

SE04EP09

D’Juan Sampson

From FSU to the Foreign Service

H: Welcome to Noles Abroad, a podcast by Florida State University International Programs! I’m Hannah

Z: And I’m Zoe! And we are your hosts. On this podcast we’ll talk about study abroad from the perspective of the students, faculty, staff, and alumni who make it an experience worth sharing. We’ll also bring you travel tips and fun facts from around the globe.

H: On today’s episode, we talk with D’Juan Sampson, an FSU alum who studied international affairs and political science. D’Juan talks about the cross-cultural experiences he had while at FSU, his time working on Capitol Hill, being a Rangel Fellow, and becoming a Foreign Service Officer. Let’s go to our conversation with D’Juan now.

H: Hey, how are you doing?

D’Juan (D): I’m doing well how are you doing today?

H: Doing really well, excited to talk to you. Can you introduce yourself to our listeners?

D: Hello everyone, from wherever you might be! My name is D’Juan Sampson I’m a 2015 graduate from FSU, go ‘Noles! And I studied Political Science and International Affairs with a concentration in Public Administration.

Z: Awesome! And where did you study abroad?

D: So I study abroad at FSU’s London study center in 2014, during my junior year.

Z: Cool and what first sparked your interest in international affairs and travel?

D: So I think I’ve always been interested in international affairs, especially since I was young. So growing up I was in martial arts, Shotokan which is a Japanese style of martial arts, and so at a young age, I think I was 3 going on 4, I think I was introduced a different culture with different precepts and principles of Japanese history, arts and culture. And so at a young age I think I was very enthused about learning about other countries and regions around the world and just wishing that I would be able to travel and see these places I learned about in school and also what I studied extracurricularly as well. And so I remember growing up and being in middle school and high school and giving presentations on you know the middle east, countries in the middle east and world religions and being so enthusiastic to learn about the GDP and just economic factors and just people to people ties and just wishing that I had the opportunity to go. So when I applied to FSU and was accepted it was a goal of mine to be able to study abroad and be able to have an immersive experience in a different culture, in a different country. And so I think once I got accepted and went to FSU and learned about all the amazing international programs out there I was like I’ve got to be a part of this.

H: Can you expand on that a little bit? Can you tell us about your study abroad experience and some of those other cross-cultural experiences you had while you were FSU?

D: Okay, of course. Yeah so I'm International Affairs, majored in Political Science and so I think I always tried to get involved with international students. So the Center for Global Engagement and Multicultural Affairs has a lot of different events from coffee hours, to language clubs and conversation clubs, to just professors just giving out you know general information about different seminars and lectures series to attend so I always wanted to go to those type of things. And so I remember my junior year, I had just completed an internship at the US Missions United Nations, and I really wanted to study abroad and I'm like 'If I don't do it now, I won't have the opportunity to do it.' And so I think the list was between London, Panama, Valencia and I was like, 'You know what? The UK would be fun,' so I applied and went and had the most amazing experience there. Being able to go around the world with friends and peers, and be able to have an immersive experience learning about British culture, going to the museums, the Shakespeare theater, you know just getting lost, taking the tube and having my Oyster card and having new experiences, trying new food. You know it was a wonderful experience and I think FSU cultivates those type of partnerships relationships with different programs, with other institutions and so I think that was a really value added by me being able to study abroad. This was my first time getting in an airplane and flying out of the country, so there's a lot of firsts for me but it was really exciting and rewarding as well.

H: Awesome, I love hearing about all those different things that you got involved in on campus there's so many things at FSU for students to do, like you don't even have to leave the country to get involved in some of these cross-cultural communication experiences. So it's cool that you got to do both! And I love you said about getting lost taking the tube. I'm sure more people than will admit, will have gotten lost on the tube. I might be one of them...

D: Yeah, I was one of those people!

Z: Sometimes that's the best way to explore though.

D: It really is. It's just so much history, you don't know what you might come across, what you might stumble upon and you know what it was just a wonderful experience especially doing it with friends so looking back I have a lot of great memories from that experience.

Z: Awesome so we know that you worked a little bit on Capitol Hill as well. Can you tell us about your time working there?

