

## It's One World, but Your Assignment is in a Different Culture

In the 1970's at Macalester I was enthusiastic about the prospects for world citizenship. I had not thought about this very much in the intervening years (it was not required), but I had a vague recall of it on the trip to Germany. On my second day there I discovered how naïve was the concept of a world citizenry. On this day I first interpreted the political posters from the elections in the state of Saxon-Anhalt. Many had similar slogans as those used in the U.S. against the NAFTA treaty a few years earlier. On this day I changed my ideas about a world citizenry—that ideal is not viable. In Germany, I conceived of our developing two “personalities” or “personas.” One is the personality or persona of our native homeland. The other is a second “face” that we put forward in the international arena. Our international face is shaped by our native personality. It is also shaped by the diversity that we as the primary inhabitants of this planet need for survival.

*Recommendation: Use your assignment to develop an “international personality.”*

I suggest an international personality will make your international assignment more fulfilling. Maintain your cultural base, and also adopt an additional personality oriented towards internationalism and commonality. This brought me closer to my hosts and they often reciprocated. You will probably find as did I that your international assignment will be doubly good when experienced through your national and international personalities.

### Summary

These are my observations on teaching and learning from a recent international assignment. I taught well but learned much more. Good motivation and preparation, a collegial attitude, and an international perspective and personality are all keys to successfully teaching and learning abroad.

## From Kennesaw to Buenos Aires and Back

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As progressive universities worldwide struggle to remake themselves in the face of the traditional stereotype of elite, ivory tower retreats, their success can often be measured in the degree to which the new academy is able to make a substantial impact on real world concerns and participate directly to alleviate social problems and influence social practice. Service to the community has become as important as the more abstract contribution that a university makes to expanding knowledge. Clearly the best programs do both.

Examples of change may be found in the Welfare to Work (WTW) program in which Kennesaw State University's (KSU) Continuing Education department participates, and in projects such as the health exams KSU's nursing students assist faculty in performing at Atlanta area health fairs. This evolutionary change signals a new function for the American university as it works to harness its considerable intellectual and human resources for the benefit of the broader community of which it must be seen as an intrinsic part. It should not be surprising, perhaps, that there is a striking parallel in the changes occurring in universities in Argentina.

During a summer 1998 Faculty Development Seminar to Buenos Aires, Argentina, members of the KSU Faculty learned about two service oriented programs in which Argentine universities are involved and which mirror our concerns and interest in serving the community. University

education at public institutions in Argentina is free. In fact, it may surprise some Americans to learn that Argentine universities have extremely high student populations: Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA), for example, has a student body of approximately 200,000. However, the extreme poverty in some sectors of the population works against the development and success of long-term educational goals for many young people. In response to the large gap between the formally educated (whose job opportunities and social position are both strong factors in their economic viability), and the generally uneducated, the Ministry of Labor in Buenos Aires initiated in 1994 a program through which universities and other organizations might provide basic skills training for an identified sector of the community. Working in collaboration with those offering training courses, companies and businesses agreed to hire the participants in an arrangement not unlike that of our Welfare to Work program (1997).

While in Buenos Aires, three KSU faculty were invited to visit with the Minister of Labor, Erman Gonzalez, to discuss the role Argentine universities are playing in the Ministry's project of integrating 280,000 individuals into its service learning system by the millennium called “Proyecto Joven,” or “Project Youth.” The program constitutes a social and educational challenge requiring both financial and intellectual resources. Participants are paid a weekly wage while enrolled in the courses of their choice;

all educational materials are supplied; and they are even provided with meals and compensated for childcare expenses while in the program. The commitment extends beyond Buenos Aires to communities throughout Argentina and brings together some of society's most disparate members: its educated elite and economically advantaged, and its dispossessed classes.

Representing the Argentine University system were the Dean of the Faculty of Science and Technology of our host university, Universidad del Salvador, Dr. Miguel Guerrero, and two teachers who had participated in the program, Mirta Pietragallio and Edith Barreiro. Guerrero described how the program has integrated the university into the formation of the work force, establishing a strong link between the economic and educational structures of society which, although they have always been allied, now work more effectively to meet the needs of those who have traditionally not been involved in their systems. These are the undereducated youth, who, in an age of rapidly developing technology, see their opportunities to enter the labor market diminishing more quickly than ever.

To prevent the growth of an emerging class of individuals who have no access to either continuing education or to dependable employment, Proyecto Joven has designed a win-win situation in which universities and other institutions of education create and implement courses to prepare the participants for internships in the marketplace. Of course, the initiative has not been without its particular challenges. For example, it has often been difficult for project managers to ascertain that all participants meet the program's initial criteria; additionally, grounds for exclusion from specific courses were frequently so ill defined that clearly unsuitable participants could not be effectively dissuaded from joining courses in which they could not possibly succeed, or in which their physical disabilities precluded their chances of gainful employment. An extreme example was the case of a man with one leg who entered a training course for hospital orderlies who were required to lift and carry immobile patients. He could not be turned away due to the lack of any mechanism for doing so.

Classes were generally held daily for six to twelve weeks, and were followed by internships scheduled for eight weeks. However, many participants move directly into full time employment. According to Pietragallio and Barreiro, the universities faced unanticipated challenges in preparing often radically nontraditional students to meet the needs of companies involved. The eligibility profile for the program indicated that participants should be over sixteen years of age, unemployed, have no more than high school education, be living at the poverty level, and lack any special labor skills. For the first phase of the project, 89,000 (of the estimated 100,000) individuals took part in any one of approximately 6,000 courses offered. A large majority of these students needed not only a review of such basic skills such as answering telephones properly but also general instructions in personal hygiene and social etiquette. Although this was not part of the project's initial

plans, this increased participants' chances of getting and keeping jobs.

Statistics show that from the participating companies' point of view, 84% believed that the students were able to "acquire work habits of discipline, punctuality and personal presentation." Furthermore, 87% held that the interns were able to integrate themselves into the company. In tracking early participants, project managers found that after one year, 71% of the men held jobs (whereas 18% had done so previously), and 52% of women were employed, while only 11% had ever held a job before entering the program.

Proyecto Joven, is a nationwide program, much like the United States Government's Welfare to Work program, in which a university or other educational organization participates, but its regularly enrolled students are not generally involved. However, Argentine University students are also involved in localized service learning projects much like those at KSU. At the Universidad del Salvador, for example, the university has a contract with a company that provides the government with statistical data. As a part of their training, a group of computer science students have joined together to form a subsidiary company that gathers and analyzes statistical data. They are currently working on the Year 2000 Census for the city of Buenos Aires. Giving the students the opportunity to apply the computer skills that they are developing in their university careers and supplying them with the tools and technology to put into practice some computer service for the city government means that students can both learn and earn. While students at the Universidad del Salvador do get paid for their work on this project, computer science students at KSU do not receive compensation for the service projects in which they are involved, either with for-profit or not-for-profit companies. They do, however, earn course credit. Likewise, service learning projects in which KSU nursing students participate provide those students with valuable clinical experience as well as credit hours. However, their participation in service projects—from implementing an abstinence based pregnancy prevention program for adolescent/disadvantaged individuals through Girl, Inc, to working in the indigent health care clinic for the underserved at Cobb Health Partners—is not compensated monetarily.

Clearly both American and Argentine universities, have moved out of the ivory tower and into the city itself. By providing training to teachers and managers of social welfare programs such as Welfare to Work's Project IDEAS and Proyecto Joven, by offering courses in practical employment skill, by monitoring programs through workshops and conferences, and by serving the community in education, in social development and in economic advancement, the university has broadened its purpose of reaching through teaching.