

Lessons in real life

Catherine Dallaire is building a health clinic in the shadow of the Peruvian Andes. Danielle Schwartz is sizing up vintage TVs in Miami. And ecologists-in-training will follow the call of the wild in the Laurentian foothills, African savannah or Arctic tundra.

Sure beats Introduction to Calculus and Shakespeare 101.

For anyone with the imagination and energy to look beyond the course calendar, going back to school doesn't have to mean returning to the classroom. At least not until students have had a chance to flex their wings - and perhaps even a little muscle.

Thanks to fellowships, internships, extracurricular programs or specialized credit courses like McGill University's Field Studies in Africa, today's university students can travel around the globe - or across the city - doing good works or off-beat research.

At the Université de Montreal, dental students will spend part of the semester at the CLSC des Faubourgs giving free check-ups and treatments to homeless teenagers, while budding scientists bond with birds and catch field mice at U de M's open-air biology laboratory in St. Hippolyte.

At the Université de Sherbrooke, engineering student Dallaire is one of a growing number of students who take advantage of semester-long internships built into the curriculum to hone their skills far from home.

"It's a lesson in being a citizen of the world," Dallaire said before she and team leader Veronique Daigle set off on a four-month project to build a health centre and women's shelter in Quillabamba, a town of 25,000 people a bumpy nine-hour bus ride north of Cusco in the Peruvian Andes.



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ON UNIVERSITIES

"I think we will learn a lot about ourselves and our abilities, about how we cope with being abroad. This will be a chance to work on our management skills and to learn to live with people of another culture. It will be humbling."

It will also be more rigorous than your average college seminar. In fact, the six-member crew spent much of the last year getting organized for their big adventure.

Despite a generous grant from the Canadian International Development Agency and support from Carrefour de solidarité internationale de Sherbrooke and Ayni Salud de Lima, the three men and three women still had to come up with \$30,000 by holding benefits, seeking corporate sponsors and bagging groceries for donations. They signed up for Spanish lessons, climbed Owl's Head to shape up for physical labour at high altitude and lined up for vaccinations and malaria medication.

Then there were weekend workshops on team-building and "culture shock training" - the latter aimed at arming students for inevitable differences in local habits and attitudes, especially when it comes to equality of the sexes. "The idea seems to be that you can go abroad, but you are still the same person, with the same values."

Because they are still students, the

Sherbrooke team had to hire a local architect, contractor and work crews to design and do the heavy lifting. However, they'll be responsible for managing and financing the engineering project, ensuring it is completed on time and on budget. "We'll also be doing some of the manual labour," Dallaire said. "We will basically be learning from these people."

Dallaire said there's increasing interest among students in doing "things which will make a difference." One classmate has just returned from several months in Burkina-Faso with Engineers Without Borders. Another Sherbrooke team is in Malaysia, scouting out local markets and potential

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business partners on behalf of Quebec companies.

Concordia University business student Magdalena Turlejski spent the summer working for the Victorian Order of Nurses in Ottawa as part of the Community Experience Initiative. She says internships with non-profit agencies offer rookies more chances to take responsibility and see how things work at the grassroots level.

"I had the opportunity to spend a day with one of the nurses on her visits, where I witnessed the real value of the work the organization does in the community, caring for palliative care patients. ... It made me see that the work I

do in the office is directly related to what is happening in the community"

Not every educational adventure has to be humanitarian. For Danielle Schwartz, it's about finding beauty in the ordinary - the out-of-this-world designs of early televisions, radios and record players.

Schwartz has just completed her PhD in art history and communications at McGill University, where her research has focused on the weird and baffling aesthetic quirks of pre-war televisions. "Why did early television have cabinets? Why did they look like spaceships? Why were they sometimes pink?"

As a research fellow at the Wolfsonian Museum, she'll spend three weeks in Miami examining the vast collection of 20th century artifacts, refining her understanding of a revolutionary medium that couldn't quite decide whether it was supposed to be a machine or furniture.

"This new technology had no precedent, except as a feature of science fiction. So early design often looked like airplanes," she said.

Schwartz, who will also be working at the Smithsonian American Art Museum in Washington this year, said she is one of few communications scholars who've been looking at what's outside the box rather than the content of programming. She hopes her work will eventually broaden our understanding of the role of television and mass media in society.

"It's ironic that the screens in our homes are getting larger while the ones in our pockets are getting smaller."

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