IUS Students Learn the Value of Education in Ecuador

On June 7, eight students from Indiana University Southeast will leave for Quito, Ecuador. There they will complete the field research component for the course, Explorations on Diversity Education, taught by Magdalena Herdoíza-Estévez, assistant professor of education at IUS.

IUS, which offers programs in elementary, secondary, and special education; counseling; and educational leadership, created the Summer in Ecuador Program to give students the opportunity to explore issues in global education. Students compare and contrast the educational systems of Ecuador and the United States; learn about the people, the culture, and the environment in Ecuador; identify and reflect on aspects of the Hispanic culture that need to be considered when educating children from this background in the United States; and discover creative ways to integrate multiple cultural perspectives into their teaching.

This summer will be the second time the course will have been taught. In June 2002, 10 students participated in the 3-credit-hour course, which is open to undergraduate and graduate education majors. "I am very much looking forward to students having this experience again," says Herdoíza-Estévez.

Well before their June departure, students participate in a five-day workshop spread over several weeks at IUS. This orientation acquaints them with the cultural history of Ecuador and includes planning for teaching and research projects. Research is compulsory for graduate students and optional for undergraduates. Once they complete these orientation sessions, students are ready for the second phase of the program in Ecuador, which takes place from June 7 to 22.

Field experience in Quito occurs at public and private primary and secondary schools. To prepare the IUS students for this phase, Ecuadorian school administrators select the topics in advance that the U.S. students will teach, such as youth issues or comparative ecology of the two countries. The students then do research and prepare lesson plans before their departure from the United States.

Although Spanish language proficiency is required for the trip, classroom discussions and teaching are conducted in English. Ecuadorian pupils prepare presentations for their visiting teachers on the designated topics. Then the IUS students present their lessons to the class, varying the teaching level according to the students’ grade level and knowledge of English.

During their stay, IUS students live with host families. When they’re not conducting fieldwork, they have time to visit cultural and historical sites in Quito and the neighboring province of Imbabura.

As part of their coursework, the IUS students were required to keep journal entries and write an overall

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reflection upon their return. "In their writings, they express how much they loved their teaching experience in Ecuador and all they learned from it," says Herdoiza-Estévez, "but across the board, the students describe visiting and observing the UNESCO literacy centers and meeting the people there as one of the most powerful experiences of their lives, one that has changed them forever."

Herdoiza-Estévez also points out that "this is the first time that these students have had the opportunity to interact with very poor people, to view their gracious behavior, and to learn the immense value they place on education, as well as the sacrifices they will make to take advantage of it... [The students] notice how they themselves complain about things like homework while these people work hard all day to make a living and then walk for hours to the centers to learn. IUS students quickly come to realize just how much they have taken education for granted in their own lives."

Andrea Gutierrez, an IUS elementary education major who went on the 2002 program, stresses that "we, as teachers and administrators, need to take into consideration the cultural variables such as surrounding environment, teacher-student relationship, the educational goals, the role of families, and the educational resources that have an influence on the child's learning process." Such knowledge will contribute to ensuring the successful transition of Hispanic students into the U.S. school setting.

In fact, last summer's students are becoming more active with the knowledge they have gained from the experience. In addition to presenting their research at conferences, they have organized a campaign to collect school supplies and monetary donations to send to Ecuador.

"What I have learned from this experience and what I have gained has never—and could never—be taught from a textbook," wrote Jennifer Yennes, who participated in the Summer in Ecuador 2002 Program, in her journal. "I learned more in two weeks about people and culture than I ever imagined possible. I will reflect upon my teaching of, meeting, and learning from the indigenous people and surveying the beautiful geography of Ecuador for the rest of my life."

The School of Education summer program is open to School of Education students from any IU campus. Spanish language proficiency is required and enrollment is limited to 16 students. For further information on the program, contact Magdalena Herdoiza-Estévez at (812) 941-2302; e-mail: mherdoiz@ius.edu.

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For more information: homerepages.ius.edu/MHERDOIZ/summer_in_ecuador.htm