

Evaluation Executive Summary

Brussels, Belgium

Business, Communication and Culture (BCC) & Advanced Liberal Arts (ALA)

November 4-8, 2013

CIEE Center evaluations are conducted roughly every 10 years. Evaluation Teams are made up of one or two members of the Academic Consortium Board joined by faculty from Consortium members with expertise in the areas of the program. The Team reviews all aspects of the program[s] and focuses in particular on any areas of concern reflected in the annual monitoring reports and/or staff reports.

I. Evaluation Team members:

Woody Pelton, Dean of Global Studies, Elon University

Lynda Maddox, Professor of Marketing and Advertising, The George Washington University

Tony Osborne, Professor & Chair, Department of Communication Studies, Gonzaga University

II. Colleagues with whom the Evaluation Team met:

The Team spent considerable time with the resident staff, both as a group and individually: Resident Director Dr. Michelangelo van Meerten, Resident Coordinator Chloé Peebles, Housing Coordinator Yamina El Atlassi, and the CIEE intern, Kim Hansen. The Team also met with administrators and faculty of Vesalius College and the Université Libre de Bruxelles and with all students attending both programs in Fall 2013. Members of the Team attended over 12 classes, spoke with faculty before and after classes, met with landlords, host families and managers of the hostel where the orientation is held, and with an internship supervisor.

III. The last evaluation was conducted September 19-24, 2004.

IV. Program Background/History

The first CIEE program in Brussels began in January 1994, running in tandem with an Amsterdam program. Brussels became an independent program in 1999 and in Fall 2002 changed host institutions from the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) to Vesalius College (VECO). The Advanced Liberal Arts programs began in 2007, with CIEE returning to ULB to deliver that program.

Students in both the BCC and ALA one-semester programs are required to take 15 credits. Although students in the ALA program have some scheduling issues and must get used to the European educational system, they are satisfied and say the program is rewarding. BCC students appreciate the American style course format and feel enriched by the Brussels experience.

There is a required Core Course offered by the Resident Director, Dr. Michelangelo van Meerten. He offers a section in English to the BCC students and a section in French to ALA students. This course is well taught and content-rich, but some students are concerned about not receiving credit for it at their home institutions. BCC students also are required to take either French or Dutch, though students with at least 6 semesters of French can elect to take a course at ULB (in French) in lieu of a French course.

The remaining courses are selected from the schedules produced by VECO and ULB. Advising for course selection is available from CIEE Staff, including the CIEE intern for ALA students, as well as advisors at both ULB and VECO. Students who apply for an internship may take one fewer course.

Students have a choice to live with a family in a “homestay” or share a room in a house.

V. Focus of Evaluation

Four areas warranting special attention were identified: (1) the core course, (2) housing, (3) internships and (4) preparation of students regarding differences between American and European educational systems.

VI. Key Discussions/Findings

Our findings regarding the areas identified above as needing special attention follow.

(1) **The Core Course** is an important foundation for the program. Students appreciate it and it helps the RD know and keep the pulse of all the students. The two areas of concern for the course were the amount of reading (which none of the students completed) and the uneven treatment of the courses by the home institution. The Team spoke with Michelangelo about ways to modify his reading list (distinguishing between required and optional), which he seemed very willing to do. The issue of home campus transfer of credit is up to AC members, though maybe there can be some way for CIEE or even Team members to reach out to campuses not awarding credit, providing a list of how other campuses are treating the course.

(2) **The housing process** is good and the current Housing Coordinator is good at the task. Students would like to know assignments before they arrive. However housing is varied and the Team was convinced that the Housing Coordinator has good reasons for waiting on assignments until after she has met the group.

(3) **Internships** vary in quality, as is true anywhere. The Team found that the process for assigning, supervising, monitoring and grading internships was appropriate and spoke with students who were enjoying their internship very much.

(4) **Student preparation** and managing expectations for the local institutions will always be an issue. The Team recommended that the website include more specific information about the different academic environment that the ALA student will find at the ULB. While we hope students are getting that detailed counseling at the home institutions, additional information on the website might help. The three students enrolled in the ALA in Fall 2013 were pleased with the program but also warned that the program is not for everyone. While the CIEE staff helps students understand the ULB, the CIEE intern (a current student at ULB) seems to be critical in helping students navigate the ULB system.

Our general findings were that the programs are strong. We felt the facilities were appropriate and staffing sufficient for current enrollments, but both CIEE’s physical space and staffing should be reevaluated if enrollments grow. We believe the BCC program title should be changed to better align with the realities of the courses offered and the strength of Vesalius, focusing on the Politics of the EU and highlighting their unique access to the center of EU politics and administration.

We give uniformly high marks to the resident staff.

VII. Priority Recommendations

Of the 17 recommendations in the full site evaluation we highlight these four.

Recommendation 3: *Dr. van Meerten should consider managing the Core Course workload by reducing the required reading list and providing supplement readings for interested students.* Dr. van Meerten expressed concern that a reduced reading list would diminish the credibility of (and transfer of credit for) the course; however, the Team found Dr. van Meerten to be such a strong lecturer that it has no doubts that his course would remain content-rich and rigorous even if he were to significantly reduce his readings. Dr. van Meerten seemed amenable to the idea.

