Nicole Cronin

Participating in JYAN made me more conscious of issues which are so prevalent in Egyptian society and allowed me to analyze how religion plays such an integral role in the lives of people around the country. Reading the letters of other participants allowed me to compare the societies where they were studying to that of Cairo, and thus to better understand the culture in which I was living.

Christian Arana

Unlike regular study abroad experiences, JYAN forces students to not just communicate with the people of their respective host countries, but to also understand their values, beliefs, and ideals. Most importantly, JYAN encourages students to discover how others view the world, particularly under the lens of religion, in hope of developing greater understanding between peoples of different cultures. Like a detective who needs clues to solve cases, or like an artist who needs great precision to paint, JYAN has allowed me to view religion in New Zealand in intimate detail and given me the opportunity to study and more deeply understand my host country.

Colleen Lima

JYAN challenged me to reflect on my day to day experiences while living in a completely different country and society, which most definitely increased the value of my experience abroad.

Participating in JYAN was a great intellectual and cultural experience because it led me to question the role of religion in the society where I was studying. It also led me to question my own religion and what it means to me, which was a truly powerful experience.

Hannah Moss

Being a part of the Junior Year Abroad Network led me to have a unique experience of my host country. My participation while abroad forced me not only to notice the religious tendencies of the Czech Republic but also to absorb and question the experiences I had with religion in both its spiritual and secular forms. This awareness gave me a lens through which to view Czech history, people, and politics which, in turn, gave me a unique synthesis of the situation in which I was placed. Moreover, the study I undertook led me to a deeper understanding of religion and, because of it, I more fully grasped the influence of religion (or the lack thereof) on the secular world.
Kory Kantenga

JYAN led me to articulate the observations and reflections going through my head during my time abroad. From there, I was able to connect my experience to a broader narrative about religion and secularisation in the United Kingdom. This broader narrative helped me interpret what I saw but could not fully understand. Through my letters, I was able to examine the complexities of religion and secularization that I had before only intuitively understood.

Chiara Cardone

JYAN gave me a reason to open myself and discard my preconceptions, even when it meant encountering with frightening truths about the challenges to peace and tolerance in the modern world. I know that I could not have been taught as much as I have learned from the experience. It has been an enriching and eye-opening experience. My year abroad was nothing short of extraordinary, and my encounters with religion are going to fuel my dedication to a durable and inclusive culture of tolerance for the rest of my life.

Table of Contents

About the 2008–2009 Junior Year Abroad Network ................................................................. 2

Student Reports from Abroad

Traditional Religion Meets the Modern World ................................................................. 4
Learning about Religion and Culture ................................................................. 10
Religion in Spite of Secularism ................................................................. 18
Encountering Others ................................................................. 24
Grappling with the Intersection of Religion and Politics ................................................................. 30
Religion and Expressions of Identity ................................................................. 34
About the 2008–2009 Junior Year Abroad Network

42 Hoyas in 20 countries on 5 continents

Study abroad is often a time of profound discovery and self-transformation. Students confront a new world in foreign lands—often through foreign languages—and through these encounters, discover themselves.

The Berkley Center Junior Year Abroad Network (JYAN) links up study abroad students in a global conversation on religion, politics, and culture. Students immersed in diverse settings—from England to Egypt to China—share their experiences and observations with one another, the Georgetown community, and beyond.

During their time living in a foreign country, students write several ‘letters from abroad’ dealing with questions of religion, culture, and politics in a different part of the world. They share these with each other through the Berkley Center website. They engage in dialogue about their common experiences and perceptions of different cultures, particularly the many roles that religion plays in their host country’s culture. They share stories about how to navigate new lands and the discovery of promising new directions for their lives.
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY
STUDY ABROAD

Georgetown University encourages students to spend a semester, year, or a summer session abroad as part of their academic experience. Georgetown’s Office of International Programs (oip.georgetown.edu) sponsors overseas study programs in various countries, including: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Chile, China, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Egypt, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Cote d’Ivoire, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Senegal, Spain, Switzerland, Taiwan, and the United Kingdom.

Students may enroll in Georgetown-sponsored programs or may occasionally study in an independent program overseas. Almost 70% of students enroll in direct matriculation programs, where they take courses in the language of the host university alongside degree-seeking students at the institution. By being fully integrated at the host university, Georgetown students are better able to make the most of the overseas experience.

BERKLEY CENTER FOR RELIGION,
PEACE, AND WORLD AFFAIRS

The Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, created within the Office of the President in March 2006, is a part of a university-wide effort to build knowledge about religion’s role in world affairs and promote interreligious understanding in the service of peace. The Center explores the intersection of religion with contemporary global challenges. Through research, teaching, and outreach activities, the Berkley Center builds knowledge, promotes dialogue, and supports action in the service of peace. Thomas Banchoff, Associate Professor in the Department of Government and the School of Foreign Service, is the Center’s founding director.
Many students were fascinated by the interactions of tradition and modernity they observed. Each day they explored new implications of globalization, finding themselves disturbed by the clashes between different worlds while heartened and surprised by striking similarities. They found cultures secularizing in reaction to their traditional past, cultures preserved through religious vestiges, and cultures exploiting religion for commerce. Students observed the fascinating process of religions evolving to survive and flourish in the modern world.
Caitlin Ryan

**MAJOR:** International Politics, School of Foreign Service  
**HOMETOWN:** Lindstrom, Minnesota  
**HOST COUNTRY:** England  
**HOST UNIVERSITY:** School of Oriental and African Studies  
**LENGTH OF STAY:** Academic Year

Caitlin Ryan focuses on International Law, Ethics and Institutions and Asian Studies as an International Politics major. She volunteered in Japan, Indonesia, and Thailand before landing in London for her first European living experience. She studied in the School of Oriental and African studies in central London, where she enjoyed access to the country’s largest collection of books on Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Both London and SOAS offered a uniquely diverse mix of perspectives on politics and religion. Caitlin was particularly thrilled to study law in this context. At Georgetown, Caitlin is involved with the First-Year Orientation to Community Involvement (FOCI) program, the Center for Social Justice, and the SFS Academic Council.

“There’s probably no God. Now stop worrying and enjoy your life,” shouts in bright pink letters from the side of sixty red London bendy-buses. The No God campaign, a project of the British Humanist Association, aims to make people think; an action anathema to religion, according to Richard Dawkins, prominent British scientist and atheist.  

The evangelist atheist voice meets competition in central London. This city replaces Washington as the most diverse place I have lived. Unsurprisingly, such diversity extends into the realm of religion. On a walk through my neighborhood, one catches view of the Quaker Friendship House, Italian Catholic Church, synagogues, mosques, Protestant Christian congregations of the Church of England, Lutheran and Baptist Churches, a Buddhist center, and a Church of Scientology. Yet according to an April 2009 EU-funded European Social Survey, only 12 percent of Brits belong to a church.

What does the city’s religious diversity look like in practice? Come springtime, commercial London drops many reminders of Easter’s approach. Chocolate bunnies and eggs line shelves of Tesco supermarket stores as early as January. A walk down bustling Oxford Street promises Easter sales. Yet among London’s mix of faiths and the faithfully apathetic, Easter morning passes like any other morning. The Sunday Times newspaper barely notices Easter’s arrival, describing one television program as “excellent Easter family viewing” and citing the Obama family’s highly anticipated Easter egg roll. The only other holiday-related article came from an atheist psychologist and was titled, “Live and let die: Atheists, too, can celebrate the soul at Easter.”

Francis Kennedy

**MAJOR:** English, Georgetown College  
**HOMETOWN:** San Antonio, Texas  
**HOST COUNTRY:** Spain  
**HOST UNIVERSITY:** University of Alicante  
**LENGTH OF STAY:** Fall Semester

Francis Kennedy was born and raised in San Antonio, Texas. He is a part of the Georgetown College class of 2010. After he came to Georgetown he realized how important it is to be able to speak more than one language. He decided that Spanish was one of the most practical languages to know and was also interested in the vast cultures that accompany the language. He enrolled in Intensive Intermediate Spanish for the first semester of his sophomore year and Intensive Advanced Spanish in the spring. After these courses he decided that full immersion was the next step and applied to study abroad in Alicante, Spain. He studied in the CIEE Language and Culture program at the University of Alicante for the fall semester. He lived with a non-English speaking Spanish host family.

I write this letter on December 8th, which is the Spanish holiday to celebrate the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception. It is one of the most important religious holidays of the country that is not internationally recognized. In the past, this day would be celebrated by a very special mass as well as an extremely large procession through the streets. A large number of the population would attend, and the rest of the day would be spent with family for the very important afternoon meal followed by relaxation. This schedule of events would be the norm in most Spanish cities and villages. Today, the mass and procession took place, but they were poorly attended in...
comparison to the celebrations of the past. This is due partly to the national movement towards a more secular society than what Spain once was. The Spanish youth view this day as the beginning of the Christmas season rather than as its own religious holiday. They spend the day going to a recently set-up carnival or fair on the edge of town, an action that holds no religious significance. It is clear that the importance of religious values in the youth of Spain is dwindling. The central causes of this decline are due to the way Spaniards are raised.

Jennifer Ho

MAJOR: Government and Philosophy, Georgetown College
HOMETOWN: Gaithersburg, Maryland
HOST COUNTRY: Spain
HOST UNIVERSITY: Complutense University of Madrid
LENGTH OF STAY: Spring Semester

Upon arriving in Madrid, I was welcomed with a two-week long orientation, which included, amongst other things, a brief tutorial about modern Spain. As with countless other Georgetown students who have studied abroad in Madrid, I learned about the “Two Spains,” namely, the Spain that is aligned with the monarchy and an official state religion and the Spain that supports freedom of religion and political liberalism. This is a conflict supported by statistics and sociopolitical analysis and one which I explored firsthand.

Now, I would gladly admit to anybody that I am the world’s most enthusiastic tourist and visiting the Monasterio de las Descalzas Reales, or the Monastery of the Barefoot Royals, was a must. The tour was fascinating and the artwork breathtaking, so imagine my surprise when, upon exiting the building, I ended up at the entrance of the Corte Inglés, the infamous chain-department store which holds a monopoly with an iron grip in the city of Madrid. Literally, on both sides of the street was the Spain of the right, an austere stone building holding priceless remnants of Spain’s religious past, and the Spain of the left, characterized by its desire to modernize and accede to the oft-propagated liberal ideals of the Western world.

