

## Student's dreams come true in South Africa

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Staff Writer

Meredith senior Amanda Deutscher spent her junior year making a life-long dream come true: she studied in South Africa and learned about the culture and people, as well as the country's problems.

During the full year she was there, Aug. 3, 1999 through Aug. 4, 2000, Deutscher studied at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzberg, which is in the province of Kwa-Zulu, Natal.

She lived on campus with seven other men and women in apartment-style housing. Most of the seven were Zulu, one of the black ethnic groups in South Africa.

Deutscher, a psychology major, took classes in South African literature, Islam in

Africa and living religions. She learned about Islam, African Traditional Religions, Hinduism and Buddhism in the South African context in her Living Religions class.

The remainder of the year, she lived with an Indian family. Deutscher said the family "took me in like I was their daughter," calling them welcoming and loving.

"It was amazing to be fully immersed in another culture: experiencing a different way of living, from religion to food," Deutscher said. "It was an enriching and profound experience."

Deutscher found the experience "incredible" but sometimes very difficult because of the social and political situation there. Apartheid, the prac-

tice of separatism in which non-whites were completely marginalized, ended in 1994 with the election of Nelson Mandela as president. But though apartheid is over, Deutscher noted that the effects are still present.

Deutscher said she could not connect with many whites because of their differences in thinking, noting that racially, South Africa could be compared to the United States during the sixties. She added, though, that in America in the 1960s, there was hope, both economically and socially, but most South Africans have little hope.

Deutscher felt drawn to South Africa because she "wanted to be in a place enriched and full of different

cultures and lifestyles." After learning about Mandela, Deutscher became interested in South Africa.

Deutscher said she did not have culture shock upon arrival in South Africa, but she noted that readjusting since she returned has been extremely difficult. Deutscher noted that she is much more globally aware; she does not think that she wants to live in the United States after graduation.

Deutscher cited U.S. materialism as a main reason for wanting to leave. Africa, in Deutscher's opinion, had not modernized enough for materialism to have overcome the social structure; the focus of society was based more on people and relationships.

While in South Africa,

Deutscher worked for the Program for Survivors of Violence, run by a non-governmental organization. The organization offered psychological support for South Africans who had been affected by political violence.

Because of her experiences, Deutscher wants to work in developing countries in community development. She is considering getting a teaching certificate in English as a second language. Currently, she's thinking about graduate school in education, psychology or international relations.

But ask Deutscher about her trip, and she's likely to tell you that her dream really did come true. Indeed, Deutscher not only met but also spoke to Mandela himself.

## Mecham brings experience to Meredith

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Among the many new faces seen at Meredith this fall, one is the face of a man with a diverse background and many aspirations. Dr. John Mecham, the head of the department of biology and health sciences, joined Meredith's community at the beginning of this semester.

Though he was born in Baltimore, MD, Mecham spent most of his childhood in Virginia. During his preteen years he spent two years in Liberia, West Africa with his family. His father worked for the U.S. Department of Agriculture and his family was one of six families from the U.S. to live there and apply modern agricultural procedures to local farming. It was this experience that prompted his interest in science and his strong interest in tropical medicine.

Mecham received his BS in biology and a Ph.D. in Zoology, both from Virginia Tech.

Joining the faculty here at Meredith also brings several new responsibilities. As the head of the department, Mecham is responsible for leading and coordinating various events such as scheduling, creating budgets and assessment.

Mecham left Catawba College in Salisbury, N.C., to come to Meredith. There he served as the chairperson of the biology department. During his career, he has served as division chairperson and associate dean at the College of New Rochelle, which is north of New York City. He has also worked at the University of South Carolina and Stratford College in Virginia.

"I see new, exciting and innovative learning taking place here," said Mecham, who came to Meredith because of a resurgence of the interest in the sciences. The planning for a new building for science and mathematics is a clear example to Mecham that progress is occurring.

The quality and diversity of the biology faculty is part of what attracted Mecham to Meredith. He values their enthusiasm for biology as well as their high standard of excellence. "Leadership is not defined as change but by helping others achieve goals," said Mecham.

Mecham hopes that biology students will represent Meredith at various forums by presenting their research. In the past he has had students present their research at the meeting of the Tri Beta Biology

Honor Society and the North Carolina Academy of Science.

"The college as an institution is in a geographical setting which makes possible the doing and practicing of science at the cutting edge," said Mecham, who views this position as one of Meredith's innate strengths, citing the Research Triangle Park and other universities in the vicinity.

Mecham's research interests are in comparative physiology and parasitology. Being in a research environment with students and working one on one or in small groups is his favorite part of teaching.

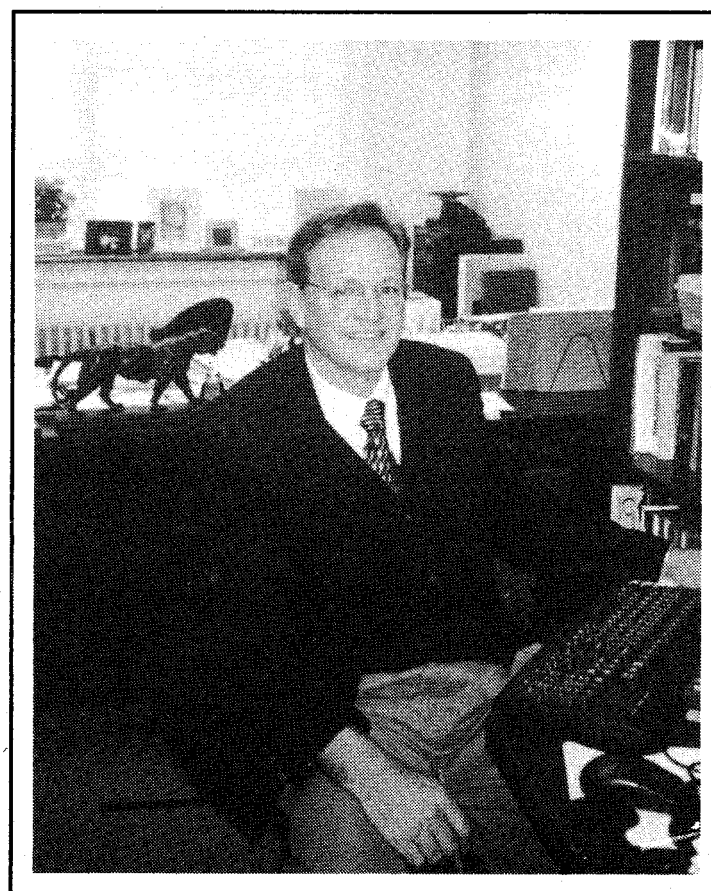
Last year at Catawba he worked to develop an interdisciplinary course in science and religion similar to the Honors colloquium taught at Meredith. He has a strong interest in the way humans interpret the world both scientifically and in terms of beliefs, which was the focus of this course. He said that much early scientific research was done within religious structures and contexts.

Throughout his career and experiences in science Mecham he has had opportunities for travel. He went to Belize, Central America with a group of students in a tropical ecosystems class from Catawba College. He also went to the

Dominican Republic, where he did consulting work with his son, who was with the Peace Corps.

Mecham, who taught in a women's college for fourteen years, has enjoyed his time at

Meredith so far. "I learned long ago an appreciation for the high level of intellectual discourse that can go on in women's colleges," added Mecham.



Dr. John Mecham is the newest member of Meredith's biology department. He is adviser to *Beta Beta Beta*, the biological honor society.

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