

**Annual Study Center Review
CIEE Study Center at Vesalius College, Brussels, Belgium
Business, Communications and Culture Program
2010**

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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 the previous academic year 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.

Program Goals

The CIEE Business and Culture 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 insight into Belgium and Brussels' unique political, cultural, and linguistic situation in Europe; and to enable student to continue or begin French or Dutch language study.

The program met its goals during the 2009-10 academic year.

New and Noteworthy

Academic

French and Dutch Language

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

Each semester a number of French-English conversation tables were organized with help from two students at Master's level at the Communication Department of the French-speaking Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB). During both semesters there was a high turnout of CIEE students and enthusiastic participation by local French-speaking students. Conversation tables were highly appreciated by CIEE students. They allowed an easy way for CIEE students to be in touch with local students and really provided an excellent venue for practicing their language skills.

The beginning levels of French language were, once again, met with wide degrees of enthusiasm. Since taking a French or Dutch language class is a requirement, it can be a challenge to motivate students who aren't particularly motivated or good in learning a language. There seems to be a rising interest to take a Dutch language class. Several students took the Dutch language class offered by Vesalius College.

Finally, a film was offered to students about every two weeks each semester. This offers the possibility to seeing non-English language films in French or with French subtitles.

Subject Area Courses

CIEE course

The only CIEE course on the Business, Communications, and Culture program is the core course, "Belgium, the European Experience". The content and guest-speakers for the course are constantly updated to keep in line with new developments, as well as with student evaluations of speakers, visits and materials. New items introduced in the past years like student presentations of course readings, and Belgian news, were maintained. The split of the class in two groups for one of the two weekly meetings was also maintained. Where possible the reader was adapted. Student feedback on the course generally indicate students value the better understanding of the culture, identities, politics and history of Belgium but that some find the reading list heavy and the some of the lectures boring.

Direct Enrollment courses

Five students took a direct enrollment course at the French-speaking Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) in fall. In spring, three students took a direct enrollment courses at the University. Though initial interest in taking direct enrollment courses was much higher, relatively few students committed to enrolling. The time commitment of internships, and the challenge of differences in academic style and examination schedules are the main reasons for students not taking direct enrollment courses. (The Advanced Liberal Arts program at the CIEE Study Center in Brussels does provide opportunities for more contact with French speaking students. This program is ideal for students interested in direct enrollment courses in a university setting.)

Out of classroom activities

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

Non-Academic

CIEE Orientation

Activities during orientation are varied and relatively short, particularly on the first day of arrival. An icebreaker, short film on Belgium, and two short walking tours create a diverse offering. A more visual component was added to explain the Brussels public transport system.

Staff continued encouraging students to arrive the day before the official start of orientation to better help adjustment. Vesalius College tried to diversify and shorten its sessions as well. They have also instituted a more formal training session for their regular students who act as group leaders. This is a positive development, but there is room for further improvements.

Cultural Activities/Field Trips

Day or Evening Activities

Fall 2009

Conversation tables

Two-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, visit of Luxembourg city and Vêves castle, dinner at 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
Possibility to participate in ALA program's visit to the memorial of the former concentration camp 'Breendonk'

Spring 2010

Conversation tables
Two-weekly film series
Morning field trip Comic strip museum in Brussels
Full day field trip to Bastogne and battle of the Bulge
Morning field trip to NATO headquarters in Brussels
Afternoon field trip to carnival recognized as UNESCO cultural heritage of humankind 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 of the Royal greenhouses in Brussels
Possibility to participate in ALA program's visit to the memorial of the former concentration camp 'Breendonk'

Students were very positive about the fieldtrips and activities, often indicating that this was one of the best aspects of the program. These activities allowed them exposure to their host country, places, traditions and cultural venues they would not have discovered otherwise. Staff seem to strike the right balance between more educational aspects (museums, institutions and the like) and more 'fun' aspects (lunches, dinners, bike riding, free time).