The stark contrast between the Corte Inglés and the Monastery of the Barefoot Royals lucidly illustrates what I learned in my modern Spain tutorial. It was merely another piece of evidence among thousands of the rapidly liberalizing Spanish society.
Mimi Powell is an English major in Georgetown College and is pursuing minors in both Spanish and Government. She spent the last spring semester studying at La Universidad Complutense de Madrid. Having studied Spanish since age five, studying abroad in a Spanish-speaking country was a natural choice. Mimi developed a passion for Spanish literature in high school and was thrilled to have the opportunity to read the works of Cervantes, Miguel de Unamuno, and Federico García Lorca in their country of origin. Originally from Atlanta, GA, she has always loved to travel and to experience the world from multiple perspectives. At Georgetown, she has had the opportunity to intern for her Congressman John Lewis as well as for a top communications firm, the Glover Park Group. On campus, she is an active member of the College Democrats, an Orientation Advisor in New Student Orientation, and is the Communications Secretary for the Georgetown University Legislative Advocates. In the future, Mimi plans to enter the field of political communications either on Capitol Hill or on K Street after attending law school.

“In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue” is a cute phrase taught to Americans in elementary school. However, in Spanish history, the year 1492 is anything but cute. It was the year that the newly empowered, fiercely ambitious Catholic monarchs of Spain made official their bloody crusade to eradicate any traces of Judaism on the Iberian Peninsula.

By the end of the Spanish Inquisition, approximately 2,000 Sephardim, the term for Spanish Jews, had been executed; nearly 40,000 had converted to Christianity to escape persecution and/or death; around 165,000 fled to neighboring regions. Like I said, 1492 was not so cute.

On a trip to Segovia, a medieval town northwest of Madrid, the year 1492 came to life. Like most sites in Segovia, the Jewish neighborhood and cemetery are
medieval relics reminding tourists of a time when the city was a hub of commercial, political, and religious power. However, unlike most sites in Segovia, neither the neighborhood nor the cemetery was marked as a historic landmark.

When I asked my tour guide if there was any Jewish presence in Segovia, he cocked his head as if judging the sincerity of my question. When he realized that I was not joking, he slowly shook his head and answered definitively, “No.”

The return of Jews to Spain in the twentieth century was slow and drawn out. Today, the Sephardic community stresses that it is one of the few Jewish communities in Western Europe that is growing in both numbers and activities, despite the historically tumultuous relationship between Judaism and the Spanish nation.

Nathan Pippenger participated in the Junior Year Abroad Network while studying at Mansfield College, Oxford for the 2008–2009 academic year. During his first two years at Georgetown, he worked at the U.S. Senate and at the New America Foundation. Nathan also hosted a radio show on WGTB, helped form a Presbyterian Student Group on campus, and worked with the Berkley Center to foster interfaith dialogue at Georgetown. While abroad, he studied religion and civic life.

English society is decidedly secular, but evidence of a heavily Christian past is everywhere. Even the names of Oxford’s constituent colleges reflect this history: there is Magdalen College, Corpus Christi College, Trinity College, and Christ Church. There are nine colleges named after saints, and on Christmas Day, students often call the Porter’s Lodge at Jesus College to sing “Happy Birthday.”

The diminishing influence of Christianity in England, however, is just as obvious. Even at Oxford, caught somewhere between tradition and modernity, The Oxford Student—a newspaper published by the Student Union—struggles to justify the continued existence of chapels on campus. “To many modern students, the religious role of the Chapel is negligible,” it writes. “For many they are simply meeting spaces, performance halls or even just a reminder that Oxford is an ancient institution.” The article points out that, in the view of many students, this should be the extent of religion’s role in society—an anachronistic establishment with a legacy consisting of nothing more than streets full of beautiful buildings. That seems to be the case where I live on Cowley Road, just outside the city’s center. Among its adult entertainment shops, fast food chains, busy students, and noisy traffic, there is a beautiful Methodist church. Its sign quotes a hymn that may reveal more about the Church than the sign’s creator intended: “Change and decay / in all around I see. / O God who changes not, / Abide with me.”
As a tourist in Prague, it is easy to assume that Christianity is prevalent within the city. At every turn, there is an imposing statue of a saint or martyr residing in the shadow of a momentous and impressively preserved church. However, the impression given by these details is an incorrect one. Christianity is, in fact, very much like the churches here. It is appreciated and preserved but it is also hollow. The religion that truly thrives within the Czech Republic has a vested faith not in God but the nation.

Nationalism, heralded by men such as Václav Hanka and Tomáš G. Masaryk, was to become the religion of the Czech people and remains so today. It is not uncommon to find a Czech who calls himself a Christian but has never attended a religious service, believed in the God of Abraham, or knelt in prayer. He is in reality professing himself to be a nationalist with deep respect for those religious peoples and institutions that have come before him and helped build the character of the Czech nation.

If religion is defined as belief in a higher good, a power worth devoting one’s life to, then religion is very much alive within the Czech Republic. It is only a belief in God that is absent.

Hannah Moss

MAJOR: Culture and Politics, School of Foreign Service
HOMETOWN: Mobile, Alabama
HOST COUNTRY: Czech Republic
HOST UNIVERSITY: Charles University
LENGTH OF STAY: Spring Semester

Hannah Moss studied at Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic during the 2009 spring semester. While abroad, she sought to understand the increasing role atheism plays in Czech society. Hannah is in the Walsh School of Foreign Service as a Culture and Politics major. Her academic focus is the interaction of church and state, specifically the influence of popular religion on state policy. At Georgetown, Hannah works for the Students of Georgetown, Inc. and is the chairperson of the Corp’s Sustainability Initiative while also working at MUG and Hoya Snaxa. She also works as a mass coordinator for the Student Liturgy Committee, is an active member of Mask & Bauble Dramatic Society, and volunteers for Relay for Life. She is considering attending law school for International Law or pursuing graduate studies in International Studies.
Students were spread across many countries and countless cultures, yet there is commonality in their tone and emotions that is not typically heard in the discussion of different religions and cultures. In Georgetown classrooms, students are presented with texts outlining ideological contradictions, cultural clashes, and the challenges of fundamentalism, and they learn these are often intractable issues. However, the students’ letters do not speak of encountering intractability or hopelessness. Instead, they are engaged by the contradictions and invested in the possibility of achieving solutions.

Students went to a foreign land to learn a new language and discover new traditions, but through their reflections they came to understand the same truth: the more they learned, the more questions they had. Their questions are an encouraging sign for the future: they communicate to our leaders that the next generation is eager to address religious and political conflict armed with a more profound understanding of religion, culture, and each other.
Maria Gabriela Fernandez Navas

**MAJOR:** International Politics, School of Foreign Service

**HOMETOWN:** San Juan, Puerto Rico

**HOST COUNTRY:** England

**HOST UNIVERSITY:** London School of Economics and Political Science

**LENGTH OF STAY:** Academic Year

Maria Gabriela Fernandez Navas studies International Politics, concentrating on Foreign Policy and Policy Processes. She studied International Relations at the London School of Economics in London, England. Gabriela is very involved in Catholic and pro-life organizations on campus. She was on the board of the Catholic Daughters of the Americas, the Cardinal O’Connor Conference for Life, and GU Right to Life. In addition, she writes for the *Georgetown Academy*. She is also very interested in International Relations and government. She has interned at the House of Representatives with the Resident Commissioner of Puerto Rico, Luis Fortuno, and Representative Ken Calvert of California.

London is one of the most multicultural cities in the world. As a demonstration of this one need not look farther than my own flat, which consists of eight LSE students: only two of them share the same religion. The rest practice different religions, making for a total of seven different beliefs in my small flat: Catholic, Hindu, Muslim, Protestant, Atheist, Buddhist, and Christian. My flat is only a microcosm of the Londoner’s reality in which one is constantly confronted with churches of different Christian denominations right across the street from restaurants that serve Halal food. These scenes of religious pluralism lead us to a deeper realization: London has transcended the religious divide in its secularization.

One of the misconceptions I had of England before I came to London was that there was going to be much intolerance towards people who are not Anglican, especially Catholics. This had been ingrained in my psyche after studying so much throughout my entire life about Henry VIII, the establishment of the Church of England, and the subsequent, often bloody, century of disputes between Catholicism and Anglicanism in the reigns of Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth I, and the early Stuarts. I thought it was going to be hard to openly declare my beliefs as a Catholic in this environment. However, the situation here is much different than what I imagined. Londoners are very accepting of other religions. There is such a plurality of beliefs in the city that its inhabitants have acquired understanding of other beliefs. As a result, there is also openness about the discussion of different religions between individuals of different faiths.
Joe Koizim
MAJOR: Mathematics, Georgetown College
HOMETOWN: Norwalk, Connecticut
HOST COUNTRY: New Zealand
HOST UNIVERSITY: University of Auckland
LENGTH OF STAY: Spring Semester

Joe Koizim is a Mathematics major and an Economics minor in the College. He grew up in Norwalk, Connecticut and studied at the University of Auckland during the spring semester. After completing a New Zealand film class this past fall, Joe became interested in the role of religion and politics in the country’s cultural structure. He hopes to continue his studies in Kiwi culture by observing the contrasting social identities of the native Maori culture and the Western-influenced Pakeha culture.

Christian missionaries were the driving force of the European colonization of the Pacific Island kingdoms. Various European missions made their way through the “savage” waters of the Pacific and brought the native peoples the teachings of the Bible. Many of the first settlers in New Zealand were missionaries who set up mission camps to teach the native Maori about Christianity. Yet in my time there, religion seemed almost nonexistent in New Zealand except in some superficial ways. Easter and Good Friday both stood out as the two quietest days of the semester; no shops were open on Easter Sunday and in Queenstown, a city known for its extreme sports and extreme nightlife, alcohol purchase was banned. In addition, all the companies that offer cliff-jumping and sky-diving services were closed.

But even in all their religious observance, I never encountered anyone going to church on these holidays. For a country founded on religion, New Zealand is very secular. In the 2006 census, 35% of New Zealand’s population reported they affiliated with no religion. Beyond that, 20,000 people even wrote in that they were Jedi Knights, taking religion as a serious joke. But Kiwis cannot forget where they came from, and for a very outspoken and opinionated population, it seems that no one objects or even thinks this hollow religious observance is strange. Easter was just one of those days you stay at home with your family and friends. The idea of going into town was laughable to even my most unreligious friends.

