



Alternative Spring Break in Mexico City

Special Interest Articles

Alternative Spring Break 2009

Mexico City

Alternative Spring Break 2009

The Andes of Ecuador

International Student Union
Annual Potluck

Faculty Visit to Muscat, Oman

Study Abroad Opportunities

NKU Phi Beta Delta Induction

Alternative Spring Break 2009

Mexico City

by Steven Wilkinson and Elizabeth Lorenz

Early morning on the Saturday of spring break eight students and two faculty/staff members of Northern Kentucky University gathered at the Cincinnati airport to depart for Mexico City for the tenth *Alternative Spring Break: Mexico City*. The program is a service learning and cultural exchange program coordinated with the YMCA of Mexico City. NKU students are given the opportunity to fully immerse themselves in the Mexican culture as they live with Mexican families and work at YMCA social service centers. Since the program is not discipline-focus, it attracts students with a wide range of interests. This year's group represented 5 of NKU's 6 colleges and schools, and 9 different majors. Georgeanna Bien-Aime is a management student, Naomi Fairbanks is in elementary education, Michael Fuehner studies physics, Laila Hameen is a graduate student in communications, Kelly Phelan is double majoring in journalism and Spanish, Ellen Nowak is a nursing student, Samantha Shottenkirk is studying Spanish, and Audrey Weatherby is majoring in both art and Spanish. Traveling with the students were Elizabeth Lorenz, who works in the Education Abroad Office, and Steven Wilkinson, a professor in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics.

The YMCA has a strong social service presence in Mexico. The ASB participants obtained a broad view of the delights as well as the problems that Mexico faces through the activities the YMCA organized. The students spent a day at a YMCA community development center in a poor neighborhood in Mexico City. The center serves the area by providing preschool and after-school programs as well as technical classes and medical assistance to nearby residences. Another day was spent at the YMCA's home for street children where they rescue those who have been abandoned to the streets of the city and attempt to reintegrate them back into society. Two days were spent in the rural village of Tepoztlán where the YMCA has a camp that during the school year houses the Becarios Program. Children of poverty stricken families from nearby areas can live at the camp during the week where they are fed, transported to and from their schools, given after-school help with their studies, and provided with many recreational opportunities. A fifth day was spent with students at the YMCA university and at an associated center that operates much like the McDonald's Houses in the US to assist families

that have children diagnosed with cancer. The services that NKU students could and did provide these different centers were the opportunities to learn and practice English with native English speakers as well as the friendly interactions of the various recreational activities and the willingness to pitch in for whatever tasks were required.

Along with the service learning aspect of the program is the cultural exchange. The history of Mexico includes a number of the oldest and most important civilizations of the western hemisphere. Besides visiting with their host families a number of the important and interesting sites in Mexico City, the ASB participants toured as a group UNAM, the largest university in the western hemisphere, the Contemporary Arts Museum, and Teotihuacán, the pre-Aztec city ruins to the north of Mexico City that is home to the Pyramid of the Sun and the Pyramid of the Moon.

This year represents the tenth anniversary of Northern Kentucky University's *Alternative Spring Break* programs. In 1999 seven students and two faculty members took the first *Alternative Spring Break* trip to Mexico City. The idea of an international study abroad program over the week of Northern's spring break has proven to be wildly successful and has grown to over seven programs that visit locations in four different continents. The 2009 trip to Mexico City is the direct descendent of that first *Alternative Spring Break* trip.

2009 also marks the tenth anniversary of the partnership between Northern Kentucky University and the YMCA of Mexico City. This is a partnership that now encompasses three programs:

- The *Alternative Spring Break* to Mexico City
- The *International Business Fellows* program, where NKU Honors business students travel to Mexico City in the month of May.
- PICO where a group of students from the YMCA University in Mexico City travel to NKU for an educational and cultural exchange program for a week in September.



Alternative Spring Break 2009

Building Peace Through Nature Conservation and Environmental Education in the Andes of Ecuador

By Miriam Steinitz Kannan and Leo Calderon

This interdisciplinary course involved students in a unique multicultural experience centered on learning about ethnic tolerance, peace and the role that environmental conservation can play to promote both respect to human rights and respect for the "rights of nature". Students worked for three days, side by side with Ecuadorian high school students planting trees in the hills of the south side of the city of Quito. They traveled to the countryside visiting a recently established broccoli plantation and hiking in the Andes. They experienced mountain ecosystems, visited two lakes, a waterfall and the famous Otavalo Indian market. The students and faculty leaders were also part of the opening ceremonies of the Trude Sojka Cultural House and Holocaust Memorial. This educational center, designated during its opening, as a "Freedom Station" by the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, honors the memory of the Czech -Ecuadorian artist Trude Sojka, a Holocaust survivor who arrived in Ecuador shortly after being liberated from Auschwitz concentration camp, in 1946. More than a Holocaust memorial, this center celebrates resilience, how through art and a love for nature a person can overcome horrifying memories. It also celebrates, with among other things a panel by NKU student Elizabeth Shelley, the role Ecuadorian citizens played in helping Jews escape from Europe during the Holocaust.

