

Thursday, June 18, 2015

Study abroad donor encourages 'investigating the world'

To hear Patti Finnegan Sharf describe the places she has visited is like listening to the plot of a good adventure book. As a young woman, she bicycled across Europe with friends, hitching a ride once the group reached the hills of Bavaria. She swam in the Amazon and in Africa taught young children who she says were "glad to have someone educate them, even if it was on dirt floors."

These and other journeys, Finnegan Sharf says, are more than vacations — they are eye-opening experiences that foster an appreciation of one's own and other cultures. Finnegan Sharf recently created a \$550,000 planned endowment for Oakland University's **Study Abroad programs**.

"Opening one's experiences is important to making them aware of the world and really appreciating what they have," says Finnegan Sharf, whose late husband Stephan Sharf pledged more than \$21 million to the University in the past 15 years. "My hope is that when the students come back, hopefully they'll educate others here and help over there."



Patti Finnegan Sharf with three students about to embark on individual Study Abroad trips made possible with a \$550,000 planned endowment.

Her aspirations align with the University's mission to increase enrollment in study abroad programs. President George Hynd's long-term goal as part of the University's strategic plan is a 300 percent increase.

"Oakland University has had a long-term commitment to international learning, and we want to continue on that path," President Hynd says. "Each year, there are about 6,000 students who enroll in both our Global Perspectives and Foreign Language and Culture courses, and 325 study abroad programs in 45 countries offered through Oakland University. I know Patti's gift will significantly help the University in its efforts to expand our global reach and better prepare our students for careers in a global environment, and we thank her for that."

Finnegan Sharf recently met three students ready to embark on summer study abroad programs made possible with her gift.

Justin Jones, majoring in environmental science and Japanese language and literature, will stay in the Japanese city of Hikone for eight months. Jones says he jumped for joy on discovering he received Finnegan Sharf's scholarship.

"To get the scholarship literally means everything to me," says Jones, who adds that he plans to use his time in Japan to increase his understanding of the Japanese language. "I want to walk away with a deeper understanding of Japanese culture and a broader outlook on society as a whole."

Khayriyyah Muhammad Smith, an international relations and French major, will travel to Paris for two purposes: write her Honors College thesis on French political parties and how they attract youth, and brush up on her French.

"There's not really a lot of primary research for my (thesis) topic since it's such a new thing, so I'm going over there to be able to do interviews with youth for this political party, and that's really exciting," she says, "because I never thought I would be doing international research."

The third student, Ian Lancaster, will travel to Orléans, France. He says he cannot wait to become immersed in the culture. "I have a proclivity toward languages," says Lancaster, who speaks French and also knows some German. He will collect data in different areas in France for a philosophy research paper.

Finnegan Sharf says she gets excited by students who are truly interested in their endeavors. "I want students to have that kind of enthusiasm, and to incite people to investigate the world."

By John Turk