

Annual Program Review Critical Studies Program at the CIEE Paris Center for Critical Studies, France 2006

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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 Critical Studies program has three main goals: to provide a challenging academic program specializing in contemporary French thought on film, literature, philosophy, arts, and criticism; to offer the opportunity to take classes at the Université de Paris III-La Sorbonne-Nouvelle; and to provide a critical appreciation of and approach to Paris, France, and the French culture in its different aspects.

The CIEE Critical Studies program goals stands but should be supplemented by the following vision of the program:

The Critical Studies Program strives to 1) offer a range of in-center classes, taught exclusively in French, that address the very importance of language in the construction of thought, the place of the image in the perspective we have on the world, and the unrelenting questions that literature and art pose to philosophy, truth and identity; 2) provide the necessary training in French stylistics and argumentation that can propel students into the Université de Paris as well as other renowned French academic institutions; 3) create an open and demanding learning environment that will help our participating students better define their future research projects, whether in the realm of graduate studies or elsewhere.

Academic Program

French language learning continues to play a major role in the experience. Under the joyful tutelage of Marie-Christine Ricci, the French language coordinator, and the other superb French instructors, students continue to benefit from the Intensive Language Program at the beginning of their stay. The Writing Workshop, a required course for all students (with an option to continue in spring for academic year students), has proven to be instrumental for French language acquisition. The elective Respiration, Articulation, Pronunciation (or RAP) speech therapy sessions were also offered with great success this year, helping many students improve (sometimes even perfect) their spoken French and often identifying speech difficulties that would be considered disabilities in the French universal health-care context.

Courses offered at the Center attracted a great many students, as usual. The program has tried to offer the most diverse, yet harmonized range of courses, addressing such subjects as art history, philosophy, gender studies, literature, film studies, and post-colonial studies. This course offering seems to have worked, in that students were able to see interconnections and conflicts between their CIEE courses. This course schedule will be offered again next year with the possible addition of a history or an art history course. The core course, following the precious advice of the CIEE Faculty Advisory Committee members, hopefully offered a more

focused view on the last 60 years of French thought by attempting to follow the evolution of the notion of the “Other” in French theory from Sartre to Virilio. Outings, activities and films were incorporated into the core course (particularly in the spring semester), the reading load was honed down, and the academic year was punctuated by a guest speaker, Sylviane Agacinski, a French feminist philosopher.

In-Center course registration went very smoothly and students showed great grit in seeking out and enrolling in courses at the Université de Paris1, 3 and 8.

Spring 2006 will be remembered by all CIEE Paris Critical Studies (CS) students as the semester the Paris University closed down. The anti-CPE strikes proved to be an emotional and academic challenge for everyone. To ensure that students continue their studies during that fiery time, the CS program set up in-Center seminars in visual studies, philosophy and literature, led by CIEE Paris Center professors. These seminars were offered even after the near 100 days of Paris university closure to ensure student success.

Students and instructors alike say that the program is excellent. This excellence is attributable to the outstanding students that the program attracts. A good third of those students taking out-of-Center classes received the equivalent of an “A”, and some even received the highest marks given in their respective Université de Paris classes. Some of the Center’s most dynamic, younger professors are deeply embroiled in their research projects, projects that are part of the life of whatever critical studies is or can be. As a response to this, their research projects are to become part of the Center experience, most explicitly through the Center’s participation in the Politics and Culture lecture series.

Non-academic Features

Last year’s two-week orientation program (for both spring and fall) gave students both the necessary information to live wisely in Paris and the necessary time to find their housing. CIEE staff addressed academics, culture shock, women’s issues, safety and security, the “titre de séjour” process, transport, and their budget. The student handbook continues to be a great resource for them.

The students went to the Château at Amboise for a day in fall to visit Leonardo de Vinci’s last abode, and to Nîmes in the south of France to experience the festive southern atmosphere and witness the historical clash of Roman ruins and modernist architecture. In spring, students spent a day at Chartres to read the tale told by that town’s cathedral’s stained glass windows, and then spent a weekend in Normandy to see the tapestry that tells the tale of William the Conqueror and visit the Museum of Peace in Caen, and then the American cemetery and D-Day beaches.

The program attempts to turn sight-seeing into learning, and the Normandy experience proved to be the richest outing. In-Center instructors were also inspired to move their classes out of the Center and experience the wealth of museums and lectures Paris has to offer. Students enrolled in the art history courses, of course, contemplated works by David, Picasso, Ernst and Buren. But many other professors took students to films, exhibitions, and conferences. In the core course, students saw a film on Lacan, went to the zoo at the Jardin des Plantes, and attended an in-Center lecture by Agacinski during the week that they studied that thinker. Students also participated in the fall CNRS scientific conference and a small number participated in the Aid Democracy conference.

The CIEE Contemporary French Studies program (which cohabitates the Center)'s resident director, Hannah Taieb, spearheaded elementary school outreach English language activities, and a few Critical Studies program students got involved.

One program student landed a research position at the prestigious Institut Pasteur to work on an allergy panacea. This internship was transformed into a field work class, for which he will receive credit.

Students, as always, were deeply challenged by their housing search this year and, in hindsight, extremely grateful for the opportunity to find their own place to stay. All of this will change next year due to radical changes in the French university calendar.

In terms of safety, the Center has installed a security system with a door code. Students were repeatedly reminded to remain far from anti-CPE protests through e-mails and during meetings.

Turkey and the fixings were offered at Thanksgiving.

With the suburban riots in the fall, and then the university blockage and protests in the spring, the students' experience in Paris this past year was an exceptional one. They were expressly instructed not to get involved, and they all showed extreme restraint and good common sense, but they did however bear witness to a moment in French history that may well remain engraved in their minds long after they have forgotten when Picasso painted Les Demoiselles d'Avignon. Thanks to the exchange program with the Université de Paris III, one of the organizers of the Sorbonne blockage was invited to talk about students' demands and the way in which education is perceived in France. For the students, it was not the best of times, nor the worst of times, but what a time it was.

Students

Last year's students were a wondrous and emblematically critical studies group. Around 10 students from last year's group (2004-2005) contacted the resident director for letters of recommendation to graduate schools. As of now, one student is doing her doctorate at NYU in Romance Languages, another is getting an MA in International Relations through the University of Bath, yet another is enrolled in the MFA program through the Sotheby's Institute in Art History, another is with Teach with America, another remains in France to get her Master's in Persian Studies, and one is going to UCLA to get his doctoral degree in Film and Critical Studies.

| Enrollment | | Gender | |
|-------------------|----|---------------|----|
| Semester | 20 | Male | 16 |
| Academic Year | 30 | Female | 34 |

Average Student GPA 3.52

Top Enrollments by Major

English
French Language & Literature
History
Comparative Literature
Political Science

Top Sending Schools

University of California, Berkeley
Oberlin College
University of California, Los Angeles
University of Colorado at Boulder
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Future Directions

While students have long disparaged and lauded the independent housing process, this will change next year due to radical changes in the University of Paris III calendar. Students will simply no longer have the time to find their own housing, and so will be placed either in roommate or studio-style housing options. Housing will now be included in the program fee. The greatest challenge will come in maintaining the program's philosophy of student autonomy and independence in this new configuration.

The program will restart the language exchanges with the French prep schools that began last year. Due to changes in direction at the school CIEE used to work through, as well as the CPE crisis, this exchange did not go into effect last year.

Focus will also be put on pushing students out to the Université de Paris.

The program, which is advised on an ongoing basis by a committee comprised of faculty in the field of critical studies from major sending institutions, will be evaluated by the CIEE Academic Consortium Board in fall 2006.