



Name: Nicole Gerring

Home State: New York

U.S. Institution: Ithaca College

Major: Journalism

Country: Senegal

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I studied abroad in Senegal through the School for International Training of Brattleboro, Vermont. I am proud of my academic and professional accomplishments in Senegal. I progressed from international-low to advanced in French on the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages Test. Perhaps more importantly, at the end of the program I felt comfortable speaking with native French speakers and learned enough Wolof greetings to communicate during my final week spent in a rural village. These were my main academic goals. The program was also a good indication that I could complete research in a foreign language, work as an international journalist or travel independently again, even in a developing country where life is drastically different and certainly not easy.

My study abroad experience fundamentally changed and challenged my worldview. I no longer imagine developing nations as idealized places of music, art and foreign language, but am more realistic about the economic divide between the haves and have-nots of this world. I understand that the American lifestyle is an incredible anomaly—we live a privileged existence that some foreign people either envy or despise. While I'm grateful to live in such comfort, I see the current geopolitical situation as unfortunate and in need of remedy.

Writing about my experiences in a public forum such as my campus newspaper, The Ithacan, and the Erie Times-News, has given me an outlet to express my readjustment and to educate Americans about life in a Muslim, African and francophone nation. I realize that I'm passionate about educating readers of the humanity of people they know only through dramatized media images and fictional books and movies. My view of the media has changed, but I still think newspapers or magazines are a practical way to enlighten Americans about world cultures. I will strive to accomplish this in an ethical, just manner.

As a senior in college, I am currently applying for a Fulbright Grant and for entry into the Peace Corps. I'd like to return to Francophone Africa but would be happy in any area where my services are needed. After living in a developing country, I realize the importance of taking time out to study and give back to other cultures. In this politically polarized world, I want to better understand other perspectives and demonstrate positive American behavior. Eventually, I hope to find work as a foreign correspondent for an English language magazine or news wire service.