Fulbright as a Launch Pad to Success: Alina Lindblom ’11

"I was the first American many of the people in this small town had met," Alina Lindblom ’11 described of her yearlong experience as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant in the Czech Republic. Speaking to a class of students in the International Scholars Program, she shared her experiences abroad and her recent studies in international law. “Go for it!” she told the students about applying for a Fulbright grant. “The Fulbright experience is truly one of a kind: It’s a chance to immerse yourself in a foreign country, meet new people and learn.”

Lindblom graduated from UMass with a degree in political science, earning honors with greatest distinction. During her time in Commonwealth Honors College, Lindblom was a member of the International Scholars Program (ISP) and spent a year at the University of Seville in Spain. “I knew that I wanted to study abroad, so the program seemed like a natural fit. It was a wonderful opportunity for thinking deeply about international issues.” ISP complemented her political science courses with an interdisciplinary perspective on the many political and economic issues facing the international community and the response of organizations and states to these global issues. “ISP attuned me to the many subtle ways in which culture influences communication. Successful cross-cultural communication requires not only fluency in a language, but a deep understanding of the culture and history of a place,” said Lindblom.

Wanting to continue spending time abroad, Lindblom received assistance from the UMass Office of National Scholarship Advisement to apply...
to the Fulbright Program for an English Teaching Assistantship. This highly competitive national program places students in classrooms abroad to provide assistance to the local English teachers while serving as cultural ambassadors for the US. “I wanted to spend time in Central and Eastern Europe and learn a Slavic language, and I thought the Czech Republic would be an ideal place given its history and location in the heart of Europe.” She taught English in two secondary schools and established a program of weekly informal conversational English lessons for her students. “I feel indebted to the students who participated in this ‘English Club’ because they made me feel like my presence in Třebíč was useful to someone other than myself.” Lindblom even influenced other teachers, noting that they planned to incorporate the games and teaching methods that she had used.

“I left the Czech Republic with a deeper understanding of the country, its language, people, culture, and history, all of which far exceeded what I expected to gain in such a short amount of time.” She recalled, “It was rewarding and challenging in equal measure.”

After Fulbright, Lindblom worked with a non-governmental organization in South Africa. As a JD candidate at Yale Law School, Lindblom most recently served as a legal intern at the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in The Hague. An organization established by the United Nations, the ICTY prosecutes serious crimes committed during the Yugoslav Wars. Applying her international perspective and legal experience, Lindblom had the opportunity to work with a multicultural group of lawyers on complex issues of international criminal and humanitarian law.

Looking back on her international journey, Lindblom said “I was excited about each step I took,” but concedes that she had no set plan for her own professional trajectory. Instead, the experiences and opportunities that she had as a student at UMass created a launch pad for her career, and did so in a way that had an impact on communities across the globe.