All aboard!

Professor Reflects on Semester at Sea

If you could choose to take, or teach, courses abroad for a semester or a year, which would be the ideal? Settling down in one country, where you could immerse yourself in language, culture and society, or crossing the globe, stopping along the way to see a bit of one place and a bit of another and a bit of yet another?

I’m not in a position to answer that question, even for myself. But, having spent a semester at sea, as part of a collegiate program called “Semester at Sea,” I can address some of the pros and cons of the non-immersion option. Semester at Sea is a credit-giving, college-level enterprise run by the University of Pittsburgh’s land-based Institute for Shipboard Education. Each semester for the last 35 years, hundreds of students from U.S. and international colleges and universities have circled the globe, stopping in nine or ten ports and taking courses that in most cases transfer back to their home institutions. The idea is to offer a mix of academic and on-shore experiences, the one complementing the other, for an educational experience unlike anything one could have at a land-based university anywhere in the world.

The fall voyage goes west: from Vancouver to Ft. Lauderdale, by way of several countries in Asia, the Middle East and Europe. The spring voyage—the one my husband, George Juergens, and I took—carried us from the Bahamas to Seattle, by way of Venezuela, Brazil, South Africa, Kenya, India, Vietnam, Cambodia, the Philippines, Hong Kong, China and Japan.

I had initially thought of this sort of venture as a bit crazy, not least because, though I’d never actually been on a ship, I knew from a history of car sickness that I’d be something of a mess, casting about at sea for 100 days. I also wondered what it would be like to be cooped up with lots of people I didn’t know for days at a time, only to be “let out of the pen” to scramble about one country after another for five-day stretches.

My field is journalism and my particular interest is in international communications. At IU, I routinely teach an undergraduate course that deals with the media of other countries. I offered to teach a version of this class and a news- and feature-writing class on the ship. My husband put in to teach a course in the history of the city and one on the history of sport, drawing from several courses he has taught at IU.

The Pros of a Semester on the Go

It goes without saying the four- or five-day visits to 12 countries within a little over three months doesn’t give one a lot of opportunity to dwell on any particular country in any great depth. Indeed, though we had nine, 10 or 11 days between docking in the early ports, by the time we reached Vietnam, we landed in a new harbor every three or four days. Not much opportunity to learn to say anything more than “hello” and “goodbye” in a new language.

And yet... Because everyone on the ship was heading the same direction; because everyone’s classes attempted to focus on aspects of the place we were next going; because we were prepped through both a daily “core” course and through evening films and cultural presentations—because of all this, we climbed off the gangway each time with at least an adequate knowledge to get us started, and with a collective sense of great adventure. Some went off on independent travel; others took advantage of trips planned by the program. But in the end, for all of us, there was a sense of connection between people and places that instilled its own lessons.

The Cons of Roaming the World

It probably goes without saying that spending day and night with 650 undergraduates, 50 or so
SEMINER AT SEA from p. 8

faculty and staff, and another 50 “se-

nors” aboard a ship the size of two foot-

ball fields can become a bit confining.

Too, we found that on-shore activities

often veered heavily toward a level of

consumerism one likely would not see

at a land-based campus. And, yes, I did

have my bouts of seasickness.

For me, though, these were lesser is-

sues than an unexpected sensation of a

“whetted appetite.” How can you spend

a day in Madras, another in Delhi, an-

other in Agra, another in Varanasi and

not want to shout, “Wait! Let me stop.

Show me more.” On Semester at Sea,

there is no stopping, not, at least, until

you return home.

It’s trite, but true, to say that returning

home has provided fresh perspec-

tives. I see things differently; the

interrelationships among nations and

peoples and issues; the courses I teach

and what I might do to enhance them;

my own life as a teacher, a student and

an American citizen. If I now had the

opportunity to choose to visit just one

of the 12 countries from the semester-

long, SAS experience, however, I am not

at all sure I know where I’d go.

– Bonnie Brownlee,
School of Journalism, IUB

MUSIC from p. 1

Articles in Part II include such topics

as the integration of music with other

performances of art such as dance and

healing rituals; theory and technology

applied to musical notation and scales;

concepts of time and timbre in perform-

ance; influences of Islam and Latin

America on African music; the spread

of the guitar; crossovers between popular

music and traditional practices; and

a new area of musical creativity, the com-

position of African art music.

In Part III, which comprises close to

half of the volume, there are analytic

studies by region (north, west, central,

east, and south) of individual musical

cultures (e.g. Hausa, Kru, Shona, Tuareg,

Yoruba) or countries (e.g. Central Afri-

can Republic, Madagascar, Sierra Leone,

Somalia, Zaire).

The book is richly illustrated with pho-

tographs, drawings, maps, graphs, mu-

sical and prosodic notations of many

kinds, and a compact disc containing

audio examples relating to discussions

in the articles. A 3,000-term glossary,

using the respective orthographies of dif-

ferent African languages, defines differ-
ent musical concepts and genres, pro-

vides the names of various ethnic

groups, and gives brief descriptions of

the musical instruments cited in the vol-

ume. There are also selective guides to

publications, recordings, and films and

videos devoted to African music.

– RMN

Donation Memorializes School

of Education’s Willis Porter

Since the advent of the economic crises in Asia, a number of donations

have been received by Indiana University’s Office of International Ser-

vices for academic year 1997-98. A major gift of $5000 has been given to

set up a special award, the Willis and Isabelle Porter Memorial Award.

Student awards and grants made from this special fund are primarily

to assist international students affected by the Asian financial crisis.

From the mid-1950s until his retirement in 1977, the late Willis Porter was

instrumental in developing the School of Education’s international dimension.

He led one of IU’s oldest and most ambitious collaborative programs,

helping universities in Thailand establish their first college degrees in

education. He also helped carry out other highly successful educa-

tional projects in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia.