*Sent to all Members*

November 3, 2024  
  
Dear {%FName%},

Rotary Minutes are provided by District 6220 Governor Roger Utnehmer (Oot-name-er) to inform and educate about the value of Rotary engagement. Please share by reading at club meetings and posting in newsletters and on social media.

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IF YOU WOULD LIKE AN INFUSION OF OPTIMISM MEET A ROTARY GLOBAL PEACE SCHOLAR

Rotary District 6220 Assistant Governor Jeff Mills joined me with our global scholar, Alex Freeman, at The Salisbury Pub in London. She recently completed a master’s degree in peace studies and conflict resolution at The London School of Economics. Rotary International sponsors as many as 80 students a year to obtain advanced degrees in peace studies at a dozen universities around the world. Alex joins hundreds of graduates of the program who will make this world a safer, more peaceful place. Congratulations, Alex. And if you would like to know more about this program simply continue reading her responses to a series of questions about Rotary Global Peace Scholars.

1. **What has been the most significant observation you have after completing the program?**

Opportunities aren’t going to fall into your lap - you have to be proactive about pursuing them. Likewise, Rotarians around the world want to help you, but you need to be willing to ask for that help. The Global Grant offers vital connections and learning experiences, but accessing those opportunities doesn’t happen automatically once you get the scholarship. I wish I had done more volunteering through Rotary early in my scholarship year, and I’m only starting to catch up on that now.

2. **How do you anticipate utilizing your training?**

My degree covered a wide range of topics that are relevant for using communication and media for global good: journalism, media and activism, humanitarian communications, ethical questions of voice, narrative, and exploitation, to name just a few.

Now, I’m working in the charity sector in London, doing media and communications for a foundation that funds organizations working toward equitable access to education and employment. I’m learning how to promote the work we’re doing to reach a larger audience, and we’re actively trying to change harmful narratives about young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. These are transferable skills, and it will be a learning experience that will be beneficial for the rest of my career. Long term, I hope to shift from the domestic charity sector to pursue international humanitarian communications and/or efforts to increase press freedom and combat disinformation.

3. **What surprised you during your year at London School of Economics?**

LSE is very international - there were less than 10 British students in my department of 300. But having classmates from all over the world was incredibly valuable. I learned how different people are able to navigate complex and dangerous media landscapes, from Hong Kong activists groups subverting media surveillance to journalists operating under threat in various regions of the world. In order to do effective communications work, you need to be able to operate in challenging environments, and I don’t know where else I would have been able to engage with all these perspectives in one room.

4. **What, in your opinion, is the value of the Rotary Peace Scholars program?**

Higher education, especially at high-quality, international universities, dramatically expands your career prospects, while also helping to expand your understanding of the world. The support of Rotary helps with the transition to life in a new place, but it also ensures that scholars feel like they’re part of a community and provides networking, educational, and volunteering opportunities.

Although living abroad is financially unattainable for too many people, I believe that it has the potential to expand your worldview in a way that is difficult to achieve without international connections. Rotary makes this opportunity accessible for so many people.

5. **How has the experience changed you personally?**

It was a major growth experience. I learned a lot in my degree programme and I’m (hopefully) more employable than I was before, but most importantly, I feel more equipped as a person to tackle future challenges. I moved to a country I had never visited, all by myself, and I’ve been able to navigate every issue that has emerged. It has reaffirmed my independence and sense of competence, potentially preparing me to take bigger risks with bigger rewards in the future. Given that I hope to someday work in international humanitarianism, I feel that, if the time ever comes for me to travel to a disaster/conflict area to provide additional support to the local teams, I’ll be more willing and prepared to do that.

6. **What advice do you have for other undergraduate students who might be interested in pursuing a global peace scholarship?**

Work hard on your application, and try to go through several rounds of edits with a fellowship advisor from your university. Not only does it dramatically increase your chances, but it also makes the grad school application so much easier. The process of writing and editing my Rotary application helped me figure out what exactly I wanted from my degree and how I could potentially use it in my future career. I used a lot of the content from my Rotary app in my LSE application.

7. **How can our world promote peace and resolve conflict?**

If only I had the answer! I’m not going to try to offer an easy explanation for what we need to do to promote peace and resolve conflict. A lot of it comes down to diplomacy and geopolitics, which is beyond the influence of most people. Vote, protest, do what you can, but it can be frustrating and painful to feel like your voice isn’t being heard. But we can all start in our own communities. We are socialized to believe the worst of certain groups of people - people who are perceived as being too different from us, with different values and experiences. Too often, we are led to believe that the existence of these groups is a threat to our own survival and wellbeing, sparking hatred, fear, and violence.

If we want a peaceful world, we need to change these narratives. We need to combat the disinformation that leads to these dangerous views, create new content to highlight the true reality of suffering around the world, and ensure vulnerable populations have the platform to advocate for themselves and their communities. I hope my future work will contribute to this.

8. **What are the challenges you face as a peace scholar?**

We live in a violent, cruel world. It’s easy to become disillusioned and to feel powerless. No one can create significant change by themselves - peace is always collaborative. That’s hard, but it also offers evidence for hope - there are other people in the world who care deeply about peace and humanity. As a collective, we are always stronger than as individuals, and everyone has something they can contribute.

9. **What has given you the greatest satisfaction?**

In the span of three days, I submitted my dissertation, signed a contract on a flat in London, and got a job offer! That was a huge week for me.

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