

MUAHS Spanish teacher travels abroad

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"Travelers never think that they are the foreigners." ~ Mason Colley

Heather Thompson, Mount Union Spanish teacher of two years, took on the role of a foreigner in the richly cultured Central American country of Guatemala June 8 through July 2. When Juniata College's Language in Motion organization offered teachers a chance to take classes abroad to better their language and teaching skills, Thompson immediately agreed.

But why was she so eager? "I love to travel, and I felt that time in a Spanish-speaking country would help me feel more comfortable in my speaking ability," Thompson comments.

Quetzaltenago, better known as Xela, is the second most populous city in Guatemala, and was, in fact, where Thompson was stationed. But these teachers couldn't fully experience the vivid city from a hotel room, so they were assigned host families with whom they were to eat, sleep and lodge.

(Continued on Page 12)

The Daily News, Huntingdon, PA p. 10
School News Page 11/3/06

MUAHS

(Con't from Page 10)

Thompson's family, the Porras, included a father, mother, a 3-year-old daughter, a high school student of no relation and another foreigner "extranjero" from Huntingdon.

"They were young, accommodating and easy to talk to," Thompson says about her host family.

A daily but rather lenient itinerary was given to the teachers.

Each morning, Thompson attended five hours of language

school where she learned about Guatemala and complex verb conjugation. Afterwards, she ate lunch with her host family and then was free to explore the city. Seeing such places as an actual jungle, volcanoes and Mayan ruins was something that Thompson really enjoyed while visiting.

"Although I loved to go sight seeing, the most rewarding experience, I feel, was the conversation with the people of Guatemala and meeting others

from all over the world," Thompson explains.

Conversation for the average English-speaking person would have been rather difficult in Guatemala, where the locals speak up to 28 indigenous languages.

"The people are not much different from you and I; there was no drastic culture shock, but the indigenous clothes and the way that some lived was something new to me," says Thompson.

Although traveling to third-

world countries might not be exciting to some, Thompson finds the travel to be invigorating and plans to continue in her excursions. In fact, she hopes to visit Ecuador next June to teach English as a second language and wishes to return to Guatemala even before that.

Sometime we must all become foreigners, be it Guatemala or the next state over, because like James Russell Lowell says, "The wise man travels to discover himself."

11/3/06 p 12