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Marshalling Service

MARY DENYER

Mary Denyer has been the assistant secretary and head of Scholarship Administration of the Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission for six years. Responsible for the administration of the Marshall Scholarship, a British government sponsored scholarship for Americans, her job ranges from drafting policy for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to the pastoral care of the 90 Scholars that are in the U.K. each year. Ms. Denyer has an international perspective in matters related to education and policy, having worked for the Association of Commonwealth Universities for nine years, the American College in London for three years and as an intern at the Fulbright Commission in London. She has a BA (Hons) in American Studies and History from the University College of Ripon and York St. John (University of Leeds) and a PG Dip in Higher and Professional Education from the Institute of Education, University of London. She also spent a semester at the University of South Florida, where she was placed on the dean's list for outstanding students. Ms. Denyer is currently a mentor for the Association of University Administrators' Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education

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Administration and also a member of the Marketing Committee for International Education Week. She is also an active participant in the National Association of Fellowships-Advisors, where she presents sessions not only on Marshall Scholarships, but also on British education in general.

A close accord between our two countries is essential to the good of mankind in this turbulent world of today, and that is not possible without an intimate understanding of each other.” These words appear at the top of the Marshall Scholarship website and come from a letter that General George C. Marshall wrote to the first class of Marshall Scholars in 1954. He went on to say: “*These Scholarships point the way to the continuation and growth of the understanding which found its necessity in the terrible struggle of war years.*”

His message continues to have relevance today, and current Marshalls still exemplify this continuation of understanding, not only through their interaction within the academic programs of the British universities they attend or through the social side of their experience, but also through the actions they take to improve their communities both at home and abroad.

Marshall Scholars arrive in the United Kingdom with an already impressive commitment to service. Some have worked in their home communities and others have spent summer vacations working in developing countries. One of the many challenges they face is to find opportunities to continue this work in a new country, expanding their experiences. In 2001 Ari Alexander, 2001 Scholar, set up the Marshall Scholars Volunteer Project, MSVP, which is database of volunteering opportunities within the United Kingdom and is kept on the MarshallScholarship.org website.¹ In addition since 2002 Marshall Scholars have also worked on *class projects*, which have fostered a further connection between class members as well as helping enormously in their chosen area.

Community service and volunteering among the recent Marshall classes has fallen roughly into three areas: local community service in all sectors, overseas development activity, and the development of groups for the service of the greater understanding between the United States and the United Kingdom and Europe.

Local Community Service and Volunteering

Local community work is the most common form of service undertaken by Marshall Scholars in the United Kingdom. Sometimes Scholars will bring interests with them; for example, there is an active group involved with Amnesty International, working with the local groups in the United Kingdom, sometimes leading them and in some cases setting them up. Other Scholars join established volunteering projects at their universities, and others will find opportunities outside the university. The range of projects is impressive with Scholars working with local schools, tutoring undergraduates, working in museums, working on help lines, and assisting deprived members of local communities. Their experiences help not only the recipients of their efforts, but also the Scholars better understand the community and culture that they are living in.

The following statements from the Scholars themselves make this clear as they talk about some of their experiences and the areas they chose to work in:

Since arriving in England, I've taken up volunteering each week at the Gatehouse "homeless cafe" in central Oxford. We provide sandwiches, soup, cakes, hot tea and coffee to any and all in need, and I've had the pleasure of getting to know many of our hundred odd guests, both at the Gatehouse and on the streets of Oxford. The aim is to provide good food and warm drinks in a caring non-judgemental setting, where hungry folks can come in off the streets and stay a while to chat, pick up clothing, check their email, or write and paint. This winter we released our first newsletter Gateway, containing the art and poetry of many of our guests, with help from Oxford University Press. Those afternoons have afforded me a wonderful, and more complete, perspective on this city I now call home, and through it I have found many fine friends among the fellow volunteers and guests.

—Dan Weeks 2006

I spent two of my three years in Britain volunteering at the British Museum. I joined the museum's object handling team for an exhibit on British archaeology, which involved helping visitors handle and interpret archaeological specimens. For a year and a half, I assisted Judy Rudoe, the Curator of Modern Collections and Assistant Keeper of the Department of Prehistory and Europe. I digitized the collection of Victorian tiles, meaning that I upgraded and created database entries, photographed the tiles, and uploaded the images to the database. For my dissertation for my Master's degree in

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Victorian Media and Culture, I conducted research on a designer represented in the collection. I also volunteered at the Leighton House Museum cataloguing objects in the museum store. Finally I worked as a volunteer at the Foundling Museum, helping visitors interpret the collections of the Foundling Hospital.

—Laura Gardner 2003

I have started doing writing tutoring at my college. St Antony's is the most international college in Oxford and many students have difficulty with writing in English. Generally, these students speak and read proficiently, but have trouble writing in natural English syntax. So, I help with the college tutoring by sitting down with those who need help for two hours each Wednesday night. We go over a short piece of writing to find common errors they can fix in their writing in the future.

