Getting Out of the Bubble

By Dr. Tim Summerlin, Schreiner University President
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Earlier this summer, I traveled to a city I had never previously visited—Barranquilla, Colombia. Barranquilla is a busy city of 2,000,000 located where the Magdalena River empties into the Caribbean, the international trade hub of the northern coast of South America. So what brought this Texan to South America for the first time?

Let me give some context. At Schreiner we are committed to an educational mission with three themes—“to prepare students for meaningful work and purposeful lives in a changing global society.” That last feature, the “changing global society,” obliges us both to bring the larger world to campus (via cultural events and visitors and exchange students) and to enable our students to experience study away from Schreiner, increasingly in international settings. For instance, Schreiner undergraduates studied in Florence, Athens and Seoul, Korea, this summer.

We also sent three enterprising young ladies to Barranquilla for six weeks. Jackie Lacefield, Rae Martinez and Claire Lewis are returning now from their overseas adventure in learning, but Dr. Maureen Russo (Spanish), Dr. Mark Woodhull (Marketing) and I were able to visit with them at the mid-point of their tenure. We were there for the official signing of our exchange agreement with Corporacion Universitaria Reformada (CUR), the Reformed University of Barranquilla, and to become acquainted with the university and its leaders.

CUR is a very young university, having opened its doors in 2001. Its founding values are very close to those of Schreiner, with a commitment to holistic learning that stresses ethical development and citizenship along with intellectual growth and openness to the changes of our digital age. They have responded to the needs of their region in creating majors in international business, environmental science, biomedical engineering, and bilingual education, among others. We were excited to add them to our international contacts. What we saw and learned about CUR made us delighted to formally complete this relationship.

More particularly, our visit with Claire, Rae and Jackie convinced us that they had found a wonderful place to learn. All were taking classes in advanced Spanish language and a culture course to meet their global studies requirement. We sat in on a class on Gabriel Garcia Marquez. In addition, the three participated in internships. Jackie’s was as a receptionist at a metal services firm, handling communications and purchase orders. Claire’s was to shadow a director of a non-profit agency that works with young people and families to upgrade their financial skills. Rae’s was as a nurse’s aide in a local hospital.

The ladies made an excellent presentation on what they had learned at that halfway point in the experience. “Getting outside the bubble,” greater cultural sensitivity and self-confidence were traits at the top of the list. They found the food a constant delight, relationships rewarding and the heat—well, tolerable, if not a delight. They agreed that the timing of their experience was perfect, providing a profound transition from the “single view” world of youth to a pluralistic awareness.

We look forward to having all three ladies back with us, as well as Luis Soledad Bayona, who will be a Schreiner student this fall. One thing I know they will appreciate—being back in a world where they can easily find Flamin’ Hot Cheetos at the local grocery!