

## LESSONS LEARNED FROM ANTIGUAN EXPERIENCE

### Mentor and students reunite in teacher training program

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**You** might say **Dr. Susan Gately**, associate professor of education, faced a few small obstacles when she traveled to Antigua this summer to present a workshop. “I started by blowing up the VCR when I plugged it into the wrong outlet,” she says. That was after she got lost, trying to navigate the unmarked roads on the Caribbean island. Add to that the challenge of driving on the left instead of the right, and the discovery, when she finally came to the Teacher’s Union building, that there was no air conditioning. “I couldn’t use an LCD projector as planned, because of the terrific breeze blowing in through the shuttered windows,” says Gately, who reports that despite all her initial mishaps, the entire

experience turned out to be positive after all. “I was oblivious to the challenges I would face when I first accepted the invitation...but my week on the island definitely raised my cultural awareness.”

Gately was invited to present a teachers’ workshop on learning disabilities and dyslexia by the Antigua- Barbuda Center for Dyslexia Awareness (ABCDA), an organization founded by Rivier alumna Paula Spencer ’00G. The summer program was a reunion of mentor and student. “I mentored Paula when she was a student here and we have stayed in touch through the years,” says Gately.

Teachers in Antigua must complete a two-year teaching assignment before beginning formal training at Antigua State College and have to leave the island if they want to earn a bachelor’s degree, says Gately. She found the twenty-six teachers and five teacher-trainers, with varying levels of education and experience, all eager to practice their phonics skills, after learning the basics of phonemic awareness.

Gately discovered that most of the teachers in Antigua have few resources—schools are small and overcrowded, books and computers are generally lacking—but she says, “Paula and her group are working hard to help improve the outcome for all students.”

Since returning to the States, Gately has initiated a book drive for the island schools. Two students are helping to sort through donations of children’s literature and teacher resources, which they hope to ship by the end of the year. Gately is particularly looking for children’s literature donations up to grade six, which can be dropped off at the first floor of the Education Center. “I was really awed by the power that Paula and her small organization have brought to the island,” says Gately. “These teachers are working hard to help children learn; what they lack in resources, they more than make up for in compassion and dedication.”

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\* **LUCIE BRYAR** earned a B.A. in English Communications from Rivier College in 1976. She has more than 20 years experience in newswriting, marketing, and public relations, including nearly 14 years as a staff writer for Rivier College. In her current position, she produces the faculty/staff newsletter, *Campus Forum*; Bryar also writes marketing materials for admissions, copy for the college website, and feature and news articles for the magazine, *Rivier Today*.