

## News Release

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### **Students learn from overseas travel; groups visit Italy, Guatemala during spring break**

**KOKOMO, Ind.** — Danielle Flager’s recent trip to Italy with an Indiana University Kokomo class has propelled her to pursue larger goals than she ever imagined.

This full-time business student and part-time Chrysler assembly line worker now seeks an internship with Fiat – the automaker’s Italian ally.

“This trip really opened my eyes to what I can do, and that I am not limited just to what is close to home,” she said. “I’ve already set up a savings account for another trip, and I can’t wait to go back.”

Flager, a junior, was one of 13 students who spent spring break in Italy. An additional nine students traveled to Guatemala.

Christine Taff, lecturer in Spanish, said overseas travel offers college students life-changing experiences, by taking them out of their comfort zones and giving them confidence to navigate the world.

“In Guatemala, the students have a cultural experience they could not have as tourists,” she said. “They see places they would not see as tourists, they meet Guatemalans, and visit in their homes. This is a real world experience.”

Taff co-leads the trip and the class leading up to its, Hispanic Culture and Healthcare, with Lynda Narwold, assistant dean in the School of Nursing.

In Guatemala, students visited a regional university, spent time in homes, toured Mayan ruins, and volunteered at the Centro de Recuperación, a feeding and recovery center for malnourished children.

The center relies completely on donations, so the IU Kokomo students brought donations of formula, bottles, diapers, medicines, and other desperately needed items. They received a \$650 grant from IU Kokomo's staff council to purchase many of the items.

Corinna Houston, a junior English major, enjoyed the laid-back attitude of the people she met, and how adults work together to care for children.

"The village truly does raise the children," she said. "Any adult can correct a child, and it is OK. We don't allow that here any more. I was amazed that the people are happy with what they have, rather than thinking ahead to what else they want. I've learned to be thankful and appreciate little things, like warm water for a shower, and a flushing toilet."

She was captivated by the ruins, and by trying to imagine what it was like as a bustling city. Volunteering at the feeding center touched her heart, too.

"As a mother, I can't imagine the agony of those parents, unable to provide for their children," she said. "They have a huge population, and not many resources and little economic opportunity."

Houston was impressed, however, with the value placed on family, and on helping one another.

"People think of it as a Third World country, but I see it as a developing country," she said. "Every Guatemalan was family with one another. As soon as you meet someone, you are connected, part of their family"

Taff plans for future student groups to continue supporting the feeding center.

Minda Douglas, assistant professor of fine arts, and Donna McLean, associate professor of communication arts, led the Italy trip. Douglas teaches Topics in Art History: Foreign Study in Italian Art, while McLean teaches Rhetoric and Society: Italian Culture and Communication.

Douglas' goal is to expose students to the culture, history, art and architecture of Italy. The group visited Rome, Florence, Siena, Pisa, and the ruins at Pompeii.

Flager was interested in the architecture, and in seeing the home of dictator Benito Mussolini. She also enjoyed meeting Italian people, who surprised her by how friendly they were.

"You hear the stereotype of 'ugly Americans,' and I was worried they would resent us," she said. "Nothing could have been further from the truth. Everyone was very welcoming."

Cat Bolinger, a junior fine art major, was excited to see in person works of art she had studied in class, especially sculptures by Gian Lorenzo Bernini.

“You study them in pictures, but looking at a picture is nothing like seeing it in person,” she said.

She previously visited France with an IU Kokomo class, and hopes for one more overseas travel experience before graduating.

“I’ve caught the travel bug,” she said. “I’m open to going anywhere.”

*Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana.*

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