During the past year, many Americans learned more about Spain than we had since grade school: Columbus may have gotten short shrift in 1992, but Barcelona hosted the most festive Summer Olympic Games in recent memory; King Juan Carlos and Queen Sofia noted the end of an era by meeting with President Chaim Herzog of Israel to commemorate the 500th anniversary of the expulsion of the Jews; and Seville was home to the international Expo '92.

Another anniversary commemoration was held last year by Spain's largest savings bank, "la Caixa," as it celebrated the 10th anniversary of its Graduate Fellowship Program—a program which has been administered by Indiana University's Office of International Programs in Bloomington since 1985. Although less heralded than the lighting of the Olympic torch, the "la Caixa" Fellowship Program embodies a farsighted vision for the scientific, educational, and cultural development of Spanish society.

Each year, following a highly competitive process, "la Caixa" selects forty young Spanish scholars whom it then funds generously for up to two years of graduate study in the U.S. In September, the Dean of International Programs and one other distinguished IU professor participate in this selection process, interviewing the finalists in Madrid and Barcelona. These "la Caixa" Fellows come from throughout the country and represent the most talented products of Spanish higher education. The Fellowship Program is open to all fields of study—Fellows are musicians, mechanical engineers, linguists, architects, veterinary scientists, visual artists, and law students.

Following the selection process, Louise Siffin, the IU "la Caixa" Program Coordinator, assists the Fellows in choosing and applying to U.S. universities. While larger universities are generally familiar with the Spanish educational system, some institutions require assistance from the IU "la Caixa" Office in interpreting and gauging the standards under which the Fellow has been educated at the undergraduate level in Spain. Once Fellows are placed, Ms. Siffin monitors their progress and offers assistance to each Fellow throughout his or her stay in the United States.

Spanish tax law offers benefits to certain institutions that contribute a percentage of profits to social, educational and cultural projects, and "la Caixa" devotes 50% of its profits.
The 1993 “la Caixa” Fellows are welcomed to the orientation program on the Bloomington campus on the occasion of a reception at Woodburn House on August 19 hosted by the Dean of International Programs. Chancellor Herman B Wells was among the many guests who greeted the Fellows. The reception featured a barbecue and live music by The Humdingers.

(Photos courtesy of M. Simons, IU Media & Teaching Resources, Bloomington)

annually to such programs. While “la Caixa” supports a number of traditional social welfare programs, it also invests in less traditional ones such as AIDS research. The Graduate Fellowship Program was the idea of Sr. José Vilarasau, President and CEO of the bank and currently a member of President Ehrlich’s International Council. Sr. Vilarasau first visited IU in May 1993 to participate in the Council’s second annual meeting and had the opportunity to meet with a former “la Caixa” Fellow, Ms. Monserrat Guilla, who has just finished a graduate degree in computer sciences at IU.

Although some “la Caixa” Fellows attend Indiana University, many do not, accepting offers of admission from such institutions as Harvard, Stanford, the Pratt Institute, Cornell, and Chicago Medical School. Each August, however, all members of the latest convocatoria arrive at IU Bloomington for a week-long orientation program to help them become familiar with an American university setting. Used to an urban educational environment in Spain, the Fellows are generally surprised at the beauty of the Bloomington campus and its extensive facilities. During last year’s orientation program, a Fellow embarking on an MBA program at Harvard indicated he might have chosen differently, had he only known all that Indiana University had to offer.

Since the Program’s inception, several hundred Fellows have returned home to contribute in their respective fields to Spanish society at the highest levels. Enriched by their personal and intellectual experiences in the U.S., the “la Caixa” Fellows also return to Spain with an appreciation of Indiana University’s abiding commitment to the international arena.

For further information on the “la Caixa” Graduate Fellowship Program, contact Louise A. Siffin, Program Coordinator, at 201 N. Indiana Ave., Indiana University, Bloomington IN 47405. Telephone: 812-855-7072.