

Study abroad opens students' eyes to other cultures

by Melanie Yeager
Knight Ridder Newspapers

Chaotic order.

That's how American-raised Truong Nguyen described the traffic patterns in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, where mo-peds and vendor carts rule the streets. It's a stark illustration, he said, of the cultural differences between the United States and a country in the Far East.

"There, it's like the chicken crossing the road - Frogger, basically," said Nguyen, referring to the computer game that pits a frog against oncoming traffic. And after an exhilarating journey across a Vietnam avenue, he said, few will take American crosswalks and stoplights for granted again.

Therein lies the chief lesson Florida State University students say they gain from studying abroad: The world is filled with people who approach life differently.

"The program is a unique experience that you cannot get in a classroom, reading a book or watching television," said Brian O'Donniley, a senior majoring in history and international affairs who has gone to Croatia twice. "Only making a visit reveals the full, unbiased story of the people on the ground. After participating, I will never again consider a 30-second sound bite sufficient to draw a conclusion on an international issue."

FSU's Office of International Programs is launching five new study sites in four countries - Ghana, Ireland, Germany and South Africa - this summer.

"Interest in traveling to Africa has been growing nationwide," said Jim Pitts, international programs director. "Our motto is 'The World is Your Campus,' and we wanted to give students here in Tallahassee (and elsewhere) the opportunity to personally experience the world in all its diversity."

Students can take photography courses in Accra or Kumasi, Ghana, or study contemporary artists in Johannesburg, South Africa. Cost for each program

depends on the number of weeks and accommodations.

FSU is No. 10 among U.S. research institutions in the number of students studying in foreign lands, according to the Institute of International Education. FSU's numbers have nearly tripled to 1,412 students since 1996. About one-third of those are from other universities and enroll at FSU for a semester just for the international experience. More

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than two-thirds of the participants are female - a figure that follows the national trend.

The number of U.S. college students receiving credit for studying abroad in 1999-2000 - the latest figures known - jumped 11 percent from the previous year to 143,590, according to the institute. Among the trends: Instead of opting for a semester away, students are choosing shorter programs.

When terrorists attacked the United States on Sept. 11, Pitts and Provost Larry Abele were quick to respond - posting a letter online assuring parents that FSU's priority is student security. No FSU students returned prematurely, Pitts said.

A recent institute survey indicates that most American students planned to continue studying overseas, despite the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

"We did notice that some students who had planned to study with us this spring postponed their international plans to a later date," he said. "But ever, it appears that our summer enrollments will be near normal."

Current job market jolts college grads

by J. Linn Allen
Chicago Tribune

When Loyola University senior Lacey Donovan was a freshman, she wanted to major in marketing but decided to change to information technology in part because she felt sure she would end up with a high-paying job.

Oops. Now Donovan, 21, of Neola, Iowa, is hoping an internship she lined up for next semester with a small web development company in Wicker Park, Ill., might end in a job offer, though she's been told there are no guarantees. She's thinking about graduate school as an alternative.

"The jokes with the top students around here used to be about signing bonuses, but now nobody is talking about a signing bonus - it's just, get the job," she said.

Donovan is typical of this year's seniors in many fields, who are coping with a drastic contraction in the entry-level job market, hiring freezes in some areas and heavy competition from laid-off workers and last year's seniors who are still looking.

Members of the Class of 2002 have lowered salary and bonus expectations for the jobs that do exist. That can be a big problem, because many will face paying for student loans and credit-card debts.

"Seniors are starting to be in a panic," said John Bradarich, director of Loyola's internship and career center. "They've heard from the last graduating class, who had offers postponed and some taken away altogether."

A survey by the Collegiate Employment Research Institute at Michigan State University reported that the number of graduates hired right out of college has fallen drastically in the last two years.

Much of the contraction occurred last spring as employers began to feel the effects of the flagging economy, according to institute director Philip Gardner.

Companies "hired in the fall (of 2000), then really had to step back when things started contracting in January, with the dot coms and consulting and manufacturing continued to slow," Gardner said. "Then there was Sept. 11, and consumer spending, transportation, tourism, food and lodging were hit."

The biggest losers will be engineers, computer science and business graduates, Gardner said. They will still have opportunities but should not expect the multiple offers or special incentives of the late 1990s, he added.

To be sure, hiring has not stopped dead and many students will still get jobs, but the squeeze extends over a wide range of fields and affects even graduates of top programs.

Hiring freeze

Lauren Arestie, a mid-year graduate from Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism, said she interviewed with recruiters from several newspapers during the fall but was told they had hiring freezes and could only take interns.

"I heard in the past students com-

ing out of Medill could have any jobs they wanted, that papers were begging and pleading with them to come, but nobody is begging and pleading anymore," she said.

Arestie, 21, from Austin, Texas, said she is hoping to be hired by a paper where she had interned, but an exception would have to be made due to a hiring freeze.

"I'm worried, because I don't want to be at home and be a sponge, sitting on the couch all day," she said.

Arestie has more than \$10,000 in student loans, and like many in her position she's considering going to graduate school.

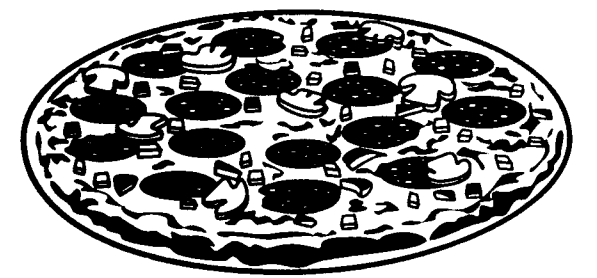
"I'm willing to stay out (of the job market) for a year or two, if I can't find a job or only a low-paying one. I'll go back to school, not have to pay off my loans, and accumulate more debt," she said with a rueful chuckle.

Managing debt
Debt was on the minds of students from schools all over Illinois who recently attended a meeting of the student advisory commission of the state Board of Higher Education, said Katie Cox, 21, an Eastern Illinois University senior from Lovington in central Illinois.

"Some fear after they graduate in May they'll be making less than \$30,000 a year. With student loans increasing, it's difficult to get on our feet," said Cox. She's a political science major interested in public policy.

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