

[san diego]

CENTER OF THE UNIVERSE

Pick a country, any country — USD is there



DOMINIK HUBER

by Ryan T. Blystone

Nicki Osborn '08 will never forget the *arti* ceremony she witnessed in Varanasi, India.

"On the bank of the Ganges River, around 8 p.m., tourists and Hindus alike sat on the steps leading to the river. The ceremony makes use of the senses in order to worship Ganga-ji, the River Goddess. Sight with a lighted lamp, sound with the blowing of a conch shell, smell with the use of incense, touch with the holding of a flower (then placed onto the river to float away)," she says. "The devotion of the Hindus, even those sitting next to me

singing along with their eyes closed, was definitely something I will remember. The ability to show such devotion, I believe, is one of the strongest parts of religion in any country in the world."

Those evocative words were prompted by experiences Osborn had during a religion diversity class she took in India this January. That sort of resonant reaction is a key reason many present and prospective University of San Diego students are flocking to Serra Hall 315 in search of their own memorable moment.

"The trend among students

entering college is that they want an international experience," says Kira Mendez, director of International Studies Abroad, based in USD's International Center. "When we talk to undergraduate admissions, the amount of questions they've received has increased. I spoke with one mother and daughter who were deciding between several colleges. The mother told me that the types of international experiences her daughter could have is a deal-breaker (when it comes to deciding on a school)."

The center, which opened in

United Front Multicultural Center Assistant Director Kimberley Fernandes (front center) is surrounded by those who feel like the 10-year-old center is their home.

September 2007, is a one-stop shop for undergraduate students interested in international education opportunities. Nearly 20 percent, or about 1,200 students, will participate in an international program this year, far more than the national average of 7-10 percent, Mendez says.

USD undergraduate students travel to more than 20 countries — including England, China, Spain, Mexico, Italy, Australia, Jamaica and South Africa — for semester, summer and inter-session courses taught by USD faculty. Currently, classes are offered to undergraduate business, engineering and College of Arts and Sciences students. Mendez hopes to add cross-collaboration opportunities, enabling more students to go on the same trip, even if they're taking different courses.

All of this activity is directly related to a strategic initiative introduced by President Mary E. Lyons in 2003 that stresses internationalization as a major component. As a result, the International Studies Abroad Committee and International Center Advisory Council were formed. Thanks in large part to Provost Julie Sullivan's leadership, the International Center is making an impact on students' education as global citizens.

"We've tried to get to the students sooner," Mendez says. "I had four freshmen come in together to the center and they were thinking about studying abroad, but not until their junior year; and they wanted our help."

The center will raise awareness by hosting its second annual International Education Week Nov. 17-21. The event is expected

to include student workshops, an international fair and guest speakers. New this year is a curriculum for USD faculty to hear from colleagues who received USD International Opportunity grants to conduct international-based projects.

Mendez's main job is to promote and organize trips, including USD's most popular and longest-running international program in Guadalajara, Mexico. "Guadalajara is the hook that gets students interested in going abroad," she says. "It's a safe place, it's close, there are a variety of courses and everyone from a freshman to a senior can go. It's a great price — one of our least expensive programs — it's well organized and students are well taken care of."

Some of the newest destinations for students to choose from are Morocco; Beijing and Shanghai, China; Bangalore, India; and a semester program for math students in Budapest, Hungary. The center is setting up foreign exchange programs with universities abroad to allow students to attend classes on each other's campus.

While the International Center focuses only on undergraduate students, USD's graduate students in law, business, nursing, and leadership and education have ample international opportunities available. In fact, all incoming SOLES graduate students are now required to complete an international component to earn a degree.

It's another sign the university encourages its students to think globally, but to experience the planet to the utmost, much like Osborn did in India.

"When a country gets a hold on you, from all your senses to your mind, you cannot shake it off," she says. "I never want to shake India off of me. I want to visit it until I have experienced all of it to the best that a foreigner can." 🌍