Study abroad can change a student’s life

Dear Friends,

The study abroad courses offered by our Liberal Arts faculty in countries around the world immerse students in foreign cultures and change their lives. Last summer, for example, students in our archaeology field school in M Elmo lived in a M eya village while they studied Spanish and the Mayan language and learned at hand about rainforest ecology. Students in Petu uncovered the ancient burial of a person who had been ritually sacrificed, a rare occurrence among Aztec peoples and a significant find. Students studying at Oxford were invited to debate the well-known scientist Richard Dawkins about his theory of evolution. Students studying language and culture today had the opportunity to meet in an audience with Pope Benedict XVI. And students in Hannover, Germany, lived with German students while they studied 20th-century German literature and met the major literary figures Goethe and Schiller, and visited the National concentration camp Buchenwald. Two students in the Hannover program expressed sentiments common among students in all of our programs. One wished she could “live in time and have every day be an Hannover day.” And another wrote, “Everyone should have the experience of coming here.”

It is always my belief that any student who wants to study abroad should have the opportunity to do so. Study abroad opens students’ eyes, providing them with experiences they usually can’t learn from books or classroom discussions or vacation travel. When they are immersed in another culture, a number of things happen. If they are studying a foreign language, they gain language skills that can be acquired only through interaction with native speakers and the languages and cultures of the people who speak them. They become more self-confident and resourceful, having learned to rely on their own capabilities. They become less judgmental and more open-minded. And students inform each other about the attributes that make it difficult and even impossible for most students to make it. These attributes include limited finances, heavy course load and geographical significance of the sites they visited.

The College of Liberal Arts

TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY-SAN MARCOS

Fall 2005

Dean

From the Dean

Highlights of Study Abroad Programs in 2005

Each summer, Liberal Arts faculty teach more than 50 courses in study abroad programs offered in nine foreign countries, and new and exciting courses are added each year. Following are highlights from the programs offered in 2005. Detailed information on the programs available is available by visiting the Office of Study Abroad Programs online, at http://www.studyanywhere.txstate.edu/sa_program_offerings, by emailing StudAbroad@txstate.edu, or by calling 512-298-3486.

D discovering a Meya burial—Archaeological Field School in Belize

Students were embedded in Belize culture as they learned archaeological field methods and research strategies. They excavated ancient Meya ruins at Cahal Pech, where they uncovered one of the earliest Meya burials on record, dating from approximately 1B.C.E. Meya native students were discovered by students on display in the Belize National Museum.

Kim Kersey in Belize:

A breathtaking discovery among the ruins

Kim Kersey, a graduate student in Anthropology, was among the Texas State students and faculty archaeologists in Belize last summer who found an astonishing Maya ritual deposit in the plaza of the Cahal Pech temple complex. A metate, a ceremonial grinding stone, and a depression in the top of the metate that in Maya creation myth in which the decapitated father of the Hero Twins is resurrected as the maize god who creates the world. This particular site is one of the earliest Meya burial sites known in Belize.

Kim said the discovery was one of the most exciting archaeological experiences she’s ever had. “We weren’t sure of what we’d find, so we were removing the layers very slowly,” she said. “I had butterflies in my stomach, wondering if there would be a body, how it would be laid out, and who it might be.” Kim has exported samples of obsidian—a resource used in trade—from surrounding excavations at Cahal Pech and Blackman Eddy to analyze for her master’s thesis on Maya trading patterns. She hopes to return to Belize to continue her research, and after graduation she plans to pursue a Ph.D., focusing on early Meya trade.

Metting some of the world’s top scholars—Oxford, England

Students studied with faculty from Texas State and Oxford University, where courses were offered in film, history, literature, political science, psychology, and more. Students heard lectures from the scientist Richard Dawkins, the theologian Richard Swinburne, the social psychologist Peter Polit, and the author J.K. Rowling. The official boxing match between the Arizona and Louisiana Tech football teams was at the Olympic Stadium in London.

In the spirit of the old Grand T o ur, students visited Pompeii, Rome, Paris, Florence, Vienna, Milan, San, S. Moritz, Zurich, Brem, and Paris. Through training in regional, physical, and human geography, they learned to become travelers rather than tourists by researching, mapping, and writing about the historical and geographical significance of the sites they visited.

Learning to be travelers in Europe—Italy, France, Switzerland

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Learning French, understanding French values—Amiens, France

This total immersion program helped students to become proficient in French as they developed an understanding of French culture and values. Courses were taught by faculty in the University of Picardy. A program highlight was the visit to Normandy cemeteries, where students saw the white crosses of 5,000 American and German soldiers who died there in WW II.

Comparing American and French government—Bordeaux, France

Through courses in government and independent study, students learned how the American government compares to the governments of France and other European countries. Students learned about the social and political cultures that shape French politics, and by contrasting American and French politics they gained a better understanding of the uniqueness of American political culture.

