



The International Educator

UW-Eau Claire study abroad information for advisers, faculty, and staff

Volume 5, Issue 4

April 2008

Do Students Actually *STUDY* in Australia?

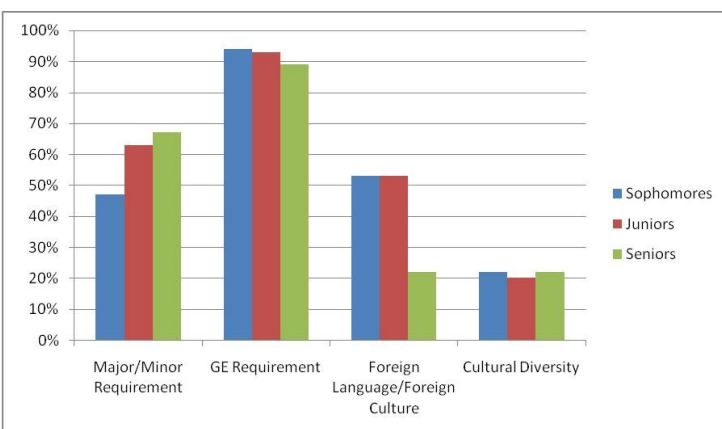
In a typical year, more UW-Eau Claire students study abroad in Australia than in any other country except the United Kingdom. They study at one of two Australian universities, Southern Cross University in Lismore, or Murdoch University in Perth, typically taking 12 credits per semester.

Perhaps because these programs are so popular, they are widely talked about on campus. While much of the discussion is positive, the study abroad staff hears several comments each semester about students taking an “academic vacation” in Australia. So let’s take a closer look at study in Australia, specifically in terms of two academic indicators: progress towards graduation and grade point average.

First, some statistics from the 2006-2007 academic year:

In 2006-2007, a total of 71 UW-Eau Claire students studied in Australia. Thirty-two of them were sophomores, 30 were juniors, and 9 were seniors. The chart below shows a quick snapshot of what students at each level accomplished academically while they were abroad. Overall, 40% of the students completed at least one major or minor requirement; 77% completed at least one GE requirement. On average, students completed 3.4 graduation requirements during a semester in Australia.

Students may make good progress towards graduation. But do they actually have to study? First, the background: to study abroad in Australia, a student must have a cumulative GPA of at least 2.75. And grades earned abroad on a UW-Eau Claire study abroad program count in a student’s GPA.



A survey of grades that students earn in Australia would indicate that they do have to study—or at least that, if they do not study, their GPA suffers accordingly. Of the students in Australia during the 2006-2007 academic year, 23% earned their lowest semester GPA ever, while 15% earned their highest. A large majority of students, 62%, earned somewhere in the middle.

So students in Australia make good progress towards graduation, and their grade point averages reflect, in general, their typical performance at UW-Eau Claire. Why, then, do some people on campus have the impression that students are on vacation in Australia? There are at least three inter-related factors that contribute to this impression: the Australian academic system; the amount of discretionary time study abroad students have available to them; and student conversational patterns.

The Australian academic system, like British higher education, requires independent, self-motivated learning. Courses generally meet for one 2-hour lecture and one 2-hour tutorial each week, and students are expected to spend 3-4 hours studying for each hour in class. Grades are usually based on two assessments, often a paper and a comprehensive final exam. How students adjust to this system varies. A few comments from program evaluations illustrate the range of opinion:

The structure of class work, and the fact that it was more personally driven rather than dictated by the instructor, made a huge difference. I was motivated to look into things for myself and to go above and beyond the requirements.

It was nice not having many assignments, but the ones I did have counted for a large percentage of my grade. I felt the teachers were very difficult when it came to grading, so you had to really go beyond the usual standards to do well.

There were fewer assignments; however, each assignment was graded harder and heavier. Therefore, I did not like the academics in Australia as well as at UWEC.

In addition to academic differences, UW-Eau Claire students often experience a major change in the amount of

(Australia continued on page 2.)



Spring 2009 Updates

We were able to accept 235 students to study abroad on 20 programs during spring 2009.

Of those students, 125 are freshman, 75 are sophomores, 29 are juniors, and 6 are seniors.

We have also accepted the first students to participate on the Nagasaki/Japan program, and the ISEP-Direct programs in: Chile, Malta, Netherlands, and New Zealand.

