

DUE's Strategic Themes: Providing Global Educational Opportunities

By Elizabeth Reed, Senior Associate Dean for Strategic Themes

DUE's global theme is committed to ensuring that all MIT students have opportunities to appreciate and learn from other cultures. Kim Vandiver leads the global theme with a team comprised of Michael Bergren, Malgorzata Hedderick, Betsy Hicks, Shonool Malik, Sekazi Kauze Mtingwa, Sally Susnowitz, and Bernd Widdig.

In the months ahead, this team will implement some of the strategy recommended by GEOMIT (Global Education Opportunities at MIT), a committee convened in June by Dan Hastings and led by Professors Linn Hobbs and Hazel Sive. The charge to the committee was to "develop a comprehensive strategy to ensure that, within five years, any MIT student who wishes to undertake meaningful study, work, or internships abroad may be able to do so without financial or academic penalty." GEOMIT's fifteen faculty and staff included several DUE representatives: Peggy Enders, Malgorzata Hedderick, Josh Jacobs, Elizabeth Reed and Kim Vandiver. Jennifer Cook staffed the committee.

The GEOMIT report, which will be completed later this month, will emphasize the fact that MIT has been a leader in developing innovative international educational models such as MISTI, D-lab and CME. As recommended in the report, the global theme team will work with others at the Institute to expand these programs and develop new ways to prepare students to live and work in a borderless world.

Writing about global education at MIT in the Faculty Newsletter (LINK) Professors Hobbs and Sive said "The innovative international programs already devised by MIT faculty and staff are enviable and provide 'quintessentially MIT' models that have been proven in several years of pilot phases. However, essentially all international programs at MIT are funded outside the Institute budget. The challenge put forward by the Task Force will be to extend existing programs and develop new programs to achieve a 500% expansion over the opportunities that we have presently, all within the next five years. This expansion will require priority Institute funding, as well as acceptance by MIT educators and administrators that these opportunities comprise an integral part of an MIT education. "

Clearly full realization of MIT's goals for global education will require major new resources. Rather than waiting for these resources, DUE is taking steps to move ahead through the global theme. One step has been by supporting faculty who want to create new international opportunities for students. Students report that these opportunities change their lives and effect their aspirations. Sometimes the neighborhood, town or region where they work is also changed for the better.

DUE was able to provide Strategic Themes funds for two new faculty-led IAP 2007 initiatives which support the global theme: Design of a Community Children's Center in Pascuales Ecuador and the IAP-Madrid program.

Street Childrens' Community Center in Ecuador

This fall architecture professor, Jan Wampler and a group of MIT students worked on a project to design and build a "Street Childrens' Center" for a small town in the poorest region of Ecuador. Their work included understanding the area, assisting in the design, and producing drawings and models to help raise funds and to provide the design for final drawings which will be produced by engineers in Ecuador.



Professor Jan Wampler with the children of Pascuales, Ecuador

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Students and professor spent the semester designing the building in collaboration with the engineers who are at a local university in Ecuador. The design, which will be a prototype for other towns in the region, includes a medical center, school, library, nursery, community room, kitchen and rooms for volunteers. The site is 600 square meters in the middle of a very low-income village. It has electricity and water but no sewage system. Materials for the design had to be inexpensive and local. They included bamboo, concrete, blocks and clay tiles. The design is as sustainable as possible, providing electricity through solar panels and water through rainwater collection.

In January, the MIT team flew to Ecuador to present their design and get feedback from the community. The response far exceeded their expectations. They were enthusiastically welcomed while walking through the streets and inside homes to share food and conversation with the families. Local TA stations and newspaper interviewed and wrote about them. 800 to 1000 people, many dressed in their best clothes, showed up to see their presentation and celebrate the sense of possibility and hope that the project inspired. Food was cooked, and dancing and singing went on from early afternoon into the evening. The event ended with the creation of a "cornerstone" for the new building, made by having children imprint their handprints into wet concrete which dried into a wall of handprints that the children can proudly point to forever. The MIT team also added their initials. Partial funding has been raised for construction. Building will start as soon as it funding is complete. Wampler wrote "When we left four days later, we left behind a 'cornerstone' and drawings and a model for the new building, but most importantly we were able to leave "hope" for a better life for this community. This is what we can bring to the world using the resources of MIT."

IAP-Madrid Program

Through this program 21 students lived, learned and explored in Spain. Because of the timing, students were able to have a substantial international experience without being constrained by the MIT curriculum. The program, a 12 unit course, combined intense language instruction by an MIT faculty member (it was a semester-long course taught intensively in 4 weeks), with the opportunity to live with a Spanish family and travel widely not only in Madrid, but to Barcelona, Sevilla, and other cities in Spain. Our students met with their peers at the Carlos III University, savored Spanish cultural life visiting the major museums in guided learning, and explored Spanish work, leisure and sports. Besides the academic and experiential value for students, this pilot program was a litmus test of whether MIT undergraduates will take advantage of this kind of program during IAP. This information will help us evaluate options for expanding global offerings.



IAP-Madrid Students Visited the Spanish "Cortes" (Parliament) as Part of a Guided Visit to Learn How Spain's Government Works

IAP-Madrid was a 2nd level Spanish course taught by MIT's lecturer in Spanish, Solivia Márquez, who grew up in Spain. Because of this immersion experience, several students were able to skip Spanish 3 and go from IAP in Madrid (Spanish 2) directly into Spanish 4 this semester. Last year Solivia led 20 MIT undergraduates on "the Route of Don Quijote" a trip that was "life-altering" according to some of the students.