



## THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC ACADEMY

### A COMMON DENOMINATOR FOR WORLD UNDERSTANDING

BY SARA JERNIGAN

/E/ Students want an education which includes a broad spectrum of world happenings in their chosen disciplines. College and university faculties can and must play a more dynamic role of leadership in the education of students in the area of international affairs. To neglect the teaching of international understandings and relationships is to neglect reality. Old as time, today is now for concerted action to imbue youth with a valued insight and understanding of international relations.

How can this goal be achieved? One of the most vital avenues is living abroad in a situation where students from many countries study, work and play together. Attending a summer session of the International Olympic Academy, Olympia, Greece, is exactly that!

The environmental setting of the Academy is steeped in historical world antiquity. The faculty and student body roster, composed of many nationalities, resembles a miniature United Nations, with many opportunities for involvement in the action and interaction of person-to-person or group-to-group happenings--getting to really know one another is one of the prime goals of the Academy.

The Academy lies in the undulating Valley of the Al-phoes and Kladeos Rivers, close to the ancient village of Olympia. The little village is as famous as any great city of the world, perhaps more so because of its historical significance and rich archaeological digs. Olympia of old, as well as of today, has a significant message for the world. It is a mecca of international understanding and peace.

A paved road leading from Olympia guides the travellers among cypress, laurel and olive trees, past the archaeological site of the sacred Olympia ruins. These ruins lie in an olive

grove, the Altis, which is covered with drums and bases of temples, the most numerous of which are those dedicated to Zeus and his consort, Hera. The flame which inaugurates all Olympiads of the modern era is lit by the sun's rays in this sacred grove.

The road continues on around the hillock of the Cronion, where Zeus is reputed to have viewed the ancient Olympic Games. Diagonally across the road from the Cronion Hill can be seen the world's most famous sport stadium, the location of the first recorded Olympic race in Olympiad I, 776 B. C. This date is the Year One of the ancient Greek world. The games had a religious origin, and it is believed that they were inspired by the oracle at Delphi for the purpose of sponsoring peace between the invading Dorians and the native population. The cult of the ancient Olympic Games lasted for over a thousand years, and they were revived in 1896 by Pierre de COUBERTIN, the father of the modern Olympic movement.

Moving on down the winding road several yards, we suddenly gaze upon the colorful display of many flags representing the nations of the people who are in residence in the International Olympic Academy for the summer session. Towering above all flies the world-famous Olympic flag.

Arriving at the gates of the Academy, in the distance we see recreational areas and low, rambling, modern buildings nestled in the hillsides of the verdant, rolling campus. Entering the campus and moving on up the driveway, a closer view is now possible of volleyball courts, basketball courts, a track and field layout, all of which are located on two different levels of the hillside, to the left of the driveway.

On the right is a beautifully landscaped area which surrounds an Olympic-size swimming pool. Approaching the attractive sand-colored buildings, we view the first row of the lower level houses which are student dormitories, a doctor's office, and infirmary. The second higher ground level of buildings house the lecture hall, recreation room, snack bar, small meeting rooms. Located behind the lecture hall is a large paved area which serves as the outdoor evening social recreation area. The Academy has an outdoor theatre where films are frequently shown at night.

On the third and highest ground level buildings are now being constructed which will contain the living quarters for the lecturers, guests, and administrative officers. These buildings will be completed in time for the opening of the 1971 Summer Session.

On the campus of the Academy is a special sacred ground, known as the Coubertin Grove. Here may be seen the monument to Pierre de COUBERTIN, who expressed the wish that

when he died, his heart should rest eternally in Ancient Olympia. The Greek nation, in cherished memory, erected a stele in which his heart now rests. This lovely monument now stands in the center of this peaceful grove. It is a memorial to the great man whose ultimate dream was peace among all people through world education of youth and international participation in sports.

