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Gifts & Grants

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Going Places

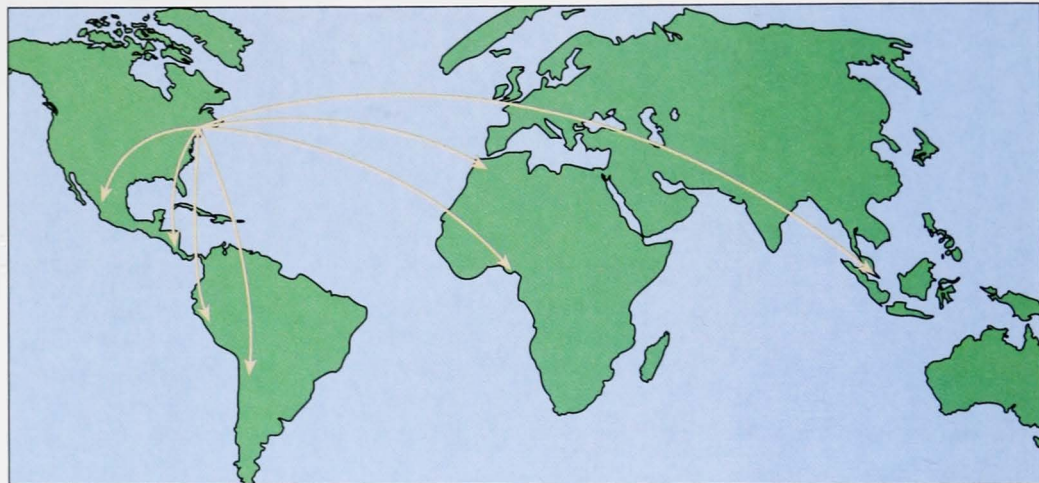
Ford Foundation grant sends student researchers scattering

By Kevin Cool

Colby's opportunities for international study received a boost recently when the Ford Foundation granted the College \$50,000 to underwrite an ambitious program of field research. Provided under the auspices of the foundation's Crossing Borders initiative, Colby's grant supported travel by 13 students recently to countries in Africa, Central and South America and Asia.

The program is designed to foster cross-disciplinary study in international affairs by establishing research groups whose members examine different aspects of an issue. It's a perfect fit for Colby, says Patrice Franko, associate professor of economics and international studies and the director of the program, because it capitalizes on the College's already strong emphasis on international study, characterized by one of the nation's highest percentages of study abroad participation.

"This concept envisages a three-year strategy where students are brought into the project in their sophomore year," Franko said. "As sophomores they are given the theoretical tools that equip them for what comes later. They go abroad during the junior year and get that first taste of international experience. Then we deepen it in the senior year." Either in January of the junior year or in the summer following the junior year students will have opportunities to participate in intensive, short-term internships. This is followed by a senior year dedicated to literature review, field research and preparing a final paper.



The Ford Foundation grant funded student travel to Nicaragua, Mexico, Peru, Bolivia, Morocco, Cameroon and Singapore.

The Ford Foundation selected 30 colleges and universities from among the nearly 200 that applied for the pilot phase of the Crossing Borders program. The foundation will grant a handful of \$400,000 to \$600,000 awards to schools that produce the best pilot programs.

Franko's and Associate Professor of Government Guilain Denoeux's students are doing research in Nicaragua, Mexico, Peru, Morocco, Cameroon, Singapore and Bolivia. Senior Abbey Lambert spent her Jan Plan in Cameroon interviewing dozens of government officials, opposition party members, media professionals, civic leaders and foreign embassy personnel to develop an assessment of the country's transition toward democracy. Before she left she said the trip would be not only an exciting academic exercise but would grow her confidence as a researcher. "I have to arrange the interviews and organize an itinerary to try to get it all done in a month—that will be intense," she said. "It's just a tre-

mendous opportunity. How many undergraduates get to do this kind of field research?"

Junior Will Barndt, whose one-month field study in Bolivia was underwritten by the grant, was asked by the director of the United States Agency for International Development mission there to provide a debriefing following his research. Denoeux says the debriefing request is a good indication of the rigor expected of students participating in the program. "This is graduate type work," he said.

Denoeux acknowledged that sending students alone into countries to conduct field research is extraordinary: "These are highly motivated and highly capable students, but they're still 20-year-old kids. What we're asking them to do is really unheard of."

Franko and Denoeux hope that kind of boundary busting will distinguish Colby from the other pilot participants. "We need to have a compelling project to win the larger grant," Franko said.

Franko, as a way of preparing her students for their field study,

organized a trip to Washington, D.C., in November. Students spent four days learning from Beltway insiders how policy decisions get made. The trip was enhanced by the involvement of Colby alumni, including Ambassador Robert Gelbard '64, special presidential envoy to Bosnia; David Hunt '63, a retired CIA officer; and David Leavy '91, communications director for the National Security Council in the White House. Hunt last year established a fund to allow Colby students involved in international studies to spend Jan Plan abroad conducting research, a gift Franko characterized as "the kernel from which this larger project developed."

Should Colby receive one of the Ford Foundation's large Crossing Borders grants, an expanded version of the current program would become a fixture in the College's curricular offerings, Franko says. "Then we would be talking about many more students going many more places over a longer period of time," she said. ♦