

December 2012

Fifteen University of Florida students participated in a five-week program to study the operations and impacts of nonprofits and community organizations in three different Indian cities.

Students traveled to three different cities in India to visit 17 different non-governmental organizations while observing the vibrant culture of rural and urban India, said Muthasami Kumaran, assistant professor of nonprofit management and community organizations at the University of Florida.

Kumaran explained how the program was developed based on three different focus areas.

“The main focus of the program was to develop a very strong educational component to teach the students about Indian NGOs and allow them to visit and explore these organizations one on one,” Kumaran said.

During the study abroad program, students traveled to India visiting 17 NGOs in the second largest non-profit sector in the world. Students ventured to Chennai, New Delhi and Jaipur showing the difference of how NGOs operate in three different social and economic sectors of India, Kumaran said.

“We visited small, medium and large NGOs ranging from youth development, advocacy, environmental, rural development, women's support groups and more,” said Wendy Roche, family, youth and community sciences graduate student.

The second aspect of the program was to facilitate a cultural exchange from the Indian people and surroundings to the American students. Students were able

to see the culture and learn the history by seeing and interacting with the people, Kumaran said.

Local universities and organizations in each city hosted the UF students during their study abroad program. In Chennai, students stayed in an international guesthouse at the Madras Christian College campus, adding value to the program as the students could interact with the local students and communities, Kumaran said.

“The India Study Abroad program is like no other,” Roche said. “Dr. Kumaran went out of his way to make sure we experienced the culture and learned as much as possible.”

Two nights and a one-day journey aboard a train from Chennai to New Delhi allowed students to have a glimpse of rural India. While aboard the train, Kumaran taught a class and discussed how Indian NGOs were developed to help those living in these rural communities, Kumaran said.

“Studying abroad puts you out of your comfort zone instead of learning in the traditional classroom,” Roche said. “It gives you a first-hand experience on a subject that interests you.”

Students immersed themselves in the Indian culture by interacting with the local communities while visiting various NGOs, historical monuments and local markets, Kumaran said.

“India has changed my life in so many ways. I am more open and aware of other cultures. The trip definitely helped me to appreciate what life has to offer,” Roche said. “I had the chance to see people from a new perspectives and grew in compassion towards others.”