

**Annual Study Center Review
CIEE Study Center at Ecole Superieure de Direction et de Gestion (ESDG),
Rabat, Morocco
Language 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 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 Language and Culture program at the CIEE Study Center at Ecole Superieure de Direction et de Gestion (ESDG), Rabat, Morocco, is designed to help students develop an understanding of contemporary Morocco, to give them insight into Morocco's role in the Arab world and its ties to Europe, and to help them develop Arabic language skills, whether at a beginning or advanced level. These goals are met through coursework and through a variety of community engagement and field-based research opportunities. Students with strong French language skills can also take elective courses in French, adding to the overall cultural and linguistic experience.

Based on feedback from CIEE students and resident staff, many of the program goals were met during the 2009-10 academic year. The program provided students with a good opportunity to experience Moroccan culture and learn about Moroccan history, politics, and society. However, the language goals of the program were not successfully met. While student feedback on the Arabic language instruction was better in 2009-10 than in previous years, the overall results of the Arabic language component did not meet CIEE expectations. Feedback on the area studies courses was mixed, but, once again, comparatively better in 2009-10 than in the previous year. Overall, students rated the CIEE homestays and excursions as the highlights of the program.

New and Noteworthy

The CIEE Rabat Language and Culture program is designed to offer students a rewarding academic and co-curricular program in the beautiful city of Rabat, Morocco. The majority of the students in fall 2009 and spring 2010 rated the program favorably and said that they enjoyed their overall experience in Morocco. The program combines area studies and language classes with innovative excursions, field trips, and cultural activities. Most students lived in CIEE homestays with local Moroccan families for a true immersion experience.

Academic

Arabic Language

This program attracts students with a diverse background in Arabic language. The majority of the students on the program in fall 2009 and spring 2010 had little to no background in the language. As a result, most students took one of the Beginning Arabic courses offered by CIEE. A small number of students on the program enrolled in intermediate-level courses. The following courses were taken by students in 2009-10:

Intensive Moroccan Colloquial Arabic
Beginning Modern Standard Arabic I
Beginning Modern Standard Arabic II
Intermediate Modern Standard Arabic I
Intermediate Modern Standard Arabic II
Advanced Modern Standard Arabic I

Beginning Moroccan Colloquial Arabic
Intermediate Moroccan Colloquial Arabic

Students are required to enroll in Intensive Moroccan Colloquial Arabic during the first two weeks of the program. Students are then required to register for the appropriate level of Modern Standard Arabic for the rest of the semester. In addition, a one-credit elective Moroccan Colloquial Arabic course is offered every semester for those wishing to focus on Darija (local dialect of Arabic). Student feedback on the Intensive Moroccan Colloquial Arabic was extremely positive, as most students felt that this intensive course provided them with a much-needed base for interacting with their Moroccan host families and other members of the community.

For those interested in French or Arabic language exchange, CIEE resident staff established a Conversation Exchange Partners program. With this program, a CIEE student is paired with a local student from the American Language Center. Students are asked whether they prefer to focus on French or Arabic and whether they have any other preferences such as gender or age. They are then both given each other's contact information and set up meeting times on their own. CIEE staff worked with students to determine basic goals and expectations and advised students to divide their time 50/50 between French/Arabic and English. Although participation in this program fluctuated somewhat depending on individual student motivation levels and effort, the CIEE Resident Coordinator reported that this new program was quite successful overall.

CIEE staff also established a more formal, Peer Language Tutor (PLT) program in fall 2009. PLTs are current Master's students who are available to provide additional support and practice to supplement the CIEE Arabic classes. On the first weekend during orientation week, PLTs meet the students at ESDG and lead them on a walking tour through various Rabat neighborhoods. Although the PLTs all speak English, they are asked to use only Arabic with the students. Again, the overall success of this new program varied somewhat from student to student. For those who met frequently with their Peer Language Tutors, however, the results were very positive.

During orientation, CIEE staff encourage students to speak Arabic and French to each other and to the staff. Intermediate students sometimes expressed their frustration at not being able to practice Modern Standard Arabic with locals because locals would often assume that as a foreigner, the student spoke French. Locals are also more likely to speak the local dialect of Arabic rather than Modern Standard Arabic. As is the case with many study abroad programs,

Modern Standard Arabic is not a widely “spoken” language in most locations. CIEE students in 2009-10 enjoyed the challenge of developing their Moroccan Colloquial Arabic skills, and most reported that they had made significant progress by the end of the semester.