Meghan Keneally
MAJOR: Government and Art History, Georgetown College
HOMETOWN: London, England
HOST COUNTRY: France
HOST UNIVERSITY: Université Marc Bloch and Sciences Po—Strasbourg
LENGTH OF STAY: Fall Semester

Meghan Keneally is a senior in the College from London, England. She studied abroad in Paris during the summer before her junior year and followed that by spending the fall semester in Strasbourg, France. As a Government and Art History double major, the combination of her time in Paris and Strasbourg was ideal, as she was able to spend time in both some of the world’s greatest art museums and in the so-called capital of Europe, which is home to the EU parliament. Meghan enjoyed traveling extensively and seeing the interactions between different countries. She hopes to pursue a career in journalism after graduation.

The idea of separation of church and state is taught to American students as soon as they learn about the Constitution and the founding fathers. Nonetheless, in my time abroad I have found the degree to which laïcité, or secularism, is followed to be surprising. While in America the sentiment is said to be important, religion often filters into daily life no matter what one’s personal beliefs are. Political campaigns are constantly filled with religious allusions and a candidate’s religious identity is considered to be an important factor; on the other hand, French politicians are welcome to identify and practice a
religion, but rarely cite religious ideals as the motivating factors in lawmaking.

The interesting aspect about laïcité in France today is that certain aspects of daily life, which originated from religious beliefs, are not essentially institutionalized so that there is no debate over their removal. I am specifically referring to the ideals associated with Sunday, which for Christian religions is known as ‘the Lord’s day.’ It shocks me that, to this day, everything is closed on Sundays. Universally, more shops and restaurants tend to close on Sunday either out of tradition, economic incentive, or need for rest, but in France this has been turned into law, which has become contested in recent years. For me, it has proved to be inconvenient, and it is proving extremely costly for others, as an IKEA outside Paris was fined $700,000 this April for staying open on a Sunday.

Christina Cauterucci

MAJOR: American Studies, Georgetown College
HOMETOWN: Bedford, New Hampshire
HOST COUNTRY: South Africa
HOST UNIVERSITY: University of Cape Town
LENGTH OF STAY: Spring Semester

Christina Cauterucci loves good food, good music, and good dogs. As an American Studies major, there are two questions that she has been fielding non-stop for the past few months: “What are you going to do with a degree in American Studies?” and “Why did you go abroad if you’re studying America?” She’s going to ignore the first question, and she hopes to illuminate some possible answers to the second question in her essays. She studied at the University of Cape Town in South Africa.

At least one third of the hundred or so student societies at the University of Cape Town are devoted to Christian faith. The fact that so many student groups can exist separately yet share a seemingly similar purpose speaks to the diversity of Christian religions here in South Africa. Although roughly three-quarters of South African citizens follow some type of Christian faith, numerous denominations are imbued with elements of indigenous religions that are specific to each language, group, and region.

Music plays an enormous role in the practice of Christianity here. I’ve heard everything: from a preacher’s wife singing a gospel interpretation of Carole King’s “You’ve Got a Friend [In Jesus]” at a pool party, to a taxi driver belting out Christian rock while my friend and I sat quietly in the backseat, unsure of whether we were being serenaded or just witnessing a private moment of rapture. Music is a common and accepted way for people to broadcast their faith and join with others to worship as a community.

The practice of religion here is a truly communal and almost familial experience, like many aspects of life in South Africa. For example, in Xhosa, the language spoken by most black Africans in this region, every woman my age calls me her sister or “sisi,” every woman old enough to be my mother is my “mama,” and so forth. Similarly, my friend Gina’s South African flatmate, Pako, has referred to her as his “sister in Christ,” although she is an atheist, explaining that he must treat her like his own family because they are both “children of God.”
The Chinese Christmas develops a Western image of the holiday that emphasizes the importance of friends and family by adding elements of Chinese traditional culture. This process can be described by the Mandarin word *ben tu hua*. *Ben tu hua* occurs when a foreign idea or product changes to better suit the tastes and customs of the local population by assimilating local elements. A textbook example is that the Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurants in China currently serve *you tiao*, a traditional Chinese breakfast food—an item obviously missing from the American menu. This is one kind of *ben tu hua*. Christmas in China is another. For most young Chinese, Christmas in China has nothing to do with Christianity, but instead is a time to enjoy the company of friends and share hopes for the future. On Christmas, friends exchange apples. The development of this new tradition springs from a rich history of Chinese holiday customs having to do with the Mandarin language. As a tonal language, Mandarin has many characters with the same Romanization but different meanings. The words for traditional holiday foods are similar or identical in sound to abstract ideas or symbols having to do with the holiday. Chinese Christmas apples are no exception. The word for apple in Chinese is *ping guo*. The gift of an apple symbolically represents the giver’s hope that the recipient’s life will be *ping an*—safe and peaceful.

**Mariel Reed**

**MAJOR:** International Politics, School of Foreign Service  
**HOMETOWN:** Orleans, Massachusetts  
**HOST COUNTRY:** China  
**HOST UNIVERSITY:** Harbin Institute of Technology  
**LENGTH OF STAY:** Fall Semester

Mariel hails from Orleans, Massachusetts on Cape Cod, where she worked for five years during the summer months as a professional pirate. She has been taking Mandarin since her freshman year and studied abroad at the Harbin Institute of Technology in Harbin, China. She is especially interested in how foreign policy is not just the official creation of states but culture as well. In particular, she would like to learn more about the importance of civil society. On the Hilltop, she has worked with other students and administrators to create The GU Art Aficionados, a group that works to make sure Georgetown students see more visual art both on and off campus. After graduation, she hopes to do research in China.
Brittney Washington

**MAJOR:** Japanese, Georgetown College  
**HOMETOWN:** Flint, Michigan  
**HOST COUNTRY:** Japan  
**HOST UNIVERSITY:** Nanzan University  
**LENGTH OF STAY:** Academic Year

Brittney Washington's interest in Japanese sparked from studying and living with a family in Sapporo, Japan for a summer during her high school years. Raised in Flint, Michigan, she has acquired a passion for public education and labor issues. Through participation in Georgetown’s DC Schools and ASK programs, Spring Break Alternative Trips, and CMEA’s Meyers Institute for College Preparation, she has been able to mentor young students and protest alongside workers. Brittney spent a year abroad studying at Nanzan University in Nagoya, Japan while participating in the Junior Year Abroad Network. She furthered her understanding of the Japanese language and culture, as well as learned more about the struggles of laborers in Japan during her stay.

While walking along a bustling intersection or even a small, quiet neighborhood in Nagoya, it is not unusual to spot Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples hidden within the scenery of towering buildings and closely knit houses. Shinto, Buddhism, and Christianity, Japan’s three major religions, have long histories and special customs in which many people engage. Most Japanese practice a blend of these traditions, although they do not claim to be followers. It is evident that religion plays a major role in the daily lives of the Japanese, but paradoxically some Japanese deny being religious. A friend explained that for the Japanese, faith is a delicate subject, as “it is something that you cannot grasp completely.” Religion is understood as a private matter that cannot easily be discussed, and because of issues with cults, the word “religion” is sometimes viewed as dangerous. During my time in Japan, I observed that religion, like a shrine, is smoothly concealed in such a way that religious traditions are often referred to as cultural customs. If religion is a shrine, and culture is the outside world, religion in Japan has no torii, or gate, to signify division.

Yasmine Al-Sayyad

**MAJOR:** International Politics, School of Foreign Service (Qatar)  
**HOMETOWN:** Tanta, Egypt  
**HOST COUNTRY:** Scotland  
**HOST UNIVERSITY:** University of St. Andrews  
**LENGTH OF STAY:** Academic Year

An Egyptian native who was born and raised in Egypt, the mobilizing power of religion came to allure Yasmine, especially in recent years. While her academic interests are mainly rooted in the Middle East, she still finds that it is her study of other regions that advances her understanding of the Middle East and puts it in perspective. While at Georgetown, she took part in MUN both as chair and as delegate, visited Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan, and took part in field research on migrant workers in the Gulf for over a year and a half, which took place partly in Kerala, India. Besides her interest in her major, International Politics, she is also extremely passionate about animal rights and opera singing.

Through its absence, my very own native language, Arabic, came to allure me. To me, language is a pillar in the very societal fabrics of reality. Imbued within its phraseology and wording are chief cultural keys. This is why the monologues of my scatterbrained self came to find solace most often with Arabic language students. As I have touched upon in my previous essay, God and reverberations of faith are appealed to in the most mindless of murmurs, and most casual of chats in many Arab cultures. For a believer living in a religiously hegemonic culture, however, it never proved necessary to discern why I for one come to voice such categorically religious elements in my everyday speech. More importantly, it never proved necessary to work out whether it is possible to still speak Arabic idiomatically and yet consciously veer away from such elements.
Anish Savani

**MAJOR:** International Politics, International Development Certificate, Georgetown College  
**HOMETOWN:** London, England  
**HOST COUNTRY:** Senegal  
**HOST UNIVERSITY:** Suffolk University  
**LENGTH OF STAY:** Spring Semester

Anish Savani is an International Politics major at Georgetown University’s School of Foreign Service, pursuing a concentration in International Law, Institutions, and Ethics and a certificate in International Development. Anish is originally from the UK but has also lived in Philadelphia. At Georgetown, he was Secretary of the Center for Social Justice Advisory Board for Student Organizations and on the board of the Hindu Students Association. Anish has also been involved in the International Relations Club and worked as a Resident Assistant. He studied at Suffolk University in Dakar, Senegal. While in Dakar, Anish stayed with a Senegalese host family and traveled around Senegal and other parts of Western Africa.

*Senegal is about 95% Muslim and 5% Christian, yet the nature of religion in Senegal is not as clear cut as these statistics suggest. As modern as Senegal seems, Islam has fused with the traditional beliefs and customs to such an extent that it is often difficult to tell where one ends and where the other begins. Despite the strong Islamic, and to a lesser extent, Christian influences, all religion and culture in Senegal is influenced by Animism. Many Senegalese people strongly believe in the existence of supernatural forces and individuals with powers to protect against illness and misfortune. The saying goes that when Senegal was doing well in the World Cup it was thanks to the Marabouts (religious leaders), but when it loses it was merely the will of god. It is common for Muslims and Christians in Senegal to wear gris-gris (protective charms with verses from religious texts), which are physical embodiments of the mixture of religion and animism. Above all, Senegal has a unique culture that blends tradition with modernity and religion with mysticism, building strong communities where Muslims and Catholics coexist peacefully.*

Deion Simmons

**MAJOR:** Portuguese  
**HOMETOWN:** Buffalo, New York  
**HOST COUNTRY:** Brazil  
**HOST UNIVERSITY:** Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro  
**LENGTH OF STAY:** Spring Semester

Born in Buffalo, New York, a city known for its cold and unforgiving winters, Deion Simmons somehow managed to turn out warm and friendly, with a pronounced interest in learning about other cultures. While at Georgetown, he was involved in many student organizations such as YLEAD (Young Leaders in Education About Diversity), 25 Days of Community Service, Club Filipino, the Black Student Alliance, the Corp, The Fire This Time, and The Hoya. In addition to that, he is also a Patrick Healy Fellow. Currently a senior in the Faculty of Languages and Linguistics in the Georgetown College of Arts and Sciences, with a major in Portuguese and double minor in French and Sociology, he studied abroad in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil at PUC Rio with the hope of learning more about the complexities of both human society and of himself. During his time abroad, he has learned that Brazil is not quite the country that it seems on TV and yet, in other ways, it is; it is a country of extremes that does not quite fit into any particular mold. It knows no limits.
If there is one religion that I have been able to observe to some great lengths, it has been a sect of Umbanda that is called Catimbó. Although it is similar to Candomblé (a religion that was brought by African slaves and synchronized with Catholicism still commonly practiced in Africa today), what distinguishes Catimbó is that it is undeniably Brazilian...

