IU-South Bend Psychologist Directs Social Action Project Linking Nigeria and Michigan

In these days of specialization and turf wars, a cooperative venture which involves people from differing professional and personal backgrounds may seem out of step with the times. Yet the Social Action Project (SOCACT) is an international exchange program between Benton Harbor, Michigan, and Aba, Nigeria, which capitalizes on the very characteristics which tend to divide people and places. SOCACT Project Director and IU-South Bend psychology professor Dé Bryant believes that today's complex problems require equally diverse approaches in solving them. To implement this objective, she directs an international, interracial team of American and Nigerian educators, students, and professionals from various fields, including the business community.

Dr. Bryant, a specialist in community psychology, developed this exchange program to be fundamentally about education and empowerment by "acting as a catalyst for people taking charge of their lives." The SOCACT program encompasses social science research, as well as more personalized projects developed to empower members of the two communities. These "people projects" include the intergenerational program, Building Unity Between Old and Young (BUOY), and the Pen Pals/Sister Families program, to link members of the two communities in a more personalized cultural exchange. SOCACT also has developed the Children's Community Theater in Benton Harbor to assist young people in working on self-esteem and self-expression.

The Social Action Project also addresses structural problems within these communities through such programs as the improvement of Aba's educational system by assisting local educators in developing a model primary-level curriculum. The SOCACT team is also exploring a curriculum for the Benton Harbor school system to highlight the achievements of blacks in America. The project team is currently working to establish a public library in Aba, as the community lacks library facilities.

In January, Dr. Bryant is taking American members of the team to Aba to confer with their Nigerian colleagues. On this visit, they will also deliver books collected for Aba's new public library and begin working with the community's educators and parents on curriculum binders for the model school. During this trip, American members of SOCACT will also gather information concerning the dance traditions of Aba, which will be featured in the spring performance of the Benton Harbor Children's Community Theater.

This international exchange project is implemented through the activities of a core team working in the neighborhoods of each community, with information flowing both directions within the SOCACT network. Current participants in the SOCACT program represent a cross-section of organizations and institutions. Indiana University plays a significant role by funding major parts of the project. On the South Bend campus, psychology professor Bryant has collaborated with members of the Education Department on SOCACT projects. Administrators of Benton Harbor's Berrien County Juvenile Center, which operates a school for its residents, have been active in SOACT's cultural exchange program. Nigerians involved in business and tourism have also contributed to the project through providing information regarding cultural and international affairs.

Individuals interested in working on the Social Action Project are welcome, with course credit available for IU-South Bend students. For further information, contact Project Director Dé Bryant at (219) 237-4447 or (616) 925-7044.

IU Student Named 1994 Rhodes Scholar

The Office of International Programs wishes to congratulate Zachary Ziliak, an IU-B undergraduate and Wells Scholar, on his selection as one of this year's 32 Rhodes Scholars. Zachary, a native of Jasper, Indiana, began his undergraduate studies at Indiana University as one of 20 students in 1990's first class of Wells Scholars. This IU undergraduate fellowship program, established in honor of Chancellor Herman B Wells, is awarded to exceptionally promising high school seniors and offers four years of full support.

In Zachary's undergraduate studies at Indiana University, he has pursued five majors—math, physics, German, Japanese, and linguistics. As a Wells Scholar, Zachary was also able to study abroad in Germany during his sophomore year. Despite his intensive program of academic studies, Zachary volunteers at a homeless shelter and is active in the physics club and Alpha Tau Omega, IU's first substance-free fraternity. In addition, he teaches and offers "help sessions" for undergraduate math students, and has been employed to work on a physics experiment. As a 1994 recipient of the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship, Zachary is to begin graduate studies at Oxford University in the fall.