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News Release

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England trip inspires IU Kokomo students to think, create, innovate

KOKOMO, IND. — Automotive industry leftovers fuel Korey West’s dreams of educating third-world children.

He envisions recycling tires, seat belts, and carpet from cars, making shoes from these scraps, and giving them to children in places like South America and Africa, where they walk miles to school and risk injury to their bare feet.

He presented his vision for “Junkyard Shoes,” as his final project for Indiana University Kokomo’s Innovation Symposium, a class intended to make students think about global issues, and what they can do to solve the world’s problems.

After a semester of reading and researching about philanthropy, the environment, and technology, they travel to England and Scotland, where they meet people working in these areas, and visit museums and ecological sites.

“As they study historical and current innovators and innovations, they practice thinking outside the box, and examine new ways to solve problems,” said Karla Stouse, senior lecturer in English, who leads the trip.

Student projects included plans to create a microbial fuel cell, encourage a sense of community among Frankfort’s diverse populations, develop a workshop to help caregivers promote active learning in dementia patients, build a travel table from recycled plastics, and develop a program to bring Afghan refugees to IU Kokomo.

West, who completed his degree in communication arts with the class, came up with his idea based on mission trips he’s taken, and then studied the TOMS shoe company, which offers customers a chance to send a pair of shoes to someone else for each pair they purchase for themselves.

“I had to take this opportunity to be able to go somewhere far away, and to learn how to make a difference,” he said. “It encourages you to think outside the box about the problems there are in the world, and what you can do about them.”

Stouse said the program’s goal is to encourage students to think beyond getting the grade in a class.

“Thinking is a skill that has somehow become lost in education,” she said. “The world needs thinkers with the courage to innovate, to try new approaches, and take the risks necessary to make positive changes. If we are not going to teach and encourage students to step up and help fix the world’s problems, what will the world look like 50 years from now?”

Innovation Symposium participants are nominated by faculty, and chosen through an essay application and interview process. As many as 10 may go each year; this year nine students participated.

In England, they discussed social entrepreneurship at celebrity chef Jamie Oliver’s foundation, which offers unemployed young people the chance to train for careers in the restaurant industry. They toured Covent Garden, with homeless people as their tour guides. They also visited the London Science Museum, Isaac Newton’s home, the laboratory of penicillin discoverer Alexander Fleming, the Bodleian Library, the British Library, the British Museum, and Westminster Abbey.

For the environmental part of the program, students went to the Isles of Mull and Iona in Scotland. They spent two weeks at Harlaxton Manor, meeting for class twice daily, and working on their final projects.

For Anthony Rentz, a junior new media communications major, that meant preparing videos to promote availability of scholarships and grants from the Community Foundation of Howard County.

“I want to show the importance of giving, and the impact grants have in the community, to encourage more people to give,” he said. “A lot of students don’t know about the scholarships that are available to them. I just want to help more people get where they want to go.”

Sarah Ferenc, humanities major from Kokomo, created travel packets for families to use, to encourage learning on their vacations. She said the experience “pushes you to create something amazing,” and requires a lot of work. It was worth it, she said.

“You get so much more out of the trip than you put in.”

Interim Chancellor Susan Sciame-Giesecke called the trip a unique opportunity for IU Kokomo students, and thanked the sponsors who made it possible.

“We appreciate our community partners who share our vision, and see the benefit of overseas travel for our students,” she said. “For many, this is their first time traveling outside the country, and it is a life-changing experience. We are thankful for support from Kathleen Ligocki, Dr. and Mrs. Richard Lasbury, our IU Kokomo Staff Council, and the Office for Applied Learning, along with our other faculty, staff, and friends who have given time and money to this effort.”

Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana.

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