



Terrorists' Gateway

Student's research in Italy uncovers security threat to the West.

Candice Ferris didn't originally aspire to a career in counterterrorism analysis. But once she found her passion, she has systematically pursued her goal.

Her preparation and persistence resulted in an internship with the U.S. State Department. She was placed at the Consulate General in Milan, Italy, for fall semester 2006, where she worked in Diplomatic Security Services.

From her research while working and studying in Italy, Ferris prepared an independent study paper that she presented on campus April 17 during the Symposium for Scholarship and Creativity.

Her presentation, "Analyzing Italy: the Terrorists' 'Gateway to the West,'" carefully documented her reasoning as to why internal conditions in Italy may foster an environment that poses a security threat to the rest of the Western world.

According to Ferris' research, Italy has dealt with internal terrorist groups for decades, particularly the Red

Brigades, a communist group that was active in the 1970s and early 1980s and that resurfaced in the late 1990s. Extremist groups also began sending fighters in the Balkan wars through Italy in the 1990s.

Since the late 1990s, Italy has become an attractive point of entry into Europe for international terrorists for several reasons, she theorizes: its central geographic location, porous borders that easily allow illegal entry, lack of political clout to enforce stiff legislation, forged documents available to allow travel throughout the European Union and create easier access to the United States, and internal organized crime groups who cooperate with international terrorists.

Since 2004-05, terrorist groups have been using Italy as a base of operations. Further evidence supporting her conclusions includes the arrest in Milan of the mastermind behind the Madrid bombings. The formula for a bomb created in northern Italy was later used in the July 2005

London bombings, providing a positive link between Italy and terrorism in other parts of Europe, she said.

Italy's response since 2005, Farris noted, has included legislation that allows deploying the army to patrol public buildings, military search and/or arrest of suspects of extremism, prolonging detention without charge and faster deportations.

Ironically, Italy's first responses in combating terrorism have been to make it easier to tap phone calls and to monitor Internet café users, she said, both strategies that face profound resistance in the United States.

"I really think these active cells threaten Western security," Farris said. "They have grown in size and capabilities extremely quickly."

Farris developed an interest in international relations at an early age. Participating in a trip to Europe with People to People between her junior and senior years in high school was a pivotal point in her life.

Originally interested in a career in science, she changed her mind and started looking for universities that offered a major in international relations. That was why she picked The University of Findlay, along with the fact that she could continue to ride her horse. She was disappointed to arrive on campus to find the international relations major had been discontinued, but Ray McCandless, D.A., professor of political science, guided her through an individualized major in international relations/political science that enabled her to achieve her goals.

Between her sophomore and junior years at The University of Findlay, Farris studied at the American University in Rome. She learned about Italian culture and picked up the language quickly, aided by her knowl-

edge of Spanish. Her studies focused on "Conflict and Peace in the Mediterranean," and she did an independent study paper on domestic terrorism in Italy. Back on campus, she took McCandless' class on "The Politics of Terrorism."

Between her junior and senior year, Farris was jetting off on yet another adventure. Although all of her studies had previously focused on Europe, she participated in the Kake Bridge exchange program offered at UF and spent a month in Japan to get another cultural perspective.

All of these experiences and her growing interest in terrorism gained her acceptance into the State Department internship. Some of her duties included doing research on the activities of terrorist groups and reading the Italian newspapers to analyze what may affect the U.S. Shortly after she arrived, Farris helped with the preparations for hosting a number of U.S. congressmen who were meeting with officials from other countries to discuss policies.

Despite her globe-trotting, Farris managed to be involved in campus life as a member of the Spanish Club, Phi Beta Delta honor society for international scholars, the Martial Arts Club and the English equestrian team.

Passionate about her research, Farris said she hopes her project will "bring proper attention to a growing problem in Italy. It is a problem that has the potential to affect not only the security of Italy, but also thousands of lives throughout all of Europe and the United States. It is my hope that the research ... will raise new questions and information on a subject that is not widely publicized."



Farris visiting a weapons factory, where arms are made for the U.S. military.



Farris feeding pigeons in a plaza, the quintessential Italian experience.



Farris with Henry Hyde, chairman of the International Committee for the U.S. House of Representatives.