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**World**



JAKE NAUGHTON/KGSA

## Internships abroad centered on social justice issues inspire ideas that— when put into action—can change the world.

BY SUSAN LADIKA

**A**S A CHILD GROWING UP IN KIBERA, Africa's largest slum, Asha Jaffar never would have dreamed she would be able to one day graduate from college and work as a journalist.

But thanks to the Kibera Girls Soccer Academy (KGSA), which provides free high school education to girls living in Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya, the 23-year-old has been able to blossom. "If the school was not there, I would not be the person I am today," Jaffar says.

And if it hadn't been for the determination of Ryan Sarafolean, a University of Minnesota graduate, KGSA may never have flourished.

Sarafolean learned of KGSA while having a beer in a bar in Nairobi while enrolled in the university's Minnesota Studies in International Development (MSID) program in Kenya, which sends university students to the East African country to study international development and take part in social justice internships or research. Now he heads the KGSA Foundation, which provides financial and technological support to KGSA.

Sarafolean, who graduated in 2007 and majored in political science and African American studies, says he was drawn to the MSID program because "I wanted an experience where I could work within a community instead of being in a classroom studying culture from the outside. I've always wanted to go to East Africa, to see and experience that part of the world, and part of it was to experience poverty," with the overarching goal of helping to alleviate it.

The University of Minnesota MSID program is one of many around the United States that seek to give students firsthand experience tackling such diverse social justice issues as education, public health, economic justice, global health, and legal justice.



Girls learning at the Kibera Girls Soccer Academy, which was founded by Ryan Sarafolean who was inspired to start the school after studying abroad in Kenya.



Allison Brown, a junior at Abilene Christian University who accompanied her father (a Pepperdine Law graduate) on a 2014 trip to Uganda with the Global Justice Program and served as a logistical coordinator to assist prisoners with plea bargains.

JAMES GASH/PEPPERDINE

**Because of the abject poverty in Kibera, most girls can't attend secondary school because their families can't afford the fees. If the families have any extra money, it's used to send boys to high school.**

At Pepperdine University, the Global Justice Program in the School of Law had its beginnings in 2007, because of “students’ desire to reach beyond themselves into the developing world,” says Jim Gash, an associate law professor and dean for student life. “Once you see the needs in the developing world, it’s very difficult to turn away.”

That’s what happened to Sarafolean, who traveled to Nairobi for a semester during his junior year at the University of Minnesota. The MSID program begins with seven weeks in the classroom, followed by a six-week-long internship. During his internship, Sarafolean was sent to a school in a rural district to help fill in for teachers and write curriculum.

But at a bar in Nairobi he met Abdul Kassim, who had started KGSA as a way to get girls off the streets of Kibera. An estimated 500,000 to 800,000 slum residents are jammed into an area that is the size of New York City’s Central Park.

Because of the abject poverty in Kibera, most girls can’t attend secondary school because their families can’t afford the fees. If the families have any extra money, it’s used to send boys to high school. Meanwhile, the girls may be



Ryan Sarafolean, founder of the Kibera Girls Soccer Academy

forced into early marriage, or even into prostitution, Sarafolean says.

Kassim initially focused only on teaching the girls soccer at KGSA, but then expanded the program into a free secondary school, launching it with 11 girls. “I was really inspired by this man’s conviction,” Sarafolean says, and he was moved to gather together funds from himself and his fellow MSID students to donate to the school. He also did a bit of fund-raising when he returned to the United States at the end of the semester.

Two years later, Sarafolean reconnected with Kassim and decided to start the KGSA Foundation. During the first year the foundation raised \$9,000; today it raises \$350,000, and 130 girls attend the school. Rather than having to pay for high school, the girls attend for free.

His meeting with Kassim “absolutely changed my life,” Sarafolean says. “I never had intended to work internationally.”

It also is changing the lives of the girls who attend KGSA. So far, about 200 have graduated, with some of them going on to study at the university level.

COURTESY OF RYAN SARAFOLEAN

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A team of Pepperdine law students, American lawyers, Ugandan law students, and Ugandan lawyers together on the day before the start of the Uganda prison project in 2014; the team met to discuss what was about to happen in the prison.

Because most education in Kenya involves rote memorization, the school started journalism, drama, and debate clubs to hone the girls' critical thinking skills.

Jaffar joined the journalism club and "we were able to identify a passion of hers she never knew was there—to write," Sarafolean recalls.

She won journalism competitions against other schools, and was elected school president at KGSA.

