Speaker 1: The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

Nicki: Hundreds of third through sixth grade students from the local area are taking a big field trip on September 25th. They'll be visiting the International Culture Fair, hosted by Missouri State University's modern and classical languages department. I'm Nicki Donnelson and today my guest is Dr. Heidi Backes, assistant professor of Spanish at MSU and coordinator of the event.

Dr. Backes: It's essentially a trip around the world. So they come to the big ballroom in the PSU and we have four rotation times throughout the day for various schools that come in to visit. And when they get into the ballroom they get a bag and a passport booklet and they visit 12 different booths around the ball room, each one representing a different country around the world and the do a particular activity related to the culture of each of those places.

So in Kenya for instance, in the past, they have visited the booth, they learn a little bit about the language. So they might learn how to say hello or how to say their name and then they'll learn a bit about the culture, the history of the place, and then they'll go into the activity. At Kenya for instance, they do beaded bracelets like the Maasai Mara tribe and that's always a big hit. Or at Spain in the past they've learned a little bit of Flamenco dancing and it's just a whole bunch of different activities that get them involved in the culture of each of these locations

Nicki: Each year, Backes says that it is a challenge to select only 12 countries that will be represented. Since some school districts and therefore some kids may come a few years in a row, she wants to vary the activities and cultures represented. More than anything though she wants to make sure the students have an opportunity to broaden their worldview by seeing and hearing things that they've never been exposed to in our community. This, she says, reflects the university's public affairs mission and she's proud to be part of that.

Dr. Backes: To be able to explore global diversity at such a young age is really an incredibly important opportunity and experience for children. Especially in the region where we are, where we're basically the urban center of 160,000 people and there aren't a lot of metropolitan areas, really within a decent drive of Springfield. So we're fairly isolated for a larger city and that means that we don't have quite the local diversity that some of these other larger metropolitan areas like Kansas City, St Louis, or further north where I'm from in Milwaukee, that they might have naturally.

So one of the best ways that we as a languages department can help the community to explore these types of cultures and languages around the world is by hosting events like this where the children gets to come and experience other languages, other traditions, and really have fun and have an exciting time doing so.

Nicki: Since the schools sign up in advance, she is certain that the elementary and middle school children will pack the Plaster Student Union on September 25th. But in order for the event to run smoothly, to keep the kids engaged and moving around the globe, she needs your help.

Dr. Backes: At the Culture Fair, I basically need as many volunteers as I can get and in each of the past two years I've had over 300 people throughout the day and I really do need that many, honestly, in order for it to, to run smoothly. Because we have between 500 and 600 children coming throughout the day in those four different rotation times. So I need people both to help with running the booths, so the ones that are leading the activities at each of the country booths, people to help with a name writing station who are fluent in languages that use a different script other than English. So things like Arabic or Greek or Korean. Any number of languages. At this table, they write the children's names in each of their languages on the little tote bag that the kids have. And usually the kids love that.

That's one of their favorite things because it's so personal to be able to see their own name written in so many different ways in each of these languages. So I'm looking for volunteers for that particular table. I also need volunteers to act as chaperones for just in general leading the children from each booth to booth and helping to coordinate the activities at each of the booths, making sure that the students are engaged and they're participating. And sometimes if there's a delay from one booth to the next, they can play games that we have globes, inflatable globes, that they can play with. So people who are comfortable working with children from roughly ages nine through 12, people who are excited about working with kids and who are excited about learning languages and divulging cultural information.

Nicki: To volunteer your time, contact Heidi Backes at hbackes@missouristate.edu. I'm Nicki Donnelson for the Missouri State Journal.

Speaker 1: For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at (417) 836-6397.