

TIME TO THINK GLOBALLY

Study abroad can change your life. Better yet, it can also benefit those you visit

By Sarah Baldauf

Back-and-forth between professors and students just isn't the norm in much of Europe. But John Ferrel didn't know that when he spent a semester at the University of Burgos in Spain before graduating in May from Boston University. "A couple of times I raised my hand in class, and everyone looked shocked," he says. But he adapted quickly: "By my second or third month, I had my first dream in Spanish."

Study abroad may sound like a dream come true, but preventing a nightmare requires some prep. The best time to do your research? "When choosing an undergraduate college," says Mary Dwyer, president of the Institute for the International Education of Students, which runs study-abroad and internship programs for colleges and universities. Here are some considerations for the adventurously inclined.

Just like home. Don't end up in an American ghetto. "Anytime there's a location with heaps and heaps of Americans running around, you tend to find more students going for the social reasons," says Jan Kielsing of the University of California-Berkeley. To make the most of being abroad, get close to the people and culture.

Worcester Polytechnic Institute tries to make sure that happens. About half of its student body goes to sites from Denmark to Thailand to work in small groups on solving local challenges. In post-apartheid Namibia, that means grappling with the country's troubled history—and communicating with families living in some of the poorest settlements in the world. "It's about learning *with* them," says Rob Krueger, codirector of WPI's Namibia project sites.

Credit check. WPI's seven-week terms abroad follow seven weeks of prep on the home campus—a require-

ment that bars outsiders from participating. At the other end of the spectrum, some colleges let you study abroad with another school, but you need to ask if the credits will transfer. Boston University, for example, offers studies and internships in Haifa and Tel Aviv, Israel. BU's own students are preapproved and get full credit, but because of a State Department trav-

Minibreaks. Catherine Semrau, a senior at Michigan State University, went on a seminar to Monterrey, Mexico, during spring break of her freshman year. That inspired a second trip to the Netherlands, France, Belgium, and Spain in the summer of 2006—the exact intention of MSU's miniprograms, now offered in the weeks before freshman year starts. More schools are also



el warning about Israel, "certain schools won't accept any credit," says Joseph Finkhouse of the university's international programs office.

Money matters. Check school rules on financial aid. Federal funds *must* transfer overseas with a student, but state and institutional money might not have to. Studyabroadfunding.com and Fastweb.com can identify sources of extra cash. And watch out for service fees: Colleges are increasingly tacking on surcharges—even if you go on an outside program—that range from \$100 to \$2,500, says Dwyer. Another option to consider is whether directly enrolling at the international university—taking time off from your American one—would save money.

Worcester Polytechnic gives its projects a focus, like converting a salon in Namibia to solar power.

offering programs tailored to requirement-heavy majors—like engineering, pre-med, and business—who've traditionally had few opportunities to leave campus.

Job prospects. While an undergrad at Notre Dame, Peter Quaranto spent a summer working with kids in Cambodia. Then he headed for Uganda, where he took classes at Makerere University and helped lay the groundwork for the Uganda Conflict Action Network, a peace advocacy group he developed in his senior year. Now a grad student, he's determined to work on international policy. "Not only do unconventional study-abroad trips provide for great storytelling," he says, "they set you apart in terms of skills and perspectives." ●