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UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON PROFESSOR TAKES LONDON BY STORM

DAYTON, Ohio — Annette Taylor, professor of journalism and public relations at the University of Dayton, is a master of the English language, but she still has not learned the meaning of the word “no.”

“As a journalist, I learned to never take no for an answer,” Taylor said. “Always keep pushing for what you want. The worst that could happen is you don’t get it.”

This philosophy has helped Taylor, a former journalist, land past jobs and “get the hard interview” when other individuals gave up due to a negative response. This past summer Taylor’s refusal to take no for an answer resulted in a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for her and the students participating in the Interdepartmental Summer Studies Abroad Program (ISSAP).

Taylor spent a lot of time preparing for her ISSAP classes and setting up special tours, speakers and events for her students before leaving for London, England at the end of June. Her greatest accomplishment was to get her ethical issues in public relations and journalism class into a press conference at Prime Minister Tony Blair’s home and offices, 10 Downing St. in London, England.

Press conferences are held daily at 10 Downing St., and only an elite group of British journalists are allowed to attend the conferences. The number of attending journalists is around 30, but Taylor was determined that they would have six more observers for one of the press conferences.

Taylor observed a regular press briefing of the American press corps in London when she was there in 1991 and created several international contacts. She made call after call to the British and American reporters she had met, hoping someone could help her find a way for her students to sit in on the press conference, but doors kept slamming in her face.

“My friends in the British media kept saying, ‘I can’t even get in, what makes you think you’re going to get in?’” Taylor said. “But I did.”

When her contacts discouraged her efforts, Taylor decided to head straight for the top. She called the prime minister’s office on several occasions, and they kept telling her the request was impossible.

“Nothing is impossible,” Taylor replied.

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Taylor's next step was to fax a letter to the prime minister's press secretary, Alastair Campbell. Taylor recounted in the letter that she had observed a press conference during Margaret Thatcher's term as prime minister and mentioned that the students were from Dayton, Ohio, site of the 1996 peace talks.

Taylor's request was approved a couple of days later, and she picked a date to observe, Monday, June 29.

"I think they realized if Thatcher would allow me in, then Blair should too," Taylor said. "The fact that we were from Dayton, which made international news with the peace talks, helped too."

On the scheduled day, Taylor and her students entered the room of the press conference and found seats at the back. Campbell addressed the journalists and gave his visitors a "nice and extravagant introduction," according to Taylor. The briefing included an outline of the prime minister's schedule for the week, and Campbell addressed a scandal concerning a high-level government official's relationship with the British media and certain businesses. Following the national briefing, Campbell held a regional meeting for a smaller group of journalists. He then met with the students to discuss his philosophy of dealing with the notorious London press.

Katie Smigelski, a senior public relations major at the University of Dayton, attended the press conference at 10 Downing St. as a member of Taylor's class.

"I was lucky to have Annette Taylor for a professor in London," Smigelski said. "Her persistence is unbelievable. Without her, we would not have had half of the experiences that we did."

In addition to 10 Downing St., Taylor succeeded in persuading the people at New Scotland Yard to allow her class to visit, and the students toured the facilities of The Mirror, one of London's tabloid newspapers.

"I don't think the gravity of the experience these kids had in London has hit them yet," Taylor said. "We accomplished the impossible — regular people just don't go to Downing Street."

For media interviews contact Annette Taylor (937) 229-2578.