

First SIUE international studies graduate set to shape a changing world

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EDWARDSVILLE - An interest in and care for international education and gender issues were the points of inspiration that led Rachel Thurston to pursue a bachelor's in international studies from the Southern Illinois University Edwardsville College of Arts and Sciences.

A native of Columbia, Thurston is the first to complete the program, which began in fall 2016. She will receive her degree with magna cum laude honors during SIUE's 9 a.m. commencement ceremony on Saturday, Dec. 16.

"The international studies program allowed me to combine the things I'm most interested in, by taking courses from a variety of disciplines," said Thurston. "With this degree, the possibilities are endless regarding how I can use it to either pursue a graduate degree or look for a full-time position. There is a strong need for individuals who maintain an international focus, and I feel thoroughly prepared to make a difference."

The program's interdisciplinary coursework and emphasis on global learning opportunities prepares students to fulfill the University's mission of shaping a changing world. Students can pursue concentration areas in international art, culture and communication, international development and sustainability, or international relations and diplomacy.

Thurston traveled to Prague, Czech Republic to fulfill the international studies program's six-credit study abroad requirement. For her senior assignment, she collected data on the history of immigration and current immigration, and wrote and designed "The Resource Book for Immigrants and Refugees in the St. Louis Area."

The book categorizes local resources such as welcoming and integration services, including interpreter services, as well as legal, health and educational services, and cultural, ethnic and religious organizations.

"Research shows that it can be problematic for immigrants and refugees in the St. Louis area to find the services they need, because some organizations are nonspecific in focus, which sometimes leads to a disconnect on where a person can go to find a particular type of assistance," Thurston explained. "My resource book helps make connections by organizing and cross-listing services."

"This book is practical and to-the-point, and could serve as an important resource for newcomers to the St. Louis area who may be bewildered about where to find help," said Associate Professor and Program Director Sorin Nastasia, PhD. "It helps individuals solve issues by answering common questions, such as where should I go for healthcare? How do I contact police? Where can I stay?"

Thurston is leaving SIUE having acquired a valuable degree and applied experiences that demonstrate her readiness to tackle contemporary global issues and play an integral role in shaping a changing world.

“The future is bright for graduates of this program, as they are qualified to engage in the complex social, political, economic and cultural interrelations that exist among nations and regions of our globalized world,” Nastasia explained. “We are proud of the success of our first program graduate and are excited for the many others pursuing this growing program, as we support their unique educational journeys.”

For more information on the undergraduate international studies program in SIUE’s College of Arts and Sciences, visit siue.edu/international-studies.

Central to SIUE’s exceptional and comprehensive education, the [College of Arts and Sciences](#) has 19 departments and 85 areas of study. More than 300 full-time faculty /instructors deliver classes to more than 8,000 undergraduate and graduate students. Faculty help students explore diverse ideas and experiences, while learning to think and live as fulfilled, productive members of the global community. Study abroad, service-learning, internships, and other experiential learning opportunities better prepare SIUE students not only to succeed in our region's workplaces, but also to become valuable leaders who make important contributions to our communities.