



Alumni Spotlight on Rory Burke: Skateistan is More Than Just Skateboarding with Kids

Rory Burke (IAFS '03) is the Projects and Operations Director of the award-winning non-profit organization, [Skateistan](#). Through its innovative skateboarding and education programs, Skateistan empowers around 3000 youth aged 5-17 in Afghanistan, Cambodia, and South Africa. The focus is on groups who are often excluded from sports and educational opportunities, providing them with safe spaces to have fun, build confidence, access education resources, and break down social barriers.

Tell us about how you got started with Skateistan.

At CU Boulder, I didn't have a major in mind and the International Affairs Program wasn't on my radar. I was on the CU Lacrosse team and one of my teammates suggested I take the introductory course. I became very interested in the major since it included many different subject areas. As a senior, I wrote a paper on the break-up of Yugoslavia through the lens of their national basketball team, which at the time was a powerhouse in international basketball. This paper taught me to look at complex issues in different ways, and how sports can be a microcosm for challenges in the world. After graduating, I worked as a college lacrosse coach and earned a master's degree in international studies, developing a passion for sport-for-development programs. I found an organization that embodied this, Skateistan, and I joined them in 2012 as a volunteer for a project in Cambodia.

What is your role with Skateistan today?

I am the Projects and Operations Director, working closely with Skateistan general managers in Cambodia and South Africa, and the country manager in Afghanistan. I work on operations to help ensure our programs have the best opportunity for success and provide students with support. Skateistan runs five programs within their Skate Schools for youth: Outreach, Dropping In, Skate and Create, Back to School, and Youth Leadership. There are four Skate Schools established: Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan; Phnom Penh, Cambodia; and Johannesburg, South Africa. A fifth Skate School is in construction in Bamyan, Afghanistan with plans to open this year.

In 2019, a documentary about Skateistan, [Learning to Skateboard in a Warzone \(if you're a girl\)](#), won an Academy Award! The film highlighted the impact our team is making in their communities. Quite often as a sport-for-development organization, people see just the sport part and think of the programs as simply skateboarding with kids, which is the opposite of the day-to-day operations. The film wonderfully highlighted



Rory Burke (center) in Bamyan, Afghanistan with colleagues Talia and Soroush

the educational aspect our work, especially our Back to School program in Kabul, Afghanistan. In this program, we work closely with the Afghan Ministry of Education and local community leaders to provide basic educational skills and support to students who are out of school or have never been to school.

[Continue reading](#)

Thank You for Attending our Spring Virtual CWA Event

On Thursday, April 8, [Dr. David Bassiouni](#) joined us for our virtual [Conference on World Affairs](#) event to talk about Africa's sustainable development in a COVID-19 era. Dr. Bassiouni is a former diplomat, former UNICEF representative, and currently the chairman and chief executive officer of The Bassiouni Group. In his talk, he reflected on the lessons learned in the field as a United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator responding to crises in warzones, and how today's leaders around the world are responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. This talk was recorded and available online.



David Bassiouni presenting virtually on May 8, 2021

[Video via YouTube](#)



Congratulations Class of 2020-2021!

On Friday, May 7, the International Affairs Program recognized 189 candidates for graduation in a virtual ceremony! Director Tom Zeiler acknowledged how they persevered through a global pandemic and the achievements and awards they earned during their undergraduate career. The virtual celebration included sentiments and advice from academic advisors and faculty along with a slideshow of this year's graduating class. Congratulations to the students, and to all their families, friends, and educators. For our new alumni, we hope to see you at an alumni event and hear from you as you achieve milestones in the years to come! You can view the 2021 virtual ceremony [here](#).

Announcements from the Program

- **Katherine Rousseau**, IAFS Assistant Director, has been recognized as a 2021 College of Arts & Sciences Employee of the Year. The College warmly acknowledged Katherine for her leadership within the program and with constituencies outside of it, the care for her responsibilities and clear direction for the duties of others, her perseverance in achieving our goals, and devotion to students, staff, and faculty. Congratulations Katherine!
- **Jeffrey Nonnemacher** (IAFS '18) recently transformed his IAFS thesis into a published article for *European Union Politics* – well done, Jeffrey!
- **Keira Hook** (IAFS '21) has been named a Fulbright finalist for the 2021-22 academic year by the U.S. Department of State and the Fulbright Foreign Scholarship board for her post-graduation plans in Argentina.



Be Inspired

Through our social media channels, such as [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), and the [Forever Buffs Network](#), you can connect with students, faculty, staff, and alumni virtually. With our Facebook page, you can see the most up-to-date events and announcements alongside our current students!

[Facebook](#)



Be Involved

Contributions to our IAFS general gift fund are used for a variety of special projects and student programming, including speaker events, graduation ceremonies, and student awards. With these gifts, we add innovative opportunities for our majors. To donate to the IAFS Gift Fund, click the link below.

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Be International

Be a part of our Global Grants endowment! Global Grants support students as they study abroad around the world. Help us continue to grow our endowment by giving today. Please add the following to the Comments box during check-out: Global Grants Endowment Fund #0151296

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