itself," said Poitras, accepting the Oscar. "When the most important decisions are made affecting all of us, we are made secret. We lose our ability to check the powers that control.

John Legend and Common took their turn with the 8-foot (2.4 meter) statue of "Selma," the now-infamous snubbed civil rights drama.

"We say that Selma is now, because the struggle for justice is right now," Legend said.

As the young Graham Moore, who talked about his depression and a suicide attempt during his acceptance speech for best adapted screenplay for "The Imitation Game," put it backstage: "I might as well use it to say something meaningful."

But in a season full of foregone conclusions, many of which came true at the Dolby Theatre, including a best supporting actress win for J.K. Simmons ("Whiplash"), the Oscars still had a few surprises up its sleeve.

Richard Linklater’s 12-years-in-the-making "Boyhood," a critical favorite of the year and one that was once considered a top contender for the evening’s top prizes, left with only an award for Arquette. The formal ambitions of "Birdman" proved to be the more compelling — even if its lead Michael Keaton was passed over in the acting race.

There was also a clear regard for uniqueness in the evening’s other multiple-prize winners. Damien Chazelle’s "Whiplash," a polarizing and vibrant independent film about a driven jazz student and his ruthless instructor, won three awards, for supporting actor, editing and sound mixing.

Director Wes Anderson’s dark WWII-set fable "The Grand Budapest Hotel" meanwhile, won four. Anderson had been long overlooked by the Academy for his idiosyncratic features. This latest outing, one of the evening’s most nominated films, was recognized for production design, score, costume design and makeup and hairstyling.

Several of this year’s biggest box-office hits nominees — Clint Eastwood’s Iraq war drama "American Sniper" and Christopher Nolan’s sci-fi epic "Interstellar" — had to settle for single wins in technical categories. "Interstellar" won for visual effects, while "American Sniper" — far and away the most widely seen of the best-picture nominees — took the best sound editing award.

As Hollywood’s studios have increasingly focused on mounting global blockbusters, the Oscars have become largely the province of smaller indies and film festival fare. In the night’s opening routine, Jack Black, playing villain to the cheeky Harris Lamented Hollywood releases “opening with lots of zeroes, all we get is superfine.”

The only film that came close to betraying that sensibility was Disney’s "Big Hero 6," which won best animated feature and is loosely based on an obscure Marvel comic.

Superhero/heroine aside, Harris and producers Neil Meron and Craig Zadan made sure to bring in a youthful spirit as possible to the evening’s festivities, hoping to continue the recent ratings upswing for the Oscars, which last year drew 43 million viewers, making it the most-watched entertainment telecast in a decade.

To truly understand people from another country and culture, you must break bread with them, as well as study their language and history. That’s why study abroad programs for U.S. college students are so important. However, those who major in science are at a distinct disadvantage when it comes to studying in a foreign country. With lab courses that all use the same equipment, they have little leverage to travel and experience life in other cultures. So, study abroad has traditionally been the realm of liberal arts and humanities students. An unusual exception is the study abroad program from the University of New England (UNE). Known for its strong science programs, especially health and medical sciences, UNE is set on getting its science students out into the world by offering opportunities to travel and study abroad with leading scientists in laboratory courses.

In Seville, Spain, UNE students take classes in genetic biology, micro-biology, physical science, and occupational therapy at the Pablo de Olavide University. Language and culture immersion comes from living with Spanish host families and enrolling in language, culture and history classes.

Last year, on the other side of the Strait of Gibraltar in Morocco, UNE inaugurated its Tangier Campus. Its brand-new buildings house state-of-the-art laboratories, classrooms and student and staff housing on land leased from Tangier’s American School. In addition to science classes, students register for history, culture and Arabic, French or Spanish classes. Their housing can be in the student dorm or with Moroccan host families.

The Tangier campus is the brainchild of Dr. Anuar Majid, UNE’s Vice President for Global Affairs. He is a Tanjawi, as people from Tangiers are called.

Majid is a prolific writer. His books and articles deal with Muslim-Western relations since 1492 — the year in which King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella ordered the expulsion of Moors from Spain. With a deep understanding of history, Majid is able to offer solutions to tensions in the world today. He bridges what can be a cultural gap in modern/contemporary Muslim-West relations.

One of the ways he does this is with lectures. He started a lecture and seminar series at the UNE’s main campus in Portland, Maine. It has become one of the most prestigious university forums in the United States dedicated to the study of human destiny in the 21st century. The lectures are open to the community.

UNE students can enroll in them as a course in which they read and discuss each scholar’s work prior to their visit and then get meet with the speaker and ask their own questions.

And now, Majid has expanded that program to the new Tangier campus. Majid worked closely with the architect designing the buildings of the new campus and true to form, the 200-seat auditorium is the heart of the classroom building. It opens right into the atrium and is now the site of the Tangier Forum — planned to be an ongoing global studies program.

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, Tangier had several colonial countries’ enclaves. You can still see signs of this. The French and Spanish consulates are full city blocks surrounded by high walls. Similarly, the American School has a 3-meter-high (12 feet) wall surrounding a huge city block. The block in that wall and view inside is at the portion of the property now leased to UNE. I see that opening in the wall as a graphic example of the type of work Majid carries out.

I was the inaugural speaker at the Tangier Forum last Thursday. I spoke about the Aztec Empire’s rise and fall. My audience included Tanjavis, Moroccans from other cities, UNE staff and students, teachers and students from the American School in Tangier, and English-speaking Moroccan residents of various nationalities.

I told them that one of the factors that led to the Aztec empire’s rapid growth was “chimampa” agriculture. This type of irrigated farming takes the fields to the water instead of the water to the fields. By building islands in the shallow lakes of the Valley of Mexico, farmers were able to work year-round and produce an abundance of food. The chimampa farmer, with a 12-month growing season, could produce food for 60 people for a full year.

Nevertheless, the Aztec Empire fell. Its downfall was rooted in its poor relations with its neighbors. One thing that every non-Aztec ethnic group in Mesoamerica could agree on is that if they had been conquered by the Aztecs they were tired of paying tribute to them. If they hadn’t been conquered they were tired of being threatened with conquest. All of this made it very hard for Hernán Cortés to make alliances with the Aztec neighbors.

It seems to me that UNE is using chimampa technology by facilitating study abroad for science students — taking the laboratories to the study abroad center — and leading to better relations with our cultural neighbors though training global humanities scholars.

The Tangier Forum talks are live online at www.une.edu/live. Tuesday at 12:30 p.m. Mexico time Greg Wolff speaks on “The Ecology of Roman Imperialism.” Anthropologist and longtime Cuernavaca resident Charlie Goff can be reached at chibble@cemahau.ac.com. Carol Lamb Hopkins, Cuernavaca resident, former teacher and school administrator collaborates on this column. Previous Charles Digs are posted at charlesdigs.com.