Granted, it has been the only religion that I have actively sought out aside from visiting the ostentatiously grandiose Catholic churches, and even then it has been for purely touristic reasons alone. It is not because I perceive it as especially intriguing or, dare I say it, exotic, but because when I am at the terreiro, or center of worship, it just feels, well, right.

This is partly due to the fact that there are no apparent signs of wealth, which is fitting because most terreiros are located in the more modest areas of the region and within the house of the pai/mãe de santos (the person that essentially runs the spiritual center in both a logistical and religious sense). In addition to that, there is no proselytizing. As it is a religion that involves the worship of African deities, or orixás, various other spiritual entities, and many other activities that are not something that many Brazilians would necessarily classify as normal behavior, all that is expected of you is merely that you respect the ceremony that is taking place before you.

Annie McBride

MAJOR: English and Studio Art, Georgetown College
HOMETOWN: Franklin Lakes, New Jersey
HOST COUNTRY: Italy
HOST UNIVERSITY: Georgetown University–Florence
LENGTH OF STAY: Spring Semester

Annie McBride is an English and Studio Art major with an Environmental Studies minor in the College. She studied in Florence, Italy at Georgetown University’s own Villa le Balze for the Spring 2009 semester. She was born and raised in New Jersey, but has always had a passion for travel and the exploration of other cultures. She looked forward to assimilating into the Italian culture and exploring the connection between art and religion in Italy’s history. While at Georgetown, Annie is very involved in Grab-n-Give (a service within the H.O.P.E organization), Midnight Mug (part of the Corp), EcoAction, and Club Lacrosse. She has also been involved in Georgetown’s Outdoor Education program and participated in past trips to Ecuador and Egypt.

After many weeks of wandering the streets of Florence, experiencing the touristy side while still trying to immerse myself in the true culture of the Florentines, I have come to realize how important religion is here. Religion is so well-integrated into the life and energy of the city that Florentines seem almost unaware of it. They walk past incredible sculptures and awe-inspiring cathedrals without recognizing their sheer religious importance because they see them on a daily basis as they walk to a café, bike to work, or chat with old friends. Religion, through its history and art that remains, is so imbedded in the city itself that it seems Florentines would have no other option than to accept their faith. Visitors, on the other hand, have a fresh view of the city and are thrilled to see aspects of Florence that are wholly important in art and religious history. At the start of my program in mid-January, when the breeze had a startling chill to it, the city was generally mellow and relaxing, and we could explore on our own accord. Now, two months later, tourist season is in full swing. Along with the deliciously warm weather came a swell of tourists. The swarms of people taking photos of the Duomo and the David have been constant reminders of how lucky we are to live in such a great city. The fact that people voyage all the way to this country proves how significant this city is in their personal perceptions of history and religion.
Religion in Spite of Secularism

Asked to reflect on their observations of their host culture’s religion, many students were confronted by paradoxical traditions. They puzzled over contradictions, such as the profusion of beautiful cathedrals in France amidst lack of interest in their religious significance. Many came to realize that faith can transcend its “official” practice. Their expectations were challenged by the rich religious traditions of the most secular countries, the clamor of new religious believers in seemingly secular societies, and the quiet, moderate faith witnessed in countries the media paints as radical. Throughout their global journeys, they were most struck by the discoveries they made at the very moment they ceased to consciously look.
Colleen Lima

**MAJOR:** Culture and Politics, International Development Certificate, School of Foreign Service  
**HOMETOWN:** New York City, New York  
**HOST COUNTRY:** France  
**HOST UNIVERSITY:** l’Université Paris-Sorbonne and l’Université de Paris VIII–Vincennes Saint-Denis  
**LENGTH OF STAY:** Spring Semester

In all of the French classes I took in the United States, there was always a great focus placed on laïcité (secularism), so I came to France expecting to find a distinct separation between Church and state and between public and private domain, but that was not exactly the case. The divided response to the Pope’s decision to accept schismatic bishops back into the Catholic Church, along with my professor’s reaction to my exposé on this story, revealed a lot to me about French culture and the strong role that religion still has in a secular country. What I learned in just a few weeks in France is that in a way, culture is always more important than the law. It is illegal to smoke in restaurants and cafés, but the French still continue to do so because it’s a part of their culture. There is supposed to be a fine line dividing Church and state, public and private, but evidently the Catholic identity that has been a part of French culture for hundreds of years is always strongly expressed and remains of great importance in French society. To the French, religion is much more than faith, as it encompasses centuries of history and culture. Whether France truly is a secular state or not, religion still has a strong presence in French culture and society.

Colleen Lima is a senior in the School of Foreign Service majoring in Culture and Politics with a certificate in International Development. Within her Culture and Politics major, Colleen’s main focus is on international women’s rights and political involvement, as well as the relationship between gender, religion, and politics. Originally from New York City, Colleen participated in the Junior Year Abroad Network from another one of the world’s greatest big cities—Paris, France, where she studied at the Sorbonne, as well as Paris VIII–St. Denis. While in Paris, Colleen not only had the opportunity to improve her French immensely, but also to become fully immersed in Parisian culture, helping her gain a better understanding of the French and the unique role of religion in French society. At Georgetown, Colleen is a Peer Mentor in the School of Foreign Service and Director of Ritmo y Sabor, Georgetown’s Latin dance group. A former congressional intern on Capitol Hill, Colleen now works at the GU Women’s Center, which has been a great place for her to further her interests in women’s rights at Georgetown.
Paul Voorhees

MAJOR: Economics, Georgetown College
HOMETOWN: Birmingham, Alabama
HOST COUNTRY: China
HOST UNIVERSITY: East China Normal University
LENGTH OF STAY: Fall Semester

Paul Voorhees is an Economics major in Georgetown College with minors in Chinese and Math. He participated in the Junior Year Abroad Network while studying in Shanghai. At Georgetown, he works for the Economics Department and MUG, a Corp coffee shop. He is interested in the role that religion plays in China, especially in relation to the role it has in America. Paul also traveled in China, so he was able to see more varied religious experiences. His other interests include development economics and international law.

The temple in Dali was a late addition to the three pagodas that are the main tourist attraction in the city. Music came out of fake rocks around each building’s corners, children raced up and down stairs, and the elderly played ma jiang, a popular Chinese game, on tables over cement sidewalks. There were a few people praying, but it seemed to be almost a matter of convenience; since they were there, they might as well kneel, offer their trinket that they picked up outside the gate, and pay their respects.

Plastic apples and bananas were stacked into identical piles, bereft of any individuality. Offerings were part of the scenery, magnifying the sense that the temple was more a dedication to tourism than Buddhism.

The temple is second to the pagodas as an attraction and was built purely for tourists, while the entrance fee for the pagodas (121 yuan) was easily the highest that I have seen in China. Perhaps that was part of the problem, that everyday worship was discouraged by the price of the attraction that, in the end, made little claim to its ostensible purpose as a place of worship.

The modern temple was a sideshow, and that made it tolerable. If signs tried to convince me that the temple was ancient, holy, or even authentic, I could have been offended, but the temple’s acceptance of its place as a modern structure, as a park that presented religious heritage rather than actually being a part of the country’s religious past, redeemed it.

Joelle Thomas

MAJOR: Science, Technology, and International Affairs, School of Foreign Service
HOMETOWN: Cleveland, Ohio
HOST COUNTRY: France
HOST UNIVERSITY: Sciences Po—Paris
LENGTH OF STAY: Spring Semester

Joelle Thomas was thrilled to study at Sciences Po in Paris. She became particularly interested in issues of religion and society after having spent a summer in Beirut, a city at the crossroads of Eastern and Western cultural and religious traditions. Caught in a bustle between veiled women and Sunday churchgoers, Joelle began to question how religion manifests itself in society, culture, and politics. In Paris, Joelle explored how a Christian majority will interact with a Muslim minority, questioned whether any societal differences are a result of religion or of culture, and examined how these social factors are impacted by secularism. At Georgetown, Joelle studies Science, Technology and International Affairs, but when she is not studying, she can probably be found in rehearsal for a student theater production on campus, or singing in the Chapel Choir. Joelle also works for the Women’s Center, a place that helped launch her interest in international women’s issues.
Upon my arrival in Paris, I found it hard to believe that a country containing so many beautiful cathedrals—Notre Dame, Chartres, Rennes—was at the same time renowned for its secularism. Yet it was not until I actually attended these masses that I started to understand that these enormous cathedrals might in fact contribute to the country’s lack of practicing Catholics or Protestants. Perhaps the cathedrals are too big and too imposing to be welcoming. Perhaps they are too reminiscent of the large theological ideas that are so difficult to grasp and do not focus on the central point that churches are a house of God where all are welcome. Perhaps with the distraction of so many statues and gargoyles, it is hard to focus inwardly on developing one’s spirituality. Perhaps in a space that could accommodate so many people, it is difficult to focus on your own personal religious experience.

All things considered, I was not surprised that the ashes they placed on our foreheads for Ash Wednesday were a curiously light gray color—so light that they almost meshed with our skin tones, making it difficult to distinguish who among the Parisians wanted to be called sinners that day. I spent my day wandering around the city, reassuming my role as a tourist in the City of Lights and forgetting my quasi-religious experience from earlier that day. And so the cycle of secularization continued.

Lukasz Swiderski

MAJOR: Philosophy, Politics, & Social Science, School of Foreign Service
HOMETOWN: Farmington, Connecticut
HOST COUNTRY: England
HOST UNIVERSITY: Mansfield College, University of Oxford
LENGTH OF STAY: Academic Year

Lukasz Swiderski is a senior studying Philosophy, Politics, & Social Science, a self-designed major in the School of Foreign Service. He spent his year abroad at Mansfield College, Oxford. His studies focus on questions of moral substance in modern life.

