(Now) I Know What You Did Last Summer

High gas prices may have kept the rest of America from traveling over the summer, but the College of Charleston was a regular globetrotter. Just in case you didn’t get a postcard, here is a sampling of some of our faculty and staff’s summer research abroad, group trips and leisure travel.

Sarah Simmonte, assistant director for the Center for International Education, accompanied two students on the first leg of their Summer Voyage with Semester at Sea. In an effort to understand the program first hand and thereby better advise students about the experience, she joined the ship in Halifax, Nova Scotia, for the faculty/staff orientation, and sailed for eight days to Bergen, Norway.

Courtenay Rivers, administrative assistant in the sociology and anthropology department, traveled the Country Music Highway after doing some missionary work in Kentucky as one of Jehovah’s Witnesses. She also stopped in the Jenny Wiley State Resort Park for a week.

David Kowal, art history professor, spent the summer in South America, where he co-directed a study-abroad trip to Peru and, previous to that, traveled over 6,000 miles through Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil to places that were accessible only by local chicken buses or by foot (and sometimes not at all) to research the Jesuit-sponsored reducciones (village enclaves) of 16th–18th century “greater Paraguay.”

Lakisha Boston, administrative assistant in the Nathan E. Miles Early Childhood Development Center, celebrated her birthday in San Juan, Puerto Rico, where she went horseback riding for the first time and hiked through a rainforest to the bottom of a waterfall.

Marsha Alterman, student life advisor in Jewish studies, accompanied students on the College’s first Birthright Israel trip. The group rafted in the Jordan River, learned how to make Kosher wine, rode camels in a Bedouin camp, helped children at an Ethiopian school, hiked in the Golan Heights and through Nachal David and reconnected with their Jewish heritage, religion and culture.

Elizabeth Grantham, assistant for administration and public relations in the Office of Professional Development in Education, went to the top of the Gateway Arch – the Gateway to the West – in St. Louis. Grantham, who is South Carolina’s 2007–2008 district president for the National Exchange Club, was honored with the Presidential Award at the St. Louis convention.

Guoli Liu, political science professor, lead a study-abroad program to China in June and remained in China for the summer to do research for the Chinese politics course he is teaching this semester and to attend a volleyball game and a soccer game at the Beijing Olympics. Ellen Duncan, project manager in information technology, took two weeks to drive home from San Diego, where she was visiting family. Over the 3,100 miles between there and here, she took a helicopter ride from Las Vegas to the Grand Canyon, where she stopped to have a champagne picnic; golfed in Sedona; admired the Petrified Forest and the Painted Desert; and gathered crystals from quartz mines in Arkansas.

Curtis Franks, exhibition coordinator at the Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, spent a month in Sierra Leone and Guinea, West Africa, with a group of South Carolina educators interested in teaching students about the unique historical and cultural connections between the people of that region and their descendants in coastal Georgia, North Carolina and South Carolina. He enjoyed long, solitary walks in the early morning hours.

Trisha Folds-Bennett, associate dean of the Honors College, visited Tegucigalpa, Honduras, where she worked with the LAMB Institute, a Christian organization that was founded by a College of Charleston alumna to serve the children and families of Honduras. She spent her time building a dining hall, a playground and cottages at a residential children’s home and visiting the homes of families in LAMB’s community assistance program.
There’s no doubt about it: Crouched at his potter’s wheel, plodding away among the scraps of clay littering his studio floor, John Davis is completely in his element.

“I like the elasticity of clay. You can do virtually anything with it – that’s why it’s so prevalent throughout history,” says the campus arborist, who is also a painter with works hanging in the second-, third- and fourth-floor lounges of the Stern Student Center. “Plus, there’s an endless supply of it in most places, since, when you think about it, you’re transforming dirt into art.”

It should come as no surprise that Davis – who has been creating art out of dirt in the gardens and flower beds across campus since he came to the College right after Hurricane Hugo – doesn’t mind getting his hands dirty for the sake of aesthetics. Still, for Davis, it’s not just about beauty.

“Clay is man’s first high-tech medium,” he says. “Where would we be without pottery? No stew! No lobster bisque! Not to mention history: Civilizations for a long time have been judged by the quality of their pottery and identified by the design of their pottery.”

Davis’ appreciation for clay and pottery started at the University of South Carolina, where, as an art major, he took the school’s first ceramics course and quickly learned that pottery was about more than just technique and training.

“You can get the technique down, but if you can’t visualize the form – if you can’t feel the center of mass and see its beginning and its end – your pot will never mean anything,” says Davis, who went on to teach ceramics at USC and the Richland Arts School while curating at the Columbia Museum of Art in the 1970s. “It’s very difficult to teach. People who can see the form in clay – you don’t have to tell them – they can just visualize it. That gives them a big leg up.”

As it turns out, an eye for form might just give you a leg up in landscaping, as well. At least that’s how it worked out for Davis, whose creative focus eventually moved outside.

