By David C. Butty

Cell phones, electronic messaging, videos come and go with such fervor, these afford the means to communicate with folks around the world. As travel has enabled us to have breakfast in Detroit and soothe our aching for an evening of prime cut New York steak on Florida Avenue in Buenos Aires. Do we understand the heritage, beliefs, identities and diversity of the multinational collection of people who make up the world? Do we each know about the person answering our call or at the computer screen? Whether and how much we know is enough so that we do not unintentionally insult them or simply conclude that they are ignorant because they do not speak our language.

Despite the advances in communication technology and transportation (and information continues to be divided by the lack of understanding of cultures other than our own) we work with languages created by different people. We are still worlds apart socially, politically, and culturally. Education is the answer to bridging this gap.

This is why the Wayne County Community College District (WCCCD) has taken an educational step to bridge the cultural divide through the Study Abroad Program.

“Our students need to understand the current events and the shape world events,” said John Bolten, WCCCD's vice chancellor for Student Affairs. “They need to get an appreciation for other cultures and traits, to understand which, I believe, is one of the keys to being a good global citizen and citizen.” Bolten offers this in conjunction with the Office of Public Affairs, coordinates the Study Abroad Program.

Dr. Curtis L. Ivory, WCCCD chancellor, is pleased.

“Studying in another country is a life-changing experience, it gives students a special perspective on the world beyond their own horizons,” Ivory said. “There is no better way to know about another country’s people, language, history, economy, art and politics than being there and seeing for yourself.”

He added that WCCCD students who study abroad are enriched academically and personally and find their jobs today employers look favorably on those who have had international experience.

WCCCD Study Abroad Program

Almost all WCCCD students who study abroad have given the students the opportunity to meet two continents, Africa and Australia. The first trip was in 2002, when 18 students spent 11 days in Ghana. The trip to Australia in 2004 allowed 23 students to spend 13 days exploring classes at the University of Sydney as well as experiencing the culture of Australia’s surf, art and politics than being there and seeing for yourself.

One of the benefits of the Study Abroad Program is that these trips added to the lives of those who participated. Students who went in 2003 to Australia said they would have packed her bags for what became a “life-altering” trip. The trip was a an opportunity of a lifetime. “The trip to Australia was a chance to experience how other people live theirs. It made me see what I was doing here,” said one student.

The students toured the city of Kumasi, the capital of the Ashante region in the western part of Ghana. They also visited the W.E.B. (William Edward Brughard) Dubois Center in Accra, Ghana.

As some of the students were returning from Ghana, they spoke of how meaningful it has been to study abroad and then take a direction their African heritage. For some, it was the coming of age ceremony in Ghana. They were now grown to be able to represent their home country. For others, the trip was personal encounter the level of poverty in their own home. Others commented on how disturbing it was to see people living there is to see people living in substandard homes. They noted that those who were living poorly were those who have been fortunate they have been. At the same time, it was to personally encounter the level of poverty we have in the United States.

“I now try to go beyond television images from other countries to find the truth,” said one student. “I try.”

The trip was a chance to explore sub-Saharan Africa’s forest wilds go about their normal business. Even the brave tend to scream a little prayer as the est point of the bridge is 123 feet in the air and even the brave tend to scream a little prayer as the walk is 250 feet off the ground. The Canopy walk is not for the weak at heart, and it allows one to walk through one of the remaining vestiges of the rainforest of Sub-Saharan Africa.

The students visited the Ghana National Museum, the Kente Museum and the National Museum, and revisited the Kwame Nkrumah Museum, and Park, which remains one of the most visited museums on the continent. The students also visited the Elmina, the slave nation, the Cape Coast Slave Castle. They will always remember the students to visit the W.E.B. (William Edward Brughard) Dubois Center in Accra, Ghana.

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While in Australia, the students explored the world political, economic, cultural and intellectual aspects of the country at the University of Sydney, with visits to the Federal Capital of Canberra.

Rhonda Collier, a student in the Information Science and Technology Program, said different courses in which she had been exposed in the post secondary education taught her to look at things differently. “It was indescribable.”

The students visited the W.E.B. (William Edward Brughard) Dubois Center in Accra, Ghana. The center’s curator led their tour on a hop scotch of the achievement of Pan Africanism. Shown is the grave site of Dubois.

The students took a picture with a march at the Chau Phuax Hue Boulevard in Hanoi, New South Wales.

WCCCD STUDENTS have been taking turns introducing themselves and talking about their disciplines at the Study Abroad Program.

Upon arrival in Accra, the Ashante region, the students were given their Ghanaian name by traditional authorities. “It was a naming ceremony in which we were given our Ghanaian name by traditional authorities.

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A CULTURAL DANCE troupe performed dur- ing a ceremony in Accra.

Personal benefits of studying abroad

• It offers an enriching and an eye-opening experience.

• Learning can extend to the world beyond the professional classrooms walls.

• There is no substitute for living and studying in a foreign country to gain first-hand experience of another culture’s customs, people, and language.

• Students often see it as an experience, which shaped their personalities and character.

• They praise being exposed to new ways of thinking and living, which no classroom can ever teach.

• They broaden their intellectual horizons and deepen their knowledge and understanding of the cultures they study.

• It is almost certain that most return from their experience abroad with a more informed perspective for their future endeavors.

• They gain a first-hand knowledge of how another culture approaches the tasks and challenges of everyday life.

• They have a sense of how the global interna- tional community has become, and an appreciation of its importance in international cooperation.

• They gain a broader understanding of and appreciation for life in the U.S. and perhaps, how it could be improved on the world stage.

Career enhancement

• Study abroad does more than promote scien- tific curricula and personal growth. It can enhance one’s employment prospects, especially in the fields of international business, international affairs and government service.

• Employees increasingly seek employees who have a sense of the world outside their own boundaries.

• They know that students who have completed the programs are likely to possess international experience and other second language skills.

• Students who study abroad are enriched academically and personally and find that these trips added to the lives of those who participated. Students who went in 2003 to Australia said they would have packed her bags for what became a “life-altering” trip. The trip was a an opportunity of a lifetime. “The trip to Australia was a chance to experience how other people live theirs. It made me see what I was doing here,” said one student.

David C. Butty is executive director of public affairs for the Wayne County Community College District.

This group photo of WCCCD students in Australia was taken from the rooftop of the Australian Parliament building in Canberra, the federal capital. In the foreground is the World War II Memorial. Louis Beehag, project assistant from the Inside Australia Program, is third from left, front row.

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