"I've learned how to become a leader; I've learned how to become a journalist," Jaffar says. She won a scholarship so she could attend Moi University in Kenya for free, and graduated in December 2015. She now works full-time at ActionAid

**Ritah Immalingat,** a Uganda Christian University Law student participating in the Pepperdine University Global Justice Program's plea bargaining project for prisoners in Uganda.



**BrieAnn West,** a Pepperdine University law student, with Rwanda Chief Justice Sam Regege during her internship with the Rwandan Supreme Court.

BRIEANN WEST

Kenya, a nongovernmental organization that aims to reduce poverty and injustice. On the side, she works as a freelance journalist for local and international outlets. Eventually she would like to become a full-time journalist and would like to start a program to mentor girls from Kibera to help them fulfill their aspirations.

"Everything has guided me to where I am," Jaffar says.

Jaffar's experience is just one example of how these university social justice internships can have a profound impact on the

university students who take part, as well as on those who are served by their efforts.



### Transforming Lives

When students take part in international social justice internships, "it's transformative. Their world gets a whole lot bigger," says Gash, who has seen it firsthand. Pepperdine's Global Justice Program sends law students to various parts of the developing world for the summer, where they may work as interns with judicial systems or nongovernmental organizations.

About 20 students are selected each year to spend their summer abroad as part of the program, and they can either receive course credit for the time they spend working in the Global Justice Program, or have about three-quarters of their costs covered. Most opt to receive the funding.

Pepperdine has standing relationships with organizations in several countries, and also does one-time placements with various groups. In Uganda students work with judges and prosecutors. In Rwanda they work with prosecutors

JAMES GASH/PEPPERDINE

or the chief justice of the Rwandan Supreme Court. In Thailand they work on refugee issues. In India they work with the Counsel to Secure Justice, which was founded by Pepperdine alum Jonathan Derby and provides free legal support for victims of sexual violence. Students also may work with the International Justice Mission, which rescues and supports people who have been victims of slavery or sexual violence, and also works to bring the perpetrators to justice.

As the law students take part in such initiatives “the world gets a whole lot bigger,” Gash says. “What they are able to do to serve the world is much bigger than they can while sitting in Malibu, (California), where they don’t interact with people in deep need on a regular basis.”

BrieAnn West, who graduates from Pepperdine in 2016, traveled to Rwanda in the summer of 2014, where she spent her time interning for the chief justice of the Supreme Court. During that time she did comparative law research for the chief justice, looking at issues such as female land inheritance laws and laws on gender-based violence, and she edited case law that had been translated into English.

West’s time in Rwanda piggy backs on her undergraduate studies, as she studied conflict resolution and political science at Hamline University. As an undergraduate she traveled to former conflict zones in the Balkans and Middle East, looking at how and why communities break down and societies break down. She also studied



**Piles of files for prisoners waiting for their day in court in Uganda—students participating in Pepperdine University’s Global Justice Program interned in Uganda assist prisoners.**

community rebuilding efforts, and how communities find justice and ultimately can recover from what tore them apart.

She now has an offer to be part of the U.S. Army’s Judge Advocate General Corps, which could take her anywhere in the world.

One key point she has learned from her time traveling and interning abroad is that, “I can give back at home just as much as I can give back abroad, rebuilding communities and strengthening relationships that I see every day.”

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David Lenett, a Brandeis University student, leads the winning moot court team at the Grotius Centre competition in The Hague.

### Pursuing Peace and Justice

Students at Brandeis University also have the opportunity to experience the process of peace, justice, and reconciliation as part of two Brandeis in The Hague programs offered by the university. Students can go for either a semester in the spring or for six weeks in the summer to the Dutch city, which is considered the International City of Peace and Justice.

The Hague is the home to the International Criminal Court and the United Nations' (U.N.) International Court of Justice. The International Court of Justice is charged with settling legal disputes submitted to it by U.N. member states, and to provide advisory opinions on issues referred to it by U.N. bodies. The International Criminal Court is an independent organization that is designed to help put an end to impunity for those who perpetrate the most serious crimes, such as crimes against humanity and destruction of cultural monuments.

The Hague is also the location for new tribunals, such as the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia and the Special Court for Sierra Leone, as well as for a wide range of NGOs, many of them dealing with peace and human rights issues.

The Brandeis undergraduates get to see up close why the city is called the International City of Peace and Justice, as they receive in-depth exposure to the international courts and NGOs. Students who are there for the semester also take part in a two-month practicum with either a court or an NGO.

Brandeis law and social welfare professor Richard Gaskins, who is director of the Legal Studies Program, launched a six-week pilot program in The Hague in the summer of 2010. The Hague program is open to students from a wide range of majors, giving them the opportunity to “do something different, which would challenge undergraduates and test their ability in a very professional kind of world, and bring the liberal arts perspective to it,” he says.

