

## **“Connecting Communities, Sharing Cultures” at Scottsdale Community College**

Scottsdale Community College (SCC) would like to nominate its “Connecting Communities, Sharing Cultures” education abroad program for IIE’s 2008-09 Andrew Heiskell Awards. Over the past four years, this program to Australia and New Zealand has become a flagship course at SCC. Each year, the faculty-led, short-term program connects Native Americans and non-Native Americans to communities of indigenous peoples in Australia and New Zealand by sharing commonalities and increasing the cultural understanding, self-awareness, connectivity, and communication skills of our students. The evolution of this education abroad program has resulted in the increased participation of Native American students, newly developed course offerings, and over \$150,000 in scholarship awards. Without a doubt, the program has impacted **our students, our college** and **our community**.

### **Background Information**

Scottsdale Community College is one of ten colleges in the Phoenix, Arizona, metropolitan area comprising the Maricopa County Community College District. SCC occupies a 160-acre site leased from the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community (SRPMIC) and, as the only public community college in the country located on land leased from Native Americans, is committed to maintaining a special relationship with this community. Each semester, SCC enrolls approximately 500 Native Americans from 20 different tribes. With this significant number of enrolled students, SCC houses the American Indian Program which provides academic and student services to this special population, many of whom are following an associate’s degree in American Indian Studies. Their unique collaboration with the International Education Programs office and several academic departments resulted in the creation of this extraordinary education abroad program.

Initially, this four-week program was offered after three art and communication faculty members, one Native American and two non-Native Americans, participated in faculty exchange and curriculum development programs to Australia and New Zealand. These faculty members saw two needs: increase the number of education abroad programs offered at SCC and increase the participation of underrepresented ethnic minorities, particularly the Native Americans on our campus. In 2004, eleven students (4 Native and 7 non-Native Americans) participated in its inaugural year spending two weeks in each country. Working with the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Riverina Institute of Australia and the Western Institute of Technology at Taranaki (WITT) of New Zealand, the students stayed with Aboriginal and Maori communities and participated in native dances, shared each others’ cultural backgrounds and learned the art of storytelling. Every day the students were asked to think of a word that described how they felt or what they experienced and to write about it in their journal. At the end of the four weeks, the group compiled at least one journal entry from each participant and created a digital story to summarize their experience. This DVD is still used today to show the transformative experience these students had. The students received six credits by completing courses in *Digital Storytelling* and *Comparison of Native American, Indigenous Australian & Maori Art*.

Since then, this program has evolved to include coursework in Photography, American Indian Studies, and Intercultural Communication. This, and the new and more affordable two-week format, has attracted more than 40 students over the past three years. Living with the Korrawinga and Broken Hill Aboriginal Communities of Hervey Bay and Dareton, Australia, and on the Puniho Pa marae of Taranaki, New Zealand, the students also completed a meaningful service project each year. One such project was a mural that stretched three 10’ x 10’ panels. The Aborigines simply asked for the wall to be painted, but the students went further and painted a story on each panel: one panel told the creation story of the Aboriginal people, one panel told the creation story of the Native Americans and the third panel told the story of how these two groups met and the activities they

were doing in order to learn about each other. Other projects such as the design and installation of a Peace Pole, making of a meaningful iBook, and creation of a quilt from pinhole photography images were gifted to the community as part of the groups' service projects.

### **Impact on Students**

Like few other education abroad programs, students return home from this experience with personal growth which impacts their own lives and the lives of their communities. Typically, education abroad programs allow participants to learn something about the *other* culture. What is truly unique about this program is how students learn just as much about *each others'* cultures. Over the years, the makeup of the group has included about one-half Native Americans, often from at least five different tribes. Though SCC resides on a reservation, many SCC students know little about our Native students' traditions. These intra-group cultural differences necessitate that the pre-departure orientations cover learning about and respect for not only the culture to which they are traveling, but also for their own cultures within the group. In other words, they connect with each other.

Students also return home with an increased connection to other indigenous peoples across the globe. Many of our SCC program participants have never traveled outside of the U.S. and some have never traveled outside of Arizona, obviously greatly limiting their ability to have any concrete awareness of our global community. Through around-the-campfire open dialogues, this program allows them to see their country, their culture, their beliefs and traditions through others' eyes. Discussing issues such as racism, water and land rights, sacred site protection, and rural-to-urban transitional living, many find similarities in the human condition and gain new appreciation for their own communities. In other words, they connect with others.

