

Ambassadors of Learning

O.U. has a selfish reason for providing the opportunity for sabbatical leaves

By CONNIE RUGGLES



While teaching in Ceylon, Dr. Sherill Christian and his family found time to see some sights such as Polonnaruwa, a city of Singhalese kings where monuments date from ca. 1050-1200 A.D.

A UNIVERSITY professor taking a leave of absence is a little like a busman taking a holiday. Most leaves allow a professor to travel or study or work in his special field, but few such leaves could be termed a vacation.

Every seventh year the O.U. professor is eligible for a sabbatical leave entitling him to apply for a year away from the University at half pay to continue his studies or catch up on research. Too often a professor feels he cannot sustain himself and his family on half pay for a year and never applies for a sabbatical. A few are able to get grants such as a Fulbright which provide varying amounts to professors on leave, but those are scarce.

Why should any professor who spends his days, and many nights too, studying and preparing for classes and checking student efforts want to leave familiar surroundings and a familiar routine for a year as a student or a lecturer in a strange school and perhaps even a strange country—all at half pay? For that matter, why should the University be willing to release a professor for a year when classrooms are crowded, and there is already a shortage of professors?

The answer is a simple one. The sabbatical leave gives the professor a chance to stand away from himself, to re-evaluate his goals and methods and to refresh his own knowledge of his field. When he returns—if the leave achieved its goal—the professor is a more valuable faculty member than when he left.

During the past year a dozen O.U. professors were on leave in foreign countries. Some of them had outside grants, others managed the stint on their half-salary from the University, but all were pleased with their year and are ready to go again.

Dr. Dale Vliet, '38Law, David Ross Boyd professor of law, spent the past year in Finland as the first Fulbright lecturer in law at the University of Finland.

"My work put me in contact with an entirely new system of law," Dr. Vliet says, "and gave me an opportunity to do a comparison of our system and the Finnish or Scandinavian system, teaching American law to students who hardly knew there was such.

"For one thing," he continues, "it gives one an all-new look at his own law because one must explain in far more basic terms and concepts than one would use with an

entering freshman law class. You must be able to compare so they will comprehend what the real philosophical bases of our system are."

Nearly all the professors who did any lecture work at all during their leaves had a problem in communication, even when they did their lecturing in English. J. Palmer Boggs, professor of architecture, spent two years on leave in Lahore, Pakistan, where instruction above the mid-high school level is in English. However, English there is British English and is taught in the old style poetic exercise manner, far from the idiomatic language Americans speak. It is usually the second or third language of the Pakistani students.

"I found if I wanted to be understood at all," Boggs says, "I had to work at it. It made me conscious of the necessity for absolute clarity—which has carried over to my work here."

Like Boggs, Dr. Harry Hoy, professor of geography, who recently returned from a year in Cairo, Egypt, found that lecturing in English was not a simple matter.

"I DIDN'T speak English," Dr. Hoy says, "I spoke American. When school first began, I carefully asked all my classes if they understood me when I spoke. Not wishing to seem ignorant or to irritate the professor, they all nodded and smiled and said, yes, they understood. For several weeks I had trouble with little groups around the room buzzing and talking during my lectures, and I gave several rather angry speeches about it. Later I found that there were some in the class who were better at English than others, and they were trying to help their classmates understand what was going on. At last a delegation came to me to ask me to pass out mimeographed sheets of my lecture material since they could all read English but could not understand it very well when spoken."

Dr. Sherrill Christian, associate professor of chemistry, had less language trouble during his leave in Ceylon.

"Language was really no problem," he says, "since the country is so terrifically British oriented, and English is taught from the early grades on up. However, it soon will become a problem because Ceylon is trying to convert to its national language. They are discontinuing the teaching of English in the grades. This will seriously handicap their scientific program because the native language has no scientific vocabulary."

In Peru Dr. John Whitaker, professor of journalism, taught public relations at Catholic University on a Fulbright grant.



Dr. and Mrs. Harry Hoy and a graduate student from the University of Cairo visited many points in Egypt including Luxor in middle Egypt, site of ancient temples and the Valley of the Kings.

