



BROADENED HORIZONS

CAL POLY RANKED NATIONALLY FOR INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

BY SCOTT ROARK

ERIN MCCOY STRAPS HERSELF SECURELY into the seat of the small plane alongside friend and fellow Cal Poly student **Kristy Logan**. Both women put on headsets and give a thumbs-up to the pilot, who throttles the single engine up to a deafening volume, moving the plane swiftly down the runway before it's airborne over the Peruvian desert. It's a clear day, perfect for sightseeing.

The plane circles slowly over the arid plateau, giving a prime vantage point for the women to see an amazing sight – figures of monkeys, fishes and lizards carved into the desert floor, the famous series of geoglyphs known as the Nazca Lines.

“A very memorable experience, to say the least,” recalls McCoy, an environmental horticultural science major who had just completed the Cal Poly Study Abroad Program.

Both women had been in Peru for six weeks as part of the Study Abroad Program, living with a local family and going to class as regular college students. They shared their meals with their Peruvian hosts and attended many local festivals – even visiting Machu Picchu and Lake Titicaca.

“It makes the world seem smaller and more tangible,” said McCoy. “This was the first time I was immersed into a Spanish-speaking culture. It's humbling to be the outsider. You un-

(Opposite page, L-R) Cal Poly students Kristy Logan, Jennifer Giese and Erin McCoy at Machu Picchu (Top R) McCoy with new friends (Middle R) A child enjoys the attention of study abroad students (Bottom R) Student Kelly Carlile in Sydney, Australia

derstand what immigrants to a new country must feel like.”

McCoy’s experience and changing perspective is typical for students in the Study Abroad Program, according to International Education and Programs Director John Battenburg.

In fact, so many students take advantage of it that Cal Poly ranked second in its category in a 2005-06 national study, based on the number of students (817) who have learned and lived on foreign soil.

According to the ranking organization, more American students than ever are recognizing the importance of studying abroad in a globally interdependent world. The number of U.S. college and university students receiving credit for study abroad increased 8.5 percent from the previous year, totaling more than 223,500 students.

Today there is consensus that globally fluent graduates are essential to American competitiveness, said Battenburg. International exposure, whether through study, volunteer work or internship, has become a “must-have” credential.

Cal Poly’s Study Abroad Program has expanded significantly over the last 10 years, adding such destinations as Thailand and Australia, along with “Cal Poly at Sea,” which allows students to spend an entire quarter on a ship, sailing the high seas of the Pacific. The ship stops at multiple ports of call. “It’s very popular with the marine biology majors, as you can imagine,” said Battenburg.

Although students can go where they choose, certain destinations are naturally more attractive to specific majors. Denmark and Italy are popular with architecture students, while Australia is popular with students in agriculture programs.

There are three popular misconceptions about the Cal Poly Study Abroad Program, said Battenburg. The first is that students have to know a foreign language, which is not true. Many destinations are English-speaking. In other areas, students have the opportunity to learn the language. McCoy, for example, spent the first two weeks in Peru attending Spanish classes two to four hours a day.

The second misconception is the cost. People think the entire program is expensive. Again, not true. It may be cheaper to spend a quarter in Thailand than to stay on campus, Battenburg said. The third is that it delays graduation. But completing courses abroad is the same as completing courses on campus.

As for McCoy, she calls her time in Peru one of the best experiences of her life. “The more I travel, the more I realize that the perceptions I had of a country beforehand are usually wrong,” she said. “People are more alike than different.” □

