



# International Informant

Volume 1 Issue 10 January 2012

**Informing you about Oklahoma State's international trade and development efforts**

### Calendar of Events

- Dec. 27 - Jan. 9: Sierra Leone
- Jan. 12 - 16: Guatemala
- Spring Break '12: South Africa, Ghana, Togo
- May '12: Moldova, Tajikistan

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Oklahoma State University: Center for International Trade and Development

## **A Message from Dr. Mike Dicks**

This has been a busy year for the Center for International Trade and Development. We had 31 students working on water drilling, bio-filters and irrigation projects, livestock production, child nutrition, small business development, international trade, organic coffee production, poultry production, grain storage and vegetable production and marketing projects, and various education projects in Mexico, Costa Rica, Moldova, Ghana, Togo, South Africa, Sierra Leone and Laos.

In January, with the development activities well underway, we began our thrust to develop the international trade portion of the center. Noted author of *The Global Entrepreneur* and trade specialist, James Foley, was brought in to assist in planning. We began teaching a five course trade program to help train certified Global Business Professionals and hired two new trade specialists, Tony Cambas and Justin Hazzard and expect to have a trade program next year that will have a significant impact on expanding Oklahoma exports.

In January we have a group of 24, which includes engineering, nutrition and agriculture students from OSU and Benedictine College that will be expanding our development efforts in Sierra Leone with Njala University, and NGOs Williamette (Oregon), One-Seventeen (OKC), and 4-HIM (Sierra Leone).

Our efforts, in one of the poorest countries in the world, continue to expand. We have developed an experiment station near Freetown that provides a secure housing and extension platform for our students to be engaged with local communities in water and water system development, health, nutrition and food production. Students from the nation's A&M college, Njala, and high school students from the Wellington Orphanage work with our students to get experience with the application of academic concepts to real, village problems. If you haven't seen the Oklahoma Horizon's program on our Sierra Leone efforts, please be sure to visit their web site and look under their October programs to view the short clips.

If you have students who want to do service projects overseas but are financially constrained, please



## A Message from Dr. Dicks Con't.

have them apply for the Mathew 25:40 scholarships. Wes and Lou Watkins have provided funding for 4, \$1000 scholarships. My Christmas wish would be to increase this so that the 31 students that traveled overseas for service projects this year could all receive some support. The average cost of their travel was roughly \$3500, a great deal of mon-

ey for most of our students.

Please mark your calendar for February 7-9, as we will have Paul Weisenfeld, who heads USAID's Bureau for Food Security on campus for the Watkins Lectureship Series. He will be discussing the need to invest in food security through efforts like the U.S. government's Feed the Future initiative, a multi-

billion dollar international effort led by USAID to develop the agricultural sectors of a number of countries throughout the developing world.

## SAGA International Market Partnership

For the past six months the OSU Office of International Trade and Development (OITD) and the Student Association of Global Affairs (SAGA) have collaborated to raise funds for OSU's West Africa community development project. The West Africa project is a collaborative effort between OSU's engineering and agriculture colleges, Njala University in Sierra Leone, Benedictine College, and One-Seventeen (an OKC, Non Governmental Organization).

During winter break of 2011, 16 students from OSU will be in Sierra Leone to continue their work with Njala University students on

water and agricultural development projects. While there, students will be building bio-sand water filters developed by the OSU engineering department. Not all the students attending the trip in December knew how to construct these water filters, so a demonstration was necessary for adequate preparation. With support from SAGA, supplies were purchased to educate and demonstrate the difficulties and realities of building a simple, re-creatable water filter.

This project is timely and pertinent because, according to the United Nations, water-related diseases cause 80 percent of all deaths and illnesses in the developing world. In Sierra Leone, diarrhea is the leading killer of children under five. Beneficiaries of this project will greatly improve their living standards while creating a culture of community investment. The Njala students will be responsible for the maintenance of the filters and the education of the local communities in their proper use.

The funds provided by SAGA were raised by an OITD and SAGA partnership that markets items such as purses, jewelry, clothing and woodcarvings from West Africa, South Africa, Central America, and South America. This "international market" was available at multiple OSU events throughout the year—the Creativity Festival, Fair

Trade Market, Eco-Fest, Student Union Farmer's Market (throughout the summer), Gardner Gallery Harms Collection of African Art reception, and International Education Week at Wes Watkins Center. Funds raised are being used to help purchase supplies for water testing, water filters, water well installation equipment, and agricultural production projects in addition to offsetting student costs for future OSU West Africa community development projects.

