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Student visits India thanks to Lawler Scholarship

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Robert Smith is absorbing the culture of India as he studies abroad this semester with assistance from the Dr. Adrian R. Lawler Exchange Student Scholarship.

Smith is the 2012 recipient of the Lawler Scholarship, which supports international study programs and is administered by the Oak Ridge Public Schools Education Foundation. Lawler, an Oak Ridge High School graduate and the second local student to participate in an American Field Service international program in 1957, established the scholarship in 2008 to offer students here similar opportunities to gain tolerance and understanding of people from other cultures.

Smith, an ORHS graduate who is now a senior at the University of Tennessee, is spending this semester in Hyderabad, India, with the Council on International Education Exchange study abroad program. An honors economics major, he is taking courses in philosophy, his second major, while also exploring India's culture. He is also doing an independent research project, a comparative study of Indian and western philosophy, under a university professor there.

"As a developing nation, India is of great interest to me as a future economist in that it is a nation in throes of radical economic change — from an overwhelmingly poverty stricken nation to leading superpower," Smith said. He noted India is the world's largest and fastest growing democratic state.

"One of the most exciting aspects of Hyderabad University is the genuine interest of the students in what they are learning," Smith wrote to the Education Foundation after his arrival there, adding that education is recognized as a valuable gift. "Being around students who are passionate about their studies, as well as being active members of community outside of class, has greatly revitalized my own interest in my education."

Smith explained he has a passion for experiencing new cultures. As he did when visiting Japan in 2006, Smith said he is actively participating in Indian culture while studying there. Besides philosophy, he is studying the theory and practice of yoga and taking a course in Hindi, India's primary language. He is also learning to play the sitar and tabla, traditional Indian instruments.

Smith, the son of Reid and Cheryl Kress, has recently served as a tutor for UT's Student Success Center. He is a member of the honor societies Sigma Alpha Lambda, Phi Sigma Theta, Golden Key and Omicron Delta Epsilon.

Before his recent death, Lawler, a retired marine scientist, designated the Education Foundation to administer the scholarship with a five-member scholarship committee. The scholarship funds learning or educational travel for ORHS students or graduates, with special consideration given to AFS students.

Students attending Oak Ridge schools and graduates of ORHS currently attending college are eligible for the scholarship. The scholarship will not usually provide total funding, but instead encourage students to earn part of their funding as a life lesson.

The Education Foundation, a nonprofit organization founded in 2000, provides funds beyond public tax dollars for education, raising funds through grants and private donations to invest in enhanced educational programming, innovative technology, and state-of-the-art facilities for teachers and students. For more information, see the foundation's website at www.orpsef.org.



Oak Ridger Robert Smith, the son of Reid and Cheryl Kress, is studying in India thanks to the Lawler Scholarship administered by the Oak Ridge Public Schools Education Foundation.

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