

## Alum offers political science, business skills to Peace Corps

Brandon Ernst '12 is six months into a two-year commitment as a Peace Corps volunteer in Senegal.

He is volunteering in the Community Economic Development sector, working with entrepreneurs and small business owners who want to learn basic business skills like accounting, inventory management, and other management tools.

While at Dominican, Brandon, an honors student who majored in [Political Science](#) and [Business](#) and minored in [leadership](#), cultivated the skills necessary for a successful career and a meaningful life. He participated in the Clinton Global Initiative Meeting at UC-San Diego and was appointed as an Institute for International Public Policy (IIPP) Fellow. He attended the IIPP intensive graduate-level summer training programs at Howard University and University of Maryland, in which he studied advanced statistics, public policy, economics, and national security. He also spent a summer studying abroad in Poitiers, France at the ESCM School of Business & Management.

"At Dominican, I learned it is absolutely vital to have a transferable, multi-cultural skill-set that allows for easy job mobility as you progress in your career," Brandon says. "After participating in networking events, I felt more confident in my approach to meeting new business people, which helped me in starting my own business and later working in D.C. Additionally, business planning classes helped me be a self-starter as an entrepreneur and in contributing innovative solutions during my time at USAID."

Brandon's thesis, entitled "The Economic Impacts of United Nations Peace Keeping Operatives: Growth vs. Level Effects," was published in the *International Journal of Public Policy*. Brandon co-authored it with Dominican professors Rajeev Sooreea and Diana Spain from the [Barowsky School of Business](#) and his advisor and mentor, Gigi Gokcek, associate professor of Political Science in the [School of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences](#).

"Professor Gokcek challenged and inspired me like no other professor ever has," Brandon says. "I will be forever grateful for everything she has done for me."

After graduating from Dominican, Brandon received a scholarship to attend Middlebury College, where he entered an intensive language immersion program in Chinese. He is now perfecting five languages and refining his resume.

Brandon created his own [website](#) and, in 2011, he established an international business developing websites and consulting business owners in social media strategy and online marketing.

His past experiences with IIPP in Washington and as an entrepreneur prepared him to work as a Program Assistant in the Asia Bureau at USAID in Washington, D.C. His path into the Peace Corps is a natural fit because it allows him to supplement the top-down policy perspective he gained from his position in D.C. with work on the ground with individuals in Africa.

After his experience with USAID, Brandon moved to China, doubled his web development business revenue, and hosted a presentation for more than 40 Chinese business owners on the benefits of having a high quality website to market their businesses. He is still working with a Chinese marketing firm called Laneway International to develop websites for their clients, and has learned about the vital Chinese business skill of *guanxi*, which is trust and relationship building that is the basis for all business partnership.

While in China, Brandon applied for the Peace Corps to continue his progression in the field of international development. He is hoping to share his entrepreneurial and technology experience with Senegalese citizens who are also starting their businesses. His aim is to help his Senegalese counterparts start a plant-based business and to provide entrepreneurship trainings and computer literacy classes in

French and Wolof, the local ethnic language. Through the Peace Corps, Brandon hopes to understand how high-level development policies in Washington D.C. can actually make a sustainable difference in people's lives all over the world.

*August 12, 2016*