For further questions about bio-sand water filters contact Liberty Galvin at [LibertG@okstate.edu](mailto:LibertG@okstate.edu)

For more information about the OSU Office of International Trade and Development or to purchase items from the international market please contact Kate Arroyo at [kate.arroyo@okstate.edu](mailto:kate.arroyo@okstate.edu) or Dr. Mike Dicks at [michael.dicks@okstate.edu](mailto:michael.dicks@okstate.edu)

The Student Association of Global Affairs (SAGA) is dedicated to educating Oklahoma State University graduate students by providing international exposure to organization members that will become part of the international community upon graduation. For more information about SAGA please contact Juliet Abdeljawad at [juliama@ostatemail.okstate.edu](mailto:juliama@ostatemail.okstate.edu) or Candace McCreary at [cmmccre@ostatemail.okstate.edu](mailto:cmmccre@ostatemail.okstate.edu)



## Cultural Stereotypes

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Nine years ago I came to the United States. This was the first time I visited the US with the purpose of staying for more than a month. The objective of my visit was to strengthen the relationships between Oklahoma State and UPAEP in Puebla, Mexico. When we (my kids and I) arrived at the OKC airport, one member of the Partners of Americas bought us a little car. So when we arrived from Mexico, we were ready to drive to Stillwater. We were left in our apartment with a map and best wishes for a successful stay in the United States.

The next morning we drove to Walmart. I only knew one way to get there and we drove almost three times more than was necessary. We purchased the basic things needed to survive, and of course a good TV. The family figured that if we could watch TV with closed caption our English would improve and we would be able to navigate easier in the new culture. We believed that the only thing missing from our cultural integration in the United States was our language skills.

Now, after almost 10 years, I still remember those days. I remember my positive and naïve attitude toward the change, and our cultural immersion. I also remember how ignorant I was thinking that improving our English skills would lead to our full integration into the new society. I was completely wrong.

After a week or two of being “ignored by the world”, I enrolled my kids in their new schools and was ready to start with my new assignments. I arrived at my new office and was immediately aware I had no plan to fit into the new culture. I hadn’t thought about the need to be accepted, or to learn how the American people interact with each other. I never thought anything would be different.

I was shocked that when my colleagues arrived at their work place they would begin working immediately without feeling the need to socialize with their coworkers, at least asking a couple of questions before start working. I was shocked at lunch time when they did not share with me or others their lunch plans. Why were they not having lunch together? Why were they not asking me to have lunch with them?

I realized that my culture was different and I needed to make some “attitude” changes in order to fit in with this new culture. In the process, however, I made a terrible mistake...I started creating stereotypes about the American culture, drawing certain conclusions from what I was seeing in my small coworkers’ group. The Americans do not like to say good morning, the Americans do not like to have lunch together, the Americans do not like to talk with me, the Americans do not like the visitors, etc. I didn’t understand that this is a part of the “normal” process when you interact with a new culture. Also, the stereotypes I was creating of the Americans and the American culture were almost always negative, because by default, my culture was best. I was applying a personal perspective of a limited group to an entire culture and comparing it to a culture with which I was comfortable.

After reading a couple of books, I found an explanation for what I was doing, I was creating stereotypes. A stereotype, according to Peterson in his book *Cultural Intelligence* emerges when a person applies one or more perceptions to an entire group. That was exactly what I was doing; I was creating cultural stereotypes and limiting my possibilities of getting to know the people from other cultures. I was referring to a person from certain culture through stereotypes, this at-

titude not only may offend them, but it may limit the opportunities to discover the new culture for what it is.

How many of us have created a culture stereotype without knowing a large number of the members of that culture? How many of us have referred to a certain culture with stereotypes that offend or denote our poor cultural competence? How many of us believe in the stereotype the TV or the media has created?

I would love to be asked if all Mexicans like tequila, or if all Mexicans are hard workers, or if all Mexicans are illegal in the United States. Would the Irish love to be asked if all of them are drunks, or Italians if they all like pizza, or the people from Chicago if they all belong to the mafia, or the Japanese if they all drink sake, or Germans if they all like beer, or Americans if they all enjoy Professional Football. Generalizations for a whole population tell you little about any specific person and likewise, generalization drawn from small groups may tell you little about the population. There is likely as much variation in cultural practices within a population as there is between populations and thus it might serve us better to learn the specific cultural practices of those around us.