Studying German history and culture—Hannover, Germany

At the Hannover City Hall

On the Irish Coast

Discovering a Maya ritual deposit in the plaza of the Cahal Pech temple complex. A metate, a ceremonial grinding stone, and a depression in the top of the metate that

Comparing American and French government—Bordeaux, France

Texas State students lived with German host-students in their homes and took courses in writing and literature. In a course titled “The Individual and the State: What Would I Have Done?” students examined 20th century Germany through literature and memoirs, from post World War I through reunification. Students visited the homes of the writers, learned about the lives of the authors, but they say that reading literature in a college classroom could never have prepared them for the impact of the stark Irish landscape on the Irish sense of identity—or on himself. Brannon, a fiction writer and student in Texas State’s MFA Program in Creative Writing, visited the Aran Islands where he saw how farmers spent centuries creating soil from seaweed and sand in order to farm the rocky, treacherous ground. He also visited off the Irish coast to Skellig Michael, a remote rock inhabited by monks throughout the Middle Ages whose monastery is one of those credited with preserving the documents of Western civilization during the Roman Empire’s collapse. “I wanted to know more about why men would cloister themselves in such a lonely place and how it made them feel closer to God,” he said.

In Ireland, the exploration began to manifest themselves in his fiction, “Ireland’s dramatic scenery and its past have given me a new vocabulary for expressing my own experience,” he said.

Examining the Irish mystique—Cork, Ireland

Through courses in travel writing, Irish culture and literature, and Irish biography and autobiography, students expanded their knowledge edge of the Irish and improved their writing skills. In 2005, students read and saw a performance of a play by the Irish author J.M. Synge. They examined the Irish “mystique” created by Synge’s work and the effect of the landscape on the Irish identity. Students took group and individual excursions to places such as Blarney Castle, the Irish coast, the Ring of Kerry, Skellig Michael, Kenmare, Gougane Barra, Dublin, and Galway.

Bearden Coleman in Ireland:

Gaining a new vocabulary for writing

Prior to Ireland last summer to study literature and travel writing in the Texas State in Ireland program, Bearden Coleman had read a number of Irish authors, but he says that reading literature in a college classroom could never have prepared him for the impact of the stark Irish landscape on the Irish sense of identity—or on himself. Bearden, a fiction writer and student in Texas State’s MFA Program in Creative Writing, visited the Aran Islands where he saw how farmers spent centuries creating soil from seaweed and sand in order to farm the rocky, treacherous ground. He also visited off the Irish coast to Skellig Michael, a remote rock inhabited by monks throughout the Middle Ages whose monastery is one of those credited with preserving the documents of Western civilization during the Roman Empire’s collapse. “I wanted to know more about why men would cloister themselves in such a lonely place and how it made them feel closer to God,” he said.

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Continued on back
Audience with the Pope—Florence & Rome

Before he went to Valladolid, Spain, to take university courses in International Studies and literature, Brian Episcopo was unsure of the value of study abroad. An International Studies major at Texas State, Brian wasn’t sure he’d save the time it took to risk delaying his graduation by spending a semester in Spain. After the initial culture shock—he’s 15th-century stone dormitory room was closed-off and freezing cold, and he had trouble understanding people—he said the experience of living abroad for five months changed him.

“I became a better Spanish speaker, and by the time I left, I felt like a citizen of Spain,” he said. Also, his ability to walk everywhere in Valladolid—one block to the supermarket, a short distance to a neighborhood bakery, three blocks to the university—caused him to think about his life style. “I’ve seen that people lead normal lives without driving, and I really want to live that way,” he said. Brian’s experience in Spain was so enlightening that he plans to spend the spring 2006 semester abroad, “I want to see Mexico for myself, to get to know how the people think about themselves and the rest of the world,” he said.

Valladolid, students enjoyed excursions to other parts of Spain, including Córdoba, Gibraltar, Granada, Málaga, Peñafort, Salamanca, Segovia, and Toledo.

Living among the Maya—Chiapas, Mexico

Students lived in the Lacandon Maya community of Lacanha, making excursions into the rainforests and visiting the ancient Maya ruins of Lacanha and those of Bonampak, Yaxchilan, and Palenque. Students made excursions to highland Maya communities and collaborated with Texas State and Mecxican primatologists in taking censuses of Black Howler monkeys and Black-Handed Spider monkeys in the Mecixcan Azules Biosphere Reserve.

Monkey censuses, Maya rituals, and political collapse: Students and faculty conduct scientific research during study abroad

Research performed last summer by students in study abroad programs is contributing to an understanding of three exciting areas of study: rainforest ecology, the ritual practices of the ancient Maya, and the effects of a pre-Inca empire’s collapse on the N aca people in Peru.

For the past three summers, students in the Department of Anthropology’s Summer Study in Chiapas, Mexico, have collaborated with Texas State and M ecxican primatologists in taking censuses of Black Howler monkeys and Black-Handed Spider monkeys in the M ecxican Azules Biosphere Reserve, a rainforest in Chiapas on the Mexico-Guatemala border.

The students map trails and take censuses to determine population densities of both types of monkeys, and they correlate food availability to population densities. After five weeks in the Biosphere Reserve, the students return to San Marcos to analyze their data.

In Guanajuato, a city known for its colonial architecture and winding cobblestone streets, students studied Spanish grammar, history, literature, and cultural life by living with host families. O utside of class, students participated in the city’s Festival of the Cross, celebrating Guanajuato’s mining heritage, and traveled to M exico City where they visited the Pyramids of Teotihuacan.

Students experienced total immersion in the Spanish way of life as they studied Spanish language, culture, and literature at a private university in the medieval city of Valladolid. Because it is possible to walk to most places in Valladolid, the city’s pace is relaxed, and Texas State students found it easy to engage local Spaniards in conversation. From Valladolid, students enjoyed excursions to other parts of Spain, including Córdoba, Gibraltar, Granada, Málaga, Peñafort, Salamanca, San Sebastián, Segovia, and Toledo.