

UW Oshkosh students go global through study abroad

by Vanessa Virbitsky - Friday, February 08, 2008

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In a world gone global, students and faculty at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh gained international experience on study abroad trips during the fall interim.

“Studying abroad helps students to realize that not everyone in the world lives like us,” said Stephanie Stewart, lead director of the Comparative Nursing and Healthcare in India program at UW Oshkosh. “You can’t get this same experience by staying in the U.S.”

From comparing healthcare systems in India to observing Belizean ecosystems, these overseas experiences taught students how much there is to learn when one’s eyes and ears are opened to other cultures, terrains and peoples.

“I believe that studying abroad was a very important part of my education,” said Devyn McIlraith, a UW Oshkosh student who recently returned from studying in Belize. “I learned more about myself and the effects that we have on the world. It also began to help me in finding out if the major I chose is the right one for me.”

Students can still take advantage of several study abroad opportunities occurring this summer. For more information visit the Office of International Education in Dempsey 146, call 424-0775, or click [here](#).

Comparative Nursing and Healthcare in India

In January, 15 UW Oshkosh nursing students joined Stewart and nursing professor Dawn Pope on a three-week excursion to one of the most overpopulated countries in the world – India.

“As a developing developed country, India is a totally different country than the United States,” said Stewart, who has made the trip to India six times. “I’ve heard it described as having ‘one foot in the 19th century and the other in the 21st.’”

From the grandeur of the Taj Mahal to the odd mix of camels and automobiles on city streets, there’s nothing quite like it, Stewart said.

Nursing students Carol Veltus and Jennifer Helgesen joined Stewart and Pope as they trekked through the masses of Chennai and New Delhi.

“The sheer number of people in these cities is shocking,” Stewart said, referencing New Delhi’s population density of 29,000 people per square mile, which tops New York City’s density of 26,402 people per square mile.

In these cities, students had the opportunity to gain hands-on experience working in and around Indian

hospitals.

“There are these huge pediatric hospitals in India and it’s a completely different atmosphere than in the U.S. because they just pack people into these rooms,” Stewart said.

According to Stewart, the Indian hospital experience is also unique because you see more than the standard Type A and B diseases. Students were able to see patients inflicted by a wide range of diseases uncommon to American hospitals.

Students also were exposed to the Indian culture and way of life.

“There are areas of vast beauty contrasted by areas of extreme overcrowding, pollution and poverty,” Stewart said. “Students always return very aware of the vast contrast of the country.”

Approaches to Resource Management of Tropical Ecosystems in Belize

Amid the “McWorld” phenomenon of American culture diffusion, there remain areas unscathed by American conglomerations – and according to trip leader and UW Oshkosh geology professor Maureen Muldoon, Belize is one of them.

“We were exposed to wildlife protection areas that have remained completely untouched,” Muldoon said. “We also saw huge diversity of natural environments.”

One of these natural environments was the Monkey Bay Wildlife Sanctuary, which is centrally located in Belmopan and surrounded by the Sibun River and watershed.

“I learned quite a lot about how ecosystems are entwined,” McIlraith said. “For instance, the slightest disturbance at the beginning of a watershed can destroy an entire reef ecosystem, which in the end all comes down to how we treat our environment.”

Offering more than just unique landscapes, Belize gave students the opportunity to meet exotic wildlife and explore agricultural systems much different than Wisconsin’s.

“Students will definitely be thinking about Belize when they go grocery shopping,” said Muldoon in regard to the students’ stop at a local banana, citrus and cocoa farm.

According to Muldoon, the Belizean bananas were treated in an insecticide so powerful that workers must wear rubber gloves to protect their skin.

“It really made me think about going organic,” Muldoon said of her experience at the banana farm.

Students and faculty also visited the Community Baboon Sanctuary.

“To visit the sanctuary, we trekked into a local stand of trees where some wild black howler monkeys lived,” said Sarah Novak, a UW Oshkosh student. “We got to feed them bananas and take pictures. It was definitely an experience.”

Novak, who returned from Belize with a much greater appreciation of Central American life, initially decided to study abroad for two reasons, the first academic and the second for a global experience.

“I decided to go on this trip because I wanted to see how another country managed its natural resources, considering that a rainforest is far more rare and difficult to manage,” Novak said. “Also, I knew I might never get another chance to experience anything like that.

“I am so grateful for this trip because what I learned and experienced cannot be taught in a classroom,” Novak said.