



Dr. Stevan L. Davies stands atop a hillside overlooking Monte Alban. in Mexico



Dr. Stevan L. Davies, right, poses for a picture with Marcus Winter, chief of Oaxacan archaeology at Monte Alban.

He's passionate about his studies

Stevan L. Davies, Ph.D. has walked along the shores of the Dead Sea, climbed 10,000 feet to explore cloud forests in Benito Juarez National Park, savored rare encounters during a South African safari and trekked through Tikal's dense jungles to reach ancient Mayan ruins all while researching the complex and diverse religions and cultures of the world.

His adventurous experiences aside, Davies is a self-proclaimed naturalist who passionately studies everything from ferns to orchids and wildebeests to sea turtles while hiking untamed lands in Mexico, Honduras and other interesting foreign destinations. His musical play list reflects his globetrotting nature, as popular ethnic music from India and Brazil oftentimes plays softly in his dimly lit office. Davies' eclectic nature is also fully displayed on his office walls where images of Buddha and the Arhats complement an icon of the Blessed Mother and other religious symbols.

A Back Mountain resident, Davies shares these divergent episodes in his life with his religious studies students at Misericordia University and through his six academic books and his appearances on international television documentaries.

One common theme is woven throughout his explorations, writings and teachings: He is constantly intrigued by Catholicism and the distinct cultures and religions of the world.

"Professors and scholars need to keep themselves intellectually alive by trying and learning new things," Davies said. "Lifelong learning is a goal for our students and should be a goal for ourselves, too. We can't just keep rehashing what we learned in grade school."

"I was able to create a course on Mesoamerican culture through journeying and reading I've done in recent years focusing on an area I never studied for an advanced degree. I've discovered that if you look for them carefully, opportunities for summer travel and learning are almost always available through the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Freeman Foundation and other sources, including our own Misericordia University," Davies added.

This summer the professor built upon his worldly experiences by participating in The Community College Humanities Association's 2007 Summer Institute, "Oaxaca: Crossroads of a Continent," along with 23 other colleagues from two- and four-year colleges and universities in the United States. It was funded by the National Endowment for

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the Humanities (NEH).

The July 1-Aug. 1 learning expedition introduced educators to the region's significant archeological sites and the Zapotec and Mixtec peoples' native cultures and religions.

Some of the world's leading authors and experts directed the daily excursions and roundtable discussions, including archeologist Marcus Winter who excavated the pre-Columbian Zapotec civilization at Monte Alban.

Today's Oaxaca is a paradox, pitting the past against the present and future. Indigenous people and special interest groups wrestle — sometimes violently — with preserving their ancestors' beliefs and practices while attempting to simultaneously join the 21st century.

"It's a contradiction to maintain the ancient culture and language and also decide to have a decent income and modern life," Dr. Davies said. "You can't really expect to do both, they're incompatible."

"There have been many attempts to make a local craft industry, but the problem is they are tourist based. The political struggle is destroying the tourism industry," he added. "It is a local problem, but last year the main city (City of Oaxaca) was taken over by revolutionaries, and first-world tourists want to relax and certainly not be in the presence of Molotov cocktails."

"There was no real violence when we were there but there was always a threat of it. The result is the indigenous people are poorer because they cannot get their products to tourists. Ironically, the struggle to benefit the indigenous people has ended up doing them considerable economic harm," Davies added.

Ten years ago, Davies participated in a similar institute that was funded by NEH. He studied Mayan culture and archeological sites in Guatemala, Honduras and Yucatan, Mexico, and incorporated those lessons into a course at Misericordia University. His latest educational adventure will also benefit Misericordia's students by enabling the expansion of that course to include new material and new regions for



An APPO encampment proudly displays pictures of Lenin and Stalin in Zocalo's city central plaza in Oaxaca.

study.

Dr. Davies holds a bachelor's degree from Duke University and a doctorate in philosophy from Temple University.

He has taught religion at Misericordia for 29 years. During that time, he has been featured in six nationally televised documentaries and has published six books, including "The Secret Book of John Annotated and Explained."

He has appeared on the Discovery Channel's "Ancient Evidence" series and was featured in a one-hour documentary, "The Miracles of Jesus," that was produced by the BBC.

National Geographic utilized his expertise for a documentary that delved into Jesus' medical techniques after Dr. Davies published, "Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance, and the Origins of Christianity," in 1995.

The cable network, Arts & Entertainment had him appear twice to discuss Jesus' disciples and offer insight into Satan as he is depicted in The New Testament.

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