Spanish Journalists Attend Annual ‘La Caixa’ Orientation at IU–Bloomington

In August, Indiana University Bloomington again hosted the annual one-week orientation of students from Spain who have been awarded prestigious graduate fellowships to continue their studies at U.S. institutions under the sponsorship of Spain’s largest savings institution, “la Caixa,” based in Barcelona.

George Walker, dean of Research and the University Graduate School, emeritus professor Alfred Diamant and Christine Barbour, both of the political science department, and John McCluskey of Afro-American Studies. Social activities included a final two-day tour of Chicago.

Unique to this year’s orientation was the presence of a group of Spanish journalists sent by “la Caixa” to observe orientation activities and to interview students and IUB administrators. In an interview with Dean O’Meara, they showed great curiosity about the U.S. system of higher education, asking such questions as how a state institution like IU is funded, how students are recruited and selected, and what national rankings mean and how they are used. They were impressed with the beauty of the IUB campus, the range of academic programs, and the many services provided.

Among the fellows they interviewed, two have already begun their studies at IU’s School of Music. Joan Orpella, who began his professional training as a violinist at age 14 in London, says that he lives for music, dreams of teaching the next generation, and feels that “all the effort and sacrifice are well worth it.” Fellow violinist Ruth Olmedilla, outgoing and extroverted, divides her time happily in Bloomington between classes, concerts, and studying, and plans a career combining teaching and chamber music performances. Overall, “la Caixa” fellows value the Bloomington orientation programs as a wonderful introduction to their stay in the United States, a time when they begin forming friendships that endure long after they return home.

IU’s Office of International Programs has been administering this fellowship program since 1985. Currently, 50 awards are given to those choosing to study in the United States (with a smaller number also awarded for study in England and Germany).

In addition to managing the financial aspects of the program, IU offers placement services for the fellows, who get accepted into some of the most prestigious U.S. institutions (Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Stanford, Chicago, IU School of Music) and in every academic discipline and professional field.

Students who attended the 1998 “16th Convocatoria Orientation” were accompanied this year by Josep-Aton Monfort, coordinator of the U.S.-“la Caixa” program, and his wife, artist Carme Bassa. Programmatic activities included presentations by Patrick O’Meara, dean for International Programs.