“As a landscape designer, I visualize things from overhead, and I’ve found that if it looks good in the drawing, it’ll look good in the garden,” he says. “The colors, the mass, the texture, the lines: It helps to have an eye for these things.”

Whether he’s working in a flower bed, at the potter’s wheel or at his easel, for Davis, it’s all about letting the unique properties of his medium speak for itself.

“I get a great joy of manipulating paint and color and I try to let the color take on movement in my paintings,” says Davis, who primarily uses acrylics. “There’s no message there except color. I’d like people to say, ‘Oh, what nice color.’ Maybe it’ll brighten up their day a bit. But color is always the big message.”

The “big message” in his pottery may not be quite as vibrant, but it is just as straightforward, subtle and striking.

“The two things I like about how I do clay are: One, I like the material to show through,” says Davis. “That’s what I want people to see when they look at my pottery: material and process.”

In other words, Davis wants us to see the organic art within the elements and the creative potential that emerges at the hands of man. And, while we can’t all have an eye for these things, we can all recognize talent when we see it.

John Davis’ goblets, vases, platters and other pottery and sculpture are on display at Sparks Studios, 12 Hagood Ave. For more information, visit sparksstudiosandgallery.com.
COUGAR HOTEL
John Campbell Offers a Little Room Service

Forget the Francis Marion, the Market Pavilion or Charleston Place. With around 4,750 visitors over the course of each summer, the College’s residence halls and historic houses together make up one of the best-run lodges in town. And, behind the scenes of it all, John Campbell might just be Charleston’s busiest innkeeper.

“Summers are high intensity around here,” says the dean of residence life and housing, noting that 165 conference and camp groups stayed at the College between May 12 and August 1 this year. “We’re filling rooms on a larger scale, cleaning the rooms around the conference schedule, trying to do repairs and maintenance for the fall. It’s a lot at one time – it gets pretty hectic.”

It requires the entire staff to jump into action—coordinating room assignments and group amenities (linens, meals/catering, fitness facilities, camp store/storage, telephones and meeting space), operating the check-in desk and carrying out the housekeeping and maintenance. And Campbell’s job? To make sure it all goes smoothly.

“I try to stay on top of it all,” says Campbell, who spends much of his time checking in with the conference staff, giving the go-ahead on various projects and expenditures and resolving any issue that arises with facilities, room assignments or guests. “I’m never sad to see the end of summer. I don’t think any of us are.”

Not that his job gets a whole lot easier in the fall, when 3,400 students move onto campus—many with roommate issues or homesickness. Still, things do become a little more predictable.

“At the beginning of the school year, we’re mostly trying to accommodate the students—helping ease their transition as much as possible,” says Campbell. “It’s our job to provide an environment that supports the success of our students and helps them feel comfortable and connected to the College.”

Living on campus plays a big role in that connection. And, according to departmental studies, students who stay on campus for their entire freshman year maintain higher grade point averages and are 10–15 percent more likely to graduate than those who commute.

“There are so many advantages to living on campus,” says Campbell, who began his career as a hall director in graduate school, eventually launching his professional career in higher-education housing in 1979. After serving in the residence life departments at several large universities, and most recently leading those at Old Dominion University and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, he ended up at the College in 2005.

“This is a friendly place,” he says. “The students are very engaged, and I think that’s a testament to the supportiveness of the faculty and staff. Plus, the campus’ location in the middle of the city gives students a lot of opportunities to get involved. Location is one thing that’s so unique about the College.”

Still, some things never change.

“It’s amazing to me that – as long as I’ve been doing this – nothing fundamentally changes except the faces,” says Campbell. “Students leave and new ones arrive. And what they all really want of us is a safe, supportive and comfortable place to stay as they figure out where they’ll go next.”

Spoken like a truehotelier.
STORM TRACKERS: Linda McClenaghan and Jared Smith Talk About the Weather

Ask most people about the weather right now, and they’ll tell you it’s hot and oppressively humid. Ask Linda McClenaghan and Jared Smith, however, and they’ll tell you it’s commanding, intriguing and surprisingly erratic.

“When you’re really paying attention to the weather, you get a whole different perspective,” says McClenaghan, perched on the roof of her Isle of Palms home, where her personal weather station measures the temperature, wind, humidity, barometric pressure, rain and other data – all of which is automatically uploaded and broadcast online. “You can get really into it.”

Just ask Smith, who operated downtown’s first weather station for two years before his recent move, and who continues to blog about the weather and broadcasted weather updates online.

“Weather became a big part of my life when I installed the station,” says the webmaster in IT, although he admits that it’s always interested him. “It started with the Weather Channel when I was 5.”

And it didn’t stop there. At age 6, Smith won a costume contest when he entered as a cumulonimbus cloud. And then, in elementary school, he reported the weather in his school’s weekly student-run television news show. “I was so into it,” he smiles.

And, to be fair, he still is.

“Weather’s raw power just blows me away – it can ruin or make a person’s day,” says Smith. “And I like how it can still be unpredictable, despite all we do to try to figure it out.”

It’s that unpredictability that both Smith and McClenaghan attempt to diminish by monitoring and broadcasting the weather from their homes.