Overnight Fieldtrips

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

In the spring, the program enjoyed a two day visit to the European Court of Justice, Luxembourg city, and Vêves Castle and a three day visit to Alsace (Eastern France) and Germany, where students visited Strasbourg, haut Koenigsbourg Castle, Riquewihr, Freiburg and Trier. The success of the visit to the European Court of Justice largely depends on the 'case' the program is able to attend. This semester's visit took place in the new premises of the Court. Students very much appreciated both visits.

Housing

In the fall semester 5 students (19%) stayed with homestay families, one student stayed with relatives and the remainder (81%) had independent set-ups, sharing an apartment, a floor or house with landlords, local students or other students of the program.

In the spring semester, 10 students (23%) stayed in a homestay, and the remainder (77%) had independent set-ups, sharing an apartment, floor or house with landlords, local students or other students of the program.

The homestay option has gained in popularity. Students who opt for this housing option typically value the opportunities for interaction and language learning offered by homestays. One student in spring moved to a different setup.

The imbalance of student numbers between the two semesters does create the challenge of holding on to good housing or finding sufficient new places. The same holds for changes in the number of homestays and the number of students who indicate they want to live in a French-speaking environment.

Community Engagement and Integration

For-Credit Internship and Community Service Options

Vesalius College provides the opportunity of for-credit internships that are academically supervised. In the fall, eight students participated in an internship at an international institution, NGO, communications or international business provided by the host institution. Three students interned at weeklies and an institution for journalism, two students interned at European NGO's working in the field of children and youth, one student interned at a major European accounting firm, one student interned at a law firm working with EU, and one student had an internship at a credit-card company. Most of the students who applied for an internship were successfully placed. In general students really appreciated their internships describing them as one of their best (learning) experiences during their stay.

In the spring, eight students participated in an internship. One student interned at a European NGO's working in the field of children and youth, two students interned at policy consultancy and think-tanks, one at a European weekly, one student interned at a major European accounting firm, one at an NGO working in the field of development aid and IT, one at the HR department of a package delivery firm, and one at NATO.

Not-for-Credit Community Service/Volunteer Projects

There is the possibility of community service projects though few students initially showed interest. In both semesters a student did English tutoring on a weekly basis for the children of a French-speaking family. In spring a student worked with a soup kitchen and organization for homeless. Another student volunteered at a music center of the French-speaking community.

Challenges

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 that allows students to get by in English rather than using French. This continues to be a challenge for the language courses. The past year saw a rise in interest for beginning levels of Dutch courses.

Resident staff will continue to direct students towards classes that got positive reviews and evaluations and direct them away from classes with less positive feedback, while

simultaneously working with the host institution on improving these courses and/or changing professors.

In the evaluations of individual courses students tend to be more positive than in their overall evaluation of the program. Generally students say they have to do a lot of work (long papers, presentations, etc.) but that the work isn't always challenging. Changing set ways at the host institution necessarily will take a long time. The changes taking place, though, seem to be in the right direction.

Registration for direct enrollment at the Université Libre de 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 second CIEE program in Brussels (Advanced Liberal Arts) may have a positive effect on direct enrollment overall.

Non-Academic

Generally group dynamics among students each semester are usually very good. Orientation, activities, and field trips create positive dynamics and many students stay in touch visiting each other across the U.S. well after the end of the program. Annual informal meetings organized by the former resident coordinator during the winter break in the U.S. attract growing numbers of alumni and create contacts among different years. The new resident coordinator intends to continue this informal winter alumni meeting.

Integration in the community remains a challenge for students without strong French or Dutch language skills. 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 dynamics going.

Future Directions

The new Resident Coordinator, Emily Miller, has created a solid new team with Resident Director, Michelangelo Van Meerten, and moving forward the team have a number of goals for the program including working with Vesalius to improve the evaluation of classes; encouraging more students with advanced French (or Dutch) to enroll at Université Libre de Bruxelles or Vrije Universiteit Brussels, respectively, and to continue to work on a better integration into the community through contacts at the host institutions.