

WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT
as an Outcome of Study Abroad
in Southeast Asia: Ford
Foundation Grant Outcome

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For the past two summers I have had the pleasure of being a member of the ASIANetwork Faculty Development Seminar, a program supported by the Ford Foundation and intended to enhance liberal arts college teaching about Southeast Asia. During the first year we met at Kenyon College for three weeks and read and discussed interdisciplinary materials on Southeast Asia. The seminar was directed by anthropology professors Rita Smith Kipp (Kenyon College) and H. Leedom Lefferts Jr. (Drew University), and the participants were faculty members (from ASIANetwork colleges) who were not formally trained in Southeast Asian Studies. One of the joint activities of our experience was to construct a website (<http://topaz.kenyon.edu/projects/seasem/welcome.htm>) to help others in undergraduate education who wish to develop new courses on Southeast Asia or to incorporate Southeast Asia into existing courses.

Prior to my participation in the seminar, I had only a modest exposure to website development. However, as a result of my summer at Kenyon, I discovered the value of this task in both outcome and process of group participation. As a result I decided to incorporate website development as an outcome for my course, The Karen of Northern Thailand,

which I teach as an interim course each January.

For the first week of the class, students live in Chiang Mai (Thailand) and attempt to understand the larger Thai society that is attempting to assimilate the Karen people. After taking up residency in the tribal village of Tee Mae Ker Lah, students gather empirical data on Karen family, religious, political, economic, and educational institutions. They also attempt to understand how changes within the larger Thai society and world have affected the lives of Karen people in the village. While in the village, students receive group and individualized instruction as they write a descriptive ethnographic paper on the structure, functions, and changes that have taken place in one of the following social institutions: family, religion, or education. In gathering information for these papers, students have group access and personal interviews (assisted by interpreters) with village leaders, pastors, educators, the village headman and tribal elders. Students also have access to extensive written materials (articles and books) concerned with the Sgaw Karen of northern Thailand and Myanmar (Burma).

For the past three years, we have collated student writings and published a book on the life of the village of Tee Mae Ker Lah. In January of this year we took the additional step of creating the Karen Webpage (<http://www.stolaf.edu/people/leming/karenpage.htm>). This webpage has six major parts:

- A Description of the St. Olaf Interim Course
- The Karen Ethnography: A Student-Written Ethnographic Report (1999),
- The Karen Museum: A Virtual Web Museum of Karen Artifacts,
- Karen Weblinks,
- The text of the documentary film "The Karen of Tee Mae Ker Lah: Rabbits in the Mouth of the Crocodile" (a film I produced in 1996)
- An Annotated Bibliography of books and articles written about the Thai Karen.



ASIANetwork Faculty Development Seminar
(Southeast Asia) members on location

Website Development--continued

The way in which this was accomplished was to have each student group (I had fifteen students divided evenly into five groups—religion, economics, government, family, and education) submit a thirty-page chapter on their area of concern with relevant pictures interspersed throughout the chapter. The submission was done on disk (in either HTML or Microsoft Word format). Students also submitted journal entries for each of the days of our trip abroad and two scanned pictures with rich descriptions of two Karen artifacts for our virtual Web Museum of Karen Culture. With the assistance of one of the students, I brought all the materials into a single webpage with a link to my own homepage.

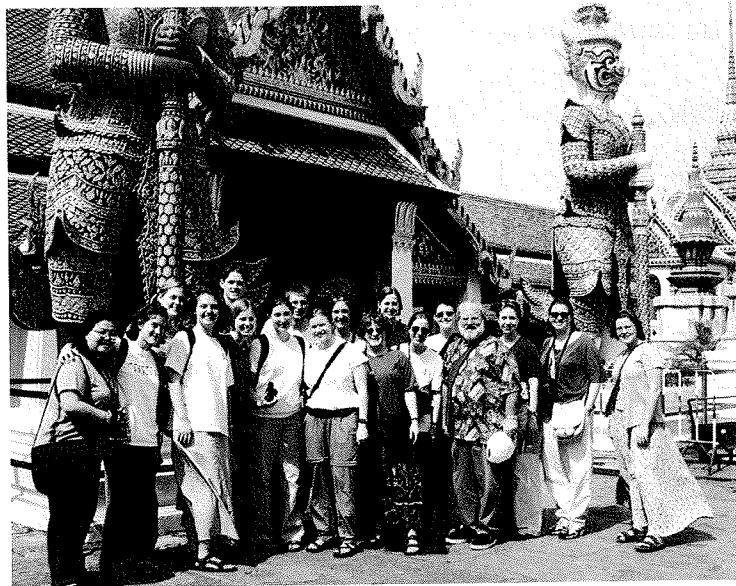
The benefits of this webpage-construction experience are the following:

- Students are producing their materials for a wider audience and have a concrete product of which they can feel proud.
- Students have an incentive to do better work.
- Students can encourage others to learn about and develop an appreciation for Karen culture.
- The Karen people have a resource for themselves to chronicle their history and culture.
- The construction process builds group cohesiveness.
- The webpage is a wonderful recruitment device for future interim students.
- Finally, the webpage can be expanded in future years and provide an archive for student experiences abroad.

While there is additional work involved, I would recommend the experience of webpage formation as an outcome of study abroad because the advantages involved far outweigh the energy and efforts related to its creation.



St. Olaf students with Karen musician



Michael Leming and St. Olaf students on location in Thailand