

**Annual Study Center Review  
CIEE Study Center at Vesalius College, Brussels, Belgium  
Business, Communications, and Culture  
2009**

CIEE Program Director: Catharine Scruggs, Program Director, Western Europe  
CIEE Resident Director: Michelangelo van Meerten  
CIEE Academic Consortium Board Program Evaluation: [www.ciee.org](http://www.ciee.org)  
CIEE Academic Consortium Board Monitor: Ellen Sayles, Oberlin College

Each summer, program directors write a Study Center Review for each CIEE Study Center program commenting on the previous academic year. The program director writes the review based on input from the CIEE Academic Consortium Board members, resident directors, sending institutions, and student evaluations. Each report is made public on the CIEE website at [www.ciee.org](http://www.ciee.org).

**Program Goals**

The program has three goals: to provide opportunities to study European identity, culture, and policy-making from a non-U.S. perspective with other international students; to offer insights into Belgium and Brussels' unique political, cultural and linguistic situation in Europe; and to enable students to improve their French or Dutch language skills.

The overall goals were met during the 2008-09 academic year.

**New and Noteworthy**

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**Academic**

**Language**

There is no community language commitment in Brussels. Students are encouraged to use and practice French and / or Dutch through cultural activities, direct enrollment in the French- or Dutch speaking universities of Brussels for students with an advanced level in these languages, and French conversation tables.

The French-English conversation tables started in fall 2007 were continued in a less formal setting during the past year. Contact was established with first year masters students at the Communication department of the French-speaking Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB). This resulted in a higher and more enthusiastic participation of local French-speaking students. The conversation tables were appreciated by CIEE students as this allowed for good interaction with local students and an excellent opportunity to practice their language skills.

A weekly film was offered in both the fall and spring semesters. This activity offers CIEE students the opportunity to see non-English language films in French or with French subtitles.

The beginning levels of French language instruction still leave room for improvement. Since taking a French or Dutch language class is a requirement, it can be a challenge to motivate students who aren't particularly interested or motivated to learn a second language. The professor teaching the beginning levels had some personal problems this year that also affected her teaching. CIEE will continue to work with Vesalius on improving the courses as well as strategies for motivating students.

Several students took the Dutch language class offered by the host institution.

## **Subject Area Courses**

### **CIEE courses**

The only CIEE course in the Communications, Business and Culture program is the core course, "Contemporary Europe: The Belgian Experience". The content and guest-speakers list for this course are constantly updated to keep in line with new developments, as well as with student evaluations of past speakers, visits and material. New items introduced in the past years, short student presentations of course readings and contemporary Belgian news items, were successful. The split of the class into two groups for one of the two weekly meetings was continued during the past year. Where possible the reader was adapted to take into account current affairs. Student feedback on the course indicates that students value the opportunity to have course specific to the culture, identity, politics and history of their host country.

### **Direct Enrollment courses**

Three students took a direct enrollment course at the French-speaking ULB in the fall semester. In the spring semester, only one student took a direct enrollment course. Though initial interest for taking a direct enrollment course was much higher, relatively few students actually ended up enrolling. The time commitment of internships and the challenge of difference in academic style and examining are the main reasons that students cite for not taking a direct enrollment course. The CIEE Advance Liberal Arts program at ULB does provide opportunities for more contact with French speaking students. The addition of the second program to the CIEE offerings is a positive evolution of the Study Center and may enhance more interest for direct enrollment courses in the future for students in the Communications, Business and Culture program.

### **Out of classroom activities**

The core course has a number of field trips that introduce students to various entities in Brussels including the Belgian federal Parliament and the Fine Arts Museum. The general excursions also include visits to cultural and historical sites that are highlighted in the core course.

## **Non-Academic Features**

### **CIEE Orientation**

Activities during orientation this past year were further shortened and diversified, particularly on the first day of arrival. An icebreaker, a short film on Belgium and an additional short walking tour helped to keep student's attention and interest. Resident staff continued encouraging students to arrive the day before the official start of orientation in order to overcome jet lag.

Changes in the orientation conducted by Vesalius College have further reduced the need for separate CIEE sessions. Staff also did additional training for local students to help tutor CIEE students and this added to the more successful orientation program. The orientation program continues to improve with students rating this component better than in any previous years.

### **Cultural Activities/Field Trips**

The following were day or evening activities during the last year.

#### *Fall 2008*

- Weekly film series
- Soccer match Belgian national team

- Thanksgiving dinner with students preparing and cooking dishes
- Full day field trip Waterloo and Villers-la-Ville abbey complex
- Full day field trip Bruges (guided tour of historical city and bike tour)
- Morning field trip to NATO headquarters in Brussels
- Full day field trip to the international criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague, the Mauritshuis Museum and Delft (Netherlands)
- Full day field trip to the European Investment Bank in Luxembourg, Luxembourg city and Vêves castle, and dinner at a local Ardennes restaurant
- Full day field trip to Ypres and surrounding First World War battlefields
- Full day field trip to Monschau and Aachen (Germany), traditional Christmas markets and visit to Charlemagne's tomb and throne in Aachen Cathedral

### *Spring 2009*

- Weekly film series
- Morning field trip Comic Strip Museum in Brussels
- Full day field trip to Bastogne and the Battle of the Bulge site
- Morning field trip to NATO headquarters in Brussels
- Afternoon field trip to Carnival recognized as a UNESCO cultural heritage event at Binche
- Full day field trip to the international criminal tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague, the Mauritshuis Museum and Delft (Netherlands)
- Full day field trip Bruges (guided tour and bike tour)
- Evening visit to the Royal greenhouses in Brussels

Students were extremely receptive to each of the field trips and activities, often indicating that these were one of the best aspects of the program. The field trips and activities are organized for students to gain knowledge of Brussels, Belgium and surrounding countries that they might not discover otherwise. The program seemed to strike the right balance between more educational aspects (museums, cultural institutions and the like) and more 'fun' aspects (lunches, dinners, and bike riding).