All of the Arabic language courses were small and allowed for maximum interaction between students and instructors. In order to put theory into practice, instructors arranged a series of out-of-classroom activities each semester. Classes were often held at cafes, in the medina, or even at a pottery market in Sale (near Rabat). Students enjoyed these opportunities to practice their Arabic skills with local people in real situations.

CIEE made significant changes to the Arabic language curriculum in fall 2009 and hired several new instructors to work with the program. As previously noted, student feedback on the Arabic language courses was more positive in 2009-10 than in previous years. However, the overall quality of the language courses did not meet CIEE expectations. There is still a gap between the expectations of the student and the teaching style of the language instructors. Instructors were often too flexible in their attempts to meet various student demands, and, as a result, did not adhere to the course syllabi in a consistent manner.

CIEE Subject Area Courses

The CIEE Rabat Language and Culture program offers students the opportunity to take various area studies courses taught in either French or English. All students enroll in the CIEE core course, Contemporary Moroccan Society and Culture. Based on feedback from students in 2008-09, various changes were made during summer 2009 to improve the quality of these courses. The CIEE Academic Director held meetings with the faculty to discuss U.S. student expectations, including the need for clear course syllabi, regular course feedback (i.e. papers, tests, quizzes), and support outside of class. Based on student feedback from fall 2009 and spring 2010, most of these changes were successfully implemented this year.

The following courses were offered in 2009-10:

Required

Contemporary Moroccan Society and Culture

Electives in English

Business and Economic Issues in the Arab World

Introduction to the Koran

Modern Moroccan Literature: Reflections of Social, Economic, and Political Issues

Gender Issues in Morocco

Organizational Internship (spring semester only)

Electives in French

Race and Ethnicity in Morocco

Student feedback indicates that the Gender Issues course was particularly valuable and rewarding this year. In addition, students had positive things to say about the Contemporary Moroccan Society and Culture course. Overall, students this year expressed very few concerns about the area studies courses. There are still some challenges related to the gap between student expectations and Moroccan academic cultural realities. Moroccan professors, in general, expect students to be much more independent and do not follow a continuous assessment model. The CIEE Academic Director met regularly with faculty and students to

discuss some of these issues, and the results indicate a marked improvement over the overall situation in 2008-09.

The final elective course offerings are determined by the total number of students and the individual students' French proficiency levels. Unfortunately, most of the students in 2009-10 did not have a level of proficiency necessary to take area studies courses in French. However, those who took the French elective courses reported that they were challenging and rewarding.

Out of Classroom Activities

The CIEE program includes two overnight academic field trips each semester as part of the required Contemporary Moroccan Society and Culture course. In addition, some of the area studies courses include guest lectures, local field trips, visits to museums and academic institutions, and discussions with local Moroccan students.

Fez

CIEE staff and students traveled to Fez and met with faculty and students at a local university. In addition to a lecture on current linguistic issues in Morocco, the group screened and discussed a film entitled "Crossing Borders." On the second day of the academic excursion, students and staff went on a ½ day tour of various cultural and historic sites in and around Fez.

Marrakech

One of the highlights of both the fall 2009 and spring 2010 programs was the multi-day academic and cultural excursion to Marrakech. Students and staff screened and discussed a short film ("Scream") and sections of the film "Marrok" on the first day. On day two, the group attended a lecture/discussion on human rights issues in Morocco, toured the Menara gardens near Marrakech, visited local museums, and went on a walking tour of the Old Medina. On the next day, the students and staff went to the Ourika Valley. They stopped at the Ibn Abbad tomb, a local Jewish temple, and a local village. The lecture/discussion topic on this day was "Local Moroccan Democracy."

Non-Academic

CIEE Orientation

The CIEE program includes a multi-day orientation at the beginning of each semester. The orientation is designed to help students adjust to their new environment and includes a combination of academic, cultural, and logistics-related sessions, walking tours, and cultural activities. In addition, all of the students begin their intensive Moroccan Colloquial Arabic course during the orientation period. Academic year students joined various orientation activities and sessions in spring 2010, adding an extra layer of peer support for the new students. Overall feedback from students suggests that the orientation achieved its goals in both fall 2009 and spring 2010.

