

VOICES

By Elaina Loveland

An Interview with Goucher College President **SANFORD UNGAR**

Education Abroad Required

BEGINNING IN FALL 2006, Goucher College will require all undergraduate students to study abroad at least once before they graduate. Students can fulfill the requirement by studying for a full year or semester overseas or participate in one of the college's three-week intensive courses offered during winter break or in the summer. To help offset travel expenses, Goucher offers a \$1,200 voucher to each student.

IE: In the past, how much emphasis has Goucher had on education abroad?

SANFORD UNGAR: Our new study abroad requirement is very consistent with the history of Goucher College. John Franklin Goucher, one of the founders and the second president of the college, was a great advocate of international learning. He was a Methodist educator and missionary, and he traveled widely and started schools, particularly in Asia. He and his wife, Mary Fisher Goucher, were instrumental in donating the land in downtown Tokyo for a university there called Aoyama Gakuin. He also started schools in China and in India.

Right from the start, Goucher had an international point of view. Quite a few Goucher students have studied abroad over the years, but as is the case at many liberal arts colleges, studying abroad has sometimes been regarded as an extra or burdensome thing to do. It was not really integrated into people's studies. We want to change that.

IE: In recent years, in your opinion, how has education abroad become more or less prominent among colleges?

SANFORD UNGAR: Encouraging intercultural learning now seems to be a trend almost everywhere. But it was something that I particularly wanted to emphasize at Goucher, and I was encouraged to do so when I was hired in 2001.

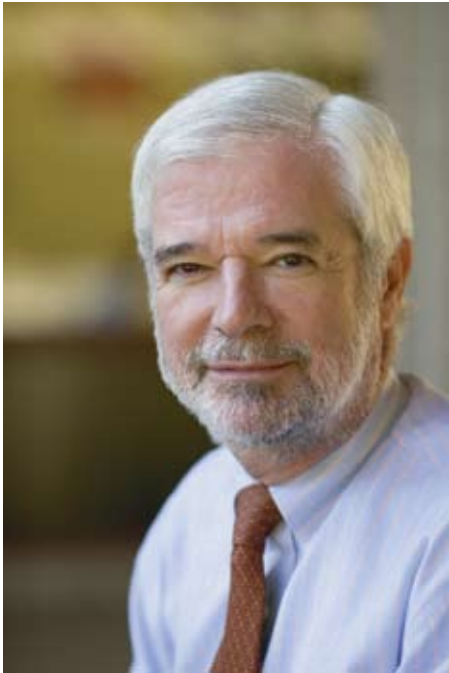
The events of September 11 occurred during my

third month here. And in reaction to that, I suppose, you could go in one direction or another. You could say, "This is really scary and we're going to circle the wagons and pull back and be cautious and careful." Or you could say, "Well, there are things to be learned here and I think we should take advantage of this opportunity to reach out to the world—to be more open and to learn what we can."

I think the best way to change the American image in the world is to change the way Americans see the rest of the world and interact with it. *That* is something we can change, rather than just saying we have to change the way *they* see *us*. We need to see the outside world in a different light and one way to accomplish this is through study abroad. In the process, *how we send people to engage with the world*, to relate with other cultures and other traditions, *can help change the world*. Along the way, we can often see our own country much more clearly from a distance.

IE: How did the idea for the campus-wide education abroad requirement begin?

SANFORD UNGAR: Soon after I arrived at Goucher, we launched a new strategic planning process. The committee was broadly representative of all college constituencies. It was chaired by a member of the faculty and a member of our Board of Trustees, and it included students, faculty, staff, and alums. The strategic plan made some very strong statements about international and intercultural exposure and



experience. We were a little bit naïve at the time. I think we thought we could require everybody to have an international experience every year. I laugh now because that would be very ambitious.

Just getting everyone to have some international experience at least once is logistically challenging, but I think it is going to work well. We already have students graduating now with multiple international experiences, taking every possible opportunity to go abroad. And as we look forward, we may have more and more students leaving here with not one, but several, study abroad experiences.

IE: How have people responded to the education abroad requirement?

SANFORD UNGAR: The response from all sides has been overwhelmingly positive. There will obviously be a few administrative challenges. For example, there will be some students who will not be able to study abroad for medical or other reasons. For them and a few others—such as international students and Americans who have already lived abroad extensively—we’ll create experiences that focus on intercultural learning somewhere within the United States. We already have one of these programs on the U.S.-Mexican border.

IE: Obviously, financial constraints can be a deterrent to college students studying abroad. How is Goucher dealing with financial concerns?