D: Yeah so after I graduated from FSU in 2015 I really wanted to work on Capitol Hill, get some Washington experience. I had done some like you know legislative experience in the state office in Florida and I was like. 'you know what it would be cool to go to DC.' And so I did an internship and I was placed in a congressional office and pretty much learned about the ins and outs of policy, appropriations, how money is allocated. So I did an internship in Spring of 2016, which led to a job. So I got a job in the Senate side and you know you start out as a staff assistant, answering phones in constituent services, you know you do a lot of those menial and mundane tasks, but they really are important especially because you're representing an entire state, you're representing a district of people. And so you want to be able to you know give them those services that they elected you for, the member. And so it was a lot of fun getting White House tours, meeting all these members of Congress, but also working on important policies as well. You know my senator who I worked for was really big on armed forces, defense, agriculture, sustainability and the environment, things that I'm very passionate about as well. So being able to know be at one of the most important centers of power in the world, the nexus of just so many different schools of thought, industries, lobbyists. You know it was constantly a learning experience for me. I feel

like it was never a boring day, it was very rewarding fulfilling. I mean it's a lot of work, but you know I think it was it gave me a really great foundation after FSU and then especially for my career currently.

H: So from there you went on to become a Charles B Rangel International Affairs Graduate Fellow. Could you tell us a little bit about that award and about the process and the experience for you?

D: Okay yeah. So the Rangel fellowship is basically a pathway into the foreign service. So there's the Rangel fellowship, Pickering fellowship, and then the USAID the Payne fellowship for people that are interested in International Development. So I knew that want to be a Foreign Service Officer and so after I was working on the Hill I was like you know what, I'm gonna apply. And so I got the fellowship and I worked with the Office of National Fellowships, ONF at FSU, at the Honors, Scholars and Fellows House. They helped me out so much that entire process and one thing I love about ONF is that you know you still are able to utilize those resources even as a graduate. And so I had graduated in 2015 and here I am in what 2017, 2018 still utilizing those resources. Drafting essays, going over my personal statements and you know kind of guiding me through that process was really alleviating some of the stresses, of course it comes with it. Yeah you have submit your personal statements, your narratives, and then they bring a group of people to do interviews, and then after that that's when you're selected after your interviews and writing and speaking and things like that, so that's really cool. And yeah so basically it's a pathway to the Foreign Service and I think most people think oh it's only about diversity. But diversity is very broad. It's not only about racial and ethnic diversity, but also geographic diversity, more women. Historically the State Department, especially the Foreign Service has kind of had centers of influence in the northeast, you know people are going to like Ivy League schools, predominantly white men, and so I think that having its type of programs are really beneficial because they make, it's really representative of the United States having a diverse Foreign Service that looks like our country. It adds so much value to the work that we're doing, to have representation all around the world as we represent the country. So for anyone applying to Rangel fellowship, Pickering, definitely do it. They're wonderful opportunities, your life will be transformed by being able to go to graduate school and to have mentors and having wonderful opportunities to intern in DC, but also an add embassy abroad. I did my internship at embassy it in the US embassy in Hanoi, one of the most amazing experiences in my life. So I'd definitely love to talk more about that later, if people have questions that'd be great.

Z: That awesome, it sounds like such a transformative experience.

D: It was, it was. My life has been changed for the better and I'm so happy to be here right now.

Z: Wonderful. So we want to know what made you want to become a Foreign Service Officer, I know you touched on that a little bit, but can you just tell us about that and your current role and where you are now?

D: Okay. Yeah so I knew I want to do something related to international affairs and when I was in high school I was doing like an SAT or ACT prep course and one of the people was helping us study and prepare said that they hoped to become a US ambassador I was like, 'huh, that sounds like a pretty cool job.' I don't know like what it entailed, but it just seemed like it was something important, you're representing the United states abroad, and I was like, 'I want to be an ambassador one day.' And we talked about different ways you can do so and I don't know that was kind of like implanted in my mind. And then I went to FSU, of course, did Political Science and International Affairs. I thought I would go to law school and do international law but you know international law is so broad. I mean international law

can be anything, but it really wasn't until I met the Diplomat in Residence for the Southeastern region, so there's different regions around the country and there's Diplomats in Residence at different colleges around the world, around the country, and they're basically there to serve as a resource for students for different states around the area to talk about fellowships offered by the State Department whether is like the Boren Fellowship or Gilman or you know Pickering and Rangel Fellowships or Critical Language Scholarships those type of things. And I met the DIR for the southeastern region and he told me about all these amazing internship opportunities and I was like. 'huh, that'd be cool.' And he encouraged me to apply and I applied and I was accepted to the US Mission to the United Nations and I think that was a very catalyzing moment for me because I learned that you know my experience in New York, this is what I want to do for a living. I was able to work on peacekeeping, multilateral issues at the United Nations you know. And this is around the time when Russia annexed Crimea 2014 so it was a very busy, very stressful time but I learned a lot. I learned about reporting, how to articulate your message across, how to be concise, how do you work with you know like-minded nations you know other democratic nations but also nations that disagree with us sometimes and how do we come to find common ground. So I think that was a very transformative moment for me and I'm so appreciative that I was able to meet the Diplomat in Residence, the DIR, when I was at FSU, to have that opportunity who encouraged me to apply for this opportunities. Yes it's competitive, but you know what why not go for it? So that's why I encourage people today if you want to apply for things like that you know, don't let any naysayers assuage you. Go for it! You know keep working, keep striving towards your goal. And there's so many resources with Alumni FSU but also centers like ONF as well.