“I always check it right before I leave work so I know what I’m coming home to. You never know what the weather’s going to be doing out here,” says McClenaghan, who installed her first personal weather station about 12 years ago and has since become known among her neighbors as the Weather Witch. “My weather station is just kind of part of my life now.”

It’s also part of the lives of others.

“My station is the only one on the islands,” says the training specialist in HR, “so this is really the only way people can find out exactly what’s going on out here whenever they want.”

And that, says Smith, is what it’s all about.

“The coolest part is that we’re providing a service,” he says, noting that his weather blog and weather broadcasts have gained the attention not only of loyal weather nuts and the media, but also of regular people who are just looking for information.

“That’s the great thing about the weather – it’s the one thing we all have in common, the one thread that ties us all together,” says Smith. “We all talk about the weather ... I just talk about it in more detail.”

That’s because, for Smith and McClenaghan both, the weather is anything but small talk.

Over the summer, Jared Smith and Jim Neff in the astronomy and physics department configured the weather station at the College’s observatory to report data to Weather Underground. Visit wunderground.com and enter the 29444 zip code.

MARKETING MIX

The Division of Marketing and Communications will soon distribute the College’s first brand manual, which includes guidelines governing the proper and consistent use of the College’s brand story, key messages, visual identity, wordmark, colors and typefaces. The manual will explain how to apply these guidelines to print materials, websites, signage, stationery and other communications materials. It also includes a comprehensive style guide to ensure that written materials are accurate and consistent. The manual is designed to be a toolkit for departments, offices and programs to use to achieve their communications and marketing goals while, at the same time, clearly communicating that each unit of the College is part of a strong, cohesive, first-class institution of higher learning.

Once the brand manual is released, campuswide branding and marketing seminars will be offered to assist with the implementation of the brand and visual identity standards. Watch for more information about these seminars in the coming weeks.

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

- The last floor of the Cato Center (SOTA project) has been poured and the roof trusses will start being set at the end of August.
- For the new science center, the disturbed pavers outside of the Addlestone Library have been replaced and the third floor concrete slab has been poured. Half of the structural steel will be erected by the end of this month, and all underground work will be completed by the first week in September.
- The backyard of 6 Glebe Street is being repurposed into an entertainment area, which should be completed by the end of September/beginning of October.
- At the Carolina First Center/John Kresse Arena, all overhead inspections were completed during the summer, and arena seating installation began. Wood flooring will begin to be installed at the end of September.
Clearly someone was out painting the town red this summer. But, by all accounts, the College was hard at work. The fresh coat of Charleston Green that James Rourke, assistant supervisor of grounds, painted over the red anti-rust primer on the fountain behind Randolph Hall was just one of the touch-ups and upgrades made on campus over the summer. Others include the new interior paint, flooring, upholstery and full-spectrum compact fluorescent lighting at the Kelly House and 20 Warren Street; the new exterior paint and comprehensive wood and stucco repairs at the Knox-Lesesne House, 8 Kirkland Lane and 40, 70 and 72 Coming Street; and the new energy-efficient windows installed at McConnell Hall and at Rutledge Rivers and Buist Rivers Residence Halls, where the lobby floor and ceiling were also replaced and the Hawkins Lounge was converted into a “smart” classroom. And, considering this isn’t even half of what was accomplished around here over the past three months, it’s safe to say that the College’s lazy days of summer were pretty darn productive.
Where on campus could it be?

Thanks to everyone who participated in last month’s photo quiz, and congratulations to Susan Fox, administrative assistant for the Teaching Fellows Program in the Department of Foundations, Secondary and Special Education. Fox was the first to guess that the object in question was the top of the sculpture in the St. Philip Courtyard in front of the Simons Center. The steel sculpture, titled Carapace, is the work of Jonathan Hills, a sculpture instructor and studio technician at the College from 1999 to 2002.

After it was featured in the 2002 Halsey Gallery exhibit, Supernatural, Hills gave the piece to Halsey Gallery Director Mark Sloan, who in turn loaned it to the College.

Take a look at the picture above. The object can be found on campus. Do you know what it is? The first person to submit the correct answer will win a tasty lunch for two at Liberty Street Fresh Food Company, compliments of ARAMARK. Good luck!

Send your submission to lutza@cofc.edu by Friday, May 16, 2008. The contest is open to all College faculty and staff. One submission per person, please.

WORD ON THE BRICKS

WHAT DO YOU DO DURING YOUR LUNCH BREAK?

Robby Brand, Director of Mail Services

“My typical lunch break consists of playing basketball at the gym with the young guys – trying to maintain my youth.”

Monica Pawlowski, Executive Director of the Cougar Club

“What break? I try to schedule the lunches I do take for business. I used to go for a run during that time of day. Thinking about it, I might start that again, thanks “Word on the Bricks!”

Ryan Holmes, Assistant Director of Alumni Relations

“Since I live close to campus, I typically go home for lunch. Every now and then I’ll do some shopping on King Street.”