

AGGIELIFE

When In Rome ...

Study abroad programs provide world experience for Texas A&M students

BY BRIAN FLEMING
The Battalion

College should be an experience that offers an endless number of opportunities for students to cultivate their minds. This is the philosophy that the Study Abroad program at Texas A&M has operated under for the past 19 years.

Through the program, students have the opportunity to study a variety of subjects in countries all over the world.

Cathy Schutt, program coordinator, said there are a variety of study programs offered.

"We have the program in Italy which is basically open to all majors, a program in Dominica for tropical biology, and we also have a program in Mexico City for journalism," Schutt said.

"There is also a language program we have at the University de la Americas in Puebla, [Mexico] that goes on every summer."

As for the experience itself, it can be valuable in many ways. For one, it gives students a true advantage after graduation.

"If you talk to any CEO of a corporation and ask them what it is they are looking for in students, one of the first things they will say is an international experience," Schutt said.

"That is the important part — the future of our A&M students and their job opportunities. It makes them more marketable."

Suzanne Droleskey, executive director of international programs for students, said she thinks all types of international experiences are valuable to students.

"It is important for our students to recognize that more and more, as they move through the process of wanting to be successful once they graduate, we have an obligation to prepare them for the types of opportunities and successes they will need to have in the workplace."

Droleskey also said she thinks there are both tangible and intangible benefits to a study abroad experience.

"The intangible benefits are those that the students bring back with them to the University after being out of the United States," Droleskey said. "I believe most of them would tell you that their lives have been changed significantly. It is a maturing, growing experience."

The tangible side is that there is a growing interest among Texas business and industry to ensure that we are a growing leader in the United States in many ways.

"As this continues, Texas businessmen, industry leaders and government officials are very interested in our Texas students having international competencies and an appreciation for things international."

The advantages of studying abroad become most clear when described by a student who participated in one.

Kelley Cassell, a junior biology major, participated in a program last spring at the Santa Chiara Study Abroad Center in the Tuscany region of Italy.

"It is the best decision I ever made," she said. "I know for a fact that I am a different person because of it."

Cassell said her experience abroad was also key to her understanding of other cultures.

"Being in Europe really opens your eyes to the world," Cassell said. "It teaches you to appreciate diversity."

The Santa Chiara Center in Italy offers a large amount of study abroad opportunities for A&M students. It has operated under the A&M System for nearly a decade.

Dr. Clint Machann, professor of English, taught two courses last spring at the center. He said he would encourage anyone interested to participate in a study abroad.

"There is really no one I would not recommend this experience to," Machann said.

While in Italy, Machann taught courses in both world literature and liberal arts. These included studies of such figures as Keats, Virgil, Homer and Dante.

Studying many of these authors and poets while in Europe is valuable to the student, Machann said.

"In teaching the world literature course, we stressed the heritage of ancient Rome, which, of course, was all around us," Machann said.

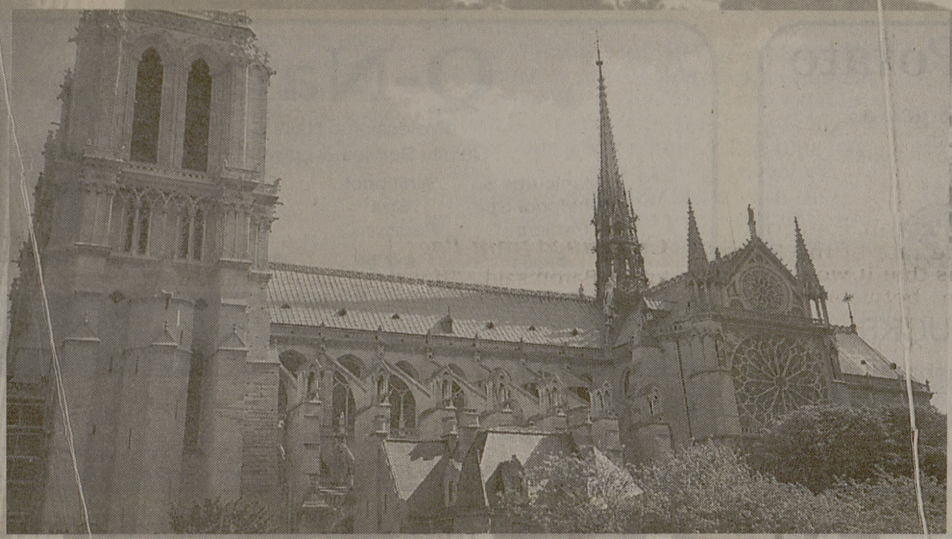
"Also, you have the medieval times, which included Dante and, of course, the Renaissance, which is exciting because of all of the paintings and the fact that many of the great masters emerged from that part of the world."

Machann said there are geographical advantages to studying in this area as well.

"For both professors and students, the high point is really getting to know Tuscany," he said. "There are frequent field trips. I don't think there is any location in the world that would be equal to it."

Every year, roughly 475 students participate in these various programs.

The various opportunities for A&M students to travel and study abroad are enumerable. Most importantly, they provide opportunities for Aggies to learn about culture, language and themselves.



Counterclockwise from top left: The Arc de Triomphe in Paris, France greets visitors; One of the many cathedrals in northern Europe gives the area a historic feel; Harrod's department store provides some of the UK's most famous celebrities with clothing; Tower Bridge gives London one of its most recognizable landmarks.

PHOTOS BY RILEY LAGRONE