

Armchair college fair

Schools defend practice of international trips

WASHINGTON (CNS) — People at Catholic colleges who organize international volunteer or study programs say the Jan. 16 attack on a student group in Guatemala should not deter others from making such trips because of the need to better understand conditions in other countries.

Sixteen students and teachers from St. Mary's College, a Maryland public college, were robbed at gunpoint after their tour bus was stopped on an isolated Guatemalan highway.

Five of the women in the group were raped before a passing military patrol broke up the assault. Within a few days, four men had been arrested in connection

with the attack. At the request of the Guatemalan government, the FBI said Jan. 22 it would provide technical experts to help with the investigation.

Amid a U.S. outcry over the incident, the organizers of study trips at several Catholic universities said there's no reason to stop such programs.

"Bad things happen all over the world," said David Knutson, an associate professor in the Spanish department at Jesuit-run Xavier University in Cincinnati, which sponsors a semester-long study program in Nicaragua each year. "I would be very disappointed if anyone chose not to do international study because of this."

"There is no travel situation in which you can reduce the risks to zero," said Karen Musalo, a frequent visitor in Guatemala in connection with her work at Santa Clara University in California, also a Jesuit school.

JoAnne White, director of the Center for International Nursing at Holy Ghost-run Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, reevaluated preparations made by the center's program that places students in community nursing situations in Nicaragua.

But she wouldn't consider ending the international studies.

"Students come back and say the experience has changed their lives," White said.

Among the precautions they take are keeping in touch with the U.S. Embassy and notifying whoever might be helpful, such as local police departments, she said.

A group of biology students from St. Norbert College in DePere, Wis., one year had to rearrange part of a study trip in a remote section of Panama's rain forest because of skirmishes across the nearby border with Colombia, said James Hodgson, who conducts the tours.

Jesuit Volunteer Corps has projects in some countries with reputations for violence, but Jesuit Father Vin DeCola said the organization is careful to post volunteers far away from trouble spots.

Life 101

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Some of these problems with roommates begin, she added, because freshmen are inexperienced with such common security measures as closing windows and locking doors.

"Many students have never had to share space or personal possessions before," Anderson added.

Frank observed that freshmen should also be open to accepting their new roommates' differences. Otherwise, he said, "You're going to have a hard time."

Frank said that he gets along well with his roommate by ignoring the little problems.

"If he can deal with my musical tastes, I can deal with his. If he can deal with my little quirks, I can deal with his," Frank said.

Anderson said she occasionally learns of roommate skirmishes in which parents attempt to get involved. In such matters, she said, it's generally best for parents to

stay in the background.

"It's hard letting your kids go. But we say to the parents, 'Why don't you let them negotiate that?'" Anderson said.

Frank said he appreciates the fact that his parents started granting him independence before college.

"You're not going to be able to rely on your parents 20 years from now," Frank said.

Nazareth College freshman Heather Durfey, 19, said that her parents, also, encouraged her to become more independent while she was still a high-school senior. For instance, they recommended that she get a checking account and debit card last year so she could begin to practice handling financial situations on her own.

Heather listed such items as shampoo, conditioner and laundry detergent among the expenses that she and many other students hadn't anticipated. And Charles said he hadn't budgeted for the meal money needed to eat at a restaurant rather than a dining hall.

"People always talk about how college

students are poor. Now I know what they're talking about!" Charles remarked. "Every little penny counts."

Complicating the matter, Anderson said, is the fact that "a number of students have never had to balance a checkbook before."

Michele Hahn said she fell into that category when she began at Nazareth.

"I opened up a new checking account and I had never used an ATM machine before. My mom had to show me how to use it," laughed Michele, 19, from Our Mother of Sorrows Church in Greece.

She admitted that doing her own laundry was an alien concept as well.

"Doing laundry for the first time was kind of weird. I was spoon-fed (growing up)," Michele said. She added that she still sneaks a dirty load home every now and then when she makes the 20-mile trip to the town of Greece on weekends.

Charles and Frank, also, dealt with laundry challenges.

In Charles' case, he had to give his girlfriend some tips when she admitted last

fall that she was having a harder time learning to do laundry than he was.

As for Frank, "One of the girls was making fun of me because I didn't know how to use a laundry machine. So I had to take a few lessons."