For those enrolled in the spring semester study abroad program, the first half is spent primarily in the classroom at the Grotius Centre for International Legal Studies at Leiden University. The students also make visits to various courts, where they meet with judges and court officials and observe trials.

“That gives them a chance to build a mental road map from whatever perspective they bring,” Gaskins says.

For the second half of the semester-long program, the undergrads take part in a practicum, working with the courts or NGOs. “The courts are part of the system of peace building,” Gaskins says. The institutions in The Hague also work to increase the judicial capacity in countries where conflicts have occurred.

The students also work with the NGOs. That may involve observing trials and interpreting them for a non-legal audience, perhaps by producing reports, blogs, and other documents.

During the summer the students don't spend time on a practicum, but they do take part in workshops and

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Camille Wang, a Cornell University student, interviews a patient with the help of a local translator in Tamale, Ghana, during a Unite for Sight internship.

practical exercises, working with prosecutors, judges, and other officials.

Gaskins says the experience has a profound impact on the undergraduates who take part in the program. “It really is life changing for many of them. The problem is what to do with it when they go back home. Human rights is not an easy career to establish.”

David Benger, who did his practicum on a trial team with the International Criminal Court and is currently working as an investigative analyst with the New York District Attorney’s Office, says of his experience in The Hague, “I underestimated how big a role it would play in my time there and ultimately my future.”

Along with typical student tasks such as copying and scanning documents, Benger worked on a defense team and interviewed some trial witnesses, finding “tremendous inconsistencies in their stories.”

Benger graduated from Brandeis in 2014 with a degree in political science and Russian studies, and in the fall he’s heading to Tsinghua University in Beijing as part of the new Schwarzman Scholars program. More than 3,000 students from around the world applied to the program and just 111 were admitted. The aim of the Schwarzman Scholars program is to have the students impact the world in a positive way. When he completes the program, Benger will graduate with a master’s degree in international affairs and then wants to enroll in law school in the United States.

Benger, whose parents were Soviet refugees, says, “I’ve always wanted to do something that helps people who get an unfair shake get a fair chance in the world.”

Through his work he wants to “feel good about what I do every day and feel like I have an impact on the world.”

## Providing a New Vision

Jamen Rose Garcia, who did two stints in Ghana with Unite for Sight, which works to help provide eye care for millions of people worldwide, also relishes pursuing projects that have a positive impact, wherever they may be in the world. “Find what your passion is, then find an organization to fit that,” she says.

Garcia, who graduated from the University of California-Los Angeles, in 2013, developed her passion for eye care after her father went blind after he suffered a stroke while she was in high school.

Garcia, who majored in Chicano studies with a minor in labor and workplace studies, first spent three weeks in Ghana as a Global Impact Fellow with Unite for Sight as a junior. She then returned for 10 months after she graduated, based in Kumasi and Tamale, Ghana.

During her time in Ghana, Garcia assisted a local ophthalmologist who received support from Unite for Sight and would travel to villages throughout the region, providing free eye screenings and doing surgeries as needed. In those areas, Garcia learned “there’s a lot of fear and misconceptions about doctors and going for surgery.”

She was impressed with the Unite for Sight model, which helps provide support for local ophthalmologists so they can then spend time assisting those in need. “Sustainable eye care is something they’re (Unite for Sight) so adamant about,” Garcia says. “I love that you’re working with local doctors and really trying to make it so we don’t have to be there anymore.”

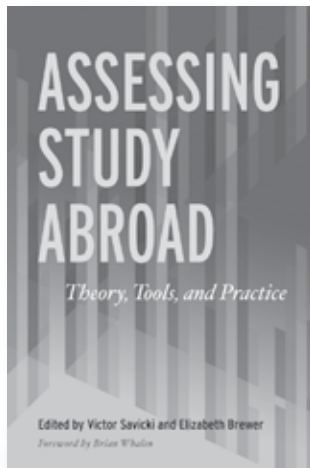
During her extended stay in Ghana, she lived with the ophthalmologist and his family. “I’m so glad I went back for that long. I got to figure out that that is the kind of life I’d be able to live,” says Garcia, who is now applying for admission to a master’s degree program in global health and then wants to continue on to medical school.

Despite the cultural differences between Garcia and the people she worked with in Ghana, “it’s our humanity we can connect on.”

Unite for Sight, which was founded in 2000, was the vision of Jennifer Staple-Clark, who was then a sophomore at Yale University. She had spent the summer after her freshman year working for a Connecticut ophthalmologist. During that time she learned that people who didn’t receive proper eye care were going blind because of glaucoma.

