

Where the Road Began

by Nancy Talbott '16



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Dr. Mark Brennan never would have imagined himself as a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) chair and Pennsylvania State professor when he graduated from Salisbury University in 1992.

Growing up in Pennsylvania, Brennan applied for admission to SU after visiting the campus with friends who already were students. When asked what had sold him on the SU experience, he confessed, "it just seemed like a good fit." Brennan went on to say that he was not a picture-perfect student when he first walked through SU's doors, but by the time he graduated, his placement on the Dean's List and his perfect attendance record were evidence of his evolution as an undergraduate student.

"My SU experience was transformational," Brennan said. "It focused me and got me on a path." Brennan had started his time at Salisbury without a plan for anything beyond a bachelor's degree. After switching majors multiple times and exploring the school's options, he made his final decision to be a sociology major.

As a graduate student, Brennan earned his master's degree in rural sociology from Pennsylvania State University before beginning his work in the social science research field. Brennan later returned to PennState and earned his Ph.D. in philosophy – rural sociology before spending time at the University of Florida as a professor. Six years later, he accepted his position at PennState before becoming a UNESCO chair.

While considering his time with UNESCO, Brennan explained that having the ability to do work that is being used on a global level is his greatest accomplishment. As one of 20 UNESCO chairs in the United States, Brennan participates on a board of scholars who meet in order to discuss methods of both preventing tragedies and resolving current issues. Both as an individual and in his group efforts, Brennan focuses his work and research on providing educational and community opportunities to worldwide youth in an effort to discourage extremism. By teaching basic literacy skills to community members of low-income countries, Brennan said, the average lifespan per capita would increase, while extremism among youth would significantly decrease. These potential results have become one of Brennan's key inspirations during his work with UNESCO, giving him both a goal to work toward and a passion to embrace.

Brennan attributed his urgency and passion for the global field to his work with Phil Bosserman, the late SU educator,

humanitarian and namesake of SU's Bosserman Center for Conflict Resolution. Bosserman, who was one of Brennan's professors during his time at SU, was also his long-time mentor and friend. "This is the field that Phil started," Brennan said, "and I'm lucky enough to be a part of it."

In addition to his work with UNESCO, Brennan also enjoys his job as a professor and the influence he is able to have on his students, just as he experienced during his time at SU. He remembers his undergraduate professors fondly, especially Drs. Charles Cipolla and Allan Pappas, and said they were "not just stuffy academics. They were people. Activists." They showed Brennan the impact that his work could have on the world by stressing the importance of not only doing research, but also on applying the results to his surroundings. "SU instilled academic excellence," Brennan said. "They instilled [in me] how important it was to view research as a craft."

When asked about what his future holds, Brennan confided that he and a group of other scholars are developing a program that will work toward the development of empathy in worldwide youth in an effort to further UNESCO's goal of bringing peace through education. In addition, he plans to continue his partnership with Salisbury University through future UNESCO presentations and projects. "The path that Salisbury started me on has been remarkable," he said, and he looks forward to continuing that path with the school where it all started.



Phil Bosserman



Brennan visited SU to lecture and meet with students in spring 2016