

Opening Remarks

Globetrotting, Syracuse Style

These days getting anywhere on a trip isn't easy. Considering the unpredictable price of gas, you might drive somewhere, hit empty on the fuel gauge, and need a second mortgage just to get back home. And airports? As former Vice President Al Gore joked during his recent Syracuse appearance, "I flew for eight years on Air Force II; now I have to take off my shoes." Welcome to civilization in the 21st century—perhaps we could expedite things at the security checkpoints by shipping our shoes to our final destinations beforehand. Then, of course, we'd end up wandering around airports in our socks. Heck, I wouldn't even escape the house if my 2-year-old daughter were on guard duty. "DaDa," she'd say, "socks have holes."

The thought of enduring all this hullabaloo—and feeling like a felon for traveling with a tube of toothpaste—can be tiresome. So I can only imagine what the SU researchers featured in this issue must experience as they disperse to locales around the globe, especially the remote places. The fortunate travel light, but I suspect some have to load up with survival essentials, as they're a long way from the nearest convenience store. Despite any logistical nightmares, I'm sure these folks cast aside the distractions of travel and inconvenience once they get down to business.

While the 20 faculty and students profiled here represent only a portion of the Syracuse researchers conducting studies overseas, one quality they all share is passion for their work. From one continent to the next, these researchers epitomize scholarship in action. They take their talents out to the world, where they explore and address issues that count: environmental conservation in Africa, mental health reform in Turkey, and the tragic human consequences of leftover landmines in Vietnam three decades after the war.

Geography doctoral student Elvin Delgado is studying how the environmental degradation of Venezuela's Lake Maracaibo affects the people who live there and depend on the lake as a lifeline. Delgado points out that he can't go there and just be a scientist. He participates in the community, developing relationships with residents and earning their trust. "You need to get involved," he says.

Whether involvement is a one-time experience or evolves into a lifetime pursuit, the personal value of making these connections cannot be overlooked—for these researchers have expanded the boundaries of their work and their lives. In the process, they may have provided new insights on a culture or an issue, and helped improve the quality of life for others.

We can visit anywhere in the world today via the Internet, but there's nothing like stepping off a plane at a place that holds the promise of adventure and new experiences. And when we hit the ground ready for action, let's hope our shoes are on our feet—not back at the airport.



JAY COX
Editor

SYRACUSE

UNIVERSITY MAGAZINE

Nancy Cantor, Chancellor and President

Nicci Brown G'98, Associate Vice President for Marketing and Interactive Media; Publisher

EDITOR
Jay Cox

ART DIRECTOR
Laurie Cronin '81

ASSOCIATE EDITORS
David Marc, Amy Shires

ASSISTANT EDITOR
Kathleen M. Haley '92

DESIGNER
Amy McVey

WEB PAGE DESIGNER
W. Michael McGrath

PRODUCTION COORDINATOR
Jennifer Merante

CLASS NOTES COORDINATOR
Monique Frost

STUDENT INTERNS
Lorae M. French '07, Kayleigh Minicozzi '08,
Lauren Pauer '07

CONTRIBUTORS
Jaime Winne Alvarez '02, Katherine Cantor G'06,
Jeffrey Charboneau G'99, Margaret Costello,
Aimee Hammill, Carol Kim G'01,
Christine Mattheis '07, Kevin Morrow,
Kelly Homan Rodoski '92, Christine Yackel G'75

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CHANGE OF ADDRESS ONLY: Advancement Services, 820 Comstock Avenue, Room 009, Syracuse NY 13244-5040. Telephone: 315-443-3904. Fax: 315-443-5169. E-mail: alafranc@syr.edu. For duplicate mailings, send both mailing labels to above address.

LETTERS TO EDITOR, OTHER MAGAZINE BUSINESS: *Syracuse University Magazine*, 820 Comstock Avenue, Room 308, Syracuse NY 13244-5040. Telephone: 315-443-2233; Fax: 315-443-5425; E-mail: jacox@syr.edu. E-mail letters must include a mailing address. Letters are subject to editing for style, clarity, and space limitations.

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