two most recent presidents are correct about the importance of elections, it is unclear how election outcomes should be interpreted in a country in which voter turnout is low and skewed to over-represent certain groups in the electorate, public officials ostentatiously manipulate the boundaries of electoral units to their advantage, the two parties have been so thor-

South Asian societies, such as security, development, and democracy. This course has two main goals. The first is to develop substantial regional knowledge. Students will learn to apply social science reasoning to tackle the major puzzles and policy issues facing South Asia. The second goal of the course is to use the knowledge of the region to shed light on the big and enduring questions of political inquiry: What is the relationship between development and democracy? What is the role of history in shaping political outcomes? Is nonviolent resistance more effective than violence? In addressing these questions, students will engage closely with classic and contemporary social scientific texts on South Asia. (designated a non-western course)

**GO 251B: States, Rebels and Warlords (4 credits)**

**Instructor: Yelena Biberman-Ocakli**

This course examines violent conflict in modern societies. It explores the role of the state as well as non-state actors in causing, escalating,

## Fall 2014 What Counts for What?