Alumni Spotlight:  Kelsi Ward, Program Specialist in the Cultural Programs Division of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs at the U.S. Department of State.

Education/Work History
"Personal engagement with diverse people and active involvement in my community has afforded me opportunities to challenge my beliefs, broaden my knowledge base, and develop a professional skill set. I worked and interned in various sectors; education, faith-based organizations, law, and non-profits, and each experience provided me with a new perspective. The most influential experience to date has been my two years serving in the Peace Corps in Peru, where I designed and facilitated community-based projects in the areas of health promotion, educational advancement, and youth civic engagement in coordination with local counterparts. Peace Corps provided a unique experience to live and work in a rural community, which forced me to truly contemplate the complexities of international development. Living with a Peruvian family in a beautiful yet poverty-stricken community in the foothills of the Andes Mountains and partnering with local education, health, and government entities allowed me to identify with the challenges facing my community. The most meaningful aspects of the experience were the relationships built and the opportunity to empower youth to explore their full potential. I am able to see the power of dialogue and shared experiences in my current position at the State Department, and continue to advocate for cross-cultural collaboration as a mechanism to promote peace and stability."

How the political science degree helped get her to where she is today.
"The small, interactive classes and personal contact with professors and other students permitted me to engage in debate and dialogue, exploring new theories and learning to assert my opinion in a coherent manner. Through my independent study project and bachelor’s essay with Dr. France and Dr. Jos, I explored immigration patterns and educational trends through policy research and personal conversations with local educators. I remember the confidence I gained when I conducted interviews in the Charleston County jail as part of my legal internship, or tangible skills gained as I analyzed program effectiveness in student success while interning at a local education non-profit. The college’s support of study abroad provided me with my first international academic experience, cultivating a love for cultures, foreign policy, and the Spanish language that continue to impact my professional choices."

Any advice you have to offer current political science students?
"Political Science offers a broad education that helps students develop their analytical and writing skills, which are integral to many professional career paths; however, I believe it is a field that must be practiced and experienced to truly take hold. I would encourage students to take full advantage of the program by pursuing their own personal passions and academic interests and finding a way to explore those subjects first-hand. Active involvement and ownership over your own academic experience will not only deepen your understanding of the course material, but help provide you with tangible skills you can leverage in your job search. Volunteer for a cause that excites you, intern at an interesting organization, organize an independent study, assume a leadership position, study abroad; the experiences you have and the connections you forge will serve you long into the future. You will always be your best advocate; so take risks, speak up, and get involved."