Professor lectures abroad on American culture, values

By Ingrid Petersen
Emerald Reporter

Foreigners perceive Americans many different ways, according to a University professor.

Americans are seen as simplistic, fast-paced, politically naive, friendly, extremely self-critical and so powerful that they hold the fate of the rest of the world in the palms of their hands, said Dr. Barbra Mossberg. Mossberg is a tenured University English professor and U.S scholar in residence for the U.S Information Agency.

"Everywhere I go I am greeted by the Marlboro Man and Mickey Mouse," Mossberg said, referring to international perceptions of the United States.

Mossberg has spent the last year lecturing on American values and culture in more than 30 different countries.

"Many people have suggested we are too free, too tolerant of diversity and that censorship might even be a good thing." However, she said, "There is a sense of respect and admiration for our country as well as frustration when we don't live up to ideals that we hold up to the rest of the world."

As U.S. scholar in residence for the Washington D.C-based USIA, Mossberg represents American culture and scholarship internationally by lecturing to foreign scholars, learned associations and academic institutions around the world.

"I am in the business of explaining who we are, our visions, our purposes and our dreams," said Mossberg, who left the University in 1986 to take the position.

Mossberg's lectures are not limited to the world of academia, however. The government sends her to lecture

Barbra Mossberg

to foreigners who have a role in shaping their country's view of America. She speaks to textbook writers, journalists, politicians and senior foreign service and embassy personnel, she said.

Mossberg visited the University on her way to deliver the keynote address last Wednesday night in Ashland, beginning a conference on foreign relationships.

Her speech, entitled "In Pursuit of Happiness: The Quality of Friendship in the USA," addressed why Americans are known around the world for being friendly and why this friendliness baffles foreigners, who often think Americans lack depth.

Mossberg also lectures groups in the United States that will be leaving the country, such as U.S. cultural attaches, on why America is perceived the way it is and what they should expect.

When she is in the country, she also can be found on any given day escorting offical visitors of the United States to various sights of interest, explaining everything from the landscape to why Americans have the opportunity to choose from more than 20 brands of laundry detergent.

Throughout the last year as the scholar in residence for the Agency's Bureau for Educational and Cultual Affairs, Mossberg also has spoken on everything from the U.S. Constitution and baseball to Emily Dickinson and the Marlboro Man.

In addition, Mossberg, who helped establish the University's American Studies program in 1985, acts as a consultant to foreign educators on how to establish an American Studies curriculum at various foreign education institutions using the University's program as a model.

"I try to generate interest in American Studies. There is great need out there for people who are interested in explaining our culture," she said.

Mossberg, who came to the University in 1976, began examining the behavior of Americans when she was the Fulbright appointment to the Bicentennial Chair of American Studies at the University of Helsinki, Finland, in 1982.

Since then, Mossberg has worked to increase international understanding of the culture and values of American society as well as what makes Americans different from the rest of the world.

Trash

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compared to the national average of 46 percent.

Goss gave examples of recycleable items, including cardboards, pizza boxes, paper, newsprint and bottles. Items such as used tissue paper cannot be recycled because they are contaminated, he said.

He added people needed to be more aware about items such as plastic that never decompose, citing this as a reason to refuse purchasing items packaged in plastic containers.

OSPIRG recently conducted a random survey of more than 450 students in which students were asked basic questions on recycling. The results showed students were aware they had the right to recycle.

"The interesting thing is that people don't know what they can recycle," said Lisa Horowitz, OSPIRG coordinator.

She added there was no real reason for having single-wrapped cheese because the plastic used will never decompose.

Horowitz said consumers were not the only people who needed to be educated on the issue of recycling. She said she believes those who package products also need to be open to the option of using recycleable material.

Furthermore, according to OSPIRG many people don't know that they have the right to curb-side recycling, Horowitz added. This is the separation of garbage into recycleables and non-recycleables on their sidewalks for "trash-hallers."

Horowitz believes the problem with curb-side recycling is that it's not profitable for "trash-hallers" to provide this service because there is no market for recycled material in this area.

"I think that Oregonians need to be more conscious of what they are throwing away and not just accept the idea that we are a throw-away society," Horowitz said.

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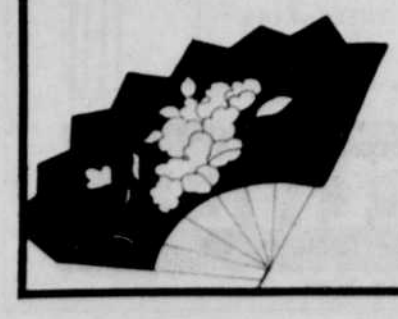

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