

FEATURE

LEARNING TO LEAD IN A DYNAMIC WORLD: MIDSHIPMEN ABROAD

PHOTO COURTESY CDR. JOSH DITTMAR



Midshipmen must be prepared to lead in today's geopolitical environment—one that demands a growing focus on ethics, multicultural understanding and the free exchange of ideas. International opportunities provide real world experience to develop language, cultural and interpersonal skills. Midshipmen are more than students who graduate with valuable international exposure. They go on to lead men and women in uniform as part of an expeditionary force that operates outside U.S. borders. Their experiences are invaluable in helping them better navigate foreign cultures, lead others in international environments and make better decisions in times of peace and conflict. The Naval Academy is committed to strengthening and expanding programs that offer such exposure to midshipmen, and donors have continued to fund these initiatives through scholarships and programmatic support. Through the generosity of these three parents of those in the fleet—all also members of the Naval Academy Foundation's Board of Directors—today's midshipmen continue to have international experiences through which to learn and thrive. For video coverage of international programs at the Academy and more from these interviews, visit www.usna.com.

Midshipmen in Norway as part of a faculty-led LREC (language skills, regional expertise and cultural awareness) program. To learn more about this visit, go to www.sites.google.com/usna.edu/drontur.

FEATURE

From Soccer to Sweden

A visit to Germany for the 2006 World Cup inspired the Festa family to support international programs at the Naval Academy. As a midshipman, Ensign Kyle Festa '18, USN, drew on that formative experience. Fred and Marylynn Festa created the Jason Jablonski Scholarship, in memory of Midshipman Jason Jablonski '17—Kyle Festa's friend and hockey teammate—for midshipmen interested in economics to study abroad. Midshipman Tanner Mix '19 was the first recipient of this scholarship and traveled to Uppsala, Sweden, for a semester.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MIDN MIX '19

MIDN Mix visiting the 13-century ruins of the Church of Saint Catherine on Gotland, Sweden's largest island.

"It was about creating that opportunity for the midshipmen to be able to gain context. They get to understand how other people perceive the U.S., how they are perceived in their country as well as how they gain a better footing of what the real world is about. They're going to bring that back to their real-life experiences. They can step out of the Naval Academy and have discussions with the best economic students around the world on the issues they'll be facing when they graduate and bring that back to the Academy."

—Fred Festa

"I have more confidence in myself because I was able to continue pushing and improving myself physically and intellectually outside of the environment at USNA. I now have an expanded sense of how to connect and communicate with people who come from cultures vastly different from my own. I also have a renewed appreciation for what USNA offers to its students. I felt a hunger for leadership experience after only weeks away from USNA and that hunger made me seek out ways to fulfill it. Joining the basketball team and getting involved in local church leadership served to placate the ferocity of that desire. Now in my final year at USNA with my new experiences, I feel more excited and appreciative than ever for the leadership opportunities ahead."

—MIDN Tanner Mix '19



Connections Through Language

Michael and Jenny Messner are co-trustees of the Speedwell Foundation and parents of Commander George Messner '02, USNR. Since their son entered the Academy, the Messner family has been involved in philanthropic causes and has made international programs a priority. Jenny Messner's international interest began at an early age and is close to her heart. In high school, Messner was selected to be her school's first exchange student and traveled to Brazil through an organization called AFS-USA. Through the Speedwell Foundation, the Messners continue to work with AFS to focus on expanding international opportunities for young people, including midshipmen. As a midshipman, Lieutenant Sarah Bull '12, USN, was able to go to Egypt for a month of summer training, and after spending three weeks in Morocco she spent a semester there as well.



PHOTO COURTESY OF LT BULL '12, USN

Navy midshipmen and officers from 27 countries take time off from sailing to trek the 260-meter high historic Mount Dilli during the 2017 Admiral's Cup Regatta. The sailing regatta was hosted by the Indian Naval Academy in Ezhimala.

“Midshipmen are about to go off into the world with varying levels of knowledge about world cultures, about foreign languages, and my feeling is that at times they are our first ambassadors in foreign nations. The more they can communicate with foreign navies and other countries, the better the Navy will do abroad and the better we are represented as Americans.”

—Jenny Messner

“The opportunities I have had abroad helped me to understand and be able to relate to people from different cultures and backgrounds. I sometimes needed to use different words or different language to explain things differently and get the information across. Being a white female in an Arab country trying to converse and be personable with the officer was intimidating at first, but speaking their language and trying really went a long way. Thank you. Merci. Dhanyawad. Shokran.”

—LT Sarah Bull '12, USN



FEATURE

An Indo-Pacific Focus

A private investor with a two-decade career in Hong Kong, Philip Bilden immediately recognized the unique opportunity to help develop vital skills and experience for midshipmen through regional studies programs. Philip and Patricia Bilden's three children grew up immersed in Hong Kong's culture and environment, and two graduated from the Naval Academy—Ensign Andrew Bilden '18, USN, and Ensign Philip Bilden '15, USN. Because of the Bildens' background, they were particularly interested in supporting activities and opportunities focused on the Indo-Pacific area.



PHOTO COURTESY OF MIDN GALLACHER '19

MIDN Colin Gallacher '19 experienced a semester abroad exchange program with the Japanese National Defense Academy.

“The U.S. Naval Academy has a unique mission that would benefit from a greater internalization and understanding by the midshipmen of cultures, languages and ways of thinking beyond U.S. borders. Our midshipmen will become junior and mid-grade officers, some will lead the fleet as admirals or general officers in the Marine Corps. Relying upon host nations as partner allies will be extremely important. The ability to communicate, to engage, to understand those different and very disparate cultures is a major competitive advantage of the U.S. Navy. USNA midshipmen abroad are among America’s best ambassadors.”

—Philip Bilden

“You learn how you work with someone different. You learn how to communicate with someone who grew up differently and has different priorities. You learn to be resilient in response to change. We’re future sailors and Marines and leading with people completely different than ourselves. In Japan, it was a new language, a new training and a new experience that I could not plan for, and I learned how to handle those situations. The meaningful experiences that I had were climbing Mount Fuji and meeting these future officers that I’ll be working with.”

—MIDN Colin Gallacher '19

