work in India rose from 3 in the academic year ending in 2005 to 57 last year.

The initiative, Domínguez said, has attracted a gift for a new Mehra Family professorship of South Asian studies, to be used in various faculties (Sanjeev K. Mehra ‘82, M.B.A. ‘86, and Karen Petersen Mehra ‘82 are the donors), and several other leadership gifts for a South Asia Founders Club.

*Advancing the agenda. Behind the scenes, Domínguez’s office is underpinning global Harvard by creating databases that will track all personnel abroad (for security purposes), and a Web resource that will detail every Harvard international initiative, so students and researchers can determine common interests and available resources. Area-studies centers have also moved toward a common application form for undergraduate work abroad, and for graduate students whose research requires exploratory travel. With the Board of Overseers restructuring its visiting committees into an integrated body that will examine international and area centers within FAS, the elements are falling in place to align and administer Harvard’s two-way discourse with the world.

Indeed, Domínguez said he sees evidence of Harvard’s ability to make “vast intellectual commitments” to important research and teaching opportunities around the globe during the twenty-first century.

---

**Teaching—and Learning—Abroad**

Mollie Wright ’09 expected to spend her summer in Costa Rica teaching English. She was, after all, a volunteer for WorldTeach, a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization affiliated with the Harvard Center for International Development that places volunteer teachers in developing countries throughout the world. But Wright, stationed in a small rural pueblo in “the northwest ‘cowboy-country’” as the profesora de inglés of nearly 100 teenage students, didn’t expect to find herself a teacher without a classroom.

The town had begun construction of a new, all-purpose building next to the overcrowded school, but lack of funds had prevented its completion. “They said, ‘We’re missing doors, hinges, windows—and you see that part of the roof that should be meeting the wall? We’re missing that, too!’” she recalls. After a meeting with other WorldTeach volunteers in a nearby city, Wright sprang into action. She helped raise the funds to complete the project by e-mailing friends and relatives for contributions and, along with community organizers, her fellow teachers, and her students, she worked to help make the building usable. When she left, with the salon nearing completion, she says she “had to fight them to stop them from naming it after me. It had nothing to do with me but everything to do with being lucky: because WorldTeach put me there, that’s what allowed this opportunity to exist.”

It’s an opportunity, says Helen Claire Sievers, executive director of WorldTeach, that exists for all the organization’s volunteers. “They’re doing everything they can in regular scheduled classes,” says Sievers, “but also [they’re participating] in international development. They are, more than simply teachers, special guests to provide outside understanding and support in these communities.”

WorldTeach (www.worldteach.org) got its start in 1985, when Michael Kremer ’85, Ph.D. ’92, then a new social-studies graduate, decided to spend some time in a rural part of a developing country and found his way to Kenya. Before long, and much to his surprise, he was called before the head of the local village government. “I didn’t know if I was in trouble, but it turned out he was starting a school, and I was asked to teach there. I stayed for a year, then started to look for someone to replace me.”

Kremer did not have to look far. In 1986, with Daniel Levy ’88 and Sydney Rosen ’87, M.P.A. ’93, he founded WorldTeach under the auspices of the Phillips Brooks House Association at Harvard.

Today, Kremer is Gates professor of developing societies, a member of the economics department in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences: a position he credits, at least in part, to his year in Kenya. “It certainly deepened my interest in development,” he notes, “and I think it was useful to combine the more academic study of development with the experience of working in a developing country. I’m sure that shaped the research I do as an academic.”

Since Kremer’s serendipitous experience in Kenya, WorldTeach—despite receiving no funding from the U.S. government and no significant sustained funding from other sources—has placed thousands of volunteers throughout Africa, Eastern Europe, Latin America, Asia, and the Pacific Islands. Currently, Harvard and non-Harvard students alike participate in seven- to eight-week summer programs in Costa Rica, Ecuador, Namibia,
Poland, China, and South Africa, while older volunteers can spend an academic year in other countries, including American Samoa, Bangladesh, Chile, Guyana, Venezuela, Mongolia, the Marshall Islands, and Micronesia. The organization charges its volunteers a significant fee ($3,990 for a summer, and anywhere up to $5,990 for a full year)—“your contribution to the overall costs of preparing and supporting a teacher in a developing country”—but various regional study centers provide fellowships for Harvard undergraduates: the Center for International Development, the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, the Center for European Studies, the Asia Center, and the Committee on African Studies all help defray the cost of travel and in-country work.

