



Kasia Zak

International student, SOU/Nicolas Copernicus University (Poland)

Age: 24

Year: Senior

Major: English

Goal: a career in public relations

Kasia Zak first came to Oregon through a collaborative program for international exchange between Southern Oregon University and the Nicolas Copernicus University in Poland, and was so impressed by her experience that she decided to stay to earn her degree from SOU. She is currently finishing her bachelors in English while starting her Masters thesis under an advisor at her university in Poland. After graduating this coming Spring, she hopes to enter a U.S. graduate program in management and communications, but is also weighing that with an internship offer for the Polish Prime Minister. Kasia is no stranger to high politics, as she learned about the Frank and Grazyna Surma Scholarship while completing a public affairs internship with the office of Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski. What stands out most when she speaks about her education, however, are the very personal, enriching relationships she has had with the professors, advisors, and mentors. In fact the scholarship program itself is based in a personal story of human connection between cultures---the founder Frank Surma lives in Ashland and founded the Frank and Grazyna Surma Scholarship in honor of his friendship with a man who escaped the Auschwitz concentration camps and moved to U.S., settling in Oregon. In her college years, Kasia has focused on understanding the English language and American culture and on developing the concrete skills she needs to compete in a global workforce. She feels that SOU has prepared her excellently for her future career in public affairs through rigorous coursework, involved professors, and applicable work experience as an assistant in the SOU Public Relations office. She speaks highly of Professor and Associate Vice Provost Paul Steinle, whose journalism classes she loved, as well as Professor Bill Gholson, the head of the English Department who advised her through the process of transferring her international credits. She is also very thankful for the supervisors on her two jobs, Luanna Giles in Duplicating Services and Christina Dunlap in the Public Relations office who both challenge her with various projects directly applicable to her career goals. She thinks the greatest challenge for international students is the fear of not being understood, and she was pleasantly surprised through her work that people were receptive to her, and in fact sincerely interested in her background. Being so far from home, the many supportive individuals involved with SOU have certainly been key to Kasia's happiness and her success.