Recommendation 8: *Do not grow the BCC program larger than 55 (the largest enrollment on record) and the ALA beyond 15 with current facilities and staffing.* Although the host institutions can support growth beyond those numbers, the evaluation Team believes that CIEE staff would need to grow to support higher enrollments, including a separate RD for each of the two programs and new office space.

Recommendation 15: *CIEE Portland should confer with CIEE Brussels about including more Website information about the realities of studying at ULB, including the need to negotiate an early final exam (for Fall semester), and less access to faculty.* The goal is not to discourage students, but to attract the right students.

Recommendation 17: *CIEE Portland and CIEE Brussels should consider changing the BCC program title to include reference to EU politics. At the same time, CIEE should consider whether it should promote in the Fall semester Professor Koops' Undergraduate Certificate in European Peace and Security Studies (EPSS).* Information regarding the program is found at <http://www.vesalius.edu/academics/international-affairs/european-peace-security-studies-certificate/>. Professor Koops offers 5 related courses in the Fall taking full advantage of the Brussels location and has a required Guest Lecture Series. He also seems willing to modify requirements to allow CIEE students to meet their other requirements.

CIEE Action Plan

In response to the Academic Consortium Board (ACB) Evaluation of the CIEE Study Center in Brussels: Business, Communications and Culture Program at Vesalius College; Summer Business, Communications and Culture Program at Vesalius College; and Advanced Liberal Arts Program at Universite Libre de Brussel

March 2014

Overview

CIEE staff are pleased to provide this Action Plan in response to the Academic Consortium Board (ACB) report on the CIEE Study Center in Brussels. The report of the site visit was received by members of the ACB at the Fall 2013 meeting. After review, the ACB accepted the report, and presented it to the Academic Consortium.

The Action Plan outlines the key recommendations from the Evaluation and the specific steps CIEE plans to follow to address the recommendation. While the Action Plan is authored by CIEE, staff solicited input from the ACB team leader of the evaluation, Woody Pelton, Dean of Global Studies at Elon University and, where appropriate, from other members of the evaluation team, Lynda M. Maddox, Professor of Marketing and Advertising at The George Washington University, Albert A. (Tony) Osborne, Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of Communications Studies at Gonzaga University. The Action Plan should be read in light of the ACB Evaluation and with reference to the detailed description of the program available from CIEE.

The “ACB Plan for Program Evaluation”, the Evaluation report, the Action Plan, and program details are available at www.ciee.org.

Actions

ACB Recommendation

The CIEE Brussels Resident Director should consider managing student workload by reducing the required reading list and providing supplement readings for interested students. The Resident Director expressed concern that a reduced reading list would diminish the credibility of (and transfer of credit for) the course; however, the Team found the Resident Director to be such a strong lecturer that it has no doubts that his course would remain content-rich and rigorous even if he were to significantly reduce his readings. The Team believes that this “problem” is largely perceptual and can also be mitigated by reiterating the rationale behind each assignment. The Resident Director seemed amenable to the idea that using oratory as the prime source of content doesn’t negate rigor or quality.

Action

The CIEE Brussels Resident Director has already reduced the reading load for spring 2014, by making much of the reading required for that week’s student presenters but optional for the rest of the group. This reduces the number of pages and the number of more technical or enumerative articles.

ACB Recommendation

Do not grow the BCC program larger than 55 (the largest enrollment on record) and the ALA beyond 15 with current facilities and staffing. Although the host institutions can support growth beyond those numbers, the evaluation Team believes that CIEE staff would need to grow to support higher enrollments, including a separate Resident Director for each of the two programs.

Action

CIEE staff agree that additional staff and a larger facility will be required should the student enrollment numbers continue to increase and will monitor the situation closely over the next few semesters through careful discussion with the on-site Resident Director.

ACB Recommendation

CIEE Portland should confer with CIEE Brussels about including more Website information about the realities of studying at ULB, including the need to negotiate an early final exam (for Fall semester), and less access to faculty. The goal is not to discourage students, but to attract the right students.

Action

Resident staff will coordinate with the appropriate CIEE Portland staff to address this issue and help ensure that expectations are clearly set. CIEE will pay special attention to the ALA section and continue to emphasize the particular environment of this program.

ACB Recommendation

CIEE Portland and CIEE Brussels should consider changing the BCC program title to include reference to EU politics. At the same time, CIEE should consider whether it should promote in the Fall semester Undergraduate Certificate in European Peace and Security Studies (EPSS), which offers 5 related courses in the Fall taking full advantage of the Brussels location and has a required Guest Lecture Series. The course professor seems willing to modify requirements to allow CIEE students to meet their other requirements.

Action

CIEE is in the process of reviewing its global program naming conventions and will likely make some adjustments to program titles in the next few years. Due to this ongoing global review, CIEE will not make any immediate changes to this program's title. CIEE will, however, will take the suggestion into consideration and discuss other changes that can be made in the short-term to help better present the International Affairs specialization at Vesalius in the program title/description.

Submitted by:

Caroline Maas, CIEE Regional Director of Operations, Northern Europe

Dr. Michelangelo van Meerten, Resident Director, CIEE Brussels Study Center

Date: March 28, 2014