No one can express what this trip meant to the students better than the students themselves. Below is a letter by one of the students, Jackson Arnett, followed by a sentence from each student about their most memorable part of the trip.

A thank you letter to Dr. Kannan

Dear Dr. Kannan,

I chose to start off my journal by first thanking you for this opportunity. I gained knowledge on this trip that I would have never gained in a classroom, or elsewhere. I want you to know that going to Ecuador, seeing your mother's art, hearing your expertise about the environment, and all the other things we saw and did has really changed my outlook on things, and has changed my life. I learned a lot from you, and from a lot of other, and often unlikely sources.

From going to Ecuador I learned that I am a citizen of Earth, both in her human community, and as a part of her wonderful and diverse bio-

logical community. When I signed up to go, I expected to learn. I expected to learn about the Holocaust and about the environment, but this trip exceeded my expectations. I learned that we all need to work together as the human community to keep the world clean and beautiful. Because of the knowledge I gained, I will be more conscious in every decision I make. I learned that as people, we have the responsibility to never turn a blind eye. I wondered how the Holocaust and the environment could ever be related. I was enlightened. It all comes down to simple responsibility as citizens. We cannot stand by, and refuse to do anything as millions are killed, or as our environment becomes more polluted. Consciousness is something of which I learned the importance of on this trip. We don't have to be environmental scientists or soldiers who liberate concentration camps to make a difference. We are all connected, and unless we put our differences aside to help confront the world's problems, both involving prejudice, and the environment, we will all be faced with problems the gravity of which we have never seen before.

I learned a lot from some very unlikely sources. Who would have ever thought that Ecuadorian high school students would have something to teach me? They enlightened me. I expected, before we went, that when we went to work with high school students, we were going to act as some kind of mentors. My experience proved quite the opposite. They mentored me, and we learned from each other. I learned that as people, we cannot pretend to have all the answers. We sometimes have to humble ourselves, and accept that the answers to the world's problems might come from some very unlikely resources. If people would just stop and listen, much as I did on that day, we could really solve some of the world's problems. I was humbled by those kids at that school, and if every high school were as conscious as that one, the world would truly be a better place.



Alternative Spring Break 2009
The Andes of Ecuador
Lake Cuicocha



Alternative Spring Break 2009 continued..

Continued from page 2.....

In conclusion, Ecuador was an experience I will never forget. Every person touched my life in a very unique and important way. I hope to return to Ecuador one day. I want to go back, and stay longer. I learned a lot from you, and I hope that you can have more to teach me sometime in the future. As much fun as I had, I will always cherish this memory as a learning experience.

Sincerely,
Jackson Arnett

Comments from the other student participants.

Maridith Yahl: I was privileged to be able to study the artwork of Trude Sojka, mother, artist and Holocaust survivor while in

Ecuador. This has been a wonderful experience personally and for my graduate studies. Personally, her artwork is amazing, I have never seen anything like it. Researching her artwork for school has helped in my understanding of women's experiences during the Holocaust and how she used art as therapy as part of her recovery process.

Osniel Gonzales: My most memorable part of the trip was at the school of INEPE. I was so impressed to learn that they have kids enrolled from a couple of years old all the way to 18 years old. Sadly most of these kids are orphans. I really enjoyed interacting with the students, hearing their opinions about the environment, and working with them in the

school's fields and planting native trees in the area. Another highlight of the trip was meeting the teachers at the school and learning about the curricula they teach. I loved getting into their classrooms and interacting with the students, asking them questions related to class or their general opinions. Being able to participate in this program and getting the opportunity to visit INEPE was definitely a good memory that I will share with the world and treasure in my mind for the rest of my life.

Sara Luse: The one thing I will always carry with me about my trip to Ecuador, was being able to contribute to the INEPE school and seeing the happiness and gratefulness from the students. The students were the most caring and bright children I have ever

met, and being able to work with them and be a role model for them is the most rewarding gift someone could get."

Jennifer Chandler: "The spring break trip to Ecuador was an amazing experience in that it afforded all of us the opportunity to immerse ourselves in the country's unique culture and to learn from the people of this beautiful country."

