



Mary Okin

I participated in a session of the Salzburg Global Seminar through San José State University, in what was then the SJSU Salzburg Scholars Program.

Initially, I admit I had some skepticism and cynicism about what the experience may be like, but it truly transformed my life and my worldview. Upon departure, I had just completed my first year of graduate study in the Art History and Visual Culture program at San

José State. I believe that my thought process went something along the lines of wanting to apply for the Salzburg Program so that I could go back to Europe, that I had plenty of friends already, and that I would do all that was required of me in return for the opportunity, but not much more. All of those thoughts would be null and void by the end of my time in Salzburg and the beginning of the 2013-2014 academic year at SJSU.

Prior to departure my cohort took a Global Studies course together and had a series of trainings at San José State. At one of them, a former Salzburg Fellow (faculty and staff from SJSU also participated in the program) gave us the advice of not sitting with the same people at any given meal and instead getting to know as many people as possible. I took that advice to heart and spent time getting to know students and faculty from my own university further, as well as talking extensively with Salzburg Global Seminar faculty, with students from across the United States, some of whom came from polytechnical community colleges in rural Louisiana and Texas, rather than major universities in urban centers.

The result was a broadening of my worldview and my group's final project at the Salzburg Global Seminar resulted in recommendations for a more inclusive view of higher education. Why couldn't one get a degree in oil refinery management or plumbing from Harvard and what would happen if the lines between white-collar and blue-collar professional training were blurred? Of meaningful interest was the fact that the community college students we were working with admitted midway through our week together that they were hesitant to speak up during seminar and our breakout sessions. They felt that their voices didn't matter as much as voices from universities, and I could not have disagreed more. As I explained to them, much as I love my field of study in a humanistic discipline and much as I hoped then that I could go on to apply for PhD programs and join the professoriate, my work would not contribute essential services for the functionality of key resources and technologies needed to serve basic human needs around the world. What they were studying to become would provide the infrastructure that makes our world function. What I offered were critical perspectives about how people have understood themselves and how they have expressed themselves creatively through the visual arts over time, and how that understanding and those expressions reflect pressing and universal concerns for how to be in the world.

Upon returning to San José State, my friendships with my Salzburg Scholars cohort, now beginning our year of service towards "globalizing SJSU" together, deepened and grew. In September, our campus awoke to the devastating news that a student in the SJSU freshman dorms had endured more than a month of racially motivated hate crimes from his dormmates. As one of the most diverse campuses in the United States and as a group passionate about and committed to promoting global citizenship, we

were appalled by what had happened and motivated to respond in a way that would globalize and unite our community. One of my colleagues, Erin Enguero, then an undergraduate junior and now a graduate student on her way to becoming a teacher, had the idea of organizing a cultural showcase. As other project ideas began to fall through, many of us joined her cause, which ended up being a student-led rallying cry for celebrating the cultural diversity and inclusive excellence that for us defined San José State.

At the time, I was still working full-time for a major non-profit in the Bay Area called Silicon Valley Community Foundation as a Donor Engagement and Scholarships Associate, but as my commitments to graduate study and to the SJSU Salzburg Program grew, I decided to leave my position and pursue those commitments full-time. I ended up fundraising for the Cultural Showcase, organizing food service for the event, recruiting volunteers, and promoting awareness of the event across campus. On the night of the dress rehearsal, I also worked with Akos Myggyes, a former Salzburg Scholar, to interview performers for a documentary film about the Cultural Showcase.

The event itself was simply magical. The performances were moving, dynamic, and “world-class,” as SJSU Salzburg Program director Dr. Reckmeyer and others told us. And I was determined to see that the SJSU Cultural Showcase had a lasting legacy at SJSU.

To that end, I created a blog where I documented our work and the event itself (<http://sjsuculturalshowcase.blogspot.com/>), and where eventually Akos’s film that I helped to edit was posted. At the end of the 2013-2014 academic year, I began coordinating the following year’s showcase, including working with Katherine Davis, the Chair of the Global Studies and Geography Department and a former Salzburg Fellow. Over the summer, I hosted a welcome home/Cultural Showcase recruiting event shortly after the 2014-2015 cohort of Salzburg Scholars returned from Salzburg, Austria. Before the start of the 2014-2015 academic year, I had assembled a Core Team Staff and began planning the 2015 Second Annual SJSU Cultural Showcase.