"The courses that seemed to be most in demand were public relations, and they seemed to have few local professors qualified to teach them. Although my field is not really public relations, I was chosen because I have a fairly good command of Spanish. A combination of journalism-Spanish is hard to find. Our schools need to do something about this by concentrating on more language requirements for students. I gave four lectures a week, which does not seem to be a very heavy load; but I was not proficient enough in Spanish to lecture from notes as I would here, so I wrote out my lectures and then translated them into Spanish. This is a very time-consuming process, but I wanted to avoid any chance of misunderstanding in my lectures."

But language was only one difference the Sooner professors found on their foreign travels.

"It is a tremendously broadening experience to make a comparison between our form of government and that found in Finland, which is bordered on 790 miles of the east border by the Soviet Union," Dr. Vliet says. "Its geographic position compels it into neutrality, contrary to its basic desires, and also forces certain government positions on it which might not be so without pressures from the East."

"Nine months," he continues, "with the Soviet Union almost looking over one's shoulder gives one a very different outlook on world problems, one which obviously must be reflected in my teaching of O.U. students in the future."

The Ceylonese system of education was entirely new to Dr. Christian, and he found it a challenging experience.

"My experience in Ceylon," he says, "caused me to look over my methods rather critically. Teaching in Ceylon is on the British system. For example, examinations are not given piece by piece through various courses as they are here. You take a stiff exam just to get in the university, and you take another to get your degree, and those are the only two that count. There is no enforced homework in the courses, which leaves more of a burden on the student. This has advantages, but it has disadvantages too in not taking care of the lazy student and giving no assessment of progress. Some students may think they are getting along quite well, when in reality they have not grasped the meaning of the course at all. Under the British system they find out too late and fail to get their degrees."

DR. ORRIN K. CROSSER, associate professor of chemical engineering, spent his leave in France. He did little lecturing, devoting his time primarily to research. "The state of chemical engineering is more advanced here," he says, "—maybe by 10 years or more. It is amazing to find when you go abroad that professional theorems that have been so essential to you simply do not translate, and you immediately have to find some way to communicate."

When a professor takes a leave to lecture

continued

the sabbatical is no holiday, but it gives a professor real time for work and study

at another university, it is obvious to everyone that he will be working just as he did at home. But when he leaves to do research, outsiders tend to look on his leave as a year's vacation; it is not.

John O'Neil, director of the School of Art, spent his sabbatical in Italy. During that time he completed 95 paintings that range in size from small water colors to 4 x 6-foot works in acrylic plastic. "Normally I work at a slower pace," he says, "however, I was ready for the leave and didn't have to wait for ideas to come."

Continuing to do original work is an important part of the sabbatical principle. In a professor's daily schedule there is never enough time to really get anything done in the way of research or creative activity.

"On sabbatical you have time," Dr. Crosser says, "I mean real time, not the kind of free minutes you have here, but lots of time to study and work in peace."

"Continuing your own work," O'Neil comments, "requires a concentration that is not available when teaching. There is not enough time, and there are too many distractions. I feel that one can't continue to teach unless one remains creative. A sabbatical serves that purpose. It certainly affected my teaching too. It has caused me to make a revision of the artist's place in the economic system. In Rome I learned a great deal about the business end of art, current prices for paintings and such, in addition to doing my own work. You must replenish your knowledge and attitudes somehow. Summers used to be for that purpose, but that is often used now for teaching, and summer is really too short for a major project anyway.

"The visual arts scene changes very fast," he continues. "You can't be currently informed unless you get out and look. There are no major centers of art in this area. You must inspect first hand rather than reproductions or slides. If you don't travel and explore, you tend to become provincial. A University teacher must have a much broader grasp than that."

Any way it is viewed, a year abroad on sabbatical is not a holiday. Take Dr. Vliet in Finland for example. He spoke widely to

civic and professional groups there and traveled some 600 miles a week among three universities teaching 15 hours a week in addition to a faculty seminar and outside lectures. In addition he did several articles on American law for Finnish and Swedish law journals and did several translations for professional magazines.

IN THE United States it is considered stimulating and downright fashionable to go abroad for study or research. Many smaller colleges offer students a chance to study in Europe during the junior year. Most institutions urge faculty members to study abroad if possible. The rate of exchange is somewhat lopsided, however. Far fewer students and professors from other countries come to the United States for study.