As my time at Oxford begins to wind down, I find myself thinking more and more about time itself. Of course, it is not hard to be time-conscious at Oxford—the past makes itself inescapable here. What I have come to really love about this place are the countless portraits of kings, clergymen, and scholars hanging in the college dining halls and libraries. Courting immortality, they stare on with wry smiles as we strive to make our own mark on the future. In a sense, past and future are constantly wrapped up in each moment, propelling the entire enterprise of learning forward. I have come to think that all this creates a kind of subtle religious experience, one that was perhaps more available to our forebears...
Lauren Calvello

MAJOR: French and Government, Georgetown College
HOMETOWN: New Rochelle, New York
HOST COUNTRY: France
HOST UNIVERSITY: Sciences Po—Paris
LENGTH OF STAY: Spring Semester

Lauren Calvello is a double major in French and Government in Georgetown College. She studied at the Institut d’études politiques de Paris, commonly referred to as Sciences Po, for the spring 2009 semester. Lauren was born and raised in New Rochelle, New York and had her first opportunity to study in France during a high school exchange in Nantes. Lauren has always had a strong interest in culture and politics. She created and co-hosted The Hilltop Report, a political talk show with WGTB Georgetown Radio. Graduating in December, this semester Lauren will begin working on her senior thesis exploring the role and place of religion in the French political system.

France is home to some of the most beautiful churches and cathedrals the world has seen: Notre Dame, Sacré-Cœur, Chartres, Reims, and Amiens fill books with discussions of their beauty and history. Their dramatic west façades, expansive naves, and ornate vaulting all contribute to awe-inspiring sanctuaries that recognize and praise the existence of God. Ascending the stairs to Sacré-Cœur inspires the feeling of taking little steps towards heaven. It is ironic, then, that a country replete with inspiring magnificent religious masterpieces now holds such a strictly detached relationship with religion. Are these monuments simply vestiges of a deeply religious past, now overshadowed by France’s strong adherence to secularism?

Kory Kantenga

MAJOR: International Economics, School of Foreign Service
HOMETOWN: Fort Myers, Florida
HOST COUNTRY: England
HOST UNIVERSITY: Pembroke College, University of Oxford
LENGTH OF STAY: Academic Year

Kory Kantenga sticks with tradition. He spent his junior year in Pembroke College at Oxford University to study economics the way it should be—PPE (Philosophy, Politics, Economics). His African identity motivates his search for the keys to unchaining the African economies. Additionally, he has a keen interest in immigration issues, such as the confrontation between Western secularization and the traditionalism that migrants sometimes bring. His long-term interests include African development, remittances, immigration, brain drains, and cultural conflict at large in Europe. He resided inside the College, which is located next to St. Aldates Church, while at Pembroke.

Pembroke College despises St. Aldates Church.

The Church wakes the college by blasting ‘new life Christian music’ out of its windows. It often attempts to stuff our mailboxes with promotional material. Much like the kebab van, it attracts people of dubious character to the college at all hours of the day. Perhaps worst of all, it robs Pembroke students, faculty, and staff of already scarce parking. Communication between the Church and the College usually involves exchanging some ‘colourful’ letters at best. At worst, it consists of Fellows throwing some choice words at Church members in the Pembroke parking lot. Either way, the College neglects to establish strong, positive relations with the Church, while remain-
the Historian/Secretary of Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlán (M.E.Ch.A) and continues to work for the Office of Advancement and the GSP Mentoring Program. The son of Guatemalan immigrants, Christian’s background has spurred his interest in traveling and getting to know and learn about different cultures, religions, and environments. He studied abroad in Lisbon, Portugal last summer where he met with top European Union officials. Originally from Van Nuys, California, just outside downtown Los Angeles, Christian hopes to work for the State Department or for the United Nations after graduating from Georgetown.

In 2007, New Zealand released the “National Statement on Religious Diversity,” which proudly acknowledges that the country consists of multiple faiths, including a significant number of those who claim no religion at all. In Auckland, this religious diversity is extremely apparent street by street, block by block. Downtown, as the famous song would make note, everything indeed was “waiting for you,” religiously speaking. I would find people shouting at the top of their lungs, preaching the Christian faith either through spoken word or through music. Continuing on down Queen Street, the main walkway in Auckland, it would not be out of the ordinary to find multiple women wearing Muslim headscarves or a rabbi walking nearby. In small shops across the city, shop owners would quietly profess their faith through the use of religious objects, as I once came across a Filipino restaurant whose owner proudly displayed a statue of the Virgin Mary near his cash register.

Christian Arana

MAJOR: International Politics, School of Foreign Service
HOMETOWN: Van Nuys, California
HOST COUNTRY: New Zealand
HOST UNIVERSITY: University of Auckland
LENGTH OF STAY: Spring Semester

Christian studied abroad in New Zealand at the University of Auckland, continuing his studies in foreign policy and policy processes. He explored the relationship between the Maoris, the native indigenous population of New Zealand, and the country’s wider society. At Georgetown, Christian served as
Encountering Others

Writers have spent many pages extolling how they learned about themselves while living in a foreign land. The network of students in the Junior Year Abroad Program was no different. They spoke of finding a sense of original and evolving self alongside their varying encounters with other peoples, cultures, and religions. They discovered strength in newfound personal faith, the dynamics of living as a minority, and how to better understand the Other. Most significantly, the network gave them the opportunity to share this process of discovery with other students in different lands undergoing unique yet parallel adventures. Flung across the four corners of the world, immersed in different languages, beliefs, and activities, they learned one lesson that was universal: the revelation that they shared a common humanity with each individual they encountered.
Natalie Murchison

MAJOR: American Studies, Georgetown College
HOMETOWN: Houston, Texas
HOST COUNTRY: Czech Republic
HOST UNIVERSITY: Charles University
LENGTH OF STAY: Spring Semester

A native Texan, Natalie Murchison ventured out of the Lone Star State first to attend Georgetown. She then studied for the spring semester of 2009 in Prague, Czech Republic. As an American Studies major, she is often faced with inquiries along the lines of, “Why did you study in Prague?” However, a response is not difficult to come by. Aside from the obvious (Prague looks like a fairytale land), this central European society offers a unique vantage point from which to reexamine those American values which are rooted in capitalism and Protestant tradition. Interested in critiques of American consumer society, Natalie was excited to live in the former Soviet bloc. While in Prague, she took classes on filmmaking, philosophy, and art in Central Europe. After graduation, Natalie hopes to continue writing and exploring culture.

Come Easter weekend in Prague, tourist season is in full swing. By now, the city’s gray-slatted winter cloak is lifted. Everywhere people are coming out of the woodwork, filling the city to capacity. Many of these fresh pedestrians are Czechs, who, after patiently going about their winter lives indoors, exhibit quiet satisfaction at walking around freely in the sunshine. And, of course, many pedestrians are foreign tourists.

On this afternoon of Good Friday, while the roar of the Easter markets could be heard far and wide, a sprinkling of older Czechs on each residential street in Prague quietly load up their cars for this Velikonoce holiday. On Easter weekend, as tourists are moving into sunny Praha, Czechs are trickling out to their countryside cottages, where many prefer to spend the weekend.

The custom of owning a cottage where the family spends its holidays and summers dates back to communism. During this time, if a Czech wanted to leave the country for a vacation, he had to appeal to the local government, which in most cases made it very difficult for its citizens to travel. Former Czechoslovakia was a landlocked country, and getting permission to take a vacation to the seaside was particularly difficult. My host mother, Eva, laments that she only was able to see the sea once every four years. While a capitalist government in Prague means little restriction on traveling, Eva, like many Czechs of her generation, continues to maintain her cottage. In this way, she and others of her generation retreat from their changing city.
Grace Erdmann

MAJOR: English, Georgetown College
HOMETOWN: Richmond, Virginia
HOST COUNTRY: France
HOST UNIVERSITY: Sciences Po—Menton
LENGTH OF STAY: Academic Year

Grace Erdmann is an English major in the College. Originally from Richmond, Virginia, she attended a boarding school in New Jersey before coming to Georgetown. She studied at Sciences Po’s satellite campus in Menton, France. While she has studied French since the age of eight, it was her decision to begin studying Arabic during her sophomore year that ultimately propelled her to do this program. The Menton cycle’s emphasis on Middle Eastern and Mediterranean studies, as well as its multi-lingual, multi-cultural environment, made the program particularly attractive. Grace’s true passion is interdisciplinary studies, so she enhanced her understanding not only of the fields in which she is interested, but the connections between those fields as well.

“Why don’t you pray directly to God?” asked a determined first-year of an equally tenacious exchange student. The former, a practicing Muslim, and the latter, a practicing Catholic, stood on a landing of one of Menton’s enormous staircases, facing one another earnestly. I felt just the slightest elevation in the emotional intensity of an otherwise amiable stroll through the winding Riviera streets.

In reply, the exchange student began to explain her understanding of the Catholic custom of praying to the Virgin Mary. She said that Mary is closer to God and, as a result, can do more to intercede on mortals’ behalf. She also added with something of a laugh, “et surtout parce qu’elle est belle,” (and above all because she’s beautiful).

Christianity and the countries in whose histories it is deeply embedded overflow with images. Such religious statues, mosaics, and murals in various states of upkeep are quite common sights around Menton. Comparable depictions of holy figures in the Muslim tradition, on the other hand, are traditionally prohibited. Their conversation illustrated that there are many things that religions do not understand about one another and also suggested to me that it is possible to reach a kind of common ground. 

Karen Cook

MAJOR: Regional and Comparative Studies, School of Foreign Service
HOMETOWN: Houston, Texas
HOST COUNTRY: Egypt
HOST UNIVERSITY: The American University in Cairo
LENGTH OF STAY: Fall Semester

Karen Cook is a Regional Studies: Middle East major in the School of Foreign Service. She is from Houston, Texas and studied abroad for the 2008–2009 academic year, first in Egypt, then in Spain. In the fall, she was a student at The American University in Cairo. In the spring, she attended the Universidad de Sevilla. She became interested in the politics and religion of the Middle East when she befriended refugees from southern Sudan who joined her church at home. Fascinated by their stories, she began to explore the history of the region in an academic setting upon arriving at Georgetown. This led her to study Arabic after earning her proficiency in Spanish, and with these two languages, studying in Egypt and Spain seemed to be natural choices. She analyzed the role of religion and the interactions of religious groups in these two countries.