In fall, I began raising funds for the showcase, including meeting with every college dean who had given us funds and many other administrators and organizations. I also attended major university meetings related to addressing the fallout from the hate crime that had happened the previous year, where I met the Interim Dean of Student Affairs and the Provost. I was invited to serve on the President’s Commission on Diversity, which had been charged with addressing ongoing concerns related to the hate crime and campus climate more generally, and, as part of that service position, contributed to the organization and job calls for SJSU’s Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.

I also became the Coordinator and Advisor for the Cultural Showcase, for which I raised \$12,200 in institutional support, coordinated internship credit for Core Team Staff volunteers through the Global Studies and Geography Department, and many other responsibilities, which amounted to full-time, in some weeks, more than full-time volunteer work.

Our cultural showcase was much larger in scope and in impact than that of the previous year. Close to 1,000 attendees came, we funded an art exhibition with works by BFA and MFA students at SJSU. We offered attendees gift packets of treats from around the world. We paid for publicity. We paid Akos for a second Cultural Showcase Documentary. We invited the local Muwekma-Ohlone Tribe, on whose ancestral lands we would be dancing, to give an opening blessing for our event. And much more. The line out the door for entering the Showcase was enormous and it was a joy to see so many students and

so many faculty, staff and administrators, including the President of the university and his wife, the Provost and his family, and many others, in attendance.

For my own journey, this project was in addition to my academic work, which was also rigorous that year. I had begun challenging myself academically also and I was still finishing graduate coursework in my department and participating in departmental service work too. The faculty of my department nominated me for participation in my university's research competition, which I won. A few weeks before the Second Annual Cultural Showcase, I traveled to the state-wide California State University competition, in which I became a second-place winner.

I also became a CSU Sally Casanova Pre-Doctoral Scholar and spent the following summer working for a leading scholar in my field at UC Berkeley who would become my mentor, a recommender for my graduate school applications, and now a member of my dissertation committee.

I mention all of the above, and in so much detail, because prior to the SJSU Salzburg Program and my attendance of the Global Citizenship Program at the Salzburg Global Seminar I had been a shy and somewhat reclusive student. As a result of my call to service, however, which had started out as a mere sense of duty, I grew to being a leader on campus, with a love of service work, and what felt like endless motivation for empowering fellow students and change within my academic and local community. The talents I had been cultivating professionally outside of academe, became connected to an increasing amount of volunteer and leadership service. In other words, the spark of global citizenship at Salzburg, strengthened by the call to serve at SJSU, transformed my work and, in many ways, my identity as a student and scholar.

Regarding the curriculum of the GCP and its relationship to my transformative interpersonal growth, it was not so much what we were studying as how we were studying that deeply affected my thinking and the course of my career. The Global Citizenship Program had given me access to conversations with people from very different walks of life. In fact, it had made us collaborators, and that experience, coupled with the experience of collaboration and growing friendships with students at SJSU who I would not have otherwise befriended or perhaps even met, was game-changing. I began to see and think about academe and the world at large from a global perspective and to understand that change comes from within each individual person, not simply from organizations that were beyond my immediate reach. And my service year at SJSU, which extended into a second year and well beyond what was required of me, only strengthened my telos of becoming a university professor and affecting positive change in the world.

Currently, I am a doctoral candidate in the History of Art and Architecture department at the University of California, Santa Barbara and a first-semester Adjunct Lecturer at San José State University. In many ways, I have come full circle and in no small part because of my participation in the Salzburg Global Seminar and the SJSU Salzburg Program.

I remain committed to expanding my discipline in ways that promote a more global and decentered view of the history of American art, to globalizing my lectures and teaching within the interdisciplinary SJSU Humanities Honors Program, and to encouraging service work and global citizenship among my students and colleagues. I also remain interested in pursuing opportunities abroad and remain a mentor to undergraduate students, and particularly younger women, who, like I once did, struggle with shyness and believe that leadership or aspirational goals may not be for them. I tell them to talk with strangers on elevators, which I started doing after coming back from the Salzburg Global Seminar. I tell them to

join or form organizations and gain professional experience and confidence through service work. I tell them that change happens one person at a time, one goal at a time, one collaboration at a time, and that they can be part of the change they want to see in the world. For me that change remains globalizing the community that I am a part of, pursuing equity among that community, and ensuring that student voices and particularly voices from marginalized communities are heard.

Mary participated in the program in 2013 as a student of San José State University. She is currently an Adjunct Lecturer at the SJSU Humanities Honors Program, and a PhD Candidate, History of Art and Architecture, University of California, Santa Barbara.