CARLISLE, Pennsylvania — In many respects no college is more internationally minded than Dickinson College. A far-sighted leader of the American Revolution founded the institution. It sends more students abroad than all but a handful of U.S. colleges. It dispatches faculty with those students to five of Dickinson’s 12 programs at universities on five continents. From the multilingual “No Parking” and “Caution While Crossing Street” signs on campus to the flags of the world that flutter from lampposts to greet the latest international visitor to the clocks set to five time zones in the library and student union, everything about this picturesque campus says, “We are here in central Pennsylvania—but also out in the world.”

This is no facade. It is a state of mind that infuses Dickinson, from administrators and staff who wake up wondering if a calamity in a foreign capital has affected Dickinson’s voyagers, to students themselves who know Málaga, Spain, Toulouse, France, and Yaoundé, Cameroon, not just as exotic names but extensions of their campus, places where they studied and where friends are studying even now. The weekly campus newspaper runs regular dispatches from “Dickinsonian Foreign Correspondents.”

Dickinson has registered more success in teaching foreign languages and placing students overseas than in bringing international students to Carlisle. Constricted by the high costs of private tuition and with a modest endowment and limited financial aid, Dickinson enrolls only a few dozen international students. Until recently, it also has struggled to achieve diversity among the American students it attracts to this campus two hours from Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington. Now, under the leadership of President William G. Durden, a German scholar and alumnus with a passion for both history and marketing, it is moving to remedy those shortcomings and make Dickinson as diverse and international at home as it is abroad. Minorities, just 4 percent of last year’s graduating class, comprised 12 percent of entering freshmen. The class of 2006 includes 11 international students, or 2 percent of the student body. Dickinson is aiming to achieve at least 15 percent minority and 5 percent international enrollment within three years.
Durden studied at Freiburg University in Germany as a Dickinson junior. “It changed my life. From that point everything I did had an international component. I spent my life connecting the dots,” said Durden, who later returned to Europe on a Fulbright scholarship. He ran the Center for Talented Youth at Johns Hopkins University and was a senior executive of Sylvan Learning Systems before accepting his alma mater’s call in 1999.

Dickinson’s West College building, or Old West, was designed by Benjamin Latrobe, architect of the U.S. Capitol, and dates to 1805. Once filled with classrooms, today it houses the office of the president and other administrators. The main corridor is lined with oil portraits of its leaders over the two centuries past.

Durden said that Dickinson’s founder, Benjamin Rush, was himself an ardent advocate of study abroad who insisted that modern languages be taught as well as Latin and Greek. Rush, as a young physician, patriot, and author, signed the Declaration of Independence and solicited funds from Thomas Jefferson and others in support of the new college. It enrolled its first college students in 1783, days after the signing of the Treaty of Paris. Modesty impelled Rush to name the college for friend and colleague John Dickinson, governor of Pennsylvania and author of the Articles of Confederation.

Rush, who fought a yellow fever epidemic in Philadelphia in 1793 and crusaded for humane treatment of the mentally ill, felt that “nothing profited him more than his year studying medicine at Edinburgh,” said Durden. “We had our course well set from the beginning. Rush knew that we had to find the best that the world had to offer and bring it back.” He also insisted that the education offered at Dickinson be useful to the building of the new nation. “Not vocational, but ultimately useful,” said Durden. The emphasis, however, was on the liberal arts. The college only recently added an international business and management major, which includes a stiff language requirement—two courses beyond the intermediate level.

Dickinson’s array of overseas programs began as a single center in Italy in the 1960s and mushroomed in

Carlisle, Pennsylvania — When Joyce Bylander was a first generation college student at Cleveland State University in the 1970s, her parents ignored her appeals to let her study abroad. They also said no when she wanted to join the Peace Corps after graduation. Bylander became a VISTA volunteer instead.

Ever since, as an administrator at the College of Charleston, Bucknell University, and now at Dickinson College, Bylander has made it her mission to sell students and, if necessary, parents on the wisdom of studying abroad. “When they say, ‘I know my parents won’t let me go,’” I say, ‘Have them call me. I am really good at convincing parents that this will be exactly what they wanted you to do all along.’”