H: It definitely sounds like you were able to take advantage of all of those opportunities and can you tell us a little bit about where that's led you now? Like where have all those opportunities gotten you, what are you up to today?

D: So I'm currently a Foreign Service Officer also known as a U.S. Diplomat. I've just been assigned to my first post and I've been here for about one month now so I'm in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic as a Consular Officer. So basically my role now is to adjudicate visas so we have nonimmigrant visa things like tourist visas, immigrant visas, people who you know about to live their lives in the United states, move there to immigrate United States. And we also have American citizen services. So we basically have diplomats who help Americans in all countries around the world with you know, whether they have kids who are born, or need flights. A lot of that was done especially during the time of COVID. Diplomats all around the world were working in hyperdrive in order to get Americans back home to the United States and just being a resource for information. And so that's what I'm currently doing now. The Foreign Service has different cones there's the political section, there's public diplomacy, management, economic and consular so you know we all work as a unit to represent United States abroad. We're the official representatives of the United States in foreign countries also in international organizations as well and multilateral institutions. So that's where I am currently and you know I had six months of Spanish language to prepare myself for this, had different other trainings to prepare to be a Consular Officer and so I'll be here for two years adjudicating visas, working American citizen services, yeah it's really exciting it's something I've worked you know years for. It's surreal to be here, especially in a country as beautiful as the Dominican Republic, which is known for its world class beaches, and so yah I have a great group of colleagues I've been learning so much from and I'm looking forward to the rest of my time here.

H: Yah, I'd imagine the Dominican Republic is not a terrible place to be sent.

D: Not bad at all, I can't complain.

H: Well I hope you enjoy that, most definitely.

D: Thank you, thank you, appreciate it.

H: Well you have given so much incredible advice throughout this whole interview already but we want to give you one more opportunity. We ask every person on this podcast to answer this question - so what advice do you have for students who are considering studying abroad?

D: Do it. Do it, do it, do it. Apply, don't be intimidated by it. There's just so many different resources out there, there's scholarships out there. I think sometimes people are just like oh you know maybe I'm not eligible, maybe I won't be qualified. I'm telling you, apply for it. So many people let fear and other things get in the way of them living their dreams and you just don't know the type of relationships, the type of experiences that you will have if you just don't apply for it. You know FSU is a wonderful institution and we have amazing study abroad programs and centers around the world so I think should everyone should definitely have this opportunity to have cross cultural, immersive experiences, to learn more about themselves, learn more about relationships between other countries and the United States. Challenge themselves. You know, get lost. Have fun. I think you should definitely do it. It will change your worldview, it'll change your perspective, it will challenge your norms. I think it'll be really rewarding experience I definitely encourage everyone, if you have the opportunity to, to study abroad.

Z: Wonderful. Well thank you so much for talking with us today and telling us a little bit more about your story and what you're up to now.

D: It was a pleasure, thank you so much for having me!

H: Thanks D'Juan!

H: Before we disembark let's talk about FSU resources for alumni!

There are many resources on campus that are available to FSU students, even after graduation! D'Juan mentioned working with the Office of National Fellowships. That office aids current students, as well as recent alumni, in finding and applying for fellowships and awards.

Z: The FSU Career Center is another great resource for alumni to utilize. You can use services such as career advising, cover letter and resume critiques, search re-employment resources, attend workshops, and more. There are also opportunities to give back to FSU students by becoming a ProfessioNole mentor, hosting students for job shadowing, and other options! You can also network with fellow alumni through the Alumni Association and its Seminole Clubs and Chapters around the world!

H: Thanks to D'Juan for talking with us today and thanks to you for listening!

Z: This podcast is a production of FSU International Programs. The music for this podcast was composed by John Bartmann. Our logo was designed by Vanessa Guirey, who also does our sound engineering. Editing, transcription, and research is done by us, Zoë Crook and Hannah Meister.

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