



International Programs Expand Horizons

By Kathleen Mortensen

For senior Cristina Smith, her campus is the world — or at least a small corner of it. The Boise State English linguistics major, who lived abroad for three years during high school, will spend five weeks this summer living with a family in Morelia, Mexico, while attending classes to learn Mexican culture and improve her Spanish language skills.

Thanks to the many international programs offered through the university's Division of Extended Studies, students like Smith can travel to 19 different countries for academic programs ranging from a few weeks in the summer to a full school year. The university plans to send more than 100 students overseas this year alone.

Hundreds of others can expand their global awareness without ever leaving town by sharing classes or living quarters

with one of the 250 foreign students studying at Boise State, including the 30 or so Japanese students from Asia University who come to study in Boise each spring semester. In all, foreign students on campus represent 55 countries and an array of cultures.

However it's achieved, international diversity is considered a definite boon to the educational process.

"Once you've made a connection with another country, there's always a connection," says Corrine Henke, coordinator of the university's Studies Abroad program. International news becomes more personal when you know someone in that country, she says. "Suddenly it's not about politics, it's personal."

Boise State's Studies Abroad program was launched in 1974 by the late Pat Bieter,

PROFESSOR ANSWERS ECOTOURISM QUESTIONS

Kathleen Mortensen

For some people, travel is a matter of "where." For Nina Ray, it's also a matter of "why."

The Boise State marketing professor recently completed ecotourism research in the Galapagos Islands, comparing sources of information used to plan an ecotourism trip (defined as responsible travel to natural areas) vs. a traditional vacation. She also looked at the types of learning experiences and natural features the travelers — part of a Nature Conservancy program — found most interesting.

The resulting paper, "Galapagos Tourism: Darwin's Country of Origin of Species," was presented at the Pan-

Pacific Conference in Viña del Mar, Chile, in late May.

"The research focuses on one of the world's best known sites for ecotourism and conservation," says Ray, who has conducted similar research in Costa Rica and the Easter Islands.

"These tourists definitely visited the Galapagos to learn more about nature and see the mammals and plants which so inspired Charles Darwin," says Ray.

Ray became interested in ecotourism after teaching a class on the subject in Heredia, Costa Rica, in spring 1997.

In late June, Ray presented another paper, "Rolling Along: Preliminary Investigations into the Tourism Needs and Motivations of the Mobility Disabled," to

the World Marketing Congress in Cardiff, Wales. Her research, which looks at the challenges faced by disabled travelers, was inspired by a cousin with a spinal cord injury.

Ray's research looks at "the importance of the U.S. disabled market, especially with regard to travel and tourism," she says, noting there are approximately 36 million disabled American travelers.

Between the two conferences, she spent time in Ireland with fellow marketing professor Gary McCain studying the role heritage travel (travel related to tracing family roots) plays in ecotourism. Ray says she became interested in that field after tracing her own family roots in Belfast, Ireland. □

then a professor of education and later a state representative. Bieter created a one-year program in Oñate, Spain, that immersed 75 college students in Basque culture. Despite the political tension that characterized the end of the era dominated by dictator Francisco Franco, the program was a huge success and is still flourishing more than 25 years later.

Stephanie Hunt, International Programs director, says students realize there's a greater need than ever to expand their horizons in order to be competitive. "They're preparing to be global leaders," she says. "Studying abroad is a great way to expand the mind."

And that works both ways. Jorge Alavez Garcia spent the spring semester at Boise State as part of an exchange program with Monterrey Tech in his native Guadalajara. Gaining international experience will help him be more successful in the long run, he says.

"My major is finance, and the United States is a big financial center of the world," he says. "I'll go back to Mexico and apply all the things I learn here with local companies. I think I will find a better job and be able to better help society."

Erich White, coordinator of the Intensive English Program, says bringing those international students to campus bridges cultural gaps from both directions. Not only do the international students learn English language skills and American culture, their Boise State counterparts are often led to question their own assumptions about their foreign neighbors.

"The [foreign] students are not always fluent in English, so the Boise State students have to come part way as well," he says. "They have to work out language and cultural conflicts. For many students, this is their initial contact with another culture. By the time some of them are juniors and seniors, they're looking at enrolling in exchange programs themselves."

Boise, with its low crime rate, scenic Greenbelt, nearby whitewater rivers and ski resort, has become an attractive option for foreign students, Hunt says. "Many international people think of the United States as violent. Idaho is such a safe community in an idyllic natural environment."

Once students arrive, they often recruit friends and family from back home, thus increasing the international student enrollment. "We build on personal connections," Hunt says. "We have one family from Spain that has sent five children here. Another from Guatemala has sent three."

Henke says that in the end, international programs benefit the community as a whole. "Boise lacks a lot of diversity," she says. "This lets them see another perspective. It's great for them to see the other side — to learn a new language and gain a better insight into the culture."

For Smith, it's simply a stepping-stone to her life dream. "I want to be able to make friends and build relationships," she says. "I hope to visit at least one Spanish-speaking country every year." □



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