“International education clearly is one of our defining characteristics. It’s a main reason students come. The study abroad numbers are as high as they are because we have learned so many
the 1980s. It operates centers at universities in a dozen countries: Bologna, Italy; Toulouse, France; Norwich, England; Malaga, Spain; Yaoundé, Cameroon; Bremen, Germany; Querétaro, Mexico; Moscow, Russia; Beijing, China; Nagoya, Japan; Seoul, Korea; and Madurai, India. In addition to semester- and year-long programs at these sites, it sends students out with professors on archaeology digs in ancient sites in Scotland and Mycenae, Greece, or to explore the Galapagos with biologists and Patagonia with sociologists and history professors. Dickinson has partnerships with universities in Australia, Costa Rica, England, Israel, and Italy. With a coveted grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, Dickinson and two historically black institutions, Xavier University in New Orleans and Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia, began in 2001 a “Crossing Borders” program that allows students from the three schools to spend a month in Cameroon, the fall semester at Dickinson, and the spring semester at Xavier or Spelman.

With Dickinson’s 2,200 undergraduates and a faculty of 175, it is a daunting proposition to maintain this global educational enterprise. Not counting international airfare, Dickinson students can spend a semester or full-year abroad and pay no more than the equivalent of the $33,000-plus for tuition, room, board, and fees in Carlisle (the programs in Cameroon and China actually cost less). Financial aid follows Dickinson students abroad.

Dickinson’s centers abroad are not the result of an Old West master plan for globalization, but rather the byproduct of curious, enterprising faculty who followed their intellectual interests across oceans. It opened its first center in Bologna in 1965, where a Dickinson political scientist, K. Robert Nilsson, sought to emulate the success that Johns Hopkins University had with its satellite campus at the University of Bologna. The late Nilsson was an authority on Italian politics and a passionate lover of Italian art and culture who used to jokingly refer to Carlisle as “Sleepy Hollow.” He shared his passions with generations of Dickinson students; the Dickinson center in Bologna today bears his name. It offers history, politics, and art courses in English as well as Italian language instruction. A Dickinson faculty member serves as resident director, and academics from Bologna teach as adjuncts. Nilsson also was instrumental in the creation of an international studies major in 1969.

Bylander said that students who study abroad come back with an increased capacity “for dissonance and discomfort. That is such a critical life skill: to be uncomfortable and still be able to function. The more they learn that skill, the more places they’ll be able to go in the world.”

“This campus will be visibly more diverse in five years,” she predicted. “I can only imagine where our next adventures will take us. The ways that we can imagine putting together exciting curricular ideas and exciting opportunities to change students’ lives are limitless.”

“As Americans we are coming to understand how very complex the world and the relationships between the people of the world are,” she said. “The greatest problems are still human problems. The more citizens we train who understand culture and cultural dynamics, the better we are as a country.”
Dickinson teamed with Gettysburg College and Franklin & Marshall three decades ago to launch a program in Medellin, Colombia, but shut it down in 1979 as that country began to be convulsed by drug violence. The 1980s brought a successful series of expansions in other parts of the world.

Nilsson was far from the only internationalist on the faculty. When Neil Weissman arrived with a Ph.D. in Russian history from Princeton, he was the sixth Russian specialist on the faculty. Weissman became the project director after Dickinson landed a three-year, $275,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to expand its Bologna program and open a new center in Toulouse, a university town and center of France’s aerospace industry in southwest France. NEH next awarded Dickinson a $1 million challenge grant to keep expanding its international education program. The college used that $1 million as seed money for what is now an $8 million Global Education Endowment Fund.

After serving as director of international education and heading the Clarke Center for the Interdisciplinary Study of Contemporary Issues, Weissman became Dickinson’s provost and dean of the college. Dickinson’s outward march was led by faculty operating on their own, he said, “but serendipitously they began to create something special: a complex and impressive edifice in global education. Once we added the program in Toulouse, other departments wanted theirs.” When Dickinson created an East Asian studies major in 1984, faculty and administrators debated whether to start with Chinese or Japanese. They added both.