In addition to the regular homestay session led by CIEE staff, the Resident Coordinator met with students individually during the start of orientation to discuss each student's homestay family and strategies for having a successful homestay experience. Students greatly appreciated this individualized attention and assistance and said that it helped them to start their homestays with increased confidence.

Most of the participants in both fall 2009 and spring 2010 were female, and thus the CIEE staff adjusted the orientation to include a more focused and enhanced discussion of gender issues in

Morocco. In spring 2010, one of the academic year students joined this discussion and gave the new students suggestions on managing the cultural challenges of being a woman in Morocco.

Cultural Activities/Field Trips

CIEE Rabat staff schedule a variety of cultural activities, day trips, and overnight excursions each semester to help students develop a better understanding of Moroccan history, culture, and various societal issues. As previously mentioned, staff and students went on two overnight academic excursions each semester (Fez and Marrakech). In addition, there were a variety of other field trips and activities in 2009-10.

Asilah Day Trip

Students and staff went on a day trip to this coastal town in northwest Morocco. Upon arriving in Asilah, the group embarked on a guided tour of the local medina and had a guest lecture about the history of the town. In the afternoon, students had free time to either relax on Asilah beach or explore the medina. On the return trip to Rabat, the group stopped at the Merdja Zerga National Park and enjoyed a boat ride on the Blue Lagoon.

Chefchaoune and Cuebta Overnight Excursion

Chefchaoune is a scenic town nestled in the Rif Mountains. This popular excursion was expanded in 2009-10 to include a stop at Cuebta, a Spanish enclave in Morocco. Students and staff had an opportunity to learn firsthand about this unique territory within Morocco. Students and discussed the history of this enclave and the stark contrasts between the surrounding Moroccan towns and Cuebta.

In Chefchaoune, students and staff hiked up to the abandoned mosque for a spectacular view of the city. Later in the afternoon, they met with local families in a mountain village. Many of the students enjoyed a rigorous hike in the Atlas Mountains on the following morning. On the return trip to Rabat, the group stopped at a dam in the Laou Gorge for a brief discussion of water issues in Morocco.

Moroccan Culture Night

Each semester, CIEE staff organize a special Moroccan Culture Night that is designed to replicate a Moroccan wedding. Students wear Moroccan attire to the cultural night. Students go shopping for traditional attire with their homestay families and practice bargaining in Arabic. Host families will generally provide traditional attire for those students who choose not to purchase their own. The event includes a live band that plays songs from various regions of Morocco and a sumptuous five-course Moroccan meal. It is a night of non-stop dancing, singing and eating. Many students commented that this was one of the best CIEE activities during the semester.

Picnic on a Farm outside of Rabat

CIEE staff arranged for students to visit a local farm to observe how one family sustains itself through organic farming. The family grows pomegranates, oranges, lemons, peaches and Chinese apples and raises their own farm animals. After learning about this organic farm, staff and students have a Moroccan barbecue under the trees.

Calligraphy

Calligraphy was held on a weekly basis for those wishing to learn about the history of Islamic Art and practice the art of Arabic script.

Moroccan Cooking Class

Cooking classes were offered for students wishing to learn how to make a selection of traditional Moroccan dishes. Students prepared the meals and then joined in a communal meal with their host families. The first cooking class each semester taught the students how to prepare cous cous, the traditional meal that Moroccans eat every Friday afternoon.

Additional Cultural Activities

In addition to the aforementioned activities and excursions, students this year visited the National Theater in Rabat and participated in various local festivals in and around Rabat. Students traveled with their peer language tutors to the old medina to practice bargaining in Arabic and also visited L'Oudaya, an old fortress overlooking the Rabat harbor. The group also visited Chellah, an impressive collection of Roman ruins in Rabat. Some students also tried out the local Turkish baths or traveled by rowboat to Sale, a town on the other side of the river in Rabat.

The CIEE staff contacted students on a regular basis to let them know about upcoming cultural events. Students had very positive things to say about the variety of cultural activities, field trips, and overnight excursions. For many of them, these experiences were the highlights of their time in Morocco.