SANFORD UNGAR: We are obviously worried about financial constraints. We don’t want finances to prevent anyone from studying abroad. We want

to keep it within every student’s reach. There are two different ways to fulfill the new requirement to study abroad; one is to go off for either a semester- or a year-long program overseas. And in that case, it’s covered by our tuition. In other words, if you go on a Goucher-approved program, you pay us the Goucher tuition and we pay the study abroad program.

The other way to fulfill the requirement is for students to take part in one of our three-week intensive study-abroad courses. The \$1,200 voucher is for every student whether he or she participates in a semester program, a year-long program, or a three-week intensive program. The cost of the three-week intensive programs is in addition to normal tuition expenses, and because the cost tends to be more than \$1,200, the voucher will not cover the entire cost of one of these courses, but it will certainly help. Students can apply for financial aid to cover the remaining costs associated with studying abroad through the three-week intensive programs, and we are raising special funds to help in this area. We are determined that no one will lose the opportunity to go overseas on the basis of financial need.

IE: How do you deal with questions from prospective students and parents about education abroad now being a requirement rather than an elective part of a students’ coursework?

SANFORD UNGAR: What we say is that “Goucher is going global. Here’s why. Join us.” We are making the point that you can’t just be a citizen of your own community; you have to be a citizen of the world. In fact, when we held an “Explore Goucher Day” this fall for prospective students, the audience burst into applause when one of our current students said that she had been abroad four times. So I think we are attracting people who are interested in this and believe in it. There is no way to be certain, of course, but we will see. We may lose some applications initially because of the new requirement, but I think, in time, the requirement will actually attract more applicants to Goucher because of its boldness and uniqueness.

IE: Because Goucher is going to have all students studying abroad in some form, it seems likely that you will need to expand your education abroad program. Are you going to encourage students to go to more programs already in place or expand the offerings of education abroad opportunities?

SANFORD UNGAR: Both of the above! We have approximately 17 three-week intensive courses at the moment. Most of them occur every other year, but some run every year. One of our most popular programs is in Accra, Ghana, which explores culture and

arts in West Africa. We have a program in Roatan, Honduras, that focuses on tropical marine biology, and there have been three-week intensive courses in London and Athens for a long time. We have a brand new three-week intensive course in Argentina and Uruguay for students to study the roles of women in the human rights, social, and economic movements of Latin America. The first group of students just returned this summer from a three-week intensive course in China. There is also a group going to India for the first time in January, and I am going along on that one. Our three-week intensive courses can be found in just about every corner of the world.

In fact, I estimate that we will probably double the capacity of our three-week intensive courses before long. Many of the ones we offer now will have to go annually instead of every other year, and new ones are being planned as well to meet the increased demand. As for the semester- and year-long programs, we are always looking for new sites overseas where we can either establish

our own programs or cooperate with existing ones. And we are very determined not to send students just to the “typical” study abroad locations in Western Europe. We want to ensure that our students have as many study abroad options available to them as possible.

IE: Does launching the new education abroad requirement impact your staffing?

SANFORD UNGAR: I think it is too soon to know what our staffing needs may be to implement this study abroad requirement. We are just beginning to examine some of the implications and complications of such an undertaking, and the first surge in students going abroad will probably come the year after next (academic year 2007-2008), when the first students to whom the requirement applies are sophomores. In some ways, the burden will initially be on faculty members to create new three-week intensive courses abroad and to advise their students about where and when to study overseas.

Goucher Education Abroad Programs

Argentina and Uruguay

- ▶ Roles of women in the human rights, social, and economic movements of Latin America

Brazil

- ▶ History and Performance of Dance in Brazil
- ▶ Brazilian Ecosystems

China

- ▶ China: Past, Present, and Future

Czech Republic

- ▶ Twentieth Century Prague: History, Politics, and Literature

Denmark

- ▶ Denmark International Study Program (DIS) (semester or year)

Ecuador

- ▶ Universidad Espiritu Santo (semester)
- ▶ Institution: Universidad San Francisco de Quito (semester)

England

- ▶ Institution: Cambridge Institute of Economic and Political Studies
- ▶ Dance and Theatre as a Cultural Metaphors
- ▶ Hansard Scholars Programme (semester or summer)
- ▶ Mahoney and Caplan Scholars (Oxford) (semester or year)
- ▶ Middlesex University (semester or year)
- ▶ University of East Anglia (semester or year)
- ▶ University of Westminster (semester or year)

France

- ▶ French 130 in Avignon
- ▶ Internships in Francophone Europe (IFE)
- ▶ Paris Program (semester or year)

Germany

- ▶ German 130 in Berlin
- ▶ Eberhard Karls Universität (semester or year)

