**Ciara Bennese**

*FSU student takes a stand on human rights*

**Major:** International Affairs, Political Science

**Graduation:** Spring 2018

**By:** Ali Buis, University Communications Intern

Senior Ciara Bennese said she felt a connection to Florida State University the very first time she set foot on campus.

“When I visited FSU’s campus with my mom, I was awestruck by how beautiful the campus was and how friendly everyone was,” Bennese said. “Not only was the atmosphere wonderful, after learning more about the different programs, opportunities and extracurricular groups, I was sold!”

Bennese has consistently excelled in her academic pursuits at FSU, receiving multiple Dean’s and President’s list honors as an initiated member of the Phi Kappa Phi, Phi Eta Sigma and Phi Beta Kappa honors societies.

The double major in international affairs and political science said her interest in these fields came about from her involvement in her high school’s Model United Nations team in Indian Shores, Fla.

“Through my four years of research and debate conferences over topics like nuclear nonproliferation and humanitarian aid I learned about and became passionate about international issues, diplomacy and foreign affairs,” Bennese said.

This summer, thanks to an FSU IDEA grant, Bennese was able to explore those career fields in person. The IDEA grant provided her the funds to travel to Puerto Rico and research the local culture for her project, “The Puerto Rican Identity: Boricua Across Borders,” which she presented at the President’s Research Showcase this fall.

“Spending a month in Puerto Rico gave me a perspective that I never would have gotten by visiting for a week or two,” Bennese said. “Living in a normal apartment instead of staying in a hotel allowed me to fully understand what life for native Puerto Ricans is like and what Puerto Rican identity is on the island in comparison to the states.”

Anel Brandl, a teaching professor of Spanish, encouraged Bennese to pursue her research Latin America, Central America and the Caribbean.

“Professor Brandl helped me sort through my ideas and decide on a plan,” Bennese said.

Together, they worked to create a proposal to apply to different grants to help fund her research.

“I admire Ciara's determination,” Brandl said. “She is one of the most intelligent and disciplined students I've had. She sets high standards for herself, which will influence her in her future.”

Outside of her research and academia, Bennese is an integral part of FSU student life and an active member of the community.

She is the current director of Amnesty International FSU and a legislative coordinator for Florida with Amnesty International USA. She is a member of Delta Nu Zeta, a local service sorority, where she served as philanthropy chairman as well as the vice president of community activities. She also participated in the World Affairs Program, FSU’s Model United Nations team, which allowed her to travel to several conferences and win numerous awards for her debate skills.

“In my opinion, going to classes is only half of the college experience,” said Bennese. “While it is the half that gives you a degree at the end, the half that includes campus organizations and making friends is what helps you figure out what you want to do with your life and who you want to be.”

Last spring, Bennese interned at the Florida Senate for Sen. Darryl Rouson, where she helped work on constituent issues, read pending legislation and helped the staff brainstorm ideas for revision. “Interning for Sen. Rouson helped me learn about Florida's state legislature and how important the laws they pass are to our everyday lives,” Bennese said. “Knowing how the legislation process works has helped me effectively lobby for human rights on the state level.”

Bennese is also a supervisor at the on-campus Chick-fil-A, where she works 20 to 30 hours a week to help students create a healthy schoolwork balance. “There have been many late nights and early mornings, but being so busy has made me really skilled at managing my time, prioritizing and multitasking,” Bennese said.

After graduation, Bennese plans to move to Washington D.C., and work for an organization that specializes in human rights. Eventually, she wants to pursue a graduate degree in International Affairs in hopes of serving as a Foreign Service Officer within the United States government.

Bennese believes that without FSU, she wouldn’t be where she is today.

“The values of Vires, Artes and Mores are values to live by not only in college but through all of life,” Bennese said. “Every student is valued at FSU and there is a place for everyone, which is something that not all universities have.”

**Related Links**

[**FSU International Studies**](http://coss.fsu.edu/inaprog/programs/undergraduate/IA)

[**Amnesty International**](https://www.amnesty.org/en/)

[**FSU IDEA Grant**](http://cre.fsu.edu/students/idea-grants)

[**FSU Phi Kappa Phi**](https://www.phikappaphi.org/join/chapters-list/florida-state-university#.WcKNI0pSyi4)

[**FSU Phi Eta Sigma**](http://www.fsuphietasigma.org/)

[**FSU Phi Beta Kappa**](https://pbk.fsu.edu/)

**Pull Quote**

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