

## **ACB Evaluation Executive Summary**

### **Evaluation of the CIEE Study Center Program in Perth, Australia**

**Spring 2012**

The ACB conducted a combined evaluation of CIEE's dual track program in the Arts and Sciences and Sustainability and the Environment. The latter track was added in 2009 to offer students a strong curricular component that capitalizes on the broad number of courses offered at Murdoch in the environmental sciences, biology and sustainability. For a location like Perth, the track is particularly appropriate given the tremendous impact on the regional economy of the energy industry – particularly in oil and gas -- and the environmental impact that exploration and production has had on the region. This notwithstanding, Murdoch has a new Vice Chancellor and the university appears to be moving toward greater centralization with an increasing likelihood that the schools of sustainability, environmental sciences will be folded back into the College of Arts and Sciences as academic departments. The resulting lower profile for these disciplines makes it increasingly difficult to justify a separate CIEE track in Sustainability and the Environment. Consequently, CIEE has recently decided to discontinue this second track at Murdoch but plans are underway to develop both a semester length Tropical Ecology, Conservation and Sustainability program and a summer length Tropical Marine Ecology program that will combine field-based studies, classroom lectures and laboratory work. Both programs will be largely developed "in-house" by CIEE in collaboration with recognized regional experts in the field.

The previous ACB evaluation, conducted in 2007, was an interim evaluation that, on the whole, was highly positive and complementary in the terms of reference areas reviewed. Many aspects of the program remain the same. Several factors outside of CIEE's control in recent years, however, have inhibited growing student numbers to Australia in general and Perth in particular. They include increased competition and fierce marketing from other providers, policy changes undertaken by a growing number of US universities that, in the wake of the economic downturn beginning in 2008, have tended to favor (for cost reasons) direct enrollment in Australian universities, and a chronically weak US dollar that makes Australia an expensive destination to both deliver and participate in education abroad programming.

The Arts and Sciences program continues to provide students, as stated in CIEE's program mission and purpose, "with a supportive yet challenging environment in which to study and gain first-hand knowledge of Australian life and culture....with a wide range of liberal arts subjects...and particularly strong offerings in the media studies, communications and field-based sciences." The Sustainability and Environment program provides "focused programming to students interested in issues of sustainability through coursework in sustainability studies, public policy, planning, legal studies, environmental science and the biological sciences." Both tracks are carried out at Murdoch, one of Australia's leading universities in terms of the strengths of its academic offerings, well qualified faculty (Murdoch holds the highest number of doctorates of all Australian universities, and the satisfaction of its graduates (it's the only university in the country to achieve The Good Universities Guide's five-star rating for graduate satisfaction for 12 out of the last 13 years).

Murdoch's strong academic caliber is ample justification for its selection by CIEE as its collaborative partner and, on the whole, students have commented that they find the courses to be really quite challenging, to say nothing of the academic culture, which focuses less on

continuous assessment and implies that students take greater responsibility for their own learning, undertaking a significant amount of directed reading on their own time. Since the last ACB evaluation in 2007, CIEE has also introduced the Seminar on Living and Learning, taught by the resident director, which students have found to be especially helpful to them as they navigate their host culture, reflect on how culture impacts one's perception of things and grow both intellectually and experientially. In my discussions with those students who are currently enrolled in the program, to a person they all commented about how pertinent the course was to their Australia study experiences and how often it helped them to put into context why they were perceiving particular aspects of western Australian culture, communication styles and assumptions in a given way.

Currently, all aspects of the program design are acceptable and respond well to the mission and goals stated by CIEE.

## **CIEE Action Plan**

### **CIEE Study Center Program in Perth, Australia Fall 2013**

#### **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 Perth for the Arts and Science and Sustainability and Environment programs. The report of the site visit will be received by members of the ACB at the Fall 2013 meeting.

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 from the evaluation, Kendall Brostuen. 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](http://www.ciee.org).

#### **Actions**

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##### ***ACB Recommendation***

CIEE should engage with the Teaching and Learning Centre in order to consider how they might work together to increase student awareness of the support resources provided by the Teaching and Learning Centre. This could be done during the orientation program or by enlisting Teaching and Learning Centre occasional involvement with the Seminar on Living and Learning.

##### ***Action***

The Teaching and Learning Centre has been engaged through Murdoch University to present an Orientation session when the students arrive. The session outlines all the key resources that the Teaching and Learning Centre can offer to the students. CIEE staff also reinforces the Teaching and Learning Centre's role during our Orientation session to emphasize the important academic support resources that the Teaching and Learning Centre offers Murdoch University students.