—Tom Isherwood 2006

The most notable thing that I did while I was at Oxford was to help organize and perform in the Vagina Monologues. This was done to raise awareness of the continuing dangers of violence against women. All profits were donated to charity, some going to local groups in Oxford, and some going to support the efforts to fight violence against women internationally. Our show sold out—we had about 200 people in the audience, including several highly ranked members of the university—so we made a good amount of money.

—Talia Karim 2001

Oxford has certainly lived up to its reputation as a great place to get involved with human rights advocacy. Since arriving here last term, I've been volunteering with a variety of rewarding campaigns focused on the rights of refugee asylum seekers, from Amnesty International to Asylum Welcome (a community-based charity that helps asylum seekers, particularly young people, access food, health care, and basic legal services). Because the university campus is located nearby Campsfield House Immigration Removal Centre, I've been able to teach a weekly volunteer creating writing class to detainees. I feel as if I'm learning at least as much as the detainees themselves—particularly since the class presents the opportunity to engage with people from incredibly diverse backgrounds and virtually all corners of the world, from Angola to Afghanistan. I'm also enjoying the chance to engage with refugees in a one-on-one setting as a participant in Asylum Welcome's visitor aid project. This work has only heightened my awareness of the grave political crises many of the refugees face in their home countries, and thus, I've also become active in student awareness campaigns surrounding issues such as the genocide in Darfur. As a member of Hands Up for Darfur, I am working with other Marshall

Scholars and Oxford students to coordinate local educational initiatives about the crisis as well as a national day of student action planned for March 9th. This has been a wonderful way to meet other students concerned with asylum seekers' rights, as well as to learn more about the relationship in our globalized era between local grassroots service projects and broader campaigns for human rights abroad.

—Sarah Stillman 2006

It is clear that the Scholars get a great deal out of these projects and are giving back in a generous manner with their time, experience, and enthusiasm. They are learning about the United Kingdom, the good and the bad. One Scholar who had been volunteering with a Catholic group who helps refugees was shocked to discover that some immigrants were kept in detention centers, and this drove him to find out more about immigration in the United Kingdom and the politics around the immigration and political asylum, and it has also made him think about the policies back in the United States.

By working in their communities, the Scholars also integrate with British volunteers and perhaps learn something about the country they are living in beyond their academic experiences and contact with students.

Overseas Development Activity

Many Scholars come to the United Kingdom having already worked on and sometimes instigated projects that help developing countries. Two significant projects that Scholars have recently worked on are the 2002 class project "Marshall Scholars for the Kigali Public Library" and the 2004 project "Millat School Development Fund." These projects combined fundraising with direct action and gave the classes the opportunity to work for a common cause.

The suggestion for a class project came from Zach Kaufman, 2002 Scholar, who had already been working on a project for the Kigali library in the United States which was an established non-profit. He brought the idea to the class, and they thoroughly supported it. This project aimed to build a public library in Kigali, Rwanda, which would symbolize the rebuilding of the Rwandan society after the genocide in 1994. The project, which is still active, had a broad range of activities that involved most of the class members. The first assignment was fund raising and to date the Marshall class, together with the American Friends of the Kigali Public

Library, has raised \$1.4 million. The Marshall class solicited grants from various donors in the United Kingdom and held several very successful fundraising events including a recital at Rhodes House, University of Oxford and a Rwandan film festival hosted at Magdalen College, Oxford.

The Scholars also focused on raising public awareness about the project and Scholars were involved in writing articles for a range of publications and speaking at various events and conferences. They solicited press coverage in *Newsweek*, *Voice of America*, the *ACU Bulletin*, and of course the *Marshall Update*, and they spoke to Rotary groups in the United Kingdom and United States, the International Youth Assembly of the YMCA-YWCA Conference, and various United States Universities.

The final aspect of the project was learning first-hand about the challenges faced in Rwanda. A group of Scholars travelled to Rwanda in the summer of 2004. They visited genocide sites with survivor groups, met with government officials and civil society organizations, and conducted literacy and education programs at local schools. This trip had a profound effect on the Scholars. The children they met really brought home the impact the genocide had had on the whole country, and this has meant that the Scholars have remained committed to the project beyond the end of their Scholarship.

The 2004 class chose to help a school in Nagpur, India. The Millat School Development Fund was proposed by Sameer Ahmed, 2004 Scholar, and aimed to help the Millat School, which is the only educational institution available to poor Muslim children in the area. The class had to create a strategy including establishing the project as a 501(c)3 in the United States. They needed to research the education system in India, set up a bank account, and create a website. They aimed to raise money for the school as well as collect books for the children and also establish a cross-cultural exchange between the school in India and schools in the United Kingdom and United States.

The Scholars between them achieved much of this, and some of the class traveled to India to visit the school, the children, teachers, and the community. This, like the class who traveled to Rwanda before them, really had a major impact on the Scholars; the poverty they saw drove them to push ahead with the project. One of the Scholars filmed the visit and created a film, which they now use for fund-raising purposes. This film put a human face on the poverty that the children lived in and overcame at least part of the suspicion that some felt about funding a Muslim school. To date the class has raised \$60,000 and has donated hundreds of books.

