International programs aim to provide global literacy

"Spending my senior year of high school in Sweden changed my life," said Sarah Stevenson, the new director of the International Education Center at St. Thomas. "Having the opportunity to study abroad, become fluent in a second language, and understand a different culture internationalized my life at an early age." Though she is of Scottish-Irish background, Stevenson, 37, has admittedly become "very Swedish." She received her Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin in 1978 with a major in Scandinavian studies and a minor in comparative literature. Her educational experience abroad includes a Fulbright Fellowship to Sweden in 1967 and to Germany in 1979. She has taught Swedish at the University of Wisconsin, the University of Denver and Gustavus Adolphus College.

Before assuming her new position at St. Thomas in August, 1983, Stevenson was director of international education at Gustavus Adolphus and has been involved in some kind of advisory capacity to foreign study centers since 1974.

The new International Education Center is located at 1901 Grand Avenue and is an expansion of the Foreign Studies Center begun in 1975 by Dr. Paul Schons, chairman of the Foreign Languages Department. "We began with one student in 1975, and now about 150 St. Thomas students go abroad each year," said Schons.

These experiences . . . "provide students with a global perspective . . . to overcome the parochialism found in America." These experiences are an essential part of a liberal arts education, believes Stevenson, since "they provide students with a global perspective and a global literacy with which to overcome the parochialism found in the American population. The vast size and power of the U.S. projects many of us from observing the rest of the world," she explained. "Sending students abroad places them firmly outside their normal patterns as they face the challenges of a new language and culture, a new educational system, and a new perspective on themselves and their world."

The coordinated international program that Stevenson directs will include study, work, and travel abroad; student and faculty exchange programs; bilingual instruction; and international programs. Various options are available. St. Thomas students may choose to enroll directly at a foreign university, join an American college's foreign program, travel with the Associated Colleges of the Twin Cities, or take advantage of specific St. Thomas programs led by St. Thomas faculty. In 1982-83, St. Thomas sponsored programs in Japan, Ireland, Puerto Rico, and Mexico.

Opportunities such as internships, summer work, and service programs are available for those students who have limits on their time or finances. Also, providing faculty with opportunities to teach and do research overseas can bring an international perspective to their classrooms," explained Stevenson.

Stevenson works closely with students to identify their goals and to match them with the kinds of experience available overseas. "For example, we are presently raising a student who has a double major in French and business who wants to study in France. Stevenson will help this student find courses in international economics and comparative politics taught in the French language, so he can do a second-year course in Paris and Toulouse. There programs offer courses in international business as well as opportunities to volunteer at the Sorbonne, Institut Catholique, or the University of Toulouse." St. Thomas has 33 students spending the 1983 fall semester abroad in places as enticingly named as Aix-en-Provence, France, and Strawberry Hill, England. Ten students are in England; eight are in France; other countries represented include Spain, Greece, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, India, Japan, Ireland, and Wales. In the January, 1983, interim, 82 St. Thomas students went abroad under a variety of educational programs.

Plans are underway to expand the College's overseas programs. "St. Thomas has indicated a strong interest in international studies," Stevenson explained, "and we also hope to identify other areas where we can set up programs. Many of our faculty have good contacts with foreign universities, and many of the strengths in our curriculum aim us toward expanding students' knowledge of life beyond the U.S. Noting that she is pleased to be at St. Thomas because of its sound academic reputation and innovative programming, Stevenson feels that the establishment of the International Education Center indicates the College's strong support for foreign study. She and her administrative assistant, Ruth Hennessy, expect a sizable increase in the number of St. Thomas students going abroad.

The College backs its commitment to study abroad by allowing students to use their financial aid (grants, work-study, and tuition remission) to go overseas. "This is a fairly unusual procedure," noted Stevenson, "and it provides an equal opportunity for all students to go abroad, not just those from wealthy families. Usually, a semester's tuition at St. Thomas will be about the same as that of a semester abroad, excluding the cost of air travel." Bonnie Bissonette, a senior majoring in international studies, provides a good example of this policy. "I am from a very average-income family," she said, "and there is no way my parents can finance a year abroad for me." But Bissonette, 21, is spending the fall 1983 semester at University College, Galway, Ireland, using her National Merit Scholarship and other financial aid to pay her way. In addition to studying political science and economics in Ireland, she hopes to take trips to places like Prague and Budapest. And the German beer was good, too," noted the 19-year-old junior who is planning a career in international business.

Since she spends her time listening to reports from student travelers and preparing programs for future semesters, what personal effect does this have on advisor Stevenson? "I hope to get to Japan next summer," she admitted. "It's time to have a non-European experience. Getting outside one's habitual routines is important, and education is a continual process.

Grants for New College offer financial aid for older students

Older students attending St. Thomas will be eligible for financial assistance funded by the College through a new program, Grants for New College.

The amount of the grants awarded under the new program will vary and will be based on the student's financial need. New College is the evening and weekend division of St. Thomas and is designed for older or non-traditional students. Most of those attending are in their mid-20s or older, have already had some college and often are married and have daytime jobs.

New College classes meet evenings and Saturdays, and students take an average of two courses per semester.

"Grants for New College is the first program of its kind at St. Thomas," noted Monsignor Terence J. Murphy, president St. Thomas."