Two out of five Dickinson faculty have directed study abroad programs. Many spent one or two years overseas as resident directors, and some have done multiple stints. They bring those experiences in India, Italy, England, Spain, France, Germany, and elsewhere back to campus and it colors their research and coursework. Brian Whalen, associate dean of the college and director of the Office of Global Education, estimated that 60 percent of the courses taught in Carlisle have international content and components.

Todd Wronski, a theater professor who has directed the program at the University of East Anglia in Norwich, England, said the experience “has been woven into the fabric of my professional life and the institutional life.” He runs regularly in Carlisle into colleagues from the University of East Anglia, visiting on sabbatical or for conferences or other reasons.

Apart from intellectual curiosity, faculty were interested in creating Dickinson centers overseas so they could exert more quality control over what students were learning during their time abroad. “We really were dissatisfied with the way students were coming back to us from (other) programs abroad,” said Nancy Mellerski, a French professor at Dickinson. “We wanted to be sure our majors had similar academic experiences whether here or overseas.”

Dickinson has made it possible for premeds and science majors to study abroad, not just humanities, language, or international studies students. The impediments are not just language. While several of the Dickinson centers are immersion programs, with courses taught entirely in the target language, others offer some or all instruction in English. Dickinson sends a large contingent to the University of East Anglia, and sends both a science and humanities professor with them. Bologna is another popular site, in part because students customarily do internships as well during their year there. Dickinson also offers a
special summer program in Bremen, Germany, every other summer for physics majors that is led by German-born physics professor Hans Pfister.

Biology professor Thomas F. Brennan will get his first taste of the overseas program at the University of East Anglia, in fall 2003. “The college needed somebody to do the job,” said Brennan, who is winding up a 25-year teaching career in Carlisle this spring. “That’s one of the advantages of the University of East Anglia. Most students figure the science courses are hard enough in English without worrying about a foreign language.” Brennan remembers a time when “science students just didn’t study abroad. It just wasn’t done anywhere. I don’t think I knew an undergraduate science major at the University of Illinois [his alma mater] who went abroad.”

Dickinson’s overall budget is $91 million. Whalen estimates that the college spends $28 million each year on various aspects of its internationalization, including foreign language instruction, faculty salaries, the overseas programming, and related efforts. Fifty people work overseas for the Office of Global Education, half as instructors and half as staff. The budget for study abroad alone is $3 million.

Naturally, Dickinson’s extensive study abroad opportunities are a major draw for students. “For someone like me interested in international relations, this is a perfect school,” said Elaine Sergeyev, 21, a senior from Baltimore, Maryland, whose family emigrated from Latvia a decade ago. She spent a semester in Malaga, Spain, and speaks four languages.

Dickinson endured lean years in the 1990s when applications fell by a third. Applications have rebounded sharply since Durden became president. The college stopped deeply discounting tuition and stepped up efforts to promote the study abroad programs. Last spring it turned away almost half of applicants; only a few dozen institutions in the entire country are as choosy. It does not require students to submit SAT scores; nevertheless, the average SAT score for the class of 2006 was a quite respectable 1239.

“There was never a moment when we wanted to walk away from any of the global education program, even when the institution was under some stress,” said Weissman. “The entire campus has a sense of ownership. It is a big edifice, but we don’t feel under a great strain sustaining it. It contributes far more energy to the campus than it absorbs.”

Some 175 Dickinson students were overseas when terrorists struck the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001. After a flurry of phone calls, not one student packed up and returned home. Beverley D. Eddy, a professor of German, recalled a colleague’s fielding a frantic call from the parent of a Dickinson student in Moscow who thought the college should bring all students home immediately. The parent backed down when the professor politely asked, “Well, should they fly back to New York or Washington?”

Enrique Martinez-Vidal, a newly retired professor of Spanish and Portuguese, was in Malaga at the time. “We spent that Tuesday working so hard to get the students to call their families. When they finally reached them, the parents would ask, ‘Are you safe?’ And the kids would say, ‘What are you talking about? We’re calling you to see if you are safe,’” he said.

