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

Nicki Donnelson...: Want to truly walk a mile in someone else's shoes? Try an ethnographic field school. It's an immersive experience where you live within another culture. I'm Nicki Donnelson, and today, on the Missouri State Journal, I have Dr. William Meadows. He is a professor of anthropology in Native American studies at Missouri State University. He leads a six-week experience for his students, living with a Kiowa family, but integrates them with members of the Plains Apache and community tribes as well. He tells us about the experience.

Dr. William Mea...: Literally, it's to do everything they do. The first thing they do the day we get there, after greeting the family and everything, is they learn how to put up a teepee, so they'll have somewhere to stay that night. Before dark, I said, "You got to get busy." But I have one of the family members show them how to set up a teepee and get it all right. Then, they move their cots into it and set up. But literally, we did everything from go to language classes, veterans meetings. We went to their dinners and their things. We went to three or four ceremonial that are performed only once a year, different types of dance and singing ceremonials, different types of native churches, the sweat lodge, a pow wow. You almost name it. We did it. It's to immerse ourselves in as wide a range of what the normal culture there is as possible.

Nicki Donnelson...: These Southern Plains tribes that the students visit share a reservation. Meadows explains it is a checkerboard of parcels of land. You might not even know you were on one unless you could visibly see a cultural relic. But the reservation remains a separate entity in terms of legal jurisdiction. He explains that while you might expect teepees to be a thing of the past, they still hold a place in the society for cultural festivals and events. For the students, it's a step towards understanding the rich ties to history and tradition that exists in Native American cultures. As they stay, they dive deep into their research focus but end up learning many intangible skills as well.

Dr. William Mea...: Because I've been there so many years and people know they're my students, that does a lot of bridgework for them very quickly. People accept them very, very quickly. Whereas if you're a new individual, you've got to build that rapport. But getting them to get comfortable with, "Okay. Not only, I got some research questions here, on a project, in mind, but I've got to make personal connections with people and set up interviews, or set up visits to their house, or to go with them on some event and establish that rapport because that is essential to someone opening up and sharing their culture with you."

The other thing, this is a society that, even today, there's a fair amount of the population that are below the poverty level. It's a little bit of a reality check because most of the kids that are going there, even some of the lower financial ones, have lived much higher up the ladder, so to speak, than some of the folks that we're going to be dealing with. That, I think, is valuable as a reality check, again, to experience something that not everything comes easy. They get to learning that even small favors like riding someone to the health clinic, or the pharmacy, or a store that doesn't have a car, just small favors like that, helping out, is a lot of their daily interaction. Learning to do that selflessly, I think, is valuable.

Nicki Donnelson...: More than anything, through this experience, the students learn a lot about the Native American culture. But the skills of observation, interviewing, and reflecting are all transferrable to whatever study that they end up wanting to pursue. That was Dr. Bill Meadows. I'm Nicki Donnelson for the Missouri State Journal.

Speaker 1: For more information, contact the Office of University Communications at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at KSMU.org.