

# Undergraduates prepare to GO! GLOBAL in their work

After Fahmida Azad collects her diploma next month, she will complete one last leg of her undergraduate education. This summer she plans to spend six weeks in India conducting research and interning with a non-governmental organization in Udaipur, Rajasthan.

Working through Nourish International, a Campus Y committee that addresses poverty worldwide, Azad is one of a half-dozen Carolina students who will work in northwestern India to create a documentary illustrating how young community members evolve as leaders. Part documentation, part recruitment effort, the film is intended to help empower young leaders within their communities.

"The people will start their own sustainable development projects," said Azad, a senior psychology major. "Our goal is to document the work of these leaders as they do something to benefit the community as a way to encourage other young leaders in surrounding areas to pick up on this idea for their own communities."

Azad, who is from Bangladesh but has lived in the United States since she was 9, will serve as the translator. She has taken courses in Hindi writing and reading and speaks the language fluently.

To make sure the content is authentic, she will be the conduit of information from the community leaders to the documentary makers, including her fellow Tar Heels.

Azad is no stranger to traveling abroad; she traveled throughout Southeast Asia the summer before her sophomore year. But she knew this summer would provide a different kind of experience and wanted to be prepared for what to expect. She also hoped to meet and talk with other Carolina students involved with similar international projects.

## IN-DEPTH PREPARATION

That is what led Azad to the GO! Global Orientation on Culture and Ethics, held last month in the FedEx Global Education Center.

Designed to go beyond information about health and safety logistics or travel restrictions, the orientation brought together 130 undergraduates who will conduct service, service-learning, research or internships in Africa, Asia and Latin America in the summer or fall.

Students worked on skill building and setting realistic expectations. They participated in activities to help anticipate challenges and prepare for culture shock. They focused on understanding cultural norms and addressing the philosophical and ethical issues of working in communities within developing countries.

And they had an opportunity to interact with other students who had already been through similar experiences as well as faculty and staff who could provide region-specific information.

"We learned that things are not always black and white," Azad said. "In the group exercises, for example, we talked about how some

of the major American ideals are challenged abroad. We tend to value things that we accomplish — the time- and task-oriented things — but that might not be the value system in another culture.

"Making us think about these things helped prepare us for what we might encounter and how to conduct ourselves."

The brainchild of Jenny Huq, director of the APPLES Service-Learning Program, and Lucy Lewis, assistant director of the Campus Y, GO! Global is an outgrowth of smaller programs that had existed within the two units, now broadened to help address the University's increasing international focus.

"During the nine-month planning process, we integrated successful training components from various programs and scaled them up to better serve the needs of undergraduates across campus," Huq said. "One objective was merely to bring the students together so no one felt alone or without resources."

The orientation was a campuswide collaboration of 15 programs that support undergraduate international experiences (see [www.unc.edu/go/about.php](http://www.unc.edu/go/about.php)). Five programs provided financial support: APPLES, Campus Y, Burch Programs and Honors Study Abroad, Morehead-Cain Foundation and the Center for Global Initiatives.

## REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Students who sign on for this type of international experience are highly motivated to make a difference in the world. Often, however, they have difficulty balancing their aspirations with realistic expectations.

Helping them find that pragmatic middle



Fahmida Azad, left, and Elaina Giolando meet at the FedEx Global Education Center, where the GO! Global Orientation on Culture and Ethics was held last month.

ground was one of the goals of GO! Global.

"We have so many high-achieving students at Carolina, and we encourage them to be successful. Then, they're put in a situation where they might not know the language, or the culture and ethics of an area," Lewis said.

"There's a real need to talk beforehand about what these students realistically can achieve, because we don't want to set them up to be discouraged about this important learning experience."

For Elaina Giolando, a sophomore international studies major who will work and conduct community-based research throughout Guatemala this summer through a SURF fellowship, that message was key.

"The orientation really addressed creating a realistic idea about what we can accomplish," she said. "We talked about how to tackle big problems by making improvements — and

how to appreciate that accomplishment."

Another valuable aspect, she said, was discussing what it meant to spend a significant period of time in a developing country and become part of that community.

Giolando will spend the summer conducting research and interning with Community Enterprise Solutions, which helps communities develop sustainable solutions to rural economic, health and educational problems. She will stay with local families along the way.

Preparing the students was a team effort.

Leading the orientation discussions were Carolina faculty members Barbara Anderson and Ann Dunbar from the Department of African and Afro-American Studies, and Trude Bennett and Deborah Bender from the Gillings School of Global Public Health. They were joined by Hannah Gill from the Institute for the Study of the Americas and Darla Dear-dorff from Duke University's Association of International Education Administrators.

In addition, a panel of six students who had worked in developing countries talked about ethical challenges they faced.

"Hearing the personal experiences of people who had done similar things was really valuable," Giolando said.

Azad agreed. "It helped us see that setting unrealistic expectations can build up a lot of frustration."

Based on feedback from participants, Huq and Lewis already have ideas for improvements for next year. Also, the students will reconvene on Sept. 17 for GO! Reflections to reflect on their experiences abroad.

They will create a legacy of their work by turning items from their travels into a reflective art project, led by community artist Bryant Holsenbeck. ■

## EXPANDING CAROLINA'S BOUNDARIES

Internationalization is not just a University aspiration; it is becoming a reality.

Although Carolina did not become as globally engaged as some of its peers early on, it has made considerable strides in the last decade or so, said Peter Coclanis, associate provost for international affairs.

Students continue to demand more in the way of international courses, something the new undergraduate curriculum is addressing, he said. And they study, conduct research and participate in service-learning abroad in great numbers.

"It was amazing to see the range of students and the variety of reasons they are going abroad during GO! Global," he said. "This program is emblematic of our new aggressive position internationally."

Internationalization is a two-way street, Coclanis said. Not only does it involve increasing the transit of international faculty, visitors and students to UNC, it also calls for sending Carolina students out into the world to "get the UNC flag planted in more places."

"We believe most of the future's problems and challenges have global dimensions, and we want our students to be prepared," he said.

The University is expanding the boundaries of its tripod mission of teaching, research and service.

"With help from people across campus, we are evolving into a true international university," Coclanis said. "We are not moving away from our tradition of serving the state, but we think we can better serve North Carolina by reaching out into the world."