

## **WEEKEND REPORT Interest in college gets Australian deported**

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### **Body**

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A British high school teacher left Atlanta Saturday after her dream vacation turned into a nightmare.

Enrica De Mello, 28, said that although she and her boyfriend, Nick Lawson, 22, held around-the-world tickets on British Airways - tickets that were to take them to Denver in a few days - immigration agents **deported** Lawson when he expressed an **interest** in U.S. **colleges**.

"We were going to spend a few days here to see the sites and to let Nick visit some potential **colleges**" before heading off to ski near Denver and then traveling to San Francisco, De Mello said.

But while De Mello was whisked through customs Friday, an Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) agent at Hartsfield International Airport stopped Lawson to ask him some questions.

Some two hours later, the high school physics teacher was told Lawson didn't qualify for entry into the United States.

De Mello said Lawson, an **Australian** living in England, was put on the next flight back to Great Britain, without the couple being allowed to sort out their possessions.

"I had all of his traveler's checks, and he had my credit cards," De Mello said. "He had half of my clothes in his bags, and I have half of his in mine."

INS agents excluded Lawson because they thought he might not have honored his 90-day visa limit because of his **interest** in U.S. **colleges** and because he had a small amount of money, INS District Director Thomas P. Fischer said Saturday.

"It's a judgment call," Fischer said. "To be here looking at schools and have insufficient funds indicates that this person might not leave the country when he is supposed to."

De Mello, who was holding all of the couple's traveler's checks, said the INS agents who **deported** Lawson were "quite verbally abusive" and refused to give her their names. "They said it was none of my business and that if I didn't leave they would call the police."

De Mello said neither she nor Lawson have ever been arrested - "We are honest people and intellectual people," she said - and she was astounded that Lawson would be **deported** just because he was **interested** in attending **college** in the United States.

Fischer defended the agents' actions. He said the couple's experience was "unfortunate from an image sense," but the INS action was not improper or unusual.

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"We exclude thousands of people each year," Fischer said.

## Graphic

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Photo: "We are honest people," says Enrica De Mello, waiting for her flight to London at Hartsfield after her boyfriend was deported Friday / JOHN SPINK / Staff

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