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► Semester at Sea Program

Students visit world — by boat

By KAREN JANES
THE BATTALION

American college students sit in a classroom discussing overpopulation. After class, they decide to "drop in" on India to take a firsthand look at overpopulation.

These students are participants in a program called Semester at Sea. They attend classes on a cruise ship, but the world is their classroom. Students spend 100 days circling the globe and visit nine to 10 countries.

Julie Speed, a senior biomedical science major who spent last fall on Semester at Sea, said she "learned by doing" while in the program.

"You study about something, then you actually see it," Speed said. "You live it."

Though students take 12 to 15 hours and attend classes every day while at sea, they can explore and travel countries while at port.

Anju Ganeshappa, a senior anthropology major, took the trip last spring. She said she remembers what she learned at port better than what she read in books.

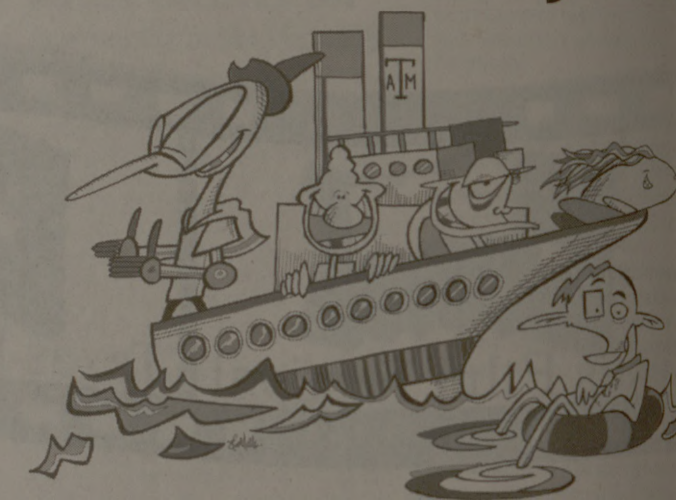
"Even though I spent the least amount of time studying from a book that semester," Ganeshappa said, "I learned the most I ever have in my entire life."

For many classes, students have assignments or field projects to do while in port. These excursions give students an in-depth look at the cultures of the countries they visit.

Both Speed and Ganeshappa visited a school for the deaf in Vietnam, which Speed said proved to be a learning experience.

"It was amazing to me that these kids were so malnourished. Most of them were mute—they never had visitors," she said. "They were so excited when we came to visit them. Their faces just glowed when we hugged them."

Ganeshappa's experiences at the deaf school made her less scared of and intimidated by language barriers. "Children are universal," Ganeshappa said. "You don't need language with them. You can communicate



with them by a smile, by drawing with them, using your hands, or even by giving them piggy-back rides."

Experiences such as those at the deaf school help Semester at Sea passengers open their eyes to the world, participants said. Ganeshappa said she felt ignorant of things happening in foreign countries before her journey. Now that she has seen so many diverse places, she understands people better.

"Semester at Sea gave me a better sense of reality," Ganeshappa said. "I believe that I am more tolerant of different people now."

Though the time spent in port visiting foreign countries is incredible,

"I learned the most about being an American by traveling outside of America."

Anju Ganeshappa
Senior anthropology major

Semester at Sea students have a good time on the ship as well. When students are not in class or studying, they watch movies, have talent shows, play volleyball, dance or just hang out. Ganeshappa said she never ran out of things to do.

"Ship life was a complete cultural experience," she said, "but a complete college experience at the same time."

Speed said the passengers on board formed their own culture and community.

"It's like you're one big family," she said. "You're eating with your professors, you're swimming with your professors, their kids are on

board. It's really a unique experience. You know everybody by the time you leave."

Forming lifelong friendships is a major perk of the Semester at Sea program, participants said. Ganeshappa still keeps in touch with many of the friends she met even sees them occasionally.

Semester at Sea gives students a completely new outlook on the world. America, participants said. Ganeshappa said she gained a better understanding of how foreigners view America.

"I learned the most about being an American by traveling outside of America," she said.

Speed said her Semester at Sea experience helped her appreciate what she has and to realize how wasteful and flaunting of money she is in the United States.

"Expensive cars and clothes are pointless to me now," Speed said.

At first, participants in the Semester at Sea program may be intimidated when visiting a foreign country. Many stay close to the port and do not take full advantage of the time on land. Ganeshappa said that Semester at Sea students stay as much time off the ship as possible.

"You have to force yourself to do it. There is a lot to learn out there," she said. "Even if you only have five minutes to walk around the port, do it. There is a lot to learn out there."

Speed advises Semester at Sea students to go with an open mind. "They're giving you the opportunity to do whatever you want to do," she said. "It's what you make of it."

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