In addition Scholars are hoping to create exchange program that aim to pair British and American schools with the Millat School allowing the children at the schools in India, the United Kingdom, and the to learn about each other and perhaps sometime in the future visit each other.

Both these projects are examples of the energy Marshall Scholars harness in dealing with difficult issues. Their enthusiasm has inspired others, including scholars from other scholarship programs, to involve themselves in these projects.

On a more individual basis, Scholars have also been involved in setting up a non-profit group called Orphans Against Aids, whose mission is to break the cycle of HIV/AIDS by ensuring that all children orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS receive a high-quality education. Scholars have also worked with NGO and with UNESCO projects, demonstrating a commitment to helping those less fortunate than themselves. They have used their positions as Marshall Scholars to help further their objectives.

Service for a Greater Understanding Between the UK and the US

The Marshall Commission also encourages their Scholars to become not only ambassadors for the United States but also to become ambassadors for the United Kingdom. Many Scholars are involved in groups that promote a better understanding between the United States and the United Kingdom.

Formally the Commission has set up a Marshall Scholars' Speakers Program; this allows Scholars to travel to various universities and other interested groups to speak about issues in the United States. Participation in the program is completely voluntary, but most Scholars want to take part. In the last six months Scholars have spoken on "The Phenomenon of Creationism," "Historical and Political Perspectives of the Vietnam War," "Ramifications of the Mid-Term Elections on U.S. Foreign Policy" and "Historical Perspectives of American Literature," and more. This program was created in 2000 to help explain the U.S. presidential elections to the British public. It has now developed into a form of debate, explaining various key issues in the United States. In the lead-up to the 2008 presidential elections, the demand for our Scholars should rise, and they will have the opportunity to speak to a diverse cross-section of the British public.

The very experience of studying overseas can open the Scholars' eyes not only to the differences in culture in the country they are studying in, but also to the way the United States is perceived within that culture. Members of the 2001 Marshall class were so concerned about misconceptions both in the United Kingdom and most especially in the United States, that they created Americans for Informed Democracy (AID). In the words of Seth Green, president of AID:

Americans for Informed Democracy was started by a group of Marshall Scholars who studied abroad just after the September 11th attacks. The students were traumatized by September 11th and wary of being overseas so soon after the tragedy. But to their surprise, they were met with intense sympathy and solidarity from people from around the world. For them, the tragedy seemed to reveal the possibility for a global community of shared values.

But when these young Americans came back to the United States, they were often greeted with questions like "How is it living abroad where people hate America?" The students realized that the picture of the rest of the world that Americans were seeing in U.S. media was not the experience of the world that they were living abroad. As an example, these young Americans abroad were having conversations with moderates from the Muslim world about how the United States could work with moderates to help root out extremism. But the only question being asked in the United States at the same time was "who are the extremists and why do they hate us?" The result was that Americans only saw the extremists and threats from around the world and not the collaborative opportunities and potential global partners.

Over time, much of the goodwill that initially embraced the American students abroad vanished and their international peers began raising the question: "Why should the international community support the United States if the United States is not willing to join the international community?" And so, on both sides, misperceptions and stereotypes grew, and the common ground and values that once seemed obvious loomed distant.

These students set up Americans for Informed Democracy to bring the world home to Americans and to showcase the opportunities for the United States to play a more collaborative role in the world from ending global poverty to acting as stewards of our earth. They began hosting town hall forums to bring new questions to the U.S. public. They also hosted international videoconferences that allowed Americans to talk face-to-face with peers from around the world. Based on their own experiences abroad, they believed that if Americans had new ways to connect with the rest of the world, they would see new opportunities for the United States to work with other countries to solve global problems. These students did not seek to

advocate a specific position or partisan ideology. Instead, they believed that if Americans just had a chance to be exposed to new issues and new perspectives, and to see the world in terms of both threats and opportunities, they would become more likely to support a collaborative U.S. foreign policy. In other words, they sought to inspire a more informed democracy.

—Seth Green 2001

This group works with students all over the United States and to date the members have brought together 45,000 students for videoconferences and have received media coverage from a wide range of publications, from the *New York Times* to *Marie Claire*.

This type of service is very different to the local community and developing world service as it comes out of the Scholars' experiences overseas. It is encouraging that the Scholars feel so strongly about the issues that confronting our societies that they are willing to set up this type of group to try and make a difference.

Marshall Scholars, by their very nature, are people who wish to be engaged, whether locally or globally. Over the years Scholars have been engaged in many types of service activities —this is just a snapshot. It is a tribute to the Scholars that they manage to be involved in so many things and still maintain strong academic performances. In a world where there is so much talk about apathy among the youth, it is encouraging that these future leaders are already so engaged. They demonstrate that the vision of the General Marshall and the British government is as relevant today as it was in 1953 when the scholarships were established.

