

# Scholar Ship charts a learned course

Brendan O'Keefe

FOR university students, there are scholarships — and then there is the Scholar Ship.

The latter, a floating university of the high seas, docked in Sydney yesterday after more than a month of sailing and study since it left Athens on its maiden voyage in early October.

The Scholar Ship has been a movable home to more than 200 university students from 35 countries, as well as to 50 academic and support staff.

It is backed by seven universities around the world, including Sydney's Macquarie University.

The ship's curriculum director, Leo West, a retired academic who was a pioneer of international education at Monash University, said the philosophy behind the ship was broadening minds.

"We're all educating students for a global environment," Dr West said from somewhere off the northern tip of New Zealand.

"This is an attempt to lift that an order of magnitude. There is a



**Diversity:** Caitlin Bell arrives in Sydney on the Scholar Ship

globalised curriculum and port programs that give students a chance to get involved in field studies. Several students have told me this has been a life-changing experience."

Students, most of whom have paid \$US20,000 (\$22,400) for the trip, are placed into multi-disciplinary learning circles.

They study core themes of global issues and inter-cultural communication and can choose

from others such as international business and communications, media cultures, sustainable development and environmental studies.

At each port, the ship stops for a week and the students go ashore for hands-on field study.

From Athens, the ship stopped in Portugal, Panama, Ecuador, Tahiti and New Zealand. After Sydney come Shanghai and, last, Hong Kong.

Macquarie law student Caitlin Bell, who like her four Macquarie shipmates was sponsored by the university, said the trip had given her a "completely different perspective". On a field trip in Panama, she studied a land conflict between indigenous people and resort developers.

"I spent five days living with an indigenous community," Ms Bell, 23, said. "We trekked up rivers, hiked giant mountains and talked with young people and elders.

"There is no recognition of their land rights. It is just sold out from under them.

"It was interesting to talk to them and hear the things I'd studied at home that had previously only lived in books."

Studying international negotiations, Ms Bell found herself talking about conflict with "people who've grown up with those histories as part of their national culture".

"You just don't have that diversity at home," she said.