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ODAILY

Meet some of OU's Davis United World College Scholars

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Emina Alibegovic attended a UWC program in Mostar. Kate Bergum/The Daily

OU has more Davis United World College Scholars than any other participating college or university this year.

55 OU freshmen are Davis United World College Scholars, according to the program's [website](#).

The Davis Scholarship provides graduates of the United World College Program, a pre-university program, with financial help for education at American universities, according to the scholarship's website.

The United World College seeks to bring students from across the globe together to promote diversity and cultural understanding, according to its [website](#).

In total, more than 137 Davis Scholars from 60 countries attend OU, said Craig Hayes, the director of OU's United World College Scholars Program and international recruitment.

UWC graduates are valuable to OU because they can use the global understanding they achieved at the program to help create a more accepting environment, Hayes said.

Emina

The United World College made Emina Alibegovic realize that borders are usually just geographical.

Raised in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country still healing from bloody civil conflict, Alibegovic was accustomed to students from different ethnic backgrounds learning different curricula despite attending the same school, she said.

The environment was completely different in UWC Mostar, Alibegovic said. Though the program was still in Bosnia and Herzegovina, nearly 200 students came together from about 80 countries to learn in a collaborative environment, she said.

“People just become people,” Alibegovic said.

In addition to learning typical secondary school material from International Baccalaureate curricula, Alibegovic learned about conflict resolution and accepting other cultures in Mostar, she said.

“The world seems so huge, but it’s not,” Alibegovic said.

After graduating from the program, Alibegovic decided to attend OU because of its welcoming attitude and because of its partnership with the Davis Scholarship Program, which helped her finance her education, she said.

Alibegovic, an international area studies sophomore, hopes to give back to the UWC and Davis Scholars community after she graduates, she said.

Michelle

When broadcast journalism freshman Michelle Velasco’s mother found out she had been accepted into a UWC program where she could learn about achieving international peace, she told her daughter that she was her hero.

Raised in Venezuela, Velasco witnessed civil wars and student demonstrations almost constantly, she said.

When she was 12 years old, Velasco realized she wanted to help countries such as Venezuela, where people were being oppressed — often violently.

Attending the UWC Nordic Red Cross program gave Velasco the opportunity to learn how to enact social change, she said. At the program, Velasco learned that conflicts like Venezuela's often stem from ignorance, and educated people can use reason to solve problems, she said.

Velasco now hopes to educate people as a broadcast journalist, she said. After graduating from OU, Michelle wants to travel around the world and cast light on situations where people are affected by war and corruption, she said.

Velasco has big dreams, including working for a major TV network such as CNN, Telemundo or BBC, she said.

However, she does not think that she will move back to her home country, where the media is controlled, many people remain blind to governmental corruption and bloody conflicts rage on, Velasco said. Since graduating from secondary school, two of Velasco's classmates have been killed in student demonstrations, she said.

But despite its bleak outlook and the fact that she is a continent away, Venezuela will always remain Velasco's home, she said.

"I will always have my heart with Venezuela," Velasco said.

Flavio

Aerospace engineering senior Flavio Moreno always knew that there was more to the world than the small town in Guatemala where he grew up, he said.

Although Costa Rica, where he attended his UWC program, was not very much different from Guatemala, the program itself seemed worlds away, Moreno said.

"You have the whole world in such a small space," Moreno said.

At the program, students lost pieces of their personal identities in order to find a more global identity, he said. Moreno became "Flavio Guatemala" while at the UWC school, he said.

The UWC program seemed like its own country, and the unified feeling carries over to university life at OU, Moreno said.

When former UWC students meet on campus, their shared experience gives them a sense of a bond, even if they went to different schools or attended in different years, Moreno said.

"You have this sense of nationality," Moreno said.

In addition to close ties with UWC students at OU, Moreno has friends sprinkled across the globe. He has determined he could travel from Canada to Argentina and have a couch to crash on in each country along the way, he said.

Benjamin

Attending a UWC program gave geography junior Benjamin Ignac an appreciation for global differences as well as the opportunity to pursue his passion for geography.

Instead of attending high school in Croatia, Benjamin attended the UWC Nordic Red Cross program, which he shared with about 200 students from 80 countries, he said.

Ignac's international experience began even before the program. As Roma, the largest minority group in Europe, Ignac's parents left their home country of Croatia before he was born to find more stable economic opportunities in Germany, he said.

From Germany, Ignac and his family then moved to Hungary and then back to Croatia, he said.

An international experience is common among students accepted into the UWC program, Ignac said. These "third culture" students, students who might not identify with a specific country, may be more receptive to a global experience, Ignac said.

As a UWC student, Ignac was also able to further his studies in geography in a more holistic way than he would have in Croatia, he said.

"It's so interdisciplinary," Ignac said. "You can connect anything to geography: art, psychology, economics and physical sciences."

Ignac has carried his passion for geography to OU and appreciates the many opportunities the geographic information studies program offers, he said.

OU is also home to a tightly knit community of former UWC students who bond because of their shared transformative experiences as UWC students, Ignac said.

However, Ignac encourages former UWC students, as well as all OU students, to foster their sense of curiosity by creating more inclusive social circles, he said.

Ignac is working to integrate into OU culture as much as he can by taking advantage of the many opportunities available on campus. Though the process is sometimes difficult, he knows that it will offer him an experience just as transformative as the UWC program, he said.