Wayne County Community College District students reflect on their educational and cultural experiences during a nine-day Study Abroad trip to Costa Rica.

BY DAVID C. BUTTY

Imagine a country where nothing is wasted, where every citizen is conscious of being “earth friendly” and preventing waste is considered a priority. Imagine a country with no military and only the police force to keep the peace; and a country where money to support the military is earmarked for education. Or even imagine a country where the average property tax is as low as $50 U.S. (25,000 Colones). Pura Vida Costa Rica! If you are in doubt of the Social Security System, just ask Fernando Chavar, a Sociology Professor who lectured on the Costa Rica Social Security System during the Wayne County Community College District (WCCCD) 9-day health education and cultural enrichment Study Abroad Program’s trip to Costa Rica in the Fall of 2012.

"Nothing is wasted," said Alisa McKinney, one of the 24 students on the trip. "Just thinking of property taxes being around $50 makes me smile. The whole country is really into recycling.”

The participants experienced the culture, learned conversational Spanish; the diverse geographical features and the wonders of Central America including rare animals and plant species. The trip included a visit to the Poas Volcano National Park which Mother Nature could not let us see because of the constant change in the weather; a tour of Don Carlos’ dairy farm where we learned the different ways to process milk and cheese; and a visit to the town of Sarchi, well known for its handicrafts. We later visited the Santa Lucia School where we exchanged information with students about education in America and they in return, told us about their educational ambitions.

During the question and answer session, we learned that a lot of the students walk to school every day. One student said that she walked 15 minutes each day before connecting with her friend who lived on the road to complete the remaining 30-minute walk to school together. Most students longed to one day visit America; a country they have seen on television.

WCCCD students attended a lecture on the Social Security System and learned about the similarities and differences between the United States and Costa Rica. Costa Ricans are required to contribute 9% of their wages while employers are bound by law to pay 14% of their employees’ salary into the Social Security System. So, for each employee, 23% of their salary goes into the system, which in turn pays for the employee’s, their family’s and even their parent’s healthcare needs.

We took a hike literally through the Manuel Antonio National Park where we encountered sloths, monkeys, and learn the history of flora and fauna of the region. The visit to the University of Santa Paula gave our students the opportunity to learn about healthcare delivery between Costa Rica and the United States.

“I am still excited about the trip to Costa Rica and considered myself lucky to be a part of this experience,” McKinney said. “Studying abroad proved to be a valuable aspect of my college experience for both personal and professional reasons. The opportunity to go to a foreign country to see how others live and structure their everyday lives was awesome.”

Each of the students had a unique prospective of their experiences. Tamiko Adams-Eddie, will graduate this Fall from the Nursing Program, said the trip overwhelmed her.

“The entire experience of having the opportunity just to make it to the top of the volcanic mountain was uplifting in itself and the uplifting sense we reached the top there was a special connection with nature, an inner peace, and a calmness that we experienced by being there, and it seemed as though the presence of God was all around us, which made the challenging climb all worthwhile.”

She added, “Although I am not a farm kind of girl, that part of the trip was existing. Having the opportunity to actually milk a cow, and seeing the relationship between a cow and a bull was just something that I only read about. As a child,
I was always taught that in order to tell the story you must first experience the opportunity, which basically means that you must experience life to its fullest. I never thought that I would milk a cow, but now there is the opportunity to tell the story.

I will never be able to express my gratitude to the Wayne County Community College District for allowing me an opportunity to behold such beauty, meet the wonderful people, experience the culture, great cuisine, and most of all - participate in such a unique experience. Everything was “Pura Vida,” Adams-Eddie concluded.

Nursing student, Marlo L. Reid said her most memorable experience was at the University of Santa Paula, of Medicine. I was amazed to see that the students were actually working with cadavers and the respiratory therapist had real human lungs that were being mechanically ventilated which we were allowed to touch with gloved hands. This was an educational opportunity that I truly appreciated.

“All in all, I learned multiple things, laughed, danced, lost a tooth, was treated by a local dentist, was exposed to beautiful people, sites, food, and adventures that I would have never done on my own and enjoyed every moment of it. I will always remember those who went on the trip and those I met while there. I can simply say - Thank You So Very Much.