Is there a difference between being a traveler and being a tourist?

This is one question I posed to my New Cultural Experiences Program (NCEP) students this spring as we began a newly formed course that combined travel writing and sketching. This question was essential in my mind to teach a course that involved a 10-day overseas component that could look a lot like tourism, because of the length of stay and because Italy is, well, Italy.

Let me begin with a few background notes. Recently, the International and Multicultural Committee began the process of looking at a wide variety of programs, courses and experiences Carroll University might offer to expand our students’ experiences off campus. The NCEP format that runs for three weeks in January or May, after courses in the fall or spring, respectively, is a model that has been in place for quite some time. The idea that we could offer an academically rich and significant experience with a shorter off-campus component is a more recent one. In this model, the off-campus experience is embedded in the semester. My NCEP, Travel Journals: Writing & Sketching in Italy, is the first such course to run using this model.

When considering the question of being a traveler and being a tourist, it seems to come down to two central issues: getting out of one’s comfort zone, and a focused reflection and integration of one’s experiences.

Comfort zone will vary widely. My comfort zone is rather wide. I’ve traveled a lot – and all my life – with family, with friends and alone. I’ve lived overseas. I remember, at age 6, carrying on long conversations and elaborate fantasy games with new friends in something that sounded a lot like German only months after having arrived there. I wasn’t afraid to try new things. While my comfort zone is wide, I did once find myself outside it when the “sept-place” (taxi) my daughter and I took to a small village in the middle of Senegal broke down and the driver hitched a ride back to town, leaving the seven of us by the side of the road in 100-degree heat, nothing in sight, by a small, straw hut village and the shade of a few baobab trees. This spring in Italy, my students might have been a bit out of their comfort zones when our driver let us off the bus one kilometer outside of the medieval hilltop town where we were spending our first three nights. He had assured us three times that he went to this town on his route. But these experiences are a part of travel. The tourist does whatever possible to prevent these unexpected adventures. A traveler embraces them; they happen anyway.

Reflection and integration will also vary widely. It might mean journal writing, which can range from a list of events to eloquent moments of personal revelation. It might mean taking time each day to sketch, to slow down, to simply be in a place, to look carefully. It might be talking, comparing notes, memories and spontaneous interconnections. It might be the realization of finding the unexpected jewel in something you think you would not want to do, but did anyway, or in trying that new food that you would never taste back in the safety of Waukesha.

This was my first time traveling with students and I loved it. It was a fantastic group of young people – willing to try something new, to go out of their comfort zones, to make friends with strangers, to speak a little of a foreign language, to navigate a large and confusing city, to find jewels there, to build new friendships. They were true travelers.
Lori Duin Kelly joined the Carroll faculty in 1986. Before that, she earned her master’s degree at the University of Chicago, completed a teaching appointment at Western Illinois University, earned her doctorate at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill and served a three-year post-doctoral appointment at Marquette University. Her impressive pedigree is supplemented by years of research and numerous publications and awards, including Carroll’s Benjamin F. Richason Jr. Faculty Award in 2000, the National Endowment for the Humanities in Disability Studies award in 2000, and a sabbatical in spring 2007.

Although Kelly’s work has taken many turns, it has now come full circle. Her dissertation at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill focused on Victorian writer Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, whose wildly popular writings on feminist versions of the afterlife and critiques of marriage in place of careers for women interested Kelly. From there, Kelly researched dress codes and explored clothing using a medical lens. This medical research led her to her studies of the body. Her findings have been session topics at the Popular Culture Association conference and were the basis of her recently published book, “Bodily Inscriptions: Interdisciplinary Explorations into Embodiment” (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008).

Today, Kelly is back to where she began, with Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, after she rediscovered a sentimental novel Phelps wrote on the topic of vivisection, or experimenting on live animals. Kelly’s work intersects “Trixy,” a novel by Phelps about the subject, and the version of what happened historically with this debate.

In addition to major research projects, Kelly teaches American literature, an Honors-level course on the cultural constructions of madness, and African literature. She also serves as the Humanities Area chair in the division; serves on Carroll’s Tenure and Promotion Committee and as area chair for Body and Physical Difference of the Popular Culture Association. She spends her free time with home repair projects – she recently helped build a two-story house on a farm she co-owns – gardening and painting. She also enjoys travel and has visited Russia, South Africa, China, India (where she worked with a cultural exchange in Bangalore) and Western Europe. Kelly finds it both enjoyable and important to immerse herself in the culture and experience all elements of various cultures, from dining to transportation. Of travel, she says, “The more exotic, the more interesting,” and she believes “getting lost is the best way to find yourself.”

The Carroll Players spring production was the bilingual theater event “Un Sueño Nuevo—A New Dream.” Written by Honduran theater troupe Teatro La Fragua, this play was a collaboration between theatre arts and the modern languages and literatures programs, and was directed by James Zager, associate professor of theatre arts, and Elena De Costa, associate professor of Spanish.