The purpose of the International Olympic Academy is to disseminate, teach and inculcate the true Olympic ideology, which embraces the spirit of peace, good will, fair play, the noble character of man, and the artistic cult of beauty and grace of the human body in movement. In Baron Pierre de COUBERTIN's own words, *"The Olympic movement tends to bring together, in a radiant union, all the qualities which guide mankind to perfection."*

The study of the Olympic Games as a festival of contests, art performances and exhibits; the analysis of the philosophy as expressed in the Olympic Constitution and the ideas of Pierre de COUBERTIN; the study of sport as an art and science; the meaning of sportsmanship, developing world friendships and international understanding, all are examples of the content of the program. Also, ancient traditions and history are blended with the philosophy of COUBERTIN and these, in turn, are interpreted in the light of present day realities.

To sit down face-to-face with persons from throughout the world, to share ideas, cultural differences and social exchange; to study, play and work together and to converse in many languages while searching for a meaningful understanding of the subjects discussed, is an international experience of great stimulation.

Mutual understandings are increased and international friendships developed through rich interchange of cultures, rewarding play and social experiences. Contests and tournaments are held in aquatics, volleyball, basketball, table tennis, and track. The Academy swimming pool is the most popular social recreation area after the close of the morning lectures. Three of the evening Academy programs are devoted entirely to social recreation which consists of games, dances, and songs of many nationalities, taught by the students of their respective countries. All students have the opportunity to participate in play and to share in the presentation of an activity of their country. Often demonstrations or performances are given by national groups or by individuals skilled in playing an instrument or in performing a dance or a song. The evening parties always end with the whole assemblage singing songs of many nations, often in different languages, accompanied by guitars, concertinas, the tap of feet and clap of hands. The parties are a great international communication experience for all.

Recreational activities and sports have always been particularly effective in reaching people because activities transcend language barriers. Such activities have great potentiality as the common denominator for mutual understanding and the development of mutual friendships. People from all nations can run, jump, dance, and play together, and this is exactly how it is at the Academy. It is common to see our student Jewish and Arab friends participating together in a game or dance or playing on the same sport team. This can only happen in a setting such as the International Olympic Academy! The magic of face-to-face communication with persons other than one's own nationality breaks down fanciful barriers, political or non-political. The Academy is a forceful leveler of international barriers.

According to Avery BRUNDAGE, "*The Olympic Movement is the most important social force in the world today.*" If this statement is a truism, then I would like to comment that I believe that the International Olympic Academy, as an institutional extension of the Olympic movement, is the most important social force of its kind in the world today. At the Academy the power of world inter-communication is in constant evidence. There are no barriers of race, religion, creed or color. Realistic, sincere friendships and understanding materialize and, seemingly, will last a lifetime. We hope so!

There are many enrichment activities interspersed throughout the total two-week session. Occasional forenoons are spent visiting the local Archaeological Museum which exhibits valuable findings from the digs in and around Ancient Olympia, and also the very beautiful new Museum on the History of the Modern Olympic Games, which contains the most complete philatelic collection of Olympic stamps in the world.

Daytime trips to ancient ruins, to new excavations, to scenic cities, and to beaches are also a significant part of the cultural and fascinating educational offerings.

Evenings, after dinner, are devoted to viewing films of many nations which concern the Olympics, sports, or related topics.

An occasional free evening is often spent by journeying on foot into the village of Olympia to patronize some of the sidewalk tavernas. These unique outdoor snack and wine restaurants are the social heart of the Greek towns. Here are seen international relations, communication and understanding functioning on the highest plane. The Academy students and faculty fraternize with the villagers with conversation, song and dance. Merriment and the warm feeling of belonging prevail throughout all these impromptu village recreational evenings. One of my local Greek friends, who owns one of these tavernas, said, on the night before our departure for home,

*"Olympia will be lonesome and sad to see their wonderful Academy friends leave, but we shall eagerly look forward to the 1971 Summer Session." All of us feel that we have left part of our hearts and thoughts in Ancient Olympia where true and deep international friendships are made. One of my student friends, Bill McDOWELL, wrote upon returning home, "I did not expect a simple trip to Greece and to the Academy to be so intense, so thoroughly emotional and so rewarding. Out of my Academy experience I gained immeasurably. I made close, lasting international friends... What a great thing that Academy was for me!"*

I believe the Academy is the greatest medium indoctrinating the Olympic message of peace, good will, and international friendship to all. The International Olympic Academy is a common denominator for world understanding.



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