Dickinson has been touched by terror and tragedy abroad, although not in its own study abroad programs. A Dickinson junior, John Buonocore III, 20, was among five Americans slain in the Rome airport massacre of December 27, 1985, when Palestinian terrorists sprayed machine gun fire and threw grenades at a Trans World Airlines check-in counter. Buonocore
had participated in a Stanford classics program and stayed behind to visit relatives in Italy. Benjamin Blutstein, 25, a 2000 Dickinson graduate, was among those killed in a terrorist blast inside a Hebrew University cafeteria on July 31, 2002. Last spring, Italian terrorists assassinated a popular professor who taught at the Bologna center; the professor had been working on national labor reforms.

“The world’s always been a dangerous place, but so is the U.S. a dangerous place,” said Durden. “When you come here, you come to a commitment to the world, and everything the world involves and needs to solve its issues.”

The provost said, “We’re there in the world. It’s not just students; it’s faculty. In 1999 one of our librarians was arrested while doing scholarly research in China on the Cultural Revolution.” Dickinson mounted a successful international campaign—including a Web site and a blizzard of press releases—to win the release of the Chinese-born librarian, Yongyi Song. That “was a very visible example of what happens when you’re engaged in the world,” said Weissman.

Dickinson is looking at new approaches to study abroad, including expansion of a successful field study program called the American Mosaic that originally began close to Carlisle. Students on the home campus devoted a full semester of study in 1996 delving into the history, culture, and ethnography of hard-pressed Steelton, Pennsylvania, and its displaced steel workers. A second American Mosaic in 1998 involved students spending four months exploring the lives of Latino migrant workers in nearby Adams County, Pennsylvania. Then in 2001 the American Mosaic metamorphosed into the Global Mosaic. Under the direction of sociology professor Susan Rose and history professor Marcelo Borges, students did a comparative study of Steelton and an oil company town in decline in Patagonia, Argentina. Global Mosaic in 2003 will take students back to Patagonia, and to follow the roots of Adams County migrant workers to Peribán de Ramos, Mexico, near Dickinson’s center in Querétaro. Dickinson faculty are also looking at the possibility of a Global Mosaic that would involve its students in both Bremen, Germany, and Yaoundé, Cameroon, in a study of how the transatlantic slave trade was conducted.

Students “step out of the box” when they sign up for a Global Mosaic, said Lonna Malmsheimer, an American studies professor who now directs Dickinson’s Community Studies Center. “They get the experience of cultural confusion that comes from studying abroad. If they do field work, they also get exposure to different strata of society. They see many other aspects of the society. They cross boundaries and meet people they otherwise would not meet.”

“Dickinson does a good job of establishing and maintaining programs in non-European sites,” said Dean of Students Joyce Bylander. “It teaches them about crossing cultures in new and nuanced ways that are exciting. Once you open up the world for students, it’s hard to close it back.”

“Crossing Borders” is the name of the unusual study abroad/exchange program that took a group of Dickinson, Xavier University, and Spelman College students to Cameroon in each of the past two summers. The students then spent the fall semester studying at Dickinson, followed by a full load of courses in the spring at either Xavier in New Orleans or Spelman in Atlanta.

The program allows students to spend a month traveling and studying in Cameroon for just $500, a price so modest that it “was almost like a gift,” said student Susan Pierson.
Pierson, 20, a Dickinson sophomore from Fort Lauderdale, Florida, said, “The study abroad program was the deciding factor in why I came to Dickinson. I wanted to see different perspectives and have that full, rounded experience. We’re kind of isolated here in America. Whenever you hear about Africa, people say how different it is. And yet I found so many similarities. That’s what I told everyone when I came back: ‘It’s not what you think it is. It was wonderful, the community and the people that care about you. When they talk to you they hold your hand the whole time that you’re talking and look in your eyes and nod.’”

