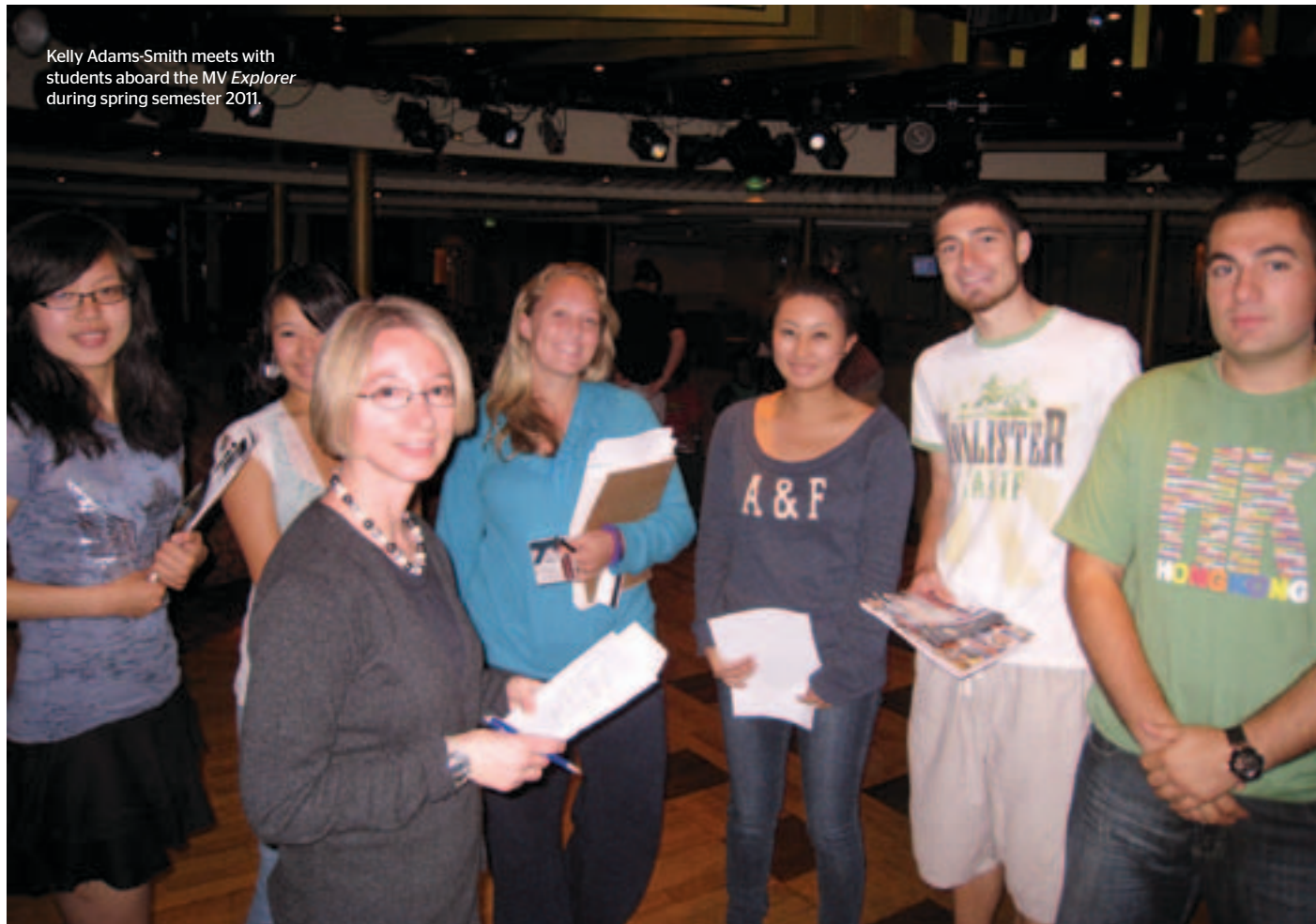


Kelly Adams-Smith meets with students aboard the MV Explorer during spring semester 2011.



Shipboard Diplomacy

Cox Fellow engages students at sea /// *By Kelly Adams-Smith*

If you could do anything for a year—and receive your salary to do it—what would you do? Thanks to the Una Chapman Cox Sabbatical Leave Fellowship, two Foreign Service officers annually get the opportunity to answer that very question.