Housing

The Language and Culture program offers students the option of living with a Moroccan family in a CIEE homestay or a student residence hall. The residence hall option is only open to women. Although a small number of students lived in the residence hall during the fall 2009 semester, almost all of the students in both fall 2009 and spring 2010 opted to live with CIEE host families. Based on student feedback, it is clear that the CIEE homestay program is working very well in Rabat. Many students commented on the strong relationships that they developed with their Moroccan families. It was quite common for students to attend family events such as weddings, go shopping with their host mothers and sisters, or travel with the families to visit relatives outside of Rabat.

CIEE has focused its policies regarding homestay recruitment and selection over the past year. It is quite common for U.S. study abroad providers to cooperate with a local homestay coordinator to find families and place students. However, CIEE staff manage the homestay program directly, allowing for good communication between hosts and staff and a more consistent homestay experience for the students. All CIEE students are placed in modern homes with internet access. Students typically eat at least two meals per day with their families. The CIEE Resident Coordinator screens and interviews each family prior to the students' arrival. Families must agree not to host students from other programs. This was a problem during the inaugural semester of the CIEE Rabat program, as the local housing coordinator would often place 2-3 students in a single home. CIEE host families are selected for their interest in cultural exchange, proximity to the CIEE Study Center, and ability to provide students with their own room, a reasonable amount of privacy, and a proper desk/table for studying.

The 2009-10 students had very positive things to say about their homestay experiences. The homestay provided them with maximum cultural immersion, daily language practice, and an opportunity to learn firsthand about life in a Moroccan home.

Community Engagement and Integration

For-Credit Internship and Community Service Options

Academic year students have the option of participating in a CIEE Internship (for credit). This year, three students participated in the internship. The internship was coordinated by the CIEE Rabat Academic Director and included a rural homestay with a family in Ourzazate.

Students examined the social, cultural, and economic constraints impacting the involvement of women in local sustainable development projects. They helped design a social and economic marketing model to help empower rural and mountain women in Morocco with the marketing of their home-produced products. The project also included the design of a training program focusing on micro-financing for women in rural Moroccan locations.

Student feedback on the internship was generally positive. Some students felt that the internship could have been better organized and started earlier in the semester. It has proven difficult for CIEE staff to find suitable internship hosts, as most local NGOs and schools expect interns to speak fluent Arabic or French and be able to devote a more significant number of hours to their organization.

Not-for-Credit Community Service/Volunteer

Two students volunteered at the Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc. ADFM is an autonomous feminist NGO whose principal objective is the promotion of women's rights and strategic interests. Students who volunteered with this organization said that it was a good opportunity to meet locals. However, they also said that they didn't feel that they were being very productive during their time with the organization.

Challenges

Academic

The quality of the academic program has improved somewhat in the past few semesters. Overall, student feedback on the area studies courses was quite good this year. Feedback on the Arabic language courses was quite mixed, however. CIEE made various changes to the language program in fall 2009. This included the addition of new instructors and regular teacher meetings with the CIEE Academic Director. The Arabic instructors are well-liked by the students and go out of their way to try and accommodate student requests. However, from the student perspective, some of the instructors do not follow the course syllabi carefully enough or give enough tests or quizzes throughout the semester. CIEE staff will meet with the language coordinator and his instructors during summer 2010 to discuss this situation in greater detail. There are significant challenges to teaching Arabic in Morocco due to the regional dialect, an academic culture that does not stress the use of class syllabi and a continuous feedback model, and the clash between local language materials and demand by U.S. students for the al-Kitaab language series.

Non-Academic

The housing and co-curricular components of this program received very positive feedback from students in 2009-10. All of the students indicated that they had a rewarding and enjoyable time living and studying in Rabat. No major changes are planned for 2010-11, but the CIEE Rabat staff are hoping to expand the range of volunteer and internship opportunities for the students. This has proven to be a very difficult aspect of the program to coordinate in Rabat, as the concept of a volunteer project or internship in Morocco differs significantly from the U.S. model.

While there are numerous NGOs and local schools in Rabat, many of them have rejected CIEE attempts to arrange volunteer projects or internships due to the students' lack of fluent French or Arabic and their inability to commit to a significant amount of time (i.e. 20-40 hours) per week.

Future Directions

The Language and Culture program received generally positive feedback from most of the students in 2009-10. CIEE continues to examine ways to improve the Arabic language instruction and add some additional area studies courses. CIEE will also consider ways to adjust the language requirements for this program in order to attract more students with a background in either French or Arabic.