IU Associate Professor of French and Minority Studies Scooter Pégram earned a spot on last fall’s Top 25 University Professors in America list based on students’ reports to RateMyProfessors.com. In the more than 15 million ratings of 1.4 million professors, students can be brutal and are never afraid to register their dissatisfaction. IU Northwest students registered just the opposite, unanimous in their approval, their comments rampant with superlatives and exclamation points. Among the more moderate ones are:

**Passionate, inspirational, caring, positive, happy.**

*He does whatever he can for his students to do well and learn.*

*Tons of passion in his teachings and genuine interest in his students.*

*He will make you love learning.*

*I never learned so much in one class than I did in this one!*

*Helps you to examine the world in a new way.*
Pégram gets perfect scores (5 out of 5) for helpfulness and clarity, but apparently his courses are not an easy A. Students award him a mere 3.4 out of 5 for “easiness.”

At IU Northwest, Pégram teaches French at all levels, Canadian Studies, and Caribbean Studies, the last a course that he designed and that he has taught since 2004. He found his international perspective as a child wading through encyclopedias at the library. “The more I read, the more that I wanted to get out there and explore.”

As a university student he did just that. “The cheapest options were my only options. I ate street food, stayed in housing where locals would stay, eating, sleeping, shopping, and doing everything in the way locals do.” He has been to 115 countries including places like Laos, Nepal, Tajikistan, Togo, and Burkina Faso, as well as all countries like Haiti, Belize, and Curaçao that figure in his Caribbean Studies course. “I may carry a Canadian passport, and I own a small house in the Guatemalan rainforest, but I view the entire planet as my home. I define myself as a global citizen, and I would not wish to limit myself to one place when it is the entire planet that I call home.”

He is particularly proud of his Caribbean Studies course and has given it special attention in his travels to the places involved in the Triangle Trade that underlies the cultures of that area and occupies several of the early weeks of the class. “My intention is to give students as much firsthand knowledge as possible. I have perused documents, records, and diaries in the major European centers of the Atlantic slave trade, and hopscotched up and down the West Africa coast visiting slave forts and other important research areas. Understanding how it feels to stand outside and cut sugar with a machete for hours makes for a better, and far more important narrative in my lectures. The same goes for describing the smells of slave forts in places like Ghana and Sénégal, or a Voudou ceremony in Ouidah, Bénin, or Rastafari acknowledging ‘Jah’ in a ‘reasonings’ ceremony, or dancing to soca music on a float during a Trinidad Carnival, or even cramped public transportation in the Caribbean or in Africa, or the life of immigrants in the Caribbean diaspora in Toronto. I provide students with photos, video, and stories of myself in the very places that I am describing. That, along with a smile and good dose of humor, goes a long way. Students retain information and are captivated by what they are learning.”

For Pégram, studying the Caribbean separate from the rest of Latin America is important. “The Caribbean has deeper connections with Africa than the rest of Latin America. The rest of Latin America has a more profound connection with indigenous cultures than the Caribbean. For the impact on slavery and the massive riches produced from things like sugar, only Brazil comes close. Most people do not view the Caribbean as playing a pivotal role in world history, but had it not been for sugar’s dominance for three centuries, the world would have developed politically and historically in far different ways.”

Students who take Caribbean Studies come from all schools and disciplines on the Gary campus. “The majority of students at IU Northwest are ‘first-generation students,’ many of whom have not travelled much. I do my best to bring a piece of the world to them that would otherwise be inaccessible.”

Pégram works hard to convey the international perspective, both in the Caribbean course and in French classes. “Those of us who teach French have a duty to see the world through its multicolored mosaic because of the wide reach of French (45 countries or more speak it officially). I make sure that the diversity of that language is given its due. After all, in a few years, Kinshasa, Congo, will pass Paris as the world’s largest French-speaking city.”

Surprised by the national recognition for his student ratings, Pégram measures the impact of his courses by the response of alumni. “I often receive postcards, emails, and other messages when they do get the chance to travel, and these alums often thank me for opening up their minds in ways that make venturing to the various places more rewarding. All this really means a lot to me. Anytime that a current or former student of IU Northwest tells me that they now view the world a bit more differently, I smile.”

Left: Internationalists commit to facing unfamiliar and uncomfortable circumstances. Pégram admits he was “terrified” when this photo was taken in Haiti.