



From Hong Kong to Yemen: U.S. Ambassador Barbara Bodine

Barbara Bodine ('70), Director for the Institute of Diplomacy at Georgetown University and former U.S. Ambassador to Yemen, decided in high school that education abroad would be a prerequisite for her college experience. After one year in Hong Kong through UCSB's Education Abroad Program (EAP), followed by over 30 years in the Foreign Service and nearly 20 years in academia, Bodine is paying it forward with the Barbara Bodine Scholarship, which supports the next generation of travel-bound students who also seek an immersive cultural experience.

Bodine was raised by a single mother in the San Fernando Valley, CA – an original Valley Girl – and was the first in her family to graduate college. At age 19, while pursuing a degree in Asian Studies at UCSB, she participated in EAP's Hong Kong program.

"When I joined the program for Hong Kong, I didn't even have a passport," reflected Bodine. "I had the sense of an outside world, but didn't know what it meant to live in another culture. You can be an Asian Studies major, but it's not the same as living in Hong Kong. While there I was fully immersed, and in no way in an American bubble. I lived in the dorm with three Chinese roommates; I took my classes with Chinese students; I commuted by train to and from the New Territories every day; and because there were no cell phones or internet, I was totally disconnected from home."

Bodine spent a full year abroad. Her fondest memories include going on picnics out in the New Territories with Chinese friends and wandering around the "marvelous, vibrant, noisy cacophony" of the city. "Even the smell was different," she commented. "You could smell the sea air and the spices and cooking, and I wrapped myself in it."

Her immersion was so powerful that at moments, she forgot she was a visitor. "One day I was downtown and looked in a store window and said, 'Who's that western lady?' I was so accepted [by my host culture] that I didn't feel other. I felt at home."

Having felt such profound personal growth and confidence following her year in Hong Kong, Bodine elected to remain abroad instead of coming back to California. For the five months before her senior year began, she hitchhiked west until she reached Lisbon, Portugal. "I loved the opportunity to figure out where I was, who I was, how this area worked, and experience each place as deeply and fully as possible. By the time I returned to Santa Barbara, I went from never having been abroad to having been to nearly 12 countries."

Bodine graduated from UCSB magna cum laude Phi Beta Kappa with a double degree in Political Science and Asian Studies and immediately entered graduate school at The Fletcher School. She commented that being one of very few women and the only student from west

of the Mississippi at the small Boston graduate program was as much a culture shock as Hong Kong. Three weeks after completing her Master's degree, she joined the Foreign Service. Because of her background as an Asian Studies major and her education abroad experience, Bodine's first tour was back in Hong Kong as a Vice Consul at the U.S. Consulate General.

Her diplomatic career also took her to Taiwan and Bangkok, and in a surprising turn, to the Arabian Peninsula and Yemen.

"In a way, it was like going off to Hong Kong when I was 19," she reflected. "I adored it. The Yemenis are some of the most delightful, funny, and open people I've ever worked with. They are so proud of their history, and so welcoming. The fact it is impoverished did not mean that it was hostile. They saw a future for themselves and believed in their country. That's what made being in Yemen so special; you were working with people who so believed in themselves."

"I thank EAP every day for giving me the courage and awareness to be able to launch this career, where I started off in Hong Kong and ended up in Yemen."

After 33 years in the Foreign Service, Bodine began her "second career" in teaching, first at Harvard's Kennedy School and as a Senior Fellow at MIT, before landing at Princeton for seven years. For the last ten years she has directed the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy and taught as a Distinguished Professor in the Practice of Diplomacy at Georgetown University's campuses in both Washington, DC and Doha, Qatar. By sharing her wisdom with new generations of aspiring diplomats, policy makers, and global leaders, she continues to feel a sense of service and purpose, and maintains her ties with the Arabian Peninsula.

"What I enjoy about teaching is that I'm working with people for whom life is a future tense verb."

Bodine has since created the Barbara Bodine Scholarship at UCSB, which supports students with financial need who are studying abroad in non-western countries. Citing her own experience, where a last-minute anonymous donor made it possible for her to afford the program, she seeks to return the favor to current and future students seeking their own immersion in an unknown culture.

"My only regret is that I didn't start [the scholarship] sooner," she said, while highly encouraging other alumni and interested donors to consider giving back as well. "I think EAP has a high return on investment. You're providing an opportunity for a unique impact that goes beyond other programs, while also supporting a strong public university system where quality education and opportunities are made accessible. As alumni, we need to give back so that the opportunities we benefited from [at UCSB] are available to others who deserve it just as much."

Bodine still loves to travel, taking 4 to 5 international trips a year. Her idea of a vacation is spending a week exploring a new area "on the back of a six-pound bike."