That experience inspired Staple-Clark to launch Unite for Sight as a student organization designed to promote proper eye care. The group would go to libraries and soup kitchens around New Haven to educate patrons about the importance of taking care of their eyes, and informing them about where they could go to receive free or low-cost care.

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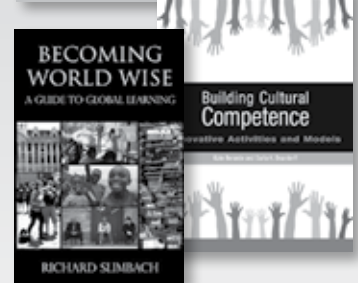
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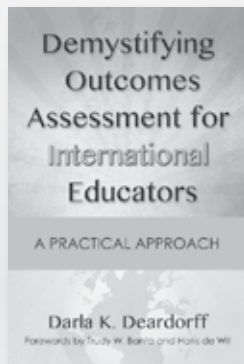
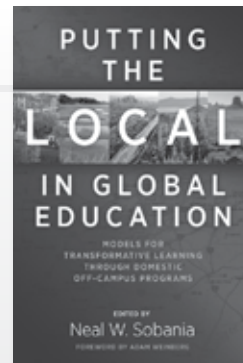
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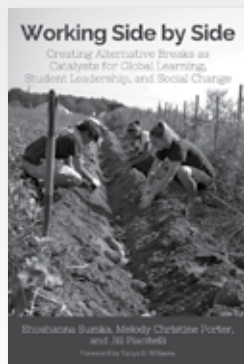
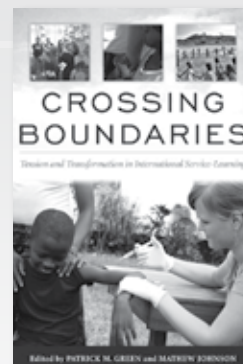
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**Each year, Unite for Sight trains between 250 and 300 Global Impact Fellows, many of whom are university students, and they are sent to assist the ophthalmologists, doing things such as conducting patient intake and dispensing eyeglasses.**



**Unite for Sight's Global Impact Fellow volunteers from North America supporting and learning from Crystal Eye Clinic's outreach team and doctors in Ghana.**

Unite for Sight gradually expanded to other college campuses in the United States, and eventually it caught the attention of Karrus Hayes, a teacher at the Buduburam refugee camp in Ghana, who approached Unite for Sight seeking assistance for those who were living at the camp.

Staple-Clark, who graduated from Yale in 2003 with a degree in biology and anthropology, was able to link up with James Clarke, MD, a Ghanaian ophthalmologist who runs the Crystal Eye Clinic in Accra and is now also medical director of Unite for Sight's Ghana program.

Clarke traveled to the refugee camp in 2005. On the first day he arrived at the camp, hundreds of people had already signed up for care. Clarke and his team performed eye exams, dispensed glasses and medications, and did surgery.

Since those early days, Unite for Sight's operations have exploded, and it now works with five eye clinics in Ghana, as well as one in Honduras and three in India. Unite for Sight's teams have reached more than 2 million people and have provided more than 93,000 sight-restoring surgeries. Some of those who were once blind are now even able to work again.

Under its model, Unite for Sight helps local eye clinics, where the doctors see paying patients, and then those doctors go into the field to assist those who otherwise wouldn't receive care. Unite for Sight "supports local ophthalmologists who have incredible ideas who simply need financial and human resources," Staple-Clark says.

Each year, Unite for Sight trains between 250 and 300 Global Impact Fellows, many of whom are university students, and they are sent to assist the ophthalmologists, doing things such as conducting patient intake and dispensing eyeglasses.

Unite for Sight hosts the annual Global Health & Innovation Conference each year in New Haven, which is the world's largest global health conference and the largest social entrepreneurship conference. It also runs Global Health University, which offers online certificate programs on topics such as global health. The proceeds from those endeavors are used to support Unite for Sight's operations abroad.

Connor Orrico, who graduated from Cornell University in May 2015 and now is an intern in the organization's New Haven office, spent two months in eastern India with Unite for Sight during the summer after his sophomore year at Cornell. Orrico, who majored in biology with a minor in global health, says Unite for Sight is one of only four programs preapproved by Cornell to fulfill its global health field experience requirement for those studying global health. He specifically was looking for a program that focused on eye care.

"What really captivated me about Unite for Sight was its cultural competence and the ethics piece of their volunteerism," Orrico says. "The program is about empowering the local community so locals lead the charge. Often programs seem to just benefit the participants."

