Student Teachers Enthusiastic About New Program in India

She thought she would end up going to Ireland, but when India was offered as a new option in the IU School of Education's Overseas Student Teaching Project, Wendy Gray jumped at the chance. "I just knew I would never get another opportunity if I didn't go to India," she said quite simply.

A native of Wabash, IN, who had never traveled far from home, Gray immersed herself for eight weeks in a culture as different as any she could imagine, and returned home determined to do more teaching abroad.

The Overseas Project, an optional program for 4th year education majors preparing for a career in teaching, offers some 70 student teachers the opportunity to supplement their Indiana teacher training by an additional eight weeks abroad in an English-speaking country such as Australia, England, Ireland, New Zealand, Scotland, and Wales. Directed by Laura Stachowski, the program collaborates with the Wisconsin-based Foundation for International Education in placing IU students abroad for short-term assignments. In preparation for these experiences, student teachers spend the preceding year taking special courses and learning as much about the host country as possible. In addition to being attracted by travel and working abroad, students who opt for the overseas program also receive graduate credit.

India became available as an option for the first time in 1997, and four IU students have chosen so far to go there. Gray, an early childhood specialist who returned earlier this year, was assigned to the DAV Public School—actually a private school—in Amritsar, Punjab State in northwestern India, a town of about 400,000. She taught a 3rd grade class of 45 students whose fluency in English, perfect handwriting, and abilities in math amazed her, more comparable to fifth grade levels in the United States.

What impressed her most, however, was the enormous respect students show for their teachers, and their enthusiasm for learning. "They just love school!" she said, still finding that remarkable. For her part, she soaked up as much of her new surroundings as possible, doing yoga meditation.

"Those who choose to go to India have to have inner strength and fortitude to deal with some of the things they will encounter."

— Laura Stachowski
Director, Overseas Student Training Program

The third grade students and teacher, Inderjit Singh, pose eagerly for Wendy Gray’s camera.

please see
TEACHING IN INDIA, p. 11
national programs, including the ASEAN Student Assistance Awards Program and the ASIA-HELP loan program. These programs, funded by multinational businesses and philanthropic organizations, reviewed applications from all over the U.S.

IUB was permitted a maximum of twelve nominations. Eleven students received loans or grants. These awards require matching funds from the institution. The IU President's office, the Bloomington campus administration, and the new Asian Culture Center allocated special funds that were used to provide these matching funds. Through the support of IU Vice President and Chief Financial Officer Judith Palmer, the President's office has continued its allocation so that matching funds are available for future rounds.

The economic crisis in Asia has highlighted a change in the character of the work of offices like the Office of International Services. Until recently, universities expected only a small minority of international students to have persistent financial difficulties. Now, more and more international students must package various kinds of financial assistance, in the way that U.S. students have done for years. And international students are asking OIS how to do that.

An important part of that package is the education loan, long used by domestic students to finance their education. International students—and financial institutions in their home countries—are just becoming aware of this concept. Citibank Japan, for example, now offers education loans up to ¥6,000,000 to Japanese students enrolled at U.S. universities. Banks in other countries are exploring similar programs.

Most international students can meet this requirement. IU has, for almost a year now, actively explored the development of loan programs which allow students to have a home-country cosigner. Such programs, now in the works at several international financial institutions, will serve not only students in an immediate crisis, but the vast number of students who still consider a U.S. university education as their primary objective in years to come.

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TEACHING IN INDIA  from p. 5

Teaching in India, from p. 5

Chad Norman, the first program participant to go to India, found the experience "truly enlightening." He especially appreciated the mutual compassion and respect he observed in such an extremely diverse and centuries-old society. "I hope that some of this age-old wisdom will rub off on me," he said.

Currently, student teachers Jeremy Voyles and Tara Wargel are preparing for their trip to India later this academic year. Voyles, who will leave in March 1999, chose a site in the foothills of the Himalayas because he wanted a place that "didn't fit the mold." Stachowski agrees, saying that "those who choose to go to India have to have inner strength and fortitude to deal with some of the things they will encounter." Wargel, an anthropology student with an interest in teaching, will be going to Madras.

Stachowski, pleased by the evident enthusiasm of these students for the India program, says she plans to add Taiwan to the list of countries available for the overseas program. In the meantime, she is preparing to host a seminar in March 1999 that will bring to the Bloomington campus a number of teachers and administrators from around the country who are involved in running overseas practice teaching programs similar to the IU Bloomington one.

—RMN

Wendy Gray at the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the most sacred site of the Sikh religion.