

Global Vision, Local Action: Bridging Borders Through a Vocation of Justice

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September 11, 2012, US Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens was killed in Benghazi, Libya during an extremist terrorist attack. In the most dangerous time of Libya's history, a prestigious and passionate ambassador was sent into the city of Benghazi to help build a democracy after the toppling of the Gaddafi regime. The country turned into a battleground for militia groups trying to take power in their country. Hundreds of thousands of Libyans were displaced, starving, and worrying for their life everyday. Only after this did the U.S. attempt to help build and support the rebuilding of a country, which in turn failed. Today Libya is currently deemed a failed state. Learning about this day through popular films about the event has opened my eyes to the sheer importance of diplomacy and its effect on the world as a whole. Being from the United States, we are privileged to have the liberty and ability to help other countries and populations, like Ambassador Stevens. During my first year at PLU, through my coursework and co-curricular experiences, I am finding that my vocation is leading me to pursue a career in diplomacy, but I do not have a particular country in mind..

As humans, we have so much in common around the world. The environment knows no borders, yet our diplomacy is often trapped within them. Diplomacy is often tainted by state interests and goals for personal gain. Whether it is hunger, war, or the climate crisis, the problems of one nation eventually become the problems of all. My time at PLU—studying Criminal Justice, Hispanic Studies, and Political Science—has shaped my understanding of this global reality. Through the lens of Diversity, Justice, and Sustainability (DJS), I have learned to examine world events not as isolated incidents, but as part of a shared human experience.

Being an avid world traveler since the age of 11, I have had the blessing of talking and discussing with people across the globe. What I have found is that we are all similar, we all laugh and love certain things like sports, cars, and of course talking politics. During my two most

recent travels to Europe, someone always asked me how I felt about US politics. Many Europeans I have met have a very strong opinion about our president, Donald Trump and this has led me to engage in meaningful dialog with people from other cultural backgrounds. The vast diversity I saw only expanded my views on how we humans are so alike. When superficial differences are set aside great things can be accomplished. Diplomacy in its strongest form is one where people are just talking and discussing without political, economic, or ethnic lenses at the forefront.

With this being said, difference and diversity is still extremely important to understand and celebrate. Social norms and historical backgrounds shape the thinking of us all. Being in the field of sociology currently I am studying how the history of a people dictates how they act and behave in this day and age. Many other factors can be but are not limited to: religion, culture, ethnicity, and language. Other countries have a vast difference in laws, morés, and folkways. The key to diplomacy is to understand and respect these differences when conversing with others. As we discussed in class, following the value of DJS challenges us all to see difference as not something to be ignored, but rather acknowledged, celebrated, and respected.¹ Not only has this been instilled in me at PLU but also throughout my K-12 experience. Coming from a Jesuit high school that promoted community service, care for the environment, and social justice, I am no stranger to conversations about these topics.

As I reflect on my vocational journey through the lense of DJS , I see that diplomacy and sustainability go hand in hand. When discussing foreign affairs you simply cannot go without mentioning something about the environment, which as I stated above does not abide by political borders. If the goal of a government is to prevent war or violence then they need to limit threat multipliers. Threat multipliers are events or subjects that snowball into massive scale problems.

We see things like food scarcity, droughts, or extreme weather events and these are usually the catalyst for a large conflict. If we zoom back into Libya we see that Gaddafi built the Great Man-Made River (GMMR). However the plan, though amazing on paper, had a major flaw. The system was non-renewable and in turn made it not sustainable at all.²This then caused a stir between Libya and its neighbors, speaking even more to the fact that these problems transcends borders. This great achievement would then turn into the biggest target during the civil war in 2011, causing a major water shortage. For a diplomat it is vital to know that man-made, unnatural resources have a fatal affect on our natural needs. The best way to work towards economic flourishing is to work with nature, not against it. As well we cannot turn a blind eye to the fact that environmental structures can always be a target during intense conflict. It is crucial that in order to have human safety, we must achieve environmental security first.

Having the opportunity to be a student at PLU who understands his vocation as being an advocate for social, political, and environmental diplomacy is such a blessing. I get to critically analyze all three of these problems. In sociology we study how the potato famine in Ireland caused mass emigration. In Latino Studies we examined the Flint water crisis and how it affected lower income communities that were primarily of color. Lastly in Political Science we discussed how a similar instance occurred in Mississippi. When focusing on sustainability we cannot limit ourselves to only think about the environment but also the sustainability of people and ensuring a sustainable future for all. As a diplomat, the people are your focus but the people need help regarding a plethora of issues. Diplomacy is not and will never be easy but its impacts can change the world.

Now this all may sound very daunting for an aspiring diplomat like myself, but I ensure that to be a diplomat you do not need to be a world traveler, a political scientist, or a linguist. All

you need is an open mind and a willingness to make and fight for change. It can start in your community, and an example could be starting a club that deals with foreign affairs, like what I am currently in the process of doing. Or even simply volunteering for community programs through your sports team where you can connect with people who are experiencing different situations than you. I am able to do this on behalf of PLU football where I've been a helper with youth sports clinics.

I am truly blessed to have been given the skills and opportunities to understand where my vocation can lead me. My first year at PLU has made me aware of global problems that need people with the skills and will to work towards a sustainable future for all no matter race, gender, ethnicity, sex, nationality, or beliefs. PLU provides a place for any student to thrive wherever their vocation may lead them, and the Wild Hope Center for Vocation specifically is a resource to support students in discovering their vocation to promote human and ecological flourishing.

Works cited

1. “Center for Diversity, Justice, & Sustainability” *Pacific Lutheran University*,
<https://www.plu.edu/diversity-justice-sustainability/>
2. “Colonel Qaddafi and the Great Man-made River”
<https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2011/04/01>