During the first week of rehearsals, the cast had the honor of working with internationally acclaimed artist Edy Barahona, a member of Teatro La Fragua. He brought a unique understanding to our work with the musical, as well as enlightened our lives outside of the show. Barahona speaks very little English, but his work helped us break down the language barrier and made us recognize our ability to communicate with each other more than we expected we could. It was a truly rewarding experience for the cast and crew.

Performances of “Un Sueño Nuevo” were April 17-19. The play explored the struggle between hope, despair, conformity and the status quo through the rich symbolism of movement, song and dialogue. The audience was presented with an almost childlike portrait of innocence by many of the characters who are fearful of achieving their secret dreams. Originally, this play and others like it were intended as traveling short dramatic pieces played before oftentimes illiterate audiences in remote regions of Central America. For many, this was their very first experience with dramatic production. Unaware of the conventions of the expected behaviors of a public prohibited from taking a participatory role in a staged production, these first-time audiences often interrupted, and even intervened during the course of dramatization. Today, this participatory role in theater is invited by popular groups such as Teatro La Fragua. A talkback after each show was our attempt to bring that tradition to Otteson Theatre.
I have always had a very strong interest in women’s rights issues and women’s literature. While studying American literature with Professor Lori Kelly, my classmates and I were introduced to works such as Kate Chopin’s novel “The Awakening,” Henry James’ short story “Daisy Miller: A Study” and Theodore Dreiser’s novel “Sister Carrie,” all of which brought to light the many prejudices faced by American women in the mid to late 19th century. Women from this period in history were indoctrinated with the ideology that to be seen as acceptable members of society, they must adhere to a very specific and very rigid set of “codes.” These codes essentially dictated for women how they were to act, think, speak and dress. The dictates of fashion were especially brutal. As my awareness of these codes for women grew, my interest and, I must admit, my outrage, also grew. When Professor Kelly suggested I pursue extensive research surrounding the subject of women’s rights in conjunction with codes of fashion, I jumped at the chance.

Together we applied for and received a 2008 Pioneer Scholars grant, and were one of nine student/faculty summer research teams. Over the summer, we examined how mid 19th century media sources, namely newspapers and women’s fashion magazines, manipulated American attitudes surrounding women’s adherence to the codes of fashion. The media wielded enormous influence over women’s lives, going so far as to create an inextricable link between a woman’s outer appearance and fashionable beauty, and her ascribed inner virtue and morality. Mid 19th century American women felt enormous pressure to submit to the impractical, uncomfortable and unhealthy dictates of fashion to be granted society’s “seal of approval.” The tight corsets and heavy, massive hoop skirts of fashionable dress caused many women to, quite literally, die for the sake of fashion.

While working on my project, I experienced some wonderful research highlights. Professor Kelly and I traveled to the Wisconsin State Historical Society in Madison to view authentic “Godey’s Ladies Magazines” dating back to the 1840s. The examination of these primary materials exhibited how fashionable dress was portrayed to women in these magazines. It was incredible to touch the delicate pages of a 160-year-old fashion icon!

We also made use of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee’s extensive microfilm collection stored in the Golda Meir Library, which gave us access to thousands of mid 19th century articles from “Godey’s Ladies Magazine,” “Graham’s,” “Peterson’s,” “The Sybil” and “The Lily.” My research also gave me an opportunity to learn how to navigate and utilize Carroll’s interlibrary loan system.

Another highlight for me was being able to wear an authentic reproduction of mid 19th century fashionable dress. My mother graciously made a dress for me that unquestionably adheres to the dictates of mid 19th century dress. It is beautiful, but it is hot, massive, heavy and constricting. Wearing the dress gave me a sort of instant connection to the Victorian women and has come to represent both the physical and emotional repression suffered by women who were forced to wear such fashionable dress.

One of the greatest challenges I faced with my project was coming up with my thesis statement. I found that I had hundreds of articles in front of me, organized into subjects and groups, all with wonderful information, but I really struggled with creating a “tight” thesis statement that expressed my precise thoughts on my research. Professor Kelly reminded me, during my many thesis redraft discussions, that if a writer cannot tell the audience in one sentence what his or her paper is about, the paper will flounder. However, once a writer discovers what he or she is really passionate about, a thesis statement will be created that directs the passions and excitement of the paper. The paper will come together and will almost write itself. I found this to be completely true.

One unexpected challenge I faced with my project was trying to balance the necessary work for my project, my job duties as an elementary school secretary and my family responsibilities, without getting too stressed out. However, with this unexpected challenge came an equally unexpected reward. I discovered how much I enjoyed the difficult and often solitary work of research. I thoroughly enjoyed sitting for hours at the library looking things up on the Internet or on microfilm. I loved all the writing and editing and re-editing that I was able to do with my project. I never expected to enjoy so much the entire process from start to finish. I feel truly blessed to have been able to work with Professor Kelly, and I thank Carroll University and the Pioneer Scholars Program for providing me such a wonderful opportunity.