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Student Profiles: Jacqueline Schumacher, Rockhurst University

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International Travel Broadens Outlook for Rockhurst Student

By Katherine Frohoff

She's a senior at Rockhurst University, but something about Jacqueline Schumacher makes her seem older. The impression must resonate with her friends, who describe her as sophisticated. It also seems to be working great on her parents, who allowed her to begin traveling abroad when she was a sophomore in high school.

Those trips — to France, Australia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Guatemala and Spain — fueled her desire to double major in Spanish and international business.

"I've traveled more abroad than domestically," says the Kansas City, Mo., native.

Spending the summer after her freshman year at Rockhurst in Oaxaca, Mexico, deepened her interest in Latin American culture as well as in learning Spanish, Schumacher says. She wanted to learn the language very rapidly and she thought immersing herself in the life of a Spanish-speaking country was the best way.

Any fears about feeling uncomfortable quickly were put aside by the family who welcomed her. Beginning the first night, the three brothers of the house, all in their late teens, gathered in the courtyard beneath her window to serenade her with love songs and classical guitar music.

"They wanted to make sure my first week went well," Schumacher says. "They became very protective of me and never let me walk anywhere alone."

As her integration into the family increased, so did her awareness of the differences between U.S. and Latin American culture.

"Meal time was extremely important to them. And when we talked about education in the United States, they had a hard time understanding why students would want to leave home to study. They had very tightly knit family bonds."

That context served Schumacher well the following summer when she earned a Miller Family Service Scholarship from Rockhurst, which



Jacqueline Schumacher

allows students to work as a volunteer in exchange for tuition assistance the following semester. She accepted an assignment working with senior adults at the Guadalupe Center, which serves Kansas City's growing Latino population. There, she served lunch, helped with arts and crafts, played bingo and spent time visiting. Before her first day, she was concerned that the people would view her as an outsider who might not be sincere in her efforts. Again her concerns were unwarranted.

"Many of their grandkids don't speak Spanish, and they loved that I could speak their language," she says.

The conversations often went beyond day-to-day pleasantries as the older people shared stories about their struggles immigrating to a new country. From these she gained a new perspective, learning

first hand what it was like to escape the political oppression in Cuba, for example. When her five-week obligation ended, Schumacher was enjoying the experience so much that she continued to make weekly visits.

Cultivating this direct human connection with people from another culture has given more immediacy to courses in Schumacher's international business major. She says studying globalization through the perspective of Jesuit concerns such as social justice and fairness makes the topic even more interesting for her. Although societal progress throughout the past century has been remarkable, many people in Latin American countries still go without basic needs, she says.

What does Schumacher think of globalization?

"There's no longer one right answer," she says. "We're asked to apply our knowledge and decide what we believe, which is one difference from early education when things are presented to students as black and white."

In the meantime, Schumacher continues to study and work part time. One thing she's proud of is that she has financed her education herself, with the help of academic scholarships.

Being financially responsible has made Schumacher appreciate college more, she says. Approaching things from the perspective of a business major helps. In one of her classes students were required to break down their tuition and fees to calculate the cost of each class period.

"After that, I would never dream of skipping class," she says.

Perhaps it's this air of responsibility and self-confidence that makes Schumacher seem older than her years — or at least more mature.

Katherine Frohoff, is director of media relations and editor of Rockhurst magazine.