For me, the fellowship was an opportunity to give something back to a program that introduced me to the Foreign Service. As a 2010–2011 fellow, I spent a year building ties between the State Department and the Institute for Shipboard Education, a nonprofit that administers Semester at Sea, in which 700 students from 250 U.S. universities sail around the world on a ship retrofitted as a floating university. During a three-month semester, they visit 10 countries and take a full load of credits from the University of Virginia, the

academic sponsor. This program had led me, as a college sophomore in 1988, to dream of a Foreign Service career.

Two Goals

When my year as a Cox Fellow began, I had two goals: to help Semester at Sea tap into embassy expertise to improve the program's quality and to help the Department take advantage of the public diplomacy and recruitment opportunities Semester at Sea represents.

First, I had to spend time on Semester at Sea's ship, the MV Explorer. Shipboard life is much like that on

any small U.S. college campus, except that students attend class every day the ship is at sea, and faculty, staff and students live together in close quarters, forming a tight bond.

Together, they watch glorious sunsets, survive the inevitable seasickness and visit the ports where the ship docks. Most students choose the program because of an interest in interna-

tional affairs, so visiting diplomats are seen as minor celebrities.

While aboard, I lectured, discussed Foreign Service careers and worked with Nobel Prize winner Archbishop

Desmond Tutu, a frequent shipboard lecturer and a member of the ISE Board of Trustees.

Watch the video
at [www.state.gov/
statemag](http://www.state.gov/statemag).





Clockwise from above: The MV *Explorer* prepares for a sunny cruise; the author shares a smile with Nobel Prize Winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who sailed with the MV *Explorer* for fall semester 2010; preparing to meet the MV *Explorer* as it arrives in Brazil are, from left, the ship's engineer, American Presence Officer Justen Thomas, Consul General Marie Damour, Guisela Shannon and Economics Officer John Barrett.

I then worked out of Semester at Sea's home offices in Charlottesville, Va., linking program officials with embassy contacts in countries where the MV *Explorer* would soon dock. In Brazil, for instance, I arranged for several officers from the U.S. Embassy in Brasilia and Guisela Shannon, wife of Ambassador Thomas Shannon, to board the MV *Explorer* in Macapa in January. They joined 750 university students and faculty as they sailed up the Amazon on the spring 2011 voyage. Over three days, the U.S. delegation gave lectures about Brazil and its importance to U.S. foreign policy. The students got a firsthand look at what it means to be a U.S. diplomat by living side by side with our Mission Brazil colleagues, an experience Semester at Sea's academic dean called invaluable.

Extensive Coverage

When the MV *Explorer* finally arrived in Manaus, it was greeted with extensive media coverage that allowed U.S. Embassy officials to highlight the U.S. higher education system to a Brazilian audience.

The trip was "hands down, one of the favorite things I've done in the Foreign Service, and with a minor outlay of resources, an excellent opportunity to brief Americans traveling abroad and recruit new talent into the



Foreign Service," said Consul General Marie Damour, an 18-year Foreign Service veteran.

Justen Thomas, American presence officer for Belem, added that "working with Semester at Sea allowed Mission Brazil to engage in places where our presence is limited and a visit can have a big impact."

Recognizing the benefits, other embassies are becoming involved. In May, Regional Environment, Science and Technology Officer Tim Lattimer, based in Costa Rica, sailed with the MV *Explorer* from Panama to Costa Rica, giving lectures and offering what Semester at Sea's vice president for Academic Affairs called "critical insights into U.S. environmental policy."

In July, the U.S. Embassy in Sofia, Bulgaria, hosted a home-stay program for 10 Semester at Sea students. Numerous other U.S. posts have provided Semester at Sea with diplomatic briefings and consular assistance. To institutionalize this cooperation, the Office

of Overseas Citizen Services in the Bureau of Consular Affairs has agreed to maintain a close relationship with the program.

The Cox Fellowship gave me the freedom to engage fully with Semester at Sea and the funds for travel and other expenses. And interacting with more than 2,000 enthusiastic students has injected new energy into my career; I returned to the Department with more appreciation and respect for our work.

More information about the Cox Fellowship is available in the Foreign Service and Civil Service Long-Term Training Opportunities booklet at <http://intranet.hr.state.sbu/workforce/assignment/pages/foreignserviceandcivilservice.aspx> or at www.uccoxfoundation.org. To see if Semester at Sea is coming to a port near you, visit www.semesteratsea.org. ■

The author is deputy executive secretary on the National Security Staff of the White House.