

**Annual Study Center Review
CIEE Study Center at Vesalius College
Brussels, Belgium
2007**

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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 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 insights into Belgium and Brussels' unique political, cultural and linguistic situation in Europe; and to enable students to improve their French or Dutch language skills.

Overall, the first two goals for the program were met in the 2006-7 academic year. There continue to be challenges related to French and Dutch language offerings.

New & Noteworthy Features

Academic Features

French and Dutch Language

Community Language Commitment

There is no CIEE Community Language Commitment in Brussels. Students are encouraged to use and practice French and / or Dutch through cultural activities, direct enrollment in the French or Dutch speaking universities of Brussels for students with an advanced level in these languages, and French conversation dinners.

In Fall 2006 students were taken to a play in French (Shakespeare's Anthony and Cleopatra), and a number of films in French or in a different language but with French subtitles. Only one student took a direct enrollment course at the French-speaking ULB. Several French dinners were organized. These took place in inexpensive restaurants and the agreement is that only French will be spoken. Since dinners are low key and amongst peers, students did enjoy them and they were also less intimidated to actually practice their French skills.

In Spring 2007 there was again the weekly film with quite a high number of French films. Films in other languages had subtitles in French. Six students took one or two direct enrollment courses at the French-speaking ULB. Several French dinners were organized.

As a result of positive collaboration with the host institution and the feedback provided on French language classes, a new professor was hired for conversational French and beginning intermediate French. This had a positive impact on the the French language classes at those levels though the upper level classes did not receive the same high marks. CIEE will work with Vesalius College on improving the French language offerings over the next year.

Based on student feedback, resident staff will put in place a language exchange program beginning in fall 2007.

Subject Area Courses

CIEE courses

The only CIEE course in the Brussels program is the core course, "Belgium, the European experience". The content and guest-speakers list for this course are constantly updated to keep in line with new developments, as well as with student evaluations of speakers, visits and material. A new item in the course was the short student presentations on a news item related to Belgium. Students commented that the course reading was very heavy and that some times the lectures were not interesting. The resident director will revise the syllabus for fall 2007.

Direct Enrollment courses

With the exception of the core course, all of the courses the students take are direct enrollment, in English, at Vesalius College. One student in Fall 2006 and six students in Spring 2007 took one or two direct enrollment courses at the French-speaking ULB. Though a specific and well-attended information session is organized for direct enrollment at ULB, not all interested students do end up taking a direct enrollment course. This is largely due to the difference in academic system (only one, mostly oral, final exam, no continuous assessment), academic calendar (courses start later and exams may take place after the CIEE and Vesalius courses end), and the fact that students are already entrenched in their course schedule and/or internships when the direct enrollment courses start. The direct enrollment courses taken were Contemporary French Language Authors (1940 to present), Art, Material Culture, and Society from late Antiquity to the High Middle Ages; Myths of classical and oriental Antiquity; Introduction to the Historical Study of a Linguistic Group of Sub-Saharan Africa; and The U.S. Political System.

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. In the spring semester students also visited the exhibit on Belgian-Congolese relationships and colonial history at the Royal Museum for Central Africa. The core course is also linked to the program's field trips. Several Vesalius classes (art, politics) also have out of class activities.

Non-Academic Features

CIEE Orientation

In the fall 2006 semester, in comparison to previous semesters, the resident staff lightened the program of the first day of arrival in order to allow students more time to recuperate. Sessions were shortened and an additional walk was incorporated. Unfortunately, due to scheduling conflicts and the unavailability of the conference room at the hostel and the larger

group, the spring session could not be handled the same way. Reactions from students indicate that shortening the total time of sessions on the first day is indeed the way to go.

Cultural Activities/Field Trips

Fall 2006

- Weekly film series
- Play in French (Anthony and Cleopatra)
- 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 and bike tour)
- Morning field trip to NATO headquarters in Brussels
- Full day kayak event in the Ardennes (descent of the Lesse river in kayak)
- Full day field trip to the International criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague, the Mauritshuis museum and Delft (Netherlands)
- After mid-term dinner
- Full day field trip to the European Investment Bank in Luxembourg, visit of Luxembourg city and Vêves castle
- Full day field trip to Ypres and First World War
- Full day field trip to Monschau and Aachen (Germany), traditional Christmas markets and visit to Charlemagne's tomb and throne in Aachen cathedral

Students were very positive as usual about the field trips and activities, indicating that this was one of the best aspects of the program allowing them to get to know their host country, places, traditions and cultural venues they would not have discovered otherwise. The program strikes the right balance between more educational aspects (museums, institutions and the like) and more 'fun' aspects (kayaking, dinners, bike riding).

Spring 2007

- Weekly film series
- Soccer match Belgian national team
- 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 at Binche
- Full day field trip to the International criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague, the Mauritshuis museum and Delft (Netherlands)
- After mid-term dinner
- Full day field trip Bruges (guided tour and bike tour)
- Evening visit of the Royal greenhouses in Brussels
- Reactions: See comment for Fall 2006
- Overnight Fieldtrips

Field trips

In the fall students participated in a three day visit to Normandy: Mont St.-Michel , Bayeux and D-Day landing beaches. Students cited the Normandy trip as the most impressive experience offered by the program.