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### ***ACB Recommendation***

It will be important that CIEE gives due consideration to the kinds of experiential activities it will develop in the future in order to help fill the void left by the Northwest trip, particularly for those students who will not be able to afford to participate in Northwest trip as an option during their time of study at Murdoch. Although the proposed semester length Tropical Ecology, Conservation and Sustainability program, based on the CIEE Bonaire model, will likely offer a wealth of field-based learning opportunities to students enrolled in this new track, such experiences will not likely be available to Arts and Sciences track students. CIEE will want to be mindful about the resulting need to ensure that the cultural activities and field trips for this particular track of students remains robust. Since the intention is to offer the Seminar on Living and Learning to both the Arts and Sciences track and TECS track students (albeit separately), this may provide an opportunity to think creatively about shared cultural activities that can be offered to both.

### ***Action***

CIEE Perth continues to offer cultural activities for the Arts and Science students of an experiential nature. Whilst not on the scale of the North West Trip, they are well above any of the activities offered by other study abroad providers at Murdoch University. It should be noted that these activities are also under the budgetary constraints that we are subject to with the higher Australian dollar and less students. Excursions and field trips typically include cultural events that students wouldn't otherwise have access to and include all aspects of white and indigenous Australian culture. Arts and Science students also have the opportunity to engage with volunteer and internship activities enhanced by their accessibility to the campus based CIEE office.

The new CIEE Perth Ecology Conservation and Sustainability program model was finalized from discussions following the ACB Evaluation and the need for a STEM program that integrated field research with a rigorous academic program. It is not a direct enrolment model, and is largely a field based experiential learning model. Students undertake research fieldwork in Tropical Marine Biology and Conservation Biology in remote locations in Western Australia.

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### ***ACB Recommendation***

In its promotional literature for the Perth program, CIEE should heavily market the Seminar on Living and Learning, using testimonials from previous students on the program. Feedback from Perth students since this seminar has been offered has been overwhelmingly positive and it is clear that the resident director has been very successful in engaging students in a way that the seminar genuinely enhances the experience. Currently, half of the students on the program are enrolled in the seminar. All of them have spoken about it in glowing terms. While CIEE likely cannot likely require this course (although it could be considered as a course that would fulfill the Australian content requirement), with heavier promotion (and, again, using testimonials from students), this dimension of the program sets CIEE apart from other providers and can serve as an effective recruitment tool for the Perth program.

### ***Action***

Resident staff will work with the Portland-based marketing staff to conduct a review of the key marketing materials for the program, namely the CIEE website and catalog, to include testimonials from Seminar on Living and Learning students and highlight the benefits of the

seminar. This may be part of a wider campaign for the Seminar on Living and Learning that is taught at a number of CIEE Study Centers around the world.

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***ACB Recommendation***

Consider how CIEE can make its on-line pre-departure program truly interactive through the use of the latest advances in technology.

***Action***

Since the Evaluation was submitted in May 2012 there has been a change in software for the Online Pre Departure Orientation, which I feel has made it a far more interactive experience for the students. I'm confident that the IT department will be aware and able to implement current meeting technology as it becomes available.

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***ACB Recommendation***

As CIEE looks to develop its new semester-length track in Tropical Ecology, Conservation and the Environment and its summer track in Tropical Marine Ecology, it give serious thought to the value of creating an academic advisory board or faculty council whose role will be to reinforce academic rigor in CIEE's programs that focus specifically on the sciences. Consideration should be given to enlisting just such a group for all CIEE programs that focus specifically on STEM disciplines.

***Action***

The idea to setup an academic advisory board was discussed at last years CIEE conference and CIEE continues to explore the possibility of a multi-disciplinary academic advisory board. The CIEE Resident Director would suggest that the faculty on the board is drawn from both overseas faculty and US. This would enable a flow of information from the US sites to the study centers and vice versa, and assist in marketing of our programs through establishing faculty networks.

There was a CIEE faculty summit in 2012 held at CIEE Portland, which included science faculty members. The CIEE Resident Director feels that this would be a good starting point to form an academic advisory board. It would also be desirable for staff from the new CIEE Perth Ecology Conservation and Sustainability program, in particular the Ecology Conservation and Sustainability Academic Coordinator, to have some involvement in a future faculty summit. The CIEE Resident Director will liaise with the CIEE Portland headquarters to request this.