Many of Egypt’s Copts choose to tattoo a cross on their wrists as a sign of solidarity with their brothers in faith; no matter what happens, they can never hide their true identity. I have had many conversations which begin with the perfunctory greetings then jump straight to the complete stranger stating, “I am a Christian!” because they recognized my French Huguenot cross. It seems important to them that I become aware of the fact that we share the strong bond of a common religion. One taxi driver was so excited to learn that I was in Egypt to study Arabic even though I was an American and a Christian girl that he gave me two small icons he carried around in his wallet, after showing me the proof of his tattooed wrist. Both Muslims and Christians in Egypt view these outward signs as a form of distinguishing themselves from one another, but these marks also serve as reminders of one strong commonality between the devoutly religious populations of Egypt. Muslims and Christians alike feel the need to struggle to maintain their identity in a torrent of foreign influence.
Virginia Boyce

MAJOR: English, Georgetown College
HOMETOWN: Belmont, North Carolina
HOST COUNTRY: Chile
HOST UNIVERSITY: Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso
LENGTH OF STAY: Spring 2009

Virginia Boyce spent her semester abroad in Valparaíso, Chile. Though born in Virginia, she grew up in the small town of Belmont, North Carolina before coming to Georgetown. She is active both on and off campus. She works as the youth group leader at her church, teaches ESL classes, and is a proud member of the FOCI community. She studied at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Valparaíso, where she took classes in literature, history, and theology. A member of a close-knit, religious family, Virginia learned about and experienced the interaction between the Church and Chilean society. She also ate lots of emapanadas.

One Sunday after church, I asked my host dad what he thought about the sermon. He looked at me and said that it was a difficult sermon for him, but one that he really needed to hear. The sermon was about forgiveness. For him, he said, forgiveness is a continuous process, a process that has taken many years and many prayers — both from him and his family. Imprisoned under Pinochet, uprooted from his family and his vocation as a teacher, my host dad has every right to be angry. He saw firsthand the injustices of the regime; though he survived, he also witnessed the executions of many who did not. For years he was stuck in the past, furious that he had lost years of his life and baffled that he was so harshly punished for political beliefs he didn’t even support. He will never forget those brutal years, no matter how much time passes.

But to him, forgiveness does not require leaving behind the past. Instead, forgiveness means coming to terms with the past and moving beyond the wrongs that others have committed against him. It means trusting in God to guide him and his family forward. “Tenemos que superar,” my host mom often says: “We have to overcome.” Several years ago, my host dad began teaching again, and he now leads classes on Old Testament history at their home church. He is also attending law school under the reparations system, studying to better understand the injustices within Chilean law in the hopes of correcting them.
Sean DeLacey is a Theology: Religious Studies major in Georgetown College and took courses in French at the Université Libre de Bruxelles in Belgium. On top of her theology major, she is also a pre-medicine student with a minor in French. Within the field of religious studies, she has come to focus mostly upon the relation between politics and religion, particularly as it relates to issues surrounding women and their rights. Though herself agnostic and at first apprehensive about Georgetown's Catholic identity, once through a few Theology classes at Georgetown, she was soon captivated by the power and mystery of religion within the world and became a theology major at the beginning of her sophomore year. Sean volunteers in the city public school systems both at home in Chicago and at Georgetown through the DC Reads program. She also works at the Phonathon office at Georgetown as a supervisor. Sean was born and raised right outside Chicago, Illinois.

One thing has become clear to me through observation and discussions with my friends: young Muslims in Belgium are generally more devout and avid about their religion than their parents or Muslims of their age in other parts of the world. The question is why? The answer, of course, varies depending upon to whom you speak.

One reason cited is that it is a reaction to their reception, or their lack of, into Belgian culture. It is not surprising that such a sense of dejection might be felt in a Western European atmosphere that is frequently resistant to the cultural influence of growing immigrant populations, specifically ones coming from Islamic cultures. For example, Belgian political groups, such as the Vlams Belang, have been publicly accused of using blatant racism in their literature. With such a welcome, many find it intuitive that Moroccans may retreat back into a previous national and religious identity.

A Moroccan friend of mine to whom I spoke to about this trend had another explanation. He said that the reason that young Belgian Muslims are more devout than their immigrant parents is because they have more educational opportunities than their parents did. He believes that the more Muslims become educated in general and about their religion in particular, the more they will be drawn to Islam. Such a belief is counterintuitive to many secularists throughout the world that think we are “progressing” to a godless world and that any step towards knowledge is a step away from God.
Catholicism weaves its way through the life of Argentina acting as a thread of cohesion among a majority population. People recognize the images and their meanings and generally accept that Catholic beliefs softly permeate their legal system (both abortion and the death penalty are illegal in Argentina).

However, immigration marks the Argentine image as much as Catholicism does. Argentina is rich with immigrants from various cultures. On my way to school, I pass a Hasidic Jewish community filled with men donning peyas and women in wigs, a stark difference to the laid-back look of most porteños. Like many non-Catholic immigrants, however, the Hasidic Jews rarely leave their enclaves. Although they conduct business selling fabric, I hardly see them outside the four block radius that holds their temple and schools.

In Argentina, Catholicism is a major part of the societal lasso that binds the society together. The Jewish, non-Catholic Christian, and Muslim communities flourish within themselves, yet remain left out of the lasso’s grasp.

Allie McCarthy will graduate from Georgetown College in 2010 with a major in Theology and a minor in English and grew up in Winchester, Massachusetts, a town just outside Boston. After spending her freshman year at The College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, MA, Allie transferred to Georgetown where she could take advantage of its diversity and urban location. She was thrilled to travel to Buenos Aires, Argentina for her spring semester junior year to further expand her horizons. At Georgetown, she is an editor for The Georgetown Independent, a tutor for the DC Schools Project, participates in Alternative Spring Break, and sings with the GU Choir. After returning from Argentina, she loves yerba mate tea.

My Argentine friend never attends Mass, yet he quickly tells me that the little card I examine on the pastry shop’s register holds the image of San Cayetano, patron saint of bread and work. He does not enjoy researching saints as a pastime, he explains; rather, he has grown up in an environment heavily entrenched in Catholicism. By virtue of being an Argentine, he knows a lot about Catholicism.
By reflecting on the role of religion, students learned to differentiate between religion as deeply embedded institutions and culture, and religion as an expression of belief and faith. The reflection process encouraged students to seek areas of collaboration and compromise between religion and politics in societies where they can seem diametrically opposed. Students often found the greatest potential for understanding through their daily conversations. While not always heartening, this dialogue pushed students to continually search for ways to understand the fragmentation of religious and secular political life.
Traditional notions of Latin America include the Catholic Church as a central part of daily life. The Spanish imperialism of the sixteenth century, with the conversion of the native population in the Americas as one of its main goals, began the long history of the dominance of the Catholic Church in Latin America. Traces of this era are apparent throughout the area with colonial churches and cities named for saints. Chile is no different. The spires of the Church of the Dominicans are clearly visible from many places in my neighborhood of Las Condes in Santiago. However, the influence that the Catholic Church enjoyed for centuries is dwindling. Though the majority of Chileans still identify themselves as Catholic, the number of Catholics who actually practice is significantly lower.

Chile’s trend away from its Catholic and conservative past was solidified after its 2005 elections when Chileans elected Michelle Bachelet to be the first female to head a South American country on her own merit. Bachelet’s election is particularly interesting because, not only is she a woman, but she is also a professed agnostic and single mother, separated from her husband because divorce was not legalized in Chile until 2004. Outsiders might find this choice to be strange; however, it signifies a shift in the larger scheme of Chilean society and politics.

Loretta Devery spent the spring semester in Santiago, Chile. At Georgetown, she is a Blue and Gray tour guide, sings in the choir at the 8pm Catholic Mass in Dahlgren Chapel, is an Orientation Adviser for New Student Orientation, and is also a member of the Georgetown Emergency Response Medical Service (GERMS). She has been interested in foreign languages and travel from a young age and studies both Spanish and French at Georgetown. She was excited to travel both in Chile and throughout South America and to observe how the traditional influence of the Catholic Church has shaped politics and society.
Religious tradition in Munich runs as deep as the city’s name itself. München, the German spelling, comes from the old German word “Mönche,” meaning “Monks.” Accordingly, the city’s coat of arms features a monk holding an oath book, and its colors are the same as those of the Holy Roman Empire: black and gold. It thus comes as no surprise that Roman Catholicism continues to be the most popular religion of Bavaria, the state in which Munich is located. This religious orientation is at odds with the rest of Germany, and these differences are reflected in the unique politics of the region.

Europe is generally known as more politically liberal than the United States, and this perception generally transfers to the majority of German political parties. However, the exception lies in Bavaria, where the Christian Social Union (CSU) has governed the state nearly every year since the party’s establishment in 1945. Their political ideology is that of a Christian democracy, though with a social conservatism that has come to be associated exclusively with Bavaria.

Despite the CSU’s historical support in the region, the party did not receive a majority in the latest state election—the first time they have been unable to do so in half a century. Although this may be only a minor fluke in their record, this could also demonstrate the toll that secularization is finally taking on the last powerful religious party in Germany.

Macy Hintzman comes from a small, rural town in Colorado. She decided to begin her study of German at Georgetown due to the language’s importance in the field of global economics. Her first time outside of the country was this past summer as part of Georgetown’s Trier Program, where she was able to learn more about the German economic system while also interning at a local sparkling wine factory. This experience allowed her to better appreciate both the challenges and opportunities that come with cultural differences—even between countries that appear fundamentally similar. During the past academic year, she studied at Ludwig Maximilians Universität in Munich, where she improved her grasp of the language and experienced German culture first-hand.
Joseph Walsh is a senior in the School of Foreign Service majoring in International Politics. He is originally from Bloomington, Indiana and studied at The American University in Cairo. He took courses in Arabic and Political Science, and used his time there to gain an understanding of the way that religion and poverty affect the conduct of international relations policy and prospects for development in Egypt.

Past JYAN participants have debated over the extent to which religion is used as a political tool in their host countries. They either argue that political elites use religion to suppress dissent, or that religion is a vehicle for resistance.

In Egypt, the continued appeal of the Muslim Brotherhood is often evoked as an example of a religious movement creating political change. The organization has strong backing from the poor and disempowered sectors of Egyptian society. Many would argue that it is Islam's focus on equality and charity which led to the creation and continued success of the Brotherhood as a political movement.

