



Wellesley, International

IN APRIL HERE AT WELLESLEY, I had the pleasure of attending a dialogue between former US Secretary of State Madeleine Korbelt Albright '59 and Nicholas Burns, former undersecretary of state, on the topic of "Revolt and Repression in the Middle East." Wellesley political-science professor Roxanne Euben, an expert on Middle Eastern and North African politics, moderated. In the question-and-answer period that followed, I listened as Wellesley students from China, Tunisia, and Ghana, as well as a student who had just returned from a semester in Egypt, spoke at the microphone. At that moment, I was struck by two things: Not only do our students consistently ask well-informed and highly thoughtful questions (no surprise there!), but our students are also amazingly international in outlook, as well as in composition.

Our international student population at Wellesley is certainly nothing new, nor is our successful study-abroad program, nor our global perspective. But it has become increasingly important for students to have international experiences and to acquire the ability to work, communicate, and solve problems with those around the globe. Every day, our world becomes smaller and more interconnected than we of earlier generations ever could have imagined. As former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said, arguing against globalization is like arguing against the laws of gravity. (It is a statement he made 11 years ago, yet it is even more apt today.)

What does an increased international focus at Wellesley mean in the 21st century? It means that our vibrant campus culture is enriched by students with a diversity of backgrounds, perspectives, cultures, and beliefs. These students come from China, Tunisia, and Ghana—like those who spoke up at the panel discussion—but also from 68 other countries. In fact, over 20 percent of Wellesley students were born outside the United States. An additional number of students arrive at Wellesley with remarkable international experiences, including those who grew up moving from country to country, or US expatriates who have never lived in this country. At Wellesley, the otherwise simple question, "Where are you from?" has an unusual variety of complex answers.

In addition, there are those many students who spend part of their junior years abroad, and then return to Wellesley with a new perspective and a deeper

understanding of the world to share with their peers. Faculty and students alike tell me that classes with students who have recently returned from study abroad are enlivened and enriched in very evident ways.

In 2009–10, 51 percent of the junior class studied abroad, one of the largest class percentages ever to study overseas. Even more interesting, among students who do study abroad, there is a growing percentage who travel to unconventional locations—i.e., fewer juniors that year traveled to western Europe.

There is no doubt in my mind that increased internationalization is

good for Wellesley. It is good for the student experience, and it is good for our campus culture. Our intellectual community—any intellectual community—requires a diversity of perspectives, viewpoints, and people. As Alexa Barnes '12 recently put it, "It's important to see the world if you're going to make a difference in the world."

The College's board of trustees has flagged this theme as a significant topic to discuss. In April, they began the first of many conversations about the importance of internationalization at Wellesley.

With so much internationalism already happening on campus, where can we go from here? Where should we go from here? Wellesley is currently in

the planning stages of two distinct initiatives that could benefit both students and women leaders in the world.

The first involves using the impetus and energy generated on campus by the successful Madeleine Korbelt Albright Institute for Global Affairs to focus on a plan for how the College, and students and alumnae, could benefit from bringing Wellesley to a larger audience around the world. We envision creating partnerships in key cities to host events that would include alumnae and would be organized around faculty interests.

The second is a burgeoning partnership between the US State Department, Wellesley, and four other women's colleges (Barnard, Bryn Mawr, Mount Holyoke, and Smith) to build and nurture a generation of women leaders in public service. A fall colloquium is being planned to kick off this exciting partnership.

I'm proud that Wellesley—long a leader in this area—is a part of this effort. I think Secretary Albright summed it up well when, before a cheering audience during the panel discussion in April, she remarked, "Just remember: Two-thirds of the women secretaries of state graduated from Wellesley."

H. Kim Bottomly



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—President H. Kim Bottomly