

Building global relationships

I come from a country that has contemporarily been built on internationalization; therefore, it only seemed logical that I would pursue a program of study with an international focus. Little did I know how international it would be. If there is one thing that I took away from a M.Sc. in International Sustainable Agriculture (SIA), it is my expanded awareness of other countries and their political situations, cultures, and of course climatic and soil conditions; most of which were conveyed by my peers.

The SIA program's winning quality are the students that enroll. With a cohort originating from all but one continent (I'll leave it to the reader to guess which continent was absent), acceptance, empathy, diplomacy, and patience are all well practiced inside the classroom, but more importantly during extracurricular events going into the wee hours of morning after a beverage or two. These skills are the most valuable and for which I am most grateful. My cohort are the people for which I am most thankful.

My goal in coming to study in Germany was to get an outside perspective on global resource-use; one different than that from a country that relies primarily on exporting natural resources. After attaining this goal, my plan was to return to Canada with my expanded horizons, in order to better decipher, understand, and react to dynamic domestic and global situations. However, after my two years in SIA, I had just been given a taste of what the world has to offer; where so many opportunities lie. Europe has largely remained the international hub of travel and trade, and therefore, I chose to stay after completing my degree. From Germany, I have access to East and West Africa, Southeast Asia, South America, the Middle East, and so much more.

As of today, I have visited regions I had, unfortunately, never given a second thought. I had never imagined that in Mali I would encounter a friendliness and thoughtfulness reminiscent of that in my home country. In the steppe and mountains of Mongolia, I found myself home in the back-country, where I camped and played as child. I lived from fried bread and meat, as I did during my stint in the Canadian arctic. The list of the places I have visited still remains quite short, but the list of places I now know I need to visit has grown exponentially: Iran, Ghana, Malawi, Malaysia, Chile, Columbia, Kazakhstan.... These are places that I do not want to visit because of the beautiful pictures in a brochure, but because of the compassionate stories shared by colleagues who have become dear friends.

I advise all those who wish to further their academic career by enrolling for a M.Sc. in Sustainable International Agriculture – the true values of your degree will be found outside the classroom. You will build global relationships that (with the help of social media and the internet) last for the remainder of your career and beyond.

Name: Brianne Altmann, PhD

Country of Origin: Canada

Completed SIA: 2015

Current Position: Research assistant at the Chair of Animal Product Quality & Coordinator of European Master's in Animal Breeding and Genetics, University of Goettingen