But at the same time, it is also possible to argue the reverse. At The American University in Cairo, the Egyptian portion of the student body is comprised mainly of members of the social elites (children of high level civil servants, ministers, business owners, etc.). Several students I have spoken with espouse the idea that God decides what a person’s place in society should be. A poor person was meant to be a poor person and a rich person was meant to be rich. This ideology provides religious justification for the lack of social welfare programs or effective education among the country’s numerous poor. If it is God who decides what people’s life chances are, then the elites are absolved of any moral obligation to help the have-nots in their country.

Therefore, one can argue in the case of Egypt (and in most cases) that religion is neither exclusively a political tool nor a vehicle for resistance.

Aliya Bhatia is an International Politics major concentrating in Trans-State Actors. She wrote from Harbin, which is a Chinese city famous mostly for its January ice festival and Russian influence. While Harbin’s weather is a bit cold compared to her hometown of Atlanta, Aliya enjoyed the immersion experience, incredible teachers, and subjects including Confucian values, Mao Zedong Thought, and a variety of modern Chinese short stories.

After many travels and discussions, I would argue that the political relationship between Xinjiang and Beijing is not the best focal point for understanding Islam in China. The bigger issue is not where it exists and how the Chinese government treats Muslims as a religious or political group, but rather how the Chinese treat Muslims from an economic perspective. One of my teachers put it very bluntly: the Chinese education system, complete with state-regulated curricula, discourages belief. Therefore, Muslims wealthy enough to live in areas supported by a good school system will not receive religious education and, for the sake of their future income, they will be discouraged to believe. On the other hand, the education system in predominantly Muslim areas is extremely poor. The result is that if one is not lucky enough to attend a city school, then one is basically an uneducated Muslim. If one does attend a city school, the classes probably breed religion out of you. I would imagine this trend would weaken rather than strengthen the Chinese Muslim community: educated Muslims have the tools to understand their religion, and also have the tools to move up the ranks in society. I fear that in China, educated Muslims, such as my teacher and my roommate, only practice their religion to the extent that they still do not eat pork. The rest of China’s Muslim world is missing out on scholarship, an essential tradition in Islam and ultimately the global driving force for progressive Islamic communities.
People express their identity through religious language, symbols, and, unfortunately, violence. Around the globe, religion often tells us who we are and who we are not—even when we do not ascribe to a religion. Students took in this phenomenon, witnessing the integration of religion and culture in Taiwan and the conflict arising when religious identity conflicts with national identities and values. As with young Muslims in France, religion allows people to express their individual identity and connect with one another to form a greater whole. In various places, students discovered how religion allows us to preserve our identities while forming new ones. It even goes as far as to tie some of us to our environment. Together, their letters shed light on how religion pervades almost every aspect of our identity and how we come to express it in our lives.
Diane Healy

MAJOR: Psychology and Philosophy, Georgetown College
HOMETOWN: Chicago, Illinois
HOST COUNTRY: Ireland
HOST UNIVERSITY: University College
LENGTH OF STAY: Fall Semester

A local of the Chicago suburbs, Diane thoroughly enjoyed traveling and experiencing new cultures during her time abroad. At Georgetown, Diane is an active member of Nomadic Theatre and the Mask & Bauble Dramatic Society, two student theater groups on campus. She also works for the Center for Clinical Bioethics at the Georgetown University Hospital and gives campus tours for prospective students with Blue and Gray Tours. After graduation, Diane hopes to pursue a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology and advocate for the ethical treatment of patients in the mental health care sector.

During the long struggle for independence, religion juxtaposed the Irish identity against their British oppressors. An Irishmen could say, "I am Catholic, they are not. This government does not represent me or my interests." Religion united Ireland when people felt greater loyalty to their county than their country, helping them to stand strong and win their independence. One hundred years later, the Catholic religion remains interwoven into the identity of an Irishman.

Thus, Catholicism in Ireland is indicative of a shared past that creates a cultural identity. However, the homogeneity of religion means that Dubliners no longer have to fight passionately for their religion and are no longer challenged by it. As a result, religion has slipped into a customary, rather than a defining, role in daily life. The vast majority of Dubliners are self-identifying Catholics whose lewd behavior does not coincide with conservative religious practices. The fact that 'everyone' is Catholic and no one challenges Catholicism in the Republic of Ireland means that religion doesn’t have to play a significant part of their daily lives. As a result, it does not. And it definitely shows when you walk down the Quay in Dublin after 9 at night.

Alexandra Dimodica

MAJOR: Government, Georgetown College
HOMETOWN: Lexington, Massachusetts
HOST COUNTRY: Italy
HOST UNIVERSITY: Università degli Studi di Siena
LENGTH OF STAY: Spring Semester

Alexandra Dimodica is a Government major and Italian minor in the College. She spent the spring of 2009 in the enchanting Tuscan city of Siena while taking courses at the Università degli Studi di Siena. Originally from Lexington, Massachusetts, she had the opportunity to examine the Italian views on government, history, and literature, and see the world through this new perspective. She used her Italian language skills to immerse herself in this new culture. At Georgetown, Alexandra has acted as a Peer Advisor to incoming freshmen, and served for two years as a Senator within the Georgetown University Student Association's Senate. In 2007, she was elected as the Senate’s Chair of the Student Life Committee. As a member of WGTB, Georgetown’s radio station, she has been the host of a radio show since freshman year and in spring of 2008 was elected to the station’s Board as WGTB’s Director of Promotions. She is thrilled to have had the opportunity to share her findings on the intersection between politics, culture, and religion within Italy’s dynamic society.

In Siena, religion is deeply engrained in the city’s past and present. Around every corner a Catholic depiction lies painted on the aged stone walls of the city’s buildings, and Saint Catherine’s relics are held in one of the city’s churches. While registering at the Università degli Studi di Siena, I spotted a painting of the Duomo on the wall of the University’s office. In this way, the Duomo is not simply a religious emblem, but a Sienese symbol of tradition. A tribute to Siena’s individuality in Tuscany and Italy is the fact that the tower in its main piazza, Piazza del Campo, rises to the same height as the magnificent Duomo. From afar one sees the two symbolic buildings as equals. One represents Siena’s religious traditions, while the other reveals the commune’s commitment to strong and fair government and the promotion of a common good. This intertwining of religious tradition and strong political conviction defines Siena. As I was reminded by a proud citizen upon my arrival in this medieval city, “We are not simply Italian, we are Sienese.”
As a Government major and Italian minor, Marissa indulged her interest in European politics and passion for the Italian language at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore in Milan, Italy. Watching the inauguration of President Obama from a Milanese bar was the first of an excess of opportunities to acquaint herself with various international perceptions of America’s place in global politics. Although Milan forced the retirement of her North Carolinian impulse of indiscriminately making small talk and smiling at passersby, she found herself at home in the city and enjoyed months of aperitifs, operas, and travel. She returned to D.C. to commence her leadership in GU Women in Politics and the board of Compass Partners (a student-run nonprofit training the next generation of student social entrepreneurs).
I have heard the phrase “in shah Allah”—translated literally as “God willing”—countless times in Cairo. It expresses uncertainty of the future, and can be used as a response to nearly any question, such as “Will the computers in this lab be working by next week?” or added as an afterthought to such statements as, “The bus will be leaving in ten minutes—in shah Allah.” The phrase crosses generational, regional, and socioeconomic gaps, and is used by everyone—from men selling fruit on the streets to my Egyptian classmates. While it literally references God, few people actually consider the meaning of the phrase when using it. The phrase has become such a natural part of Egyptian speech that its meaning is subconsciously accepted.

When carefully considered, it becomes apparent that the phrase summarizes this worldview: Egyptian society collectively places its trust in the God of Islam. But I have come to believe that if Egypt is ever to resolve some of its most persistent and pressing issues, it must strike a balance with its tenacity of faith. To achieve this end, the people must be able to identify the role that religion plays in Egyptian society, recognizing the inextricable link between the two. In the puzzle of peace and prosperity, God must be not the entire picture, but rather only one piece, used in conjunction with education, true freedom of press, effective economic development policies, and other plans enacted—not passively accepted—by the Egyptian people.

Nicole Cronin

MAJOR: Regional and Comparative Studies, International Development Certificate, School of Foreign Service
HOMETOWN: Harrisburg, Pennsylvania
HOST COUNTRY: Egypt
HOST UNIVERSITY: The American University in Cairo
LENGTH OF STAY: Fall Semester

Nicole Cronin is majoring in Regional and Comparative Studies of Latin America and Africa and pursuing an International Development Certificate. Her focus is on gender issues. Having studied Spanish for several years, Nicole began Arabic courses in Fall 2007, and started learning Portuguese and French upon her return to Georgetown in the spring. On campus, Nicole is active in the Pep Band, works in the Lombardi Cancer Center, serves on the Relay for Life Committee and has held several leadership roles in the organization Hoya Outreach Programs and Education (HOPE), which addresses hunger and homelessness in D.C. through service and awareness. Nicole takes a special interest in photography, food, and the second floor of Lauinger Library. She has always enjoyed traveling and the opportunity it grants to experience life in a unique setting. In Egypt, Nicole explored how cultural aspects of religion and gender influence the politics of development.
that they were a loud, gregarious group of people, but I did not really understand what they meant until I went to a Christian baptism. Unlike the more somber baptisms I had attended in the United States, this baptism was a large, loud party at the church. That night there were 65 adults being baptized and all of their friends and family came to celebrate. Every time someone was baptized, his name flashed in bright red on a screen above the stage. Then the crowd of hundreds of people burst out into song and cheered. After singing the same song 65 times and cheering my voice out, I realized that this slight modification to a traditional Christian rite was a way for the Taiwanese to not only enjoy their faith, but also to make it more translatable to their lively culture.

Rachel Ellis

MAJOR: French and Sociology, Georgetown College
HOMETOWN: Baltimore, Maryland
HOST COUNTRY: France
HOST UNIVERSITY: l’Université Paris-Sorbonne and l’Université de Paris VIII—Vincennes Saint-Denis
LENGTH OF STAY: Spring Semester

Rachel Ellis is a double-major in French and Sociology in the Georgetown College. She studied in Paris at both the Sorbonne and Université de Paris VIII—Vincennes Saint-Denis. Rachel’s principal academic interests within her majors focus on French culture, sociological theory, and gender studies, with particular attention to the status and identity of Jewish women. At Georgetown, she has studied sociolinguistics as a research assistant, volunteered in extracurriculars such as Take Back the Night and Best Buddies, and sung in Harmony, the university’s all-female international a cappella group. In France, Rachel improved her language skills, approached academia via French methodology, and visited places she had only before seen in pictures.