Orrico is now applying for medical school. His time in India "confirmed and refined my career goals. I would like to practice medicine across cultural barriers."

### **Focus on Policing**

Another student who worked to aid those in India was Donovan Wood, now a third-year law student at Indiana University. Wood currently is studying at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland. He is spending the year in Ireland as part of a joint program in international comparative law between Indiana University and Trinity College.

Wood traveled to India as part of Indiana University's global externship program following his first year in the Maurer School of Law. The program, which started in 2010, offers law students the opportunity to work in one of several countries. Students heading to India work with an NGO. Those organizations are focused on areas such as women's rights or development issues.

The goal of the externship program is to "get first-year law students into positions they wouldn't necessarily find on their own," says Lara Gose, graduate student services coordinator with the law school.

The program helps students see "law is an international thing, not just domestic. They can transfer the skills they

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University of Minnesota students in Ecuador at an organic farm, the site for their internship placement, with the owner of the farm.

gain from international experience,” Gose says. It also helps them “develop the intercultural skills they need to be good citizens of the world, and also to be good lawyers.”

By working in other countries, the students gain experience assisting those from different cultures and develop cross-cultural skills and sensitivities, which they can make use of at home or abroad, she says.

Wood worked with the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative in Delhi, which strives to promote human rights. During his time there he assisted the police reform team, where he researched and wrote about policing in India, particularly in Delhi and Mumbai. He looked at topics such as sexual violence against women, and he found that because the subject “was culturally sensitive for police, they simply wouldn’t handle it,” he says.

He also looked at the issue of police violence. “It was kind of shocking. Police would respond with violence when it was unnecessary.”

Wood returned to the United States shortly before the unrest in Ferguson, Missouri, following the police shooting of Michael Brown, an unarmed black teen, and the death of a Baltimore man, Freddie Gray, while in police custody. “That put things in a different light,” he says. It made him wonder “is there something big underlying it (police violence).”

Wood, who graduated in 2009 from the University of Oklahoma with a degree in economics, says he would like to practice international law with a focus on civil rights or economic rights.

He says of his time in India, “There’s a real sense that the work that’s being done there will have a big effect on what will happen next. Things there are changing very rapidly.”

### **Important Impacts**

Having an impact on the world is a key component of the University of Minnesota’s MSID program. The university has a long history of organizing social justice internships for its students. It launched the MSID program in 1983. The program has existed for many years in Kenya, Ecuador, India, and Senegal, and the university added an MSID program in Thailand this school year.

All the MSID programs follow the same format. Students spend the first half of the program in the classroom in their host location, and the second half is spent doing an internship or research project in the country, working with a grassroots community organization, says Heidi Soneson, program director in the university’s Learning Abroad Center.

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University of Minnesota students with women's cooperative members in Toubacouta, Senegal.

The new MSID program in Thailand drew many students of Hmong origin, who were going to or returning to the region for the first time. Many families left the area as refugees. "It's a population that might not have (previously) had a study abroad location that spoke to them," Soneson says.

By sending students to developing nations, "the question of social justice naturally arises. It's an important topic we feel needs to be part of our curriculum," Soneson says.

Each year about 100 to 150 students take part in the MSID program. By spending a semester in such locations, students have "an opportunity to understand complex historical dynamics," she says. "MSID by its very nature will stretch students beyond their comfort level."

Mohamud Jama, longtime director of Kenya's MSID program, says the efforts are "devoted to the preparation of culturally sensitive students."

The students who come to Kenya have an opportunity to intern with dozens and dozens and dozens of grassroots organizations that focus on a wide range of issues, including education, children's issues, the environment, global health, and microbusiness.

They may work at an elephant sanctuary, at a center for children who have been abandoned, or with an organization that helps women who live in the slums pool their money so that a different one of the members can start a microbusiness each month, Jama says.

During that time, students stay with middle- and lower-income host families. "How else would they get to know the cross-cultural issues? How else would they get to know social justice issues?" Jama asks. "It turns students into a culturally sensitive lot."

It also forges deep ties between the students and the host families. "The umbilical cord is never cut," Jama says.

Many students return to visit Kenya and their host families, bringing their own parents with them. And many come back to work in Kenya or nearby countries, he says.

Through their experience with the MSID program, "it opens up their minds, their attitudes," Jama says. "Their world view is turned totally upside down." **IE**

**SUSAN LADIKA** is a freelance writer in Tampa, Florida. Her most recent article for *IE* was "Women Peacemakers" for the January/February 2016 issue.