Finally, the personal growth is often the most difficult for many to express. Communication skills are increased as students are required to share, listen and answer questions respectfully with aboriginal community members, with children, with respected elders of the tribe, and with non-aboriginal Australian leaders. Cultural sensitivity is increased as they overcome unfounded stereotypes and prejudices. Spiritual growth is experienced as they share with healers on the other side of the world. In other words, they connect with themselves.

*"As a Native American Student, I felt a deep connection and respect for the indigenous people here. What I thought was amazing were the similarities in all areas of our cultures. Going to another area in the world really makes you realize the conflicts and struggles other communities have had, and, in the end, I feel that I have a better understanding of myself and my people," summarized one student from the Pima/Maricopa tribe.*

*"Australia is a beautiful country filled with life from every corner. The people have united and formed new friendships that will last forever. My family has just grown with taking home the hearts of my new brothers and sisters," shared a student from the Hopi/Dine.*

### **College Growth**

At the college level, the Australia and New Zealand program has truly broadened the reach of international education. Over the past five years, the college has strengthened its relationship with the SRPMIC, internationalized the curriculum by adding two new courses, increased the participation of underrepresented students, increased students' intercultural competencies, received recognition for the success of its program, developed partnerships with foreign institutions and welcomed more than a few visitors to campus who were part of the program in Australia or New Zealand.

After the program in 2007, the faculty leaders determined there was a need to introduce the students to the political, economic, and social structures of indigenous peoples and the United States prior to arrival. Two new courses were developed -- AIS 103: Introduction to Indigenous Cultures (1 credit), is taught for four Fridays during the spring semester and AIS 282AC: Volunteerism for Indigenous Studies (3 credits) reflects the service learning component students complete within private/public agencies, educational institutions, governmental agencies, arts, and national parks abroad. Since all students who want to graduate with a two-year degree from SCC must take a course that meets Global Awareness criteria, SCC is able to include these innovative, internationalized courses as part of its offerings.

In addition, SCC implemented an assessment tool to capture the growth of intercultural competency and changes in ethno-relativism. With direction from the Cultural Awareness Assessment Team, this program is contributing to the colleges' Student Learning Outcomes by administering the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) to students pre- and post-trip. The results have shown that there is a general trend toward improved intercultural sensitivity as a result of participation in these short-term programs. Although data did not show an increase in students moving to the Acceptance/Adaptation stage, it did show an increase of students moving from the Defense/Denial stage to Minimization; moving students away from simplifying or polarizing cultural differences. This data has also been used to revise pre-departure faculty and student orientations in order to maximize an increase in intercultural sensitivity.

Overall, this education abroad program has received substantial recognition on and off campus with television, radio and newspaper coverage in Australia, New Zealand and Arizona as well as local awards. One such honor is our District's Diversity Advisory Council's "Award of Excellence." In 2007, SCC's education abroad program to Australia and New Zealand was recognized for its intentional and ongoing engagement with diversity.

### **Community Connections**

Finally, this program has connected communities to communities. One unique feature is the truly reciprocal nature of this program: SCC and SRPMIC have partnered to host numerous guests who were eager to learn more about the cultures of the Arizonans they had hosted on their own Aborigine and Maori communities. Several Maori leaders and traditional healers, an artist, film student, language instructor, and performing arts group enriched the campus and classroom discussions. One spring, a coordinator from one of the Australian host institutions improved our pre-departure orientation hundredfold with her presence and perspective. Local high school students were treated to Maori dancing and a Phoenix gallery hosted an expo of the Maori artist's pieces. In one of our Pima language classrooms, Maori and Pima groups singing to each other brought tears to the eyes of all present. The singing and dancing group performed at our Native American Graduation, sheered sheep while staying on the Navajo Reservation, and prepared a 'hangi' (traditional Maori feast) to express their gratitude to SRPMIC. Perhaps as a means of showing their gratefulness to the global outreach SCC has afforded its tribal members, the SRPMIC invited the college to apply for grant moneys gleaned from casino profits and ultimately awarded \$150,000 in funding for education abroad scholarships. Communities connected. Students gained.

The mission of Scottsdale Community College is "to create accessible, effective, and affordable environments for teaching and learning for the people of our communities in order that they may grow personally and become productive citizens in a changing and multicultural world." We hope you will agree that the success of this education abroad program not only supports the mission of SCC, but has indeed broadened the reach of international education for our students, our community college, and our community.