*Lupita Fabregas*



# Opportunity

The glass ceiling. The obstacle you've been fighting against your entire life. Your dreams are as far as the sky, but you are only able to reach so far.

As you push on the glass ceiling, in attempts to expand your ability to soar,

the glass prison pushes back, and seemingly smashes you back into the ground. As you grow older, the ceiling gets closer and closer, almost to where you can touch it... it never moves. You are hopeless. You have no way to break free.

This exact feeling encapsulates many... at home and abroad.

I grew up on a ranch. For as long as I can remember, my dad has been a cattleman. However, with the markets, flooding and cold weather during 1997, the family farm, cows, and "cattleman American dream" died instantly. Our family was forced from the livelihood we knew and moved to town temporarily. We experienced the life of a low income socio-economic family and, as children, were forced to grow up fast. Granted, due to hard work and perseverance, we have overcome such struggles; however, I understand the glass ceiling... I lived it... wanting things and needing things, but not being able to obtain them.

When I touched down in Sierra Leone, West Africa after a long exhausting plane ride, relief and exhaustion raced through my veins. I was prepared to make a difference in the lives of individuals I came in contact with; however, what I was not prepared for was how well I would relate to them, and truly un-

derstand their desires and hope, but also their lack of opportunity.

I looked deep into the eyes of the orphans I worked with. They

*"...I realized that despite the dreams, ideas, and hopes of these young children, many would not have the opportunity to chase them."*

*- Watson*

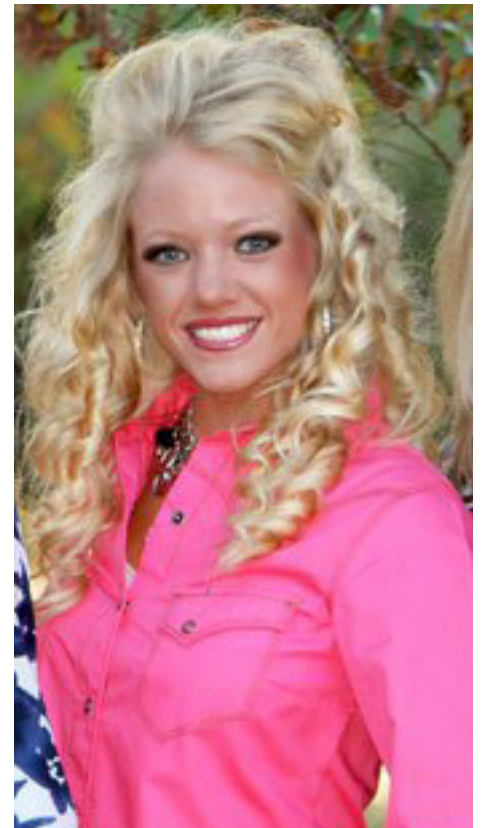
sparkled, full of eagerness and love. They were appreciative and full of hope and joy. Their dreams to make a difference in their community stretched far, and their ideas to accomplish their dreams raced and soared. The more time I spent in the community, I realized that despite the dreams, ideas, and hopes of these young children, many would not have the opportunity to chase them.

These kids had nothing to their name- no family, no possessions, and no future. I quickly realized how they reached to the sky, with the faith to conquer the world, but as they reached, their socio-economic position in the world pushed back. The glass ceiling tempted them, but they could not break through the thick glass.

My heart sank as I left the children to travel to the airport and fly back to the United States. I knew I was going back to a world that allowed me to shatter the glass ceiling with force and passion, to chase my dreams despite worldly pressures. The children I left did not have that opportunity. The American Dream only stretches to the ocean borders of the United States, and that pained my heart.

Last semester, I received the Wes and Lou Watkins Matthew 25:40 scholarship, enabling me to

travel to Sierra Leone, and to the orphans. The scholarship was created based upon the principles of the Matthew 25:40 Bible verse, which states, "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.' (NIV) This scholarship gives students the opportunity to travel to the developing world and provide service and assistance to people; it is preparing a future generation to have hearts of service, love, and a passion to help. It inspires me, and I look forward to the difference we can make as we work to make a change, make a difference, and leave an impact.



*Shannon Watson*