Valerie Harmon, 19, a Dickinson sophomore from the Bronx, said, “Anyone can go to Europe; it’s not a big deal. But Africa seemed so far away. You had to struggle to get there. There was no way I could have passed up the opportunity.” She, too, was struck by the Cameroonians’ strong sense of community. “It was just great to be among people who, when you walk into their room or their apartment, they cut off the television because they want to hear what it is you have to say,” said Harmon.

Women outnumbered men in the “Crossing Borders” group four to one. On average, throughout the U.S., almost twice as many women as men study abroad. Robert Ness, a Dickinson English professor who helped create the Cameroon center, offered his own take on that phenomenon. “Women are more venturesome, more intellectually curious, and less inclined to hang around here and bond with their fraternity buddies,” said Ness. He estimated that all but 10 of the 100 Dickinson students who have spent a semester in Yaoundé over the past decade were women.

Two-thirds of the Dickinson class of 2002 studied abroad. Since some students go to more than one place, Dickinson shows up at 80 percent-plus in the Open Doors ratings.

“We have big faculty buy-in,” said French professor Catherine A. Beaudry, who has twice been the resident director in Toulouse. Tullio Pagano, a professor of Italian and chair of the French and Italian department, went to Toulouse himself one summer as a student in an immersion program for faculty. Like Dickinson students, Pagano lived with a host family. Dieter J. Rollfinke, a longtime member of the German department faculty, said colleagues go the extra mile for Dickinson’s study abroad programs because they know “this is what distinguishes us from other schools.”

While Dickinson isn’t planning to expand its overseas centers beyond the current dozen, it is always looking for new opportunities to encourage students to get out their passports. For nearly 20 summers, archaeology majors have worked with R. Leon Fitts, chair of the classical studies department, on excavations of Roman ruins in East Lothian, Scotland. Now they can also go on digs in the ruins of ancient Mycenae, Greece, under the direction of Christofilis Maggidis, a Greek-born archaeologist who accepted Dickinson’s offer of an endowed chair in 2001. Maggidis is also the assistant to the Greek archaeologist, Spyros Iakovidis, who oversees all the work in Mycenae. “We are the only undergraduate institution there now. That was a great honor for the college,” said Maggidis. “Our students get the best possible training with the best possible site.”

Maggidis, who earned his Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania in 1994, said he had offers from larger universities but chose Dickinson because “I was searching for a very good, dynamic, small college that would immediately realize the benefit of an undergraduate archaeology program and having such a major
Dickinson’s emphasis on international programs played a big difference in my decision."

Natalia Iarotskaya, 19, an exchange student from Moscow State University, said the international community at Dickinson “is small but strong. And Dickinson students are really hospitable for us.” She remembered hearing complaints from Americans and other international students attending Moscow State “that they don’t really have Russian friends and can’t practice with native speakers. I have a lot of American friends here.” Russians are intolerant of accents, while Americans “are crazy about accents. They love them,” she observed.

Christina Barth, 23, a graduate student from the University of Bremen, speaks English with a perfect American accent, cultivated starting at age eight when she spent a year in Logan, Utah, where her mother, a high school English teacher, came for graduate training (“After three months, my English was better than hers,” she recalled). The University of Bremen requires future English teachers to study in an English-speaking country for at least one semester. “I didn’t want to go to Great Britain because I’m afraid to lose my accent. I work hard on it,” said Barth, who also worked in Massachusetts for a year as an au pair.

“There’s another girl from my university here, and we keep talking about how when you’re talking German, people will stop and will say, ‘Hey, wasn’t that German? I know some German,’ and then they tell you they are freshmen, but maybe they want to go to Bremen and what’s Bremen like, and then they tell you where they live and give you their phone number,” Barth said. “People here are so friendly. It helps so much.”

Despite her formidable command of the language, Barth is still struggling with some American verbal shorthand that substitutes for conversation. “I had real big trouble with ‘What’s up?’ I say, ‘I’m good,’ and they’re gone. In Germany, when you ask somebody, ‘How are you doing?’ you really want to know. You want the whole story.”

