2013 UMN GPS Alliance-Sponsored Outreach Trip to Papua New Guinea

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In August Peter Demerath returned to Papua New Guinea, where he carried out his dissertation field research in 1994-1995, to explore partnership opportunities with the University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) and University of Goroka (UG), visit primary and secondary schools, and continue his collaborative sustainable development work in the village of Pere, Manus Province. The trip was supported in part by a UMN Global Programs and Strategy Alliance travel grant awarded to he and his wife, Ellen (Division of Epidemiology, School of Public Health, UMN).

Port Moresby, National Capital District

At UPNG the Demeraths met with Professor Steven Winduo (PhD English, University of Minnesota) and Moyep Kilepak regarding possibilities for scholar, student and knowledge exchange between the two institutions. The intention is for these efforts to build on the partnership between the two institutions from the 1990s sponsored by MUCIA (Midwestern Universities Consortium for International Activities. (Steven Winduo is the author of the blog, The Window: http://stevenswindow.blogspot.com/)

The visit to UPNG occurred on August 5 - a day that university students were marching in protest of a recent agreement between the governments of Australia and Papua New Guinea to send asylum seekers traveling by sea to Australia, to a processing and detention center in Manus, Papua New Guinea. The previous day, Australian PM Kevin Rudd had vowed to make Manus an “Island Hell” for asylum seekers. This was a chillingly ironic comment given Australia’s own origins as “boat people” during the era of “transportation” and the brutal conditions suffered by convicts at earlier “island hells” such as Norfolk Island.

For more background and an account of recent conditions at the Manus facility go to: http://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/news/article.cfm?c_id=2&objectid=10902744
At the University of Goroka, Demerath met with Pro Vice Chancellor Michael Mel, and Dr. Kapa Darius Kelep Malpo, Executive Dean of the College of Education and author of *Gender Equity at the Workplace: A Recipe for Smart Organizations with a Purpose* in Papua New Guinea.

Dr. Malpo’s work is motivated largely by Papua New Guinea’s continuing challenges with gender equality, and recent evidence the situation is actually worsening relative to other countries. The country ranked 153 out of 187 on the United Nations Gender Inequality Index\(^1\) in 2011, down from its ranking of 145 in 2010.

Dr. Malpo and Dr. Demerath discussed approaches to addressing gender equality and gender diversity in the preparation of teachers; exchanged books, and Demerath shared relevant materials from the EDHD 5000 course “Culture, Schools and Communities” he co-teaches with Michael Goh.

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In Lorengau, the capital of Manus Province, Demerath returned to Manus Secondary School, one of the two focal schools for his 1995 research on student culture and identity. He met with teachers on the current state of the school and continuing challenges it faces, and was invited to address the student body at an assembly the following day. He presented the school with gifts of encyclopedias on CD-ROM. He also visited the class of Margaret Matawai, one of the focal participants in his original research, who is now an art teacher at the school.
In the village of Pere, on the south coast of Manus, Demerath visited Pere Primary School, and conferred with Headmistress Duniyato Maien on the current state of the school. She reported that while enrollments have been expanding under the new national no-fee education plan, local support for the school was still an issue. She gave Demerath a tour of the school grounds, making sure that he saw a teacher’s *haus kuk* (kitchen) which had fallen into a state of disrepair.
The Demeraths also had meetings with the Pere Executive Council and Pere Council of Chiefs to plan the next phases of construction for the rebuilding of the Margaret Mead Memorial Community Centre. The original Centre was built four years after Mead’s death in 1982, by her friend, Barbara Roll, an amateur physical anthropologist. Before Barbara Roll passed away in 2000 she bequeathed a small sum to the Demeraths to establish a non-profit foundation to support sustainable development in Pere and Manus. The Demerath have since used the fund along with their own resources to underwrite the Margaret Mead Scholarship Fund, support local development projects, and to rebuild the Centre, which had deteriorated and fallen into disrepair.
The new greatly expanded Mead Resource Centre will provide space for training in sustainable fishing technologies, community government meetings, and community events. It will also have a Margaret Mead museum. The Demeraths are currently working with Professor Emeritus Ted Schwartz of the University of California San Diego to procure items for the museum, including a library, historical photographs, and, at the request of the Pere community, original recordings of garamut drumming and spoken Titan language from the early to mid-20th century. The Demeraths carried a message of goodwill with them for the completion of the Centre from Mead’s daughter, Catherine Bateson.
While in Pere, the Demeraths made a contribution to the village string band to support their upcoming trip to a cultural festival in Madang.

Their daughters learned the *tamena* dance.
The Demeraths celebrated the completion of the first phase of the Mead Resource Centre rebuilding project with the people of Pere by sponsoring four outrigger sailing canoe races. This was intended in part to support the vibrancy of this vital subsistence technology, as Pere is located approximately 20 km from the commercial center of Lorengau, and petrol for outboard motors has become ever more expensive – currently K35 (20 USD) per gallon.

Four canoe races were held, two for men and two for women, using both mbromana (large) and mwelipwe (small) outrigger canoes. Until recently it had been forbidden for women to sail on the large canoes; this was the first large canoe race for women in the history of the province.
The day before the women’s race, throughout the village brothers and husbands could be seen showing sisters and wives how to rig the canoes.

Practicing knots and rigging for the women’s mwelipwe race

Rigging up the mast for the start of the race
Under sail

After the finish; not in the top three, but still *hammamas* (happy)
Equal prize money was distributed to the winners of the women’s and men’s races, with small consolation prizes given to all participants (to “hammamasim” them – make them happy).

Please feel free to contact me if you are interested in learning more or getting involved with our outreach efforts in Papua New Guinea.

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