



Students participate in the Emory-Tibet Partnership in spring 2012. Here they are with Tara Doyle, outgoing director of Tibetan Studies in Dharamasala and senior lecturer of religion at Emory University and Lobsang Sangay, the Kalon Tripa (equivalent to Prime Minister) of the Tibetan Government in Exile.

Reaching Out to Tibetan Refugees

They don't fit the typical perception of refugees, but by living and studying among Tibetan exiles in India, U.S. students receive a unique insight into their world through the Emory-Tibet Partnership.

"It's a remarkably successful refugee community," says Tara Doyle, outgoing director of Tibetan Studies in Dharamasala (India) and senior lecturer in the Religion Department at Emory University, in Atlanta.

They've set up schools, medical facilities, and businesses, and many people tend to forget the Tibetans living in Dharamasala, India, are actually refugees.

Through the Emory-Tibet Partnership, students live in dorms at the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics' (IBD) Sarah campus with Tibetan students. For one assignment they interview their roommate for a life history project. "That really wakes them up. They realize so many people they encounter have these incredible stories of exile, flight, suffering, loss and resilience," Doyle says.

Her time in India had a major impact on Colorado College rising senior Lindsey Pointer, who took part in the partnership, which is open to

students from various universities.

Her relationships with Tibetans "touched the strings of my heart," says Pointer, a religion major with a minor in nonviolence. "You gain the depth of learning from emotional attachments and that makes it feel so much more real."

Pointer spent four months in India. That included a home stay with a Tibetan family, volunteering to teach English to former political prisoners, and conducting research on the role of women as activists in the community and preserving Tibetan culture.

The Emory-Tibet Partnership was formed in 1998. In 2007, the Dalai Lama was named presidential distinguished professor at Emory, and he'll teach the students during their time among the Tibetan community.

Along with the spring semester program, U.S. students can take part in the Emory Tibetan Mind-Body Sciences summer term, studying and discussing Buddhist philosophy, culture, medicine, and science.

"It opens so many doors for our students," says Geshe Lobsang Tenzin Negi, who came to Emory to help establish Drepung Loseling Monasteries Inc., a center for Tibetan

Buddhist studies in Atlanta, and pursue graduate studies in psychology at Emory. ["Geshe" is an academic title for monks.] He now is a senior lecturer in the university's religion department and director of the Emory-Tibet Partnership.

Tibetan students also benefit from the partnership, says Geshe Kel-sang Damdul, IBD assistant director. "The Tibetan students get firsthand knowledge of life in the West."

He says the Tibetan students "are very inspired by democratic values. America is viewed as the most democratic country in the world."

The partnership also brings a Tibetan student to Emory for four years. Dawa Tsering, a rising junior at Emory, is studying math, computer science, and physics, and intends to return home when his studies are completed. "There are only a few Tibetan science teachers. I can help fill that gap."

Kari Leibowitz, who recently graduated with a degree in psychology, is spending her second summer in India, and relishes her experiences studying among the Tibetan exiles.

"We might forget this is a refugee community, but it's always on their minds," Leibowitz says.