In Egypt, Dr. Hoy found great interest in exchange of professors and students. "Egypt is eager to get anyone in science, medicine and those fields," he says, "but they will send no Egyptian professors out-

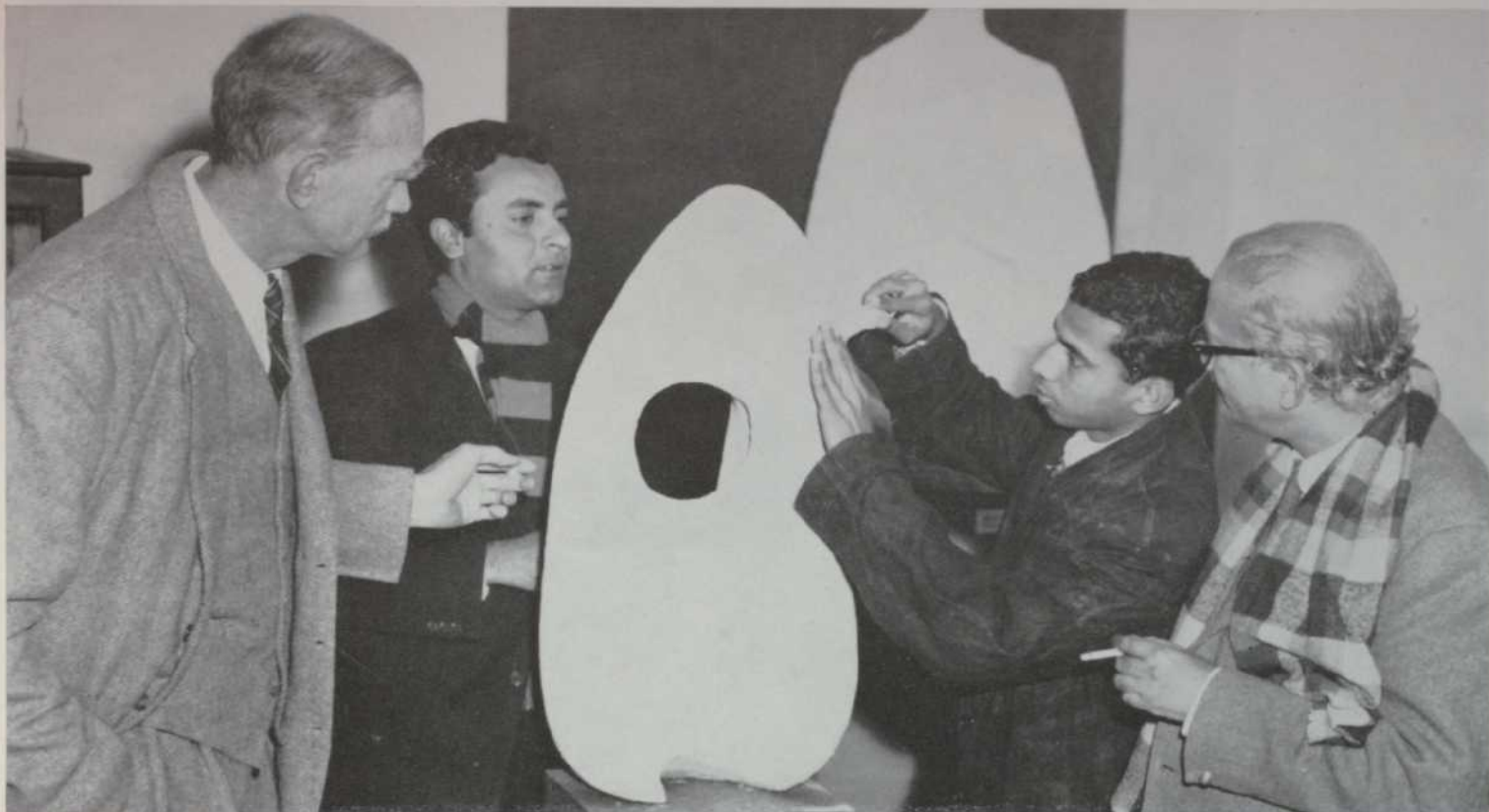
side the Moslem countries. Professors are in great demand, and the government offers no opportunity for professors to get outside the area."