Likewise, Vlad Olievschi, 19, a sophomore, said that when he tried saying “Hey” back home in Bucharest, Romania, “I found that doesn’t work with my family.” Olievschi learned about Dickinson on the Internet. He was impressed by how much interest Robert J. Massa, vice president for enrollment, student life, and college relations, showed in his application. Massa personally answered Olievschi’s letter and stayed in touch throughout the application year.

Olievschi’s parents, both engineers, sent him to an unlicensed kindergarten that taught pupils English songs and poetry during the last days of the Ceausescu regime. After the dictator was toppled in 1989, English was taught in regular schools. “I started early and I think that’s what makes the difference,” he said. Olievschi wondered if a small American town would be right for him, but now he’s glad he chose Carlisle. “I really get a sense of living in a community,” he said. “I don’t consider New York or Washington or Los Angeles regular American life. Here I get the idea of how America really is.”

Ana-Maria Vasilescu, 19, also from Bucharest, said Dickinson students themselves are not very diverse, but the college is very successful in convincing students “to get out and see other ways of life.” Judging from other campuses she has visited, “Dickinson students are probably better informed” about world affairs, Vasilescu said.

Athanasius Ako Ayuk, 25, a graduate student from the University of Yaoundé, commended the Dickinson Office of Global Education for seeking to enroll more international students. “They are committed to internationalizing the college,” said Ayuk, who noted that Penn State, a much larger university, recently shut down its academic exchange with Cameroon. “Dickinson students are well known there,” Ayuk added.
Ayuk had one complaint. He thought the pictures that the “Crossing Borders” students brought back from their month in Cameroon “didn’t do justice to the country. Their pictures didn’t show the good places—not even the beautiful quarter in which they were living.” Ayuk said, “Every country has its slums, its dirty backyards, but I’m particularly concerned about Americans’ image of Africa. They see it as a continent of disease, poverty, and starvation.” Ayuk predicted that as Dickinson brings in more foreign students, it will make the Carlisle campus a tighter knit place. “People here seem naturally distant from each other. The more international students come, the more warmth they will bring to the campus,” he said.

Provost Weissman said that more than most U.S. colleges and universities with study abroad programs, Dickinson “takes responsibility for the overseas experience. If I were a prospective student and asked a college about its biology department, I wouldn’t be impressed if they said, ‘Well, we don’t actually have our own biology department. We rely on other people to teach biology, but they’re fine. We’ll send you off to work with them.’ Yet lots of colleges and universities are willing to do that vis-à-vis study abroad.

“Wealth our approach may not be exportable to every college, I’m a great believer that any college serious about international education ought to be running at least one program of its own,” the provost said.

Dickinson’s long-standing commitment to its overseas centers puts the college in a strong position to weather crises and minor turbulence, from unrest to currency devaluations. Whalen’s office maintains a special $1 million fund to help tide its centers through emergencies.

Dickinson, both independently and in conjunction with other universities, also is trying to gauge the impact of study abroad on students after their return to campus and after graduation. Whalen is personally tracking hundreds of Dickinson alumni across time. Dickinson also is part of a Title VI-funded study with Georgetown University, Rice University, and the University of Minnesota that will gather information from thousands of students on what they learned while studying abroad.

“I always say study abroad begins when they come back. It doesn’t happen in the experience. It’s too painful. Ask them when they come back and you’ll get poor answers. Ask a year or two later, and you get very sophisticated answers,” said Whalen, who edits Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad. Whalen’s office is also the host site for Abroad View magazine.

Durden said that Dickinson’s commitment to global education goes “beyond mere study abroad. Americans have a very good way of forgetting their junior year abroad; they come back and it’s gone. We’re about a lifestyle. We’re about internationalizing the campus.”

Durden, a one-time education consultant to the U.S. State Department, said the late Emperor Hirohito believed every emerging leader in postwar Japan should have 15 close international friends. Hirohito felt his generation’s insularity was one reason Japan pursued its disastrous course into war.

Durden’s ambition for Dickinson graduates is similar. “I want them to be able to get off a plane anywhere in the world and immediately be comfortable—and to have friends and colleagues in each place,” the president said.