WorldTeach offers an international experience altogether different from Harvard’s study-abroad programs, and draws an accordingly unique pool of applicants. “A handful of our volunteers may go on to do work at the [Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE)],” says Sievers, “but in general they don’t intend to become teachers, even though a non-negligible number will go on to work in international education.” The large majority simply “want to do something really different, and want to do something meaningful.”

The organization is constantly considering new partnerships with host countries, a process involving a careful consideration of each country’s individual concerns and needs. While volunteers in Costa Rica and Ecuador focus on teaching English, for example, the volunteers in Namibia work to incorporate computer technology into its education system and those in South Africa focus on the economic empowerment of their students.

But whatever the volunteers’ focus, WorldTeach takes teaching seriously. Every volunteer now goes through an intensive two-week in-country training program (four weeks for the yearlong programs) that covers everything from the basics of the native language and culture to the techniques of teaching. Each volunteer also receives a 45-hour teacher-training manual, the text for their orientation training, written by interns from the HGSE with staff member Nicole Watson. Sievers hopes eventually to offer 125 hours of training, even though the current session is a respectable 65 to 70 hours. “We try to train them as well as we can,” she says, “and to be as supportive as we can.”

But what WorldTeach volunteers often find the most rewarding aspect of the experience are their activities outside the classroom. “We strongly encourage them to pursue community-service projects,” says Sievers, pointing to the photographs of enterprising volunteers covering the walls of the WorldTeach offices in Cambridge. One volunteer raised the funds to provide mosquito nets and bed sheets for the children in her Namibian village. Another built a theater for children in the Marshall Islands, while a volunteer in Guyana provided her school with its own photocopier. Libraries, playgrounds, even a basketball court built from scratch in Costa Rica—there are few things that haven’t been built or pursued by WorldTeach’s “teachers.”

Professional improvisers might be a better job description. In Cape Town, South Africa, during the summer of 2009, Thomas Wooten ’08 spent a few weeks leading a “microfinance initiative for teenagers” with the Foundation for Economic and Business Development. When his subsequent assignment with an environmental organization fell through, Wooten and a fellow volunteer threw together an informal after-school tutoring program for local high-school students. “Only one of them had a textbook, and I didn’t even have a blackboard, but they were some of the most motivated students I could have asked for,” he reports. When he wasn’t teaching, Wooten assembled interviews for an oral-history project about apartheid, headed by the director of WorldTeach South Africa, Roddy Bray.

“It is amazing,” says Sievers, “to see what our volunteers can do in two months, let alone a year.” Even so, she sees the time each volunteer spends with WorldTeach as more of a beginning than an end. “We are, at least to Harvard students, a sort of ‘International Living and Working 101,’” she adds. “We want to help our volunteers become dedicated international citizens. And I think we’ve been very effective in that.”

For Mollie Wright, the difficulties of teaching under a tree in Costa Rica haven’t deterred her in the slightest from further work in international development and education; a tour in the Peace Corps, she says, is not out of the question. Wooten, inspired by his work in the shantytowns of Cape Town, sought out classes in MIT’s urban studies and planning department when he returned for his sophomore year, and conducted thesis research on the disaster-recovery efforts in New Orleans this past summer.

Even the simple rewards of being a world citizen have not been lost on Alton Buland ’04, who spent a summer with WorldTeach Poland, then worked for two years at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and is now pursuing a master’s at the Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins. “I’ve learned,” he says, “that knowing a little Polish can go a long way with expats, students, or diplomats from Warsaw—usually leading to a vodka shot and a heartfelt Na Zdrowie!”

~SAMUEL BJORK