Elizabeth Shelley: "The most meaningful part of the trip to me was getting to meet the ambassador from Israel and being able to talk with him about the great importance of Holocaust memorials such as the Trude Sojka museum". ***

ISU 18th International Potluck Dinner and Talent Show

International Student Union Potluck Dinner and Talent Show

By Adam Widanski

On the sunny afternoon of April 11, 2009 the members of the International Student Union (ISU) wowed a 300+ size audience with culinary and artistic performances that raised bar standards for ISU's biggest annual event called the International Potluck Dinner and

Talent Show. The packed program of four hours of entertainment throughout the 18th Potluck Dinner resulted in rave program evaluations received from the NKU community, the community at large, and invited VIP's.

Moreover, the new location of the event in the Student Union (SU) Ballroom itself ensured the overall success of the event which would not be possible without the hard

work on the part of various NKU Administrators who supported ISU in transitioning from past performances in Regents Hall to the first performance in the new Student Union Building.

The state-of-the-art audio/video capabilities of the SU Ballroom were indeed effectively utilized by diverse live artistic performances on the part of ISU members and invited performers. Artistic

programs comprised of activities from the World Bazaar, to a Fashion Show, poems, songs, and a richness of dances from various cultures. The International Potluck Dinner also provided the audience with the usual culinary richness of food samples from all over the world. In short, the 18th Annual Potluck Dinner of April 11, 2009 will be remembered as "awesome" by all who attended. ***

Faculty Travel

A Visit to Muscat, Oman

By Elaine Jarchow, Ph.D.

Dr. Salina Shrofel, Associate Provost for Research and Dean of Graduate Studies, and Dr. Elaine Jarchow, Dean of International Education, traveled to Muscat, Oman, in February to present

workshops in Grant Writing and Publishing to the faculty of the College of Education at Sultan Qaboos University. Northern Kentucky University is concluding a U.S. Department of State Middle East Partnership Initiative to strengthen the teaching of English through service

learning. During the Oman visit, meetings were held to complete a curriculum guide, which will be disseminated to Arab Gulf States Colleges of Education, and to complete a comprehensive website. Oman is a beautiful country and Drs. Shrofel and Jarchow were treated to site

seeing tours of the souq and forts and to Arab hospitality at excellent restaurants. The workshops were really well received and several linkage projects between Sultan Qaboos University and Northern Kentucky University were discussed. ***

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Opportunities

International Study Scholarships

The International Study Scholarship was established in order to make education abroad opportunities available to more students. The scholarships will be available for the 2009-2010 academic year. The application form and deadlines are available at <http://studyabroad.nku.edu/start/scholarship.php>.

Academic Exchanges are available for the Spring 2010 semester with our exchange partners. Deadline for application is Friday, September 18, 2009. Exchanges are available at:

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| Edith Cowan University in Australia | Autonomous University of Zacatecas in México |
| National University in Costa Rica | Autonomous University of the State of Morelos in México |
| Aarhus School of Business in Denmark | Cebu State College of Science and Technology in Philippines |
| University of San Francisco in Quito, Ecuador | Babes-Bolyai University in Romania |
| University of Caen Basse-Normandie in France | Peoples' Friendship University of Russia |
| Ludwig Maximilians University in Germany | Glasgow Caledonian University in Scotland |
| Gifu University in Japan | University of Leon in Spain |
| Nanzan University in Japan | National Chengchi University in Taiwan |
| Hansung University in Korea | |
| Jesuit University of Guadalajara: ITESO in México | |

NKU's Chapter of Phi Beta Delta

Zeta Phi Inducts 20 New Members

By Elizabeth Leibach

Twenty new members were inducted into the NKU Zeta Phi chapter of Phi Beta Delta last fall. This international honor society for scholars was originally founded at California State University, Long Beach in 1986. It is the first honor society dedicated to recognizing scholarly achievement in international education. As of December of 2007, 168 chapters have been chartered. NKU's chapter was created on December 15, 2006.

The current NKU chapter consists of faculty, staff, students and alumni engaged in international education including a member of the NKY Chamber of Commerce, Daniele Longo. With Daniele as a member, Phi Beta Delta is learning new ways to engage the international business community and expand our networks of recognized scholarly achievement.

During the induction ceremony, the Zeta Phi chapter elected officers and began considering new ways to make the group more active on campus. As a result, the chapter hosted a spring lecture series to promote international endeavors across campus. The lecture series encompasses the Phi Beta Delta's values of recognizing achievement in international education.

The first lecture was held in March in the lecture hall of the Albright Health Center. The speaker was Adele Dean, Assistant Professor in

the School of Nursing. Adele recently traveled with a group of nursing students to Mexico. The second lecture was held in April and included a panel of Fellows from the International Leaders in Education Program hosted by the School of Education and Human Services through a grant funded by the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX).

For more information about Phi Beta Delta visit the national chapter web site at <http://www.phibetadelta.org/> or contact one of the officers of the Zeta Phi chapter at NKU:

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