Life Changing Culture Shock To Cultural Connection

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BRIAN STEWARD CALLS HIS PERSONAL INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES “INCREDIBLY LIFE-CHANGING.” HE WANTS HIS STUDENTS TO HAVE THE SAME LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCES.

Steward, an agricultural and biosystems engineering associate professor, traveled abroad for the first time at the age of 25. He went to China and says he was overwhelmed by culture shock.

Later, he and his wife Stacia lived in China for a year while teaching English.

“These first international experiences, while being very challenging personally, helped me realize how little I know about the world, and how blessed I am to live in this country,” he says.

Now Steward provides leadership to international programs in his department. “I like to help students have these types of experiences and gain similar perspectives,” Steward says.

Outside of the classroom, Steward’s research focuses on information technologies needed for precision agriculture.

His research, interest in international travel and desire to show students the world all got a boost when he was awarded a Fulbright Scholar grant to spend the 2009-2010 academic year at the Federal University of Viçosa in Brazil.

“In Brazil, I was learning a new modeling language for virtual prototyping, plus teaching a course in which the students used this language to model a variety of systems in agriculture and biosystems,” Steward says. “Virtual prototyping uses more computer models in the design process, pushing back the need to build a physical prototype.”

Steward also organized and led a two-week study abroad trip for 10 students from Iowa State and eight from the University of Kentucky. The study tour focused on the development, adoption and use of engineering technology in agricultural and bioenergy production in Brazil.

It included a visit to the Federal University of Viçosa, one of the leading agricultural universities in Brazil, which was founded in 1921 by Iowa State alum Peter Henry Rolfs.

In 2002, Steward visited a former classmate who was a professor at the Brazilian university. That led to the development of a student exchange program between Iowa State and the Federal University of Viçosa, several other joint student and research projects and Steward’s Fulbright assignment.

Steward says there are many global challenges for which he hopes Iowa State students can help find solutions. “Feeding a growing population, providing sustainable energy to a world of growing affluence, managing nutrients and wastes in an environmentally responsible manner—if our students don’t have an understanding of the world, they will be ill-equipped to deal with these issues,” he says.

“Engineering is not done in just one location anymore, but by teams of people across the globe communicating daily with one another,” Steward says. “Our students need to understand the globally connected nature of our world, and how to interact effectively with people from different cultures and countries.”
**ENDURING RELATIONSHIPS, LASTING LEGACY**

*By Melea Reicks Licht*

In the shadow of Mount Kilimanjaro, Sophia drafts a letter to a friend. She thinks about translating each word from her native Swahili as she carefully prints in English.

“Thanks for your letter... I failed to answer your letter immediately because my last-born Aman was very seriously sick with malaria. I always remember your kindness and love which you show me... Many regards to your family and friends.”

Building relationships like that between Sophia and her American friend Eileen are the heart of Gerald Klonglan’s work in Tanzania. In fact, they’ve been the heart of his life’s work.

As chair of the Bethesda Tanzania Ministry Team at Bethesda Lutheran Church in Ames Klonglan (’58 rural sociology, MS ’62, PhD ’63) fosters the relationship between the Shighatini Lutheran Parish in Tanzania and Bethesda.

Klonglan is a professor emeritus of sociology and former associate dean for national programs and research. His boundless enthusiasm hasn’t diminished since his retirement in 2001. He continues to put his idealism and practical know-how to work bringing people together across continents for the betterment of society.

“It’s about accompaniment—walking side-by-side,” Klonglan says. “This is not a business trip or a vacation, it is a human development trip for both them and us.”

With apparent joy, he recounts how the relationship has grown and how the Bethesda team supplies basic needs and assists residents of Shighatini while learning from them as well.

“We no longer send missionaries abroad to ‘educate.’ We work with residents to support their needs as a society,” he says. “We bring experts with us to focus on improving health, agriculture and education systems. Projects are not pursued unless both sides agree.”

Bethesda’s projects in Shighatini benefit all residents regardless of religious affiliation. Together they have established gravity flow water systems, improved dairy production, introduced crops and improved poultry production. Their efforts have been funded privately by the Bethesda congregation and gifts from The Rotary Club of Ames.

Klonglan also helped form a nonprofit organization, Empower Tanzania, to connect communities in the U.S. with those in rural Tanzania.

Prior to his work in Tanzania, Klonglan’s career in sociology took him around the world and often to the center of history.

He is most recently known for his work in college administration establishing relationships with historically black land-grant colleges and the tribal colleges. And his efforts with funding agencies led the college to become number one in the nation for earning U.S. Department of Agriculture external grants in 1999.

In retirement, Klonglan is an oft-requested speaker on the legacy of George Washington Carver, he hosts groups for the ISU Alumni Association and he continues to foster friendships and serve communities like Sophia’s.

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