Ghana

- ▶ Culture and Arts in West Africa
- ▶ University of Ghana (semester or year)

Greece

- ▶ Stage and Page in Greece

Honduras

- ▶ Tropical Marine Biology in Honduras

India

- ▶ India: Solving the Puzzle
- ▶ Calcutta (semester or year)

Italy

- ▶ A Cultural Exploration of Italian Opera
- ▶ Siena (semester or year)

Mexico

- ▶ Border Crossing: Experiencing the U.S.-Mexico Border
- ▶ Spanish 120 in Cuernavaca
- ▶ Universidad Autonoma de Guadalajara (semester or year)

Romania

- ▶ The Art and Science of Glass in Romania

Russia

- ▶ Summer in Moscow

Scotland

- ▶ Glasgow School of Art (semester or year)

South Africa

- ▶ Inequality and Social Policy in South Africa

Spain

- ▶ Astronomy and Spanish in Granada
- ▶ University of Salamanca (semester or year)

Thailand

- ▶ Payap University and volunteer work in the city of Chiang Mai (semester or year)

IE: How do you think this education abroad requirement will influence Goucher's curriculum in general? Will international experience extend into classrooms on campus?

SANFORD UNGAR: Given the mission of the strategic plan, we are trying to internationalize our curriculum across the board. For many of our longstanding three-week intensive courses, there is a seven-week course that students must take before they go. The majority of these cohorts that have gone overseas together remain a cohort when they return. They then apply what they have learned to the courses they take here. Their international experience inevitably becomes part of the whole college learning experience.

I think that many of our students have found that when they do go abroad, their experience overseas has a direct relationship to the things that they are doing here. We had a graduate a few years ago, Kara Byrne, who had gone overseas to Argentina and to South Africa. She was also very involved in community service at Goucher and volunteered at a battered women's shelter in Baltimore. She has often said that what she learned overseas was very useful to her community service work here, and vice versa. The local-international link is an integral part of the curriculum's overall design.

In addition, just this fall we launched a new multi-year initiative called the International Scholars Program. Students in their first and second year form a cohort and participate in internationally focused seminars together over time, which is another way—aside from the study abroad requirement—that we are internationalizing our curriculum.

IE: Will the new education abroad requirement influence the foreign language curriculum here?

SANFORD UNGAR: Of course. The more we send our students overseas, the more they are curious about learning to communicate in a foreign language. The study of foreign languages is a key component of any international experience. I believe that through language training and proficiency, you can better immerse yourself in another culture and learn from that culture on a deeper, more profound level. So we will inevitably be teaching more languages at Goucher in the future. We already have a virtual explosion in the number of people studying Spanish, by the way.

IE: How do you think this is going to change Goucher's image to other colleges and universities in, say, five or ten years?

SANFORD UNGAR: I think launching the new study abroad requirement does set Goucher apart

from other colleges. Today, many institutions of higher education are struggling to identify themselves and to distinguish themselves from one other. Prospective students often ask the questions, "What is special about this place? Why should I go to college here?" So I think it will change the character of our campus in the sense that it will be an internationally oriented place and very self-consciously so.

When students go abroad, they come back and often find that their peers on campus don't quite understand what they've seen and what they've experienced. Well, imagine a campus where every student has either gone abroad or is going abroad. There will be much more for the students to talk about, and they can better relate to one another since they will have had similar—yet different—overseas experiences.

IE: What does Goucher hope to accomplish with this initiative?

SANFORD UNGAR: Throwing stones in a pond creates ripples. We have 1,350 undergraduate students right now, and there is a limit to the influence you can have. But if each of these students affects five or six or 10 other people, including members of their family, that's where you can make a difference. When they leave here and talk about the value of studying abroad, it is going to filter down and that can create real change.

You don't have to look any further than the front page of the newspaper to see that global events have a direct and immediate influence on all of our lives. Those of us in the business of higher education are simply not living up to our responsibility if we do not find ways to educate our students not only to understand what is happening on the international scene, but also to bring their learning to bear in addressing the global challenges of our time. At Goucher, we are taking the lead in redesigning what it means to provide a comprehensive education for the world of the twenty-first century.

The idea is to have every student have some experience abroad to put his or her learning into an international context. Even a short three-week experience abroad is enough to change someone's perspective. The goal is for our students to influence others to think differently and more broadly about our country's role in the world. We want Goucher students to demonstrate who they are to people of other cultures and see themselves more clearly by learning from those cultures. We hope other colleges will join us in this effort. I hope it is a tide that cannot be stopped. **IE**

ELENA LOVELAND is managing editor of *IE*.

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