

Name: Maria Gershuni
Institution: SUNY Geneseo
Major: International Relations
Minors: Edgar Fellows Honors College, Central and Eastern European Studies

Unlocked

My passion lies partway in between the art of International Politics and the art of pretending. In my specialized math and science high school I thought that I wanted to spend my life in theater because I have never felt more myself than when I was pretending to be someone I wasn't. But what was simply a small fraction of my high school existence, consumed my world and reality in college. International Politics, I found, is just an extension of the art of pretending. Diplomacy is the art of pretending to like other people for negotiation's sake, and politics is the art of pretending you hold all the chips, while you can barely manage to hold a single bag. I discovered the reason I like pretending so much is because every time I take on a new character in a play I am unlocking a part of myself that I did not know about. The same happens whenever I debate and write on the policies and recommendations of a different country in Model United Nations. I begin to see the world from a slightly different perspective, whether it be from a developing African country or a communist Asian power. The majority of my personality is still a mystery to me, because I haven't even made a dent in the litany of roles and sovereign nations I could possibly portray, but I know that when I do, they will stir something else inside my personality that will stay with me throughout my life.

For this same exact reason, I believe that a liberal arts education is vital to my development and the development of my fellow students. In the course of 4 years you can pretend to be a politician, a chemist, a philosopher, a musician, and a computer scientist, inside the classroom. Each time you walk into a class at a liberal arts institution, you unlock a hidden

part of yourself. While some freshman come in to college complaining about the liberal arts requirements they must fulfill, they have little idea of how much of themselves they are not familiar with. The personalities and interests they have perfected in high school make them fear the extensive course load and unfamiliar work, but by the time they graduate, they become entirely new people. This is not because they have fundamentally changed. The part of them that entered college as freshman remains inside of them, but so many new parts have been unlocked, that they have overshadowed the people they were.

I came into college exclusively focused on studying International Politics. I wanted nothing to affect my ability to get good grades and get into graduate school, which I assumed meant staying totally focused on my major. However, there were two factors that managed to break me out of my self-imposed bubble. The first was my acceptance into the Geneseo Honors Program, which gave me access to fascinating Honors classes taught by professors from several departments all around the school. The program was totally committed to the ideals of liberal arts and crafted classes specifically to ensure that they couldn't fall under one discipline. This program complimented my International Relations major, interdisciplinary in its foundation, so well that my studies all came together seamlessly.

Taking advantage of the various learning opportunities I have been presented with has been a highlight of my academic career. I have always loved theater, but was worried that I would feel out of place in classes since I wasn't a Theater major. However, sitting in specialized theater classes with several honors students, debating the political and historical application of a piece of art showed me that my interests are not mutually exclusive. Because of a class called Shakespeare on Film, I was able to successfully represent in a pro-Brexit argument in a simulation of the UK Parliament by using Henry V metaphors. My liberal arts education has

successfully managed to engage all my curiosities, making me feel more connected to the world around me. This was clear to me last semester when I participated in a semester long, full time internship at the United Nations headquarters in New York for academic credit. Rather than feeling like the semester was an interruption of my regular studies, my internship experience simply felt like an extension of my educational experience. At the moment, I am taking a COPLAC digital online class through the Honors program with a focus on secessionist movements. While I have focused on secessionist movements before, I have always approached it through an international lens. Through COPLAC, I am taking a hyper-localized approach and studying the history and current political climate of the Upstate-New York secessionist movement while learning how to build a website, create original media, and use digital tools.

The second influence, outside of my liberal arts classes, that has allowed me to flourish has been the people I have met at SUNY Geneseo. A liberal arts institution attracts certain kinds of students and molds them into diverse, interesting individuals. The people I have met in this school have been so passionate and excited about their courses of study, their enthusiasm was contagious. I wanted to see and experience what made them delighted to wake up every morning and go to class and participate in extracurricular activities. As much as freshman-me was determined to stay inside her dorm and study, convinced that this was the correct course of action, the people surrounding me forced me to unlock the different aspects of my personality. The more classes I took, the more people I met, and the more clubs I joined, where I met more people that inspired me to take more classes and get involved in more activities around campus. Without the wonderful people that populate liberal arts colleges, a shy college freshman might never know that she likes to write op-eds for the student newspaper or volunteer at Relay for Life.

People say that they graduate college as completely new people than when they came in. However, I do not believe that is true. The capacity for critical thinking, active learning, and ethical reasoning is inside all students. Liberal arts colleges provide students with the ideal environment to unlock parts of themselves that would have otherwise remained hidden. Combining an engaging education with an environment that fosters exploration and learning, liberal arts institutions allow students to discover new facets of themselves every day.