Based on the philosophy of equal treatment by the state, the French government defines citizens as French and only French; the development of communities based on other identity markers is therefore a potential source of conflict. So how do French Jews balance republicanism and community spirit? The answer is found in the obscurity of religious practice in secular society and the fact that

Amanda Kerrigan

MAJOR: Regional and Comparative Studies, School of Foreign Service
HOMETOWN: Aliso Viejo, California
HOST COUNTRY: Taiwan
HOST UNIVERSITY: National Chengchi University
LENGTH OF STAY: Academic Year

Amanda Kerrigan is a student in the Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University. Her major is Regional Studies: Asia. She studied abroad in Taipei, Taiwan during the 2008–2009 academic year. She studied Mandarin and Taiwanese culture at National Chengchi University in Taipei. Prior to learning Chinese, Amanda focused on learning Spanish and studied abroad in Quito, Ecuador during the summer of 2007. During her time at Georgetown, Amanda has been dedicated to raising awareness and promoting education about sexual assault and sexual harassment issues on college campuses.

Riding a bus through the streets of Taipei, you will see many bright neon orange crosses glowing in the night sky. For a place where only 4.5% of the population is Christian, there is a surprisingly large number of churches. But there is an even larger number of red and golden temples where the majority of Taiwanese people practice their traditional religion, a combination of Buddhism, Taoism, and local beliefs. Even though Christianity is often characterized as a “Western” religion, the people of Taiwan have added their own unique touches to Christianity. The Taiwanese often warned me...
Jewish identity can sometimes transcend national identity. In France, the Jewish community is not easily visible. Unlike the cathedrals that line the streets of Paris, most synagogues are tucked away, out of sight. Once when I wanted to attend Shabbat services, I thought I was lost because I found myself in what appeared to be an apartment complex. I was buzzed in by a security guard only to find I was not lost at all—a rosy sanctuary and a gathering of people assured me I had come to the right place. Judaism must be sought out.

While politics and geography might hide the prevalence of Judaism in Paris, solidarity continues to exist. Jewish theology and historical anti-Semitism reinforce the need for community. For instance, many Parisians were thrilled to learn that my name is Rachel, because according to them, most Rachels in France are Jewish, and they were therefore happy to meet someone who shared their faith. In France’s public sphere, republicanism trumps religious differences, but beneath the surface, the Jewish community remains vibrant and connected.

Maija Paegle is a senior in the College pursuing a major in Psychology. At Georgetown, she is a diver on the GU Swim and Dive team. She studied at the University of Melbourne in Melbourne, Victoria. This was a big change for her, since it was the first time she attended a school not associated with Catholicism. Studying abroad in Australia had been a lifelong dream ever since she discovered her love of koalas at age eight. As the time to leave for Australia drew closer, she realized that studying in Australia would be a great experience on a cultural level as well because, although Australia may seem very similar to the United States on the surface, it is a totally unfamiliar place. She explored religion in the quite secular country of Australia and, yes, she cuddled a koala.

Aboriginal beliefs and spirituality in Australia, even among those who identify themselves as members of traditional organized religion, are intrinsically linked to the land and certain natural sites of significance. Every Aboriginal Australian would recognize the natural landmarks and significance of each landmark in his own territory. This focus on natural landmarks may be why there has been such a significant decrease of participation in Aboriginal mythology. Aboriginals have been pushed from their own land since settlers first arrived on the con-
Chiara Cardone

MAJOR: Government and French, Georgetown College
HOMETOWN: Glen Mills, Pennsylvania
HOST COUNTRY: France
HOST UNIVERSITY: Sciences Po—Menton
LENGTH OF STAY: Academic Year

Chiara Cardone grew up in a big family in Glen Mills, Pennsylvania, a relatively rural town where she enjoyed horseback riding and summer bonfires. She didn't have many opportunities to travel until she was invited to stay with the former host-family of her older (Hoya) sister Christina. So it was at age twelve that she had her first French immersion experience and decided to study international relations and languages—all the languages she could manage to learn. After high school she started out at St. Joseph's University majoring in French and International Relations, but wanted more opportunities, specifically to study Arabic. She applied to transfer to Georgetown College and was accepted for her sophomore year. Her major in the College is Government with a concentration in International Relations, and a second major in French.

In 1989, a very interesting social transformation took place in the French Muslim Community, as highlighted by my professor, Giles Kepel. The entity that defended the right to wear the veil in public schools before European tribu-

I believe that at least one of the causes of the fall of Aboriginal beliefs from prominence even in Aboriginal society is the settlers’ movement of the Aboriginal people from their homelands. In more recent years, the Australian government has tried to make amends. At every public event I went to in Australia, the announcer would first start by thanking and honoring the elders of the Aboriginal people to which the land the event was taking place on belonged. Although I thought this was a step in the right direction, I still wonder if these actions are too little and too late.
Ike Perkins

MAJOR: History, Georgetown College  
HOMETOWN: Los Angeles, California  
HOST COUNTRY: Egypt  
HOST UNIVERSITY: The American University in Cairo  
LENGTH OF STAY: Fall Semester

Ike Perkins was born in Sao Paulo, Brazil, but moved to the United States when he was young and now lives in Los Angeles, California. He is a senior in the College, majoring in History and minoring in Classics and Portuguese. He studied at The American University in Cairo, Egypt. He spent his time there studying History and Arabic. Around Georgetown he is involved in the Kids2College volunteer program and walks Jack the Bulldog.

The adaptation to daily life in Cairo is not an easy one. Cars honking, vendors yelling, dusty air, dirty streets, people pushing every which way. To an outsider, Cairo is a complete and utter mess, a vision of chaos at its very breaking point. And yet, despite all the commotion, the disorder of it all, there remains one universal constant that manages to unite the lives of virtually every Cairene in an ordered and controlled way: the Islamic faith.

Shortly after arriving in Egypt, the Islamic holy month of Ramadan started. I had been given some warning as to what this entailed, but I grossly underestimated the role that religion played in the everyday life of cosmopolitan Cairo in the same way I miscalculated the number of people that would actually be adhering to the strict guidelines set for practising Muslims in this season. Before ever coming to Cairo, I knew that during Ramadan, Muslims are not supposed to eat or drink from sunup to sundown. What I did not know was that virtually every Muslim, excluding those with extenuating circumstances, actually sticks to this rather severe command.
Joe Koizim

Being a part of the JYAN forced me to consciously evaluate the cultural implications of religion in New Zealand. Had I not been a part of the JYAN, I would not have gotten to know New Zealand as well as I did. I found myself looking for the ways in which religion crossed paths with politics, secularism, culture, and daily life. I probably would have neglected these nuances of New Zealand life entirely had I not been a part of JYAN. As a product of an nonreligious family, it would have been easy for me to overlook the role religion plays in New Zealand. However, I found that I learned a lot about the ways religion interacts within a vastly secular and nonreligious society.

JYAN gives students a great opportunity to take part in a global dialogue about religion and its place in various cultures with their peers. It enables students to better understand their study abroad experience because they are able to compare what they see and do with other students on the other side of the globe.

Anish Savani

Rather than a passive study abroad experience, JYAN encouraged me to ask questions surrounding the deep religious, political, and cultural issues in Senegal. The program allowed me to explore perspectives different from my own and to articulate my thoughts. I had discussions with my host family and local people about their beliefs and opinions, and I observed traditions and cultural practices in the capital, Dakar, and local villages. Through JYAN, I was able to actively engage in dialogue and reflection to better understand the complex and fascinating country in which I was living.

Allie McCarthy

JYAN challenges students studying abroad to pick apart the many facets of the interplay between religion, culture, and politics in their host countries. Instead of simply absorbing cultural differences, students must ask questions, fully engaging with the culture in a dialogue of who’s, what’s, and why’s. I loved being a part of JYAN because it gave me a forum to collect and present my observations. Moreover, connecting with other students who had also written reflections on their host countries truly broadened my perspective on how the world works.
Deion Simmons

Through actively searching for religion and its manifestations in my host country, JYAN pushed me to reflect critically upon my spirituality, which was something that I had not often done in the past. Though similar to the United States in many ways when it comes to tacit religious observation, one characteristic that separates Brazil from the United States is its spirituality and mysticism. It has an indescribable energy. With knowledge and a perceptive eye, one can find religion almost everywhere. Since I have returned to the United States, religion and spirituality come to my thoughts at least once a day, which is a whole lot more than it did before. Sometimes, when I find myself actively speaking about religion these days, I take a step back and just take the whole scene in from a different perspective, and I’m astonished by how much I have changed in that respect.

Maria Fernandez

Participating in JYAN was a great way to reflect on the complex interactions between religion and society. Through JYAN, I was able to more fully reflect on my study abroad experiences. This reflection not only led to a better understanding of the culture but helped me in my personal growth. It helped me ask questions and articulate answers that would have otherwise remained unanswered if I had not explored them further. Although some of my questions have still not been answered, participating in the program enabled me to learn more from my study abroad experience.

Maija Paegle

I really appreciate the opportunity I had to participate in the JYAN program while I was abroad. The JYAN program was a truly unique experience because it allowed me to more fully experience my study abroad program. It brought me to another level of awareness about the culture and the people of Australia.
Junior Year Abroad Network Coordinators

**Thomas Banchoff**  
*Director of the Berkley Center and Associate Professor of Government*

A political scientist specializing in comparative politics and international relations, Tom is the editor of *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism* (Oxford 2007) and *Religious Pluralism, Globalization and World Politics* (Oxford 2008). He received his B.A. from Yale, a M.A. from the University of Bonn, and a Ph.D. in Politics from Princeton.

**Michael Kessler**  
*Assistant Director of the Berkley Center and Visiting Assistant Professor*

A Visiting Assistant Professor in the Department of Government, Michael's research centers on political theology, religious freedom, and fundamental rights and moral legislation. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago and has studied law at Georgetown.

**Melody Fox Ahmed**  
*Director of Programs and Operations*

Melody joined the Berkley Center in June 2006. Previously, she worked at the Corporate Executive Board and the Buxton Initiative, a leading interfaith dialogue organization. She received her B.A. from Vanderbilt University and M.A. in Global, International and Comparative History from Georgetown.

**Abby Waldrip**  
*Program Assistant*

Abby joined the Berkley Center in March 2009. She graduated from Brigham Young University in 2008 with a B.S. in Business Management from the Marriott School of Management, and a Minor in Communications concentrating on principles of journalism.

**Contributing Editors**

Kory Kantenga, Vania Reyes, and Sarah Balistrieri provided valuable comments and support. Design work by MillerCox Design, Inc.