In the spring students participated in a two day visit to European Court of Justice, Luxembourg city, and Vêves castle and a three day visit to Alsace (Eastern France) and Germany, visits to Strasbourg, haut Koenigsbourg castle, Riquewihr, Freiburg and Trier. The success of the visit to the European Court of Justice largely depends on the 'case' students are able to attend during the visit. This Spring the case wasn't very inspiring, but students still enjoyed having been able to visit the EU institution. In spring the students visited the East of France and Germany including a visit to the city of Trier with impressive Roman remains. Students appreciated this visit.

Housing

In the fall semester four students stayed with homestay families, one student stayed with a relative and the remainder had independent (CIEE-arranged) accommodation, sharing either an apartment, floor or house with landlords, local students or other students on the program.

In the spring semester, eight students stayed with homestay families, one student found her own housing, and the remainder had independent accommodation, sharing either an apartment, floor or house with landlords, local students or other students on the program.

It usually takes some of the students a bit of time to adapt to the city and the fact that commuting using public transport, is a normal feature of daily life. Resident staff try to meet students' individual preferences (in terms of set-up, language exposure, etc.) as best as possible, but it does occur that the fit isn't entirely satisfactory. In Spring 2007 there were three students moved in the first week of their stay to a different set-up that indeed better fitted their needs and preferences.

The imbalance of student numbers between fall and spring 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 un-paid for-credit internships. Occasionally students have their own contacts or CIEE staff can provide them and an internship is set up through CIEE. In the fall semester, seven students took an internship (law firm, Quaker Council for European Affairs, Johannah Bernstein – lobbying firm, BBC Brussels, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Royal Museum for Fine Arts), while one student was able to do an ROTC internship at NATO, administered by CIEE. In general students really appreciated their internships describing them as one of their best (learning) experiences during their stay. In Spring 2007, six students took an internship (law firm, EDMA European Diagnostic Manufacturers' Association, MLEX Markets and Law, New Europe Newspaper, ROTC internship at NATO), while one student was able to do an internship administered by CIEE, serving as assistant to the communications manager at a bi-communitarian cultural organization.

In spring 2007, Vesalius started a new procedure for internships, requiring resumes and cover letters prior to the students arrival. The changes also included more contact hours for internships (150 instead of 135 hours), and more supervision resulting in a letter grade rather than Pass/Fail. Communication and organization of the new internship procedures weren't

optimal and this may have resulted in some students not securing the internship that they wanted. There continues to be the issue of students only focusing on the most prestigious internships for which competition is highest. The new team in charge of internships is, however, working hard to improve and streamline procedures and organization.

Not-for-Credit Community Service/Volunteer Projects

There is the possibility of community service projects in Brussels. But mainly due to the availability of for-credit internships and time constraints there were no students who were interested in engaging in a community service project.

Challenges & Future Directions

Academic Challenges

Language

There are 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. The new professor for beginning and conversational French has improved students appreciation of the beginning and conversational French courses. The challenge is to work with Vesalius College on the more advanced French courses.

A beginning level Dutch course was not offered in spring and at least one student was disappointed though did not communicate this to the Resident Director. In the future, CIEE will organize its own Dutch classes if there is student interest.

In general the host institution will offer a second session of a course if there is a high demand from students. Student numbers in classes therefore generally are low enough to enhance good classroom interaction. Some students commented that they thought some of the language courses could be more challenging.

CIEE Course

Students complained that there were too many readings in the core course and that some of the lectures were long. The Resident Director is reviewing the syllabus for the coming year.

Direct Enrollment

The overwhelming majority of classes are direct enrollment, either at Vesalius College in English or at the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) in French or the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) in Dutch or English. At each of these institutions, resident staff continues to direct students towards classes that have received positive reviews and evaluations and direct them away from classes with less positive feedback, while simultaneously working with the host institutions 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 courses. Generally students say they have to do a lot of work (long papers, presentations etc) but that the work isn't always challenging. This is particularly true at Vesalius College. A challenge for the CIEE Resident Director is to try to work with Vesalius to improve the latter and possibly diminish the former.

Registration for direct enrollment at ULB is relatively complex and requires motivated students. It is, however, part of discovering the host culture. More students than ever have taken up this challenge and most have gotten good grades.

Non-Academic Challenges

Generally group dynamics among students of the group were very good. Orientation, activities and field trips created positive dynamics.

The refurbished computer lab at Vesalius has improved access to printing facilities and to internet. Practically all housing has wireless access allowing students to hook up to internet with their portable computers.

Integration in the community is a huge challenge. Generally students who stay the full academic year take advantage of the many opportunities for integration. Semester students tend to be less successful in doing that. The goals meetings and possible creation of language exchange may be ways to improve the contacts with locals.

Future Directions

For fall 2007, the program will return to shorter orientation, with a short first day and more activities taking place outside. The more extensive academic session will be moved to week two of the program, when students are more apt to tune into this subject.

The resident director will lighten the reader for the core course and replace some of the existing lectures with more contemporary cultural material. In addition, pairs of students will each be assigned one of the readings to summarize at the beginning of each class.

The resident staff will move forward on building a language exchange program with ULB students.

The resident staff will work in conjunction with Vesalius to improve the upper level French language classes. CIEE will offer its own Dutch course if one is not available for students.

CIEE will include more specific information in predeparture materials on the profile of Vesalius College.