Britain has an important influence on Ceylon, Dr. Christian found. "The people in Ceylon are very interested in exchange programs," he says. "They are more interested in having us come there because they get the benefit of our experience at no cost to them. But few of them want to come here to study. As I say, the tie to England is very strong, and to have a degree from an English university is considered the pinnacle. In order to teach at the university in Ceylon, they must have a degree from England, and all the top people are eager to teach at the university. Some would like to come to the United States for training, but if they did, they could not go back to Ceylon and get the jobs they wanted."

Money presents a serious stumbling block to an effective exchange program in Peru. "There is a terrible shortage of books



During his sabbatical leave in Italy, Artist John O'Neil completed 95 paintings of varying sizes.



With a Pakistani student, a sculpture instructor and the principal of the school, Professor J. Palmer Boggs evaluates a piece of student work.

down there" Dr. Whitaker says, "so there was little opportunity for outside reading. There is little available in Spanish in the field of journalism. What books there are usually come from the Soviet Union, which makes a big impression on the people.

"The best schools in Peru are private ones. Public schools are crowded and not very good since the teachers are so poorly paid. Education there is Europe-oriented, particularly to France. The United States is working on scholarship programs for the students there, but the trouble is that those qualified for scholarships are usually the ones from wealthy families because they could afford to go to the private schools and get good training. The poorer people may be quite intelligent, but they never get a chance to show it."

In Pakistani architecture, professor Boggs found a rich cultural heritage although it is little utilized in proportion to its history. "There is some effort at imitating the West," he says, "and too often they imitate the worst features of the West rather than the best. But they do try to capitalize on their own rich resources. The people are interested in the help America has given them and in learning about the West. The students are eager to come to the United States. Pakistan could use probably 10 times the amount of exchange assistance it now has."

"There is great interest there in sending

graduate students to the United States," Dr. Crosser says. "Graduate research in France is limited to only two schools. There is also an interest in the different viewpoints. There is not much interest in a visiting professor program, however. They like to have people come there, but few want to come here. They are not too familiar with America and have misconceptions."

IN SPITE of the problems involved in spending a year abroad, virtually all the professors are ready to take another sabbatical when their time comes. "By its very nature," O'Neil says, "a sabbatical is never abused. I think it serves a very useful purpose. It is all worth it if you can manage."

For Dr. Hoy, his year in Egypt was a very worthwhile experience since he knew little about the Middle East geography when he went there. One of his greatest pleasures, he says, was teaching Middle East geography at O.U.'s Ft. Sill extension school when he returned.

As an architecture instructor, Boggs is particularly interested in widening his outlook. "To do a competent job of instructing and leading youth," he says, "one needs to get a broader view of the knowledge of other peoples. The way to do this is to get out and look at it first hand. The people around Pakistan have created some magnificent beauty of which we are just partially aware. Too much art history stops

only at Europe. Maybe our lack of appreciation keeps us from recognizing the real beauty of the subcontinent."

Dr. Crosser, like the others, finds himself with a changed attitude. "The whole thing has a profound influence on things you teach and how," he says, "but it is impossible to put a value on it. We went to France at considerable personal monetary sacrifice. It took us a month to find a place to live, and then we had to take one without furniture, and we could afford to buy little; but in spite of all that, I would do it again."

Dr. Christian went to Ceylon almost by accident. "We knew very little about Ceylon when we went there," he says. "Originally we applied for Peru, but that did not work out, and we were offered Ceylon. We knew nothing about it and turned it down. Then we got to reading about Ceylon, and the next year we applied for it and got it. We're very glad we did."

Perhaps Dr. Vliet sums it up best. "Certainly I feel my activities in the broadening of my own knowledge and my teaching techniques were as great or greater in the areas in which I was working abroad than in my day-to-day work on the Oklahoma campus," he says. "The experience gained should be reflected in my future contribution to legal education in Oklahoma in a degree commensurate with the time I was absent from the classroom in Norman."