

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

Page 3A • Tuesday, September 9, 2003

Leaving on a jet plane

Students create lasting memories through A&M study abroad programs

By Lauren Romero
THE BATTALION

James Thornton felt awkward when the daughter of his French host family walked in the room and kissed him on the cheek every day to say hello.

"I never did figure out if I was supposed to be really kissing or fake kissing her cheek," said Thornton, a senior international studies major who studied abroad in France this summer.

Ralph Schoolcraft, an associate professor of French at Texas A&M, said studying abroad is an important endeavor.

"It's one of the best things students can do for themselves in education," he said.

A&M students travel to many countries to study and experience a new culture.

Whether they are there to learn a foreign language or study subjects such as architecture, going abroad provides an experience that students will never forget.

eraries and teaching the orientation class.

"Texas A&M has many strengths where they don't need my help, but this is one area where I have expertise that can contribute to the student community at A&M in its effort to internationalize," he said. "What I'm interested in is getting other people interested in tackling the challenge to take their education into their own hands."

Elizabeth Autin, a junior economics major and peer counselor for the Study Abroad Office,

said she first considered working in the Study Abroad Office because of her experiences abroad through family vacations and a high school trip.

"I wanted to be part of something that gets people out there and expresses the fact that people shouldn't be afraid of everything," she said.

Megan Crocker, a graduate management student, wanted to gain experience in public relations. She went on a study abroad trip to Mexico, organized by the Department of Journalism.

The next summer, she was asked to return for a fully-paid internship.

"It was definitely not a coffee and copies internship," she said. "I did work I probably would not be entrusted to do here."

Even though Crocker said the internship was challenging and stressful, it confirmed she wanted to pursue a career in PR.

She is now considering moving back to Mexico City after graduation.

Crocker recommends studying abroad rather than just going on vacation.

"Living there gives you the opportunity to get to know the locals and find out where and where not to go," she said.

Schoolcraft said studying abroad allows students to see what life is like for another culture. "Studying abroad brings students a lot more than they expect," he said. "Students expect to be tourists, and instead they face great personal

challenges that bring them confidence and a desire to continue to travel."

Thornton said he would like to go back to Europe to study and possibly live with another host family.

"There's so much to see and do in Europe — as well as tons of different people to meet and talk to — that one experience over there isn't enough," he said.

Thornton said he didn't want to encounter all the people that he did meet, however.

He once met a man in Rome dressed in yellow rubber boots, old worn out pants and a homemade vest with matching hat.

"I saw him and didn't think much of it again until I turned around, and he was taunting me with his stick that was obviously supposed to be a sword. He then made faces at me like he was a crying baby drinking a bottle. I think he wanted some money," Thornton said.

While Crocker didn't have any experiences quite like Thornton's, she said she wished she would have studied Spanish before going.

Schoolcraft advises students to talk to others who have studied abroad. He also recommends talking to foreign students studying at A&M.

Autin encourages Aggie students to go abroad for a full semester instead of just a summer term. That way, she said, people can be enveloped in the whole culture.

Schoolcraft said one of the drawbacks of the summer program was the length.

"You can't learn a language in six weeks," he said.

For students who don't know where they want to go, or what they want to study, the Study Abroad Office has its own library of references to foreign countries. Certain programs are open to all majors, others are major-specific.

"We want to make sure that people have plenty of opportunities to go abroad," Autin said. "If you're here for four years, going abroad provides a really nice break."

One wish Schoolcraft has for the program is for there to be more scholarships available, to limit the factor of economic selection.

However, he said if someone wants to go badly enough, they will find a way to get there.

While some students were concerned about traveling in wartime, or in times of other crises, Autin said they shouldn't worry.

"The University won't send someone on a trip if the area is unsafe," she said.

She also said the Study Abroad Office receives numerous travel warnings that they read and take into account.

Schoolcraft said this year was an especially sensitive time for students in France.

"When we arrived and showed genuine respect for our hosts, it opened many doors, and it was clear how much the two countries have to offer each other," he said.

Crocker agrees that people need to break down existing stereotypes about foreign cultures. She said people need to experience other cultures and ways of life because the American way isn't the only way of doing things and students should be exposed to all walks of life.

"Even if going abroad just confirms your love for the U.S. and what you've been blessed with here, what's so wrong with that," she said.

"I wanted to be part of something that gets people out there and expresses the fact that people shouldn't be afraid of everything."

— Elizabeth Autin
junior economics major



Schoolcraft directed the French Language study abroad program twice. What Schoolcraft called advanced babysitting in France also included forming budgets, making itin-



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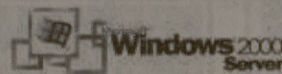
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