### **Overnight Fieldtrips**

In fall, students enjoyed a three day visit to Normandy: Mont St.-Michel, Bayeux and D-Day landing beaches. Students again cited the Normandy trip as the most impressive experience the program offers them.

In spring, students participated on a two day visit to European Court of Justice, Luxembourg city, and Vêves castle and a three day visit to Alsace (Eastern France) and Germany, where there were visits to Strasbourg, haut Koenigsbourg Castle, Riquewihr, Freiburg and Trier.

The success of the visit to the European Court of Justice largely depends on the 'case' that is accessible during the visit. In spring, the visit was to the new Court premises.

### **Housing**

In the fall semester, four students stayed with homestay families, one student stayed with relatives and the remainder (87%) had independent set-ups, sharing an apartment, floor or house with landlords, local students or other CIEE students. In the spring semester, nine students stayed with homestay families and the remainder (83%) had independent set-ups as described above.

The homestay option seems to be less popular than in previous years. Students seem to value their independence higher than the opportunities for interaction and language learning offered by homestays.

It usually takes some of the students a bit of time to adapt to the city and the fact that commuting using public transport is a normal feature of daily life. CIEE Resident staff try to meet students' individual preferences (in terms of set-up, language exposure, etc.) as possible. In order to facilitate this, students stay the first few days of orientation together in a youth hotel.

## **Community Engagement and Integration**

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### **For-Credit Internship and Community Service Options**

Vesalius College provides opportunities for un-paid for-credit internships that are academically supervised and receive a letter grade.

In the fall semester, six students took internships at a variety of NGOs, communications and international business institutions in Brussels. Two students interned at a European NGO working in the field of children and youth, one student interned at a European federation for direct marketing, two students at a law firm working with the EU, and one student at the Associated Press. Vesalius was able to accommodate almost all students who wished to do an internship. In general students really appreciated their internships describing them as one of their best (learning) experiences during the semester.

In the spring semester, seven students took an internship. Three students interned at a European NGO working in the field of children and youth, one student at a European federation for direct selling, one student at the Brussels United Nations Office for Industrial Development, one student at the Jordan mission to the EU and one student at a publishing house.

### **Not-for-Credit Community Service/Volunteer Projects**

CIEE students have the possibility of taking part in community service projects. In both semesters a few students initially showed interest, but the interest waned such that no student participated.

## **Challenges**

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### **Academic**

#### **Language**

There will always be a number of students who aren't really interested in the language aspect of the program. This is also enhanced by the international character of the city such that students are able to get by in English rather than using French.

#### **CIEE Course**

The CIEE core course seems to be on the right track. Student's feedback indicates that the course significantly contributes to a better understanding of the host culture. Speakers, course material and topics continue to be monitored and evaluated to allow for changes when appropriate.

### **Vesalius Courses**

Vesalius offered a second section of a course if there is a high demand from students. The past year saw a rise in interest for beginning levels of Dutch courses. In the fall, students took this level at the language institute related to the Vrije Universiteit Brussels (VUB). In the future Vesalius will organize and guarantee beginning Dutch language classes for program participants.

Resident staff will continue to direct students towards classes that receive positive evaluations while simultaneously working with Vesalius on improving those courses that are less highly reviewed. In the onsite evaluations of individual courses students tend to be more positive than in their overall evaluation of courses when doing the CIEE program evaluation. Generally students say they have to do a lot of work (long papers, presentations etc) but that the work isn't always challenging.

### **Direct Enrollment**

Registration for direct enrollment at the Université Libre Bruxelles (ULB) is relatively complex and requires motivated students. It is, however, part of discovering the host culture. Increasing contacts with students from ULB and the presence of the Brussels second Advanced Liberal Arts program may have a positive effect on direct enrollment at ULB.

### **Non-Academic**

#### **Internet access**

The refurbished computer lab at Vesalius has improved access to printing facilities and to internet. All housing has wireless access to internet.

#### **Student Integration into Community**

Integration in the community remains a challenge. The participation of a good number of French-speaking students at the French-English conversation tables created positive dynamics and more contacts with the host community. The goal for coming semesters is to keep this dynamic going.

### **Future Directions**

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The Resident Director intends to continue to contribute towards improving the evaluation of classes at the host institution, in general; increase the percentage of advanced French language (or Dutch language) students enrolled at ULB (or VUB); obtain a higher rate of success of students interested in taking internships; continue to work on a better integration into the community through contacts with ULB, goals meetings and setting up activities with locals.