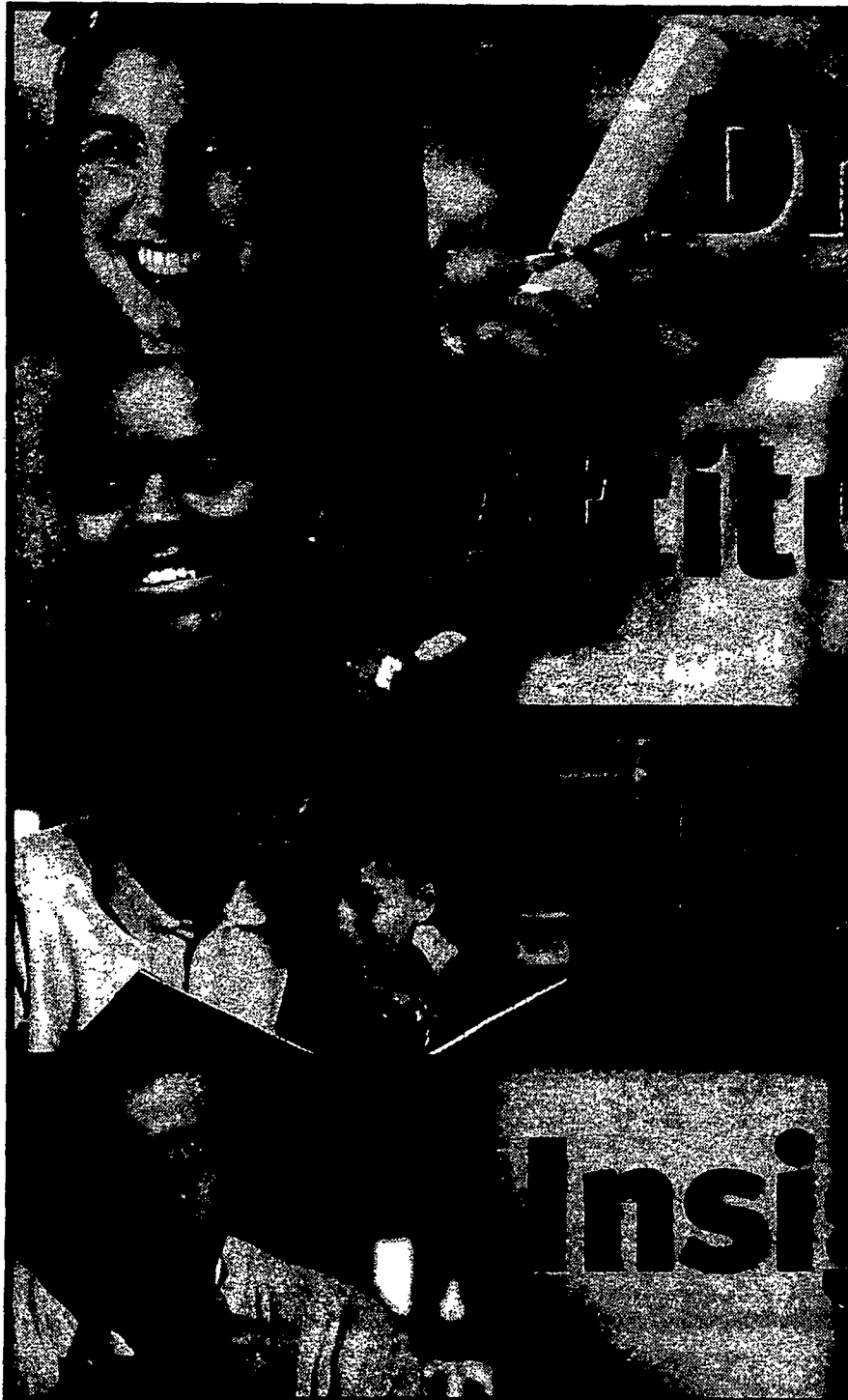
A few lessons would be in order, Heather observed, for freshmen who attempt to make their own meals and snack food in the dorms.

"We're too lazy!" laughed Heather, from the Church of St. Mary Our Mother in Horseheads. "I can't cook to save my life — but I know how to open up a can and put it in a microwave."

Heather remarked that students on her floor usually don't get any more creative than making popcorn, or toasting Pop-Tarts and bagels.

Michele said that other low-budget, low-maintenance specials include soup — "everybody makes it; all you have to do is boil the water" — and boxes of Kraft macaroni and cheese.

"I could live on that stuff!" Michele remarked.



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