

Media Release

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QCC Professor Provides Unique Learning Experience as Class Visits Ellis Island in New York

WORCESTER, Ma. – QCC second year student Janet Alfara did not want to learn about immigration simply by reading her textbook. Instead, she suggested to her professor that the class visit Ellis Island, site of the largest influx of immigrants into the U.S. from 1892 to 1954. Professor Nancy Donohue-Berthiaume couldn't think of any reason why they shouldn't make the trip.

Thus, last week Donohue-Berthiaume took her Dynamics and Racial Ethnic Relations class, plus family members, faculty, and other students on a one day trip to New York City. The group of over 50 toured Ellis Island, now a museum and under the management of the National Park Service. Alfara called the experience "unbelievable."

"Actually being at Ellis Island was a great way for the class to see how immigration really happened during that time period," she began. "We learned how the immigrants felt, what they saw, what questions they had to answer... it was excellent."

Part of the experience was an audio tour, in which the group heard recordings of interviews conducted with people who came through Ellis Island. There were also photographs throughout the museum. "You could actually see the scared look in the people's eyes," Alfara said of the photos.

Some students even researched their own ancestors, and many found they had relatives who came through Ellis Island. Alfara said the students would not soon forget their experience.

"Everybody loved it. We all had such a great time. It was amazing to get a true first hand account," she added.

Professor Donohue-Berthiaume was thrilled not only with the success of the trip, but also the enthusiasm with which various College departments supported their efforts.

"This demonstrates an example of the responsiveness of the institution and the commitment of all areas of this College community to work together to support our mission of student learning," Donohue-Berthiaume stated, noting the wonder she saw in the students' faces as they toured the island.

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“Witnessing the excitement for learning both in and outside of the classroom, the expressions of compassion and empathy for second wave immigrants and the recognized appreciation for the opportunities that the United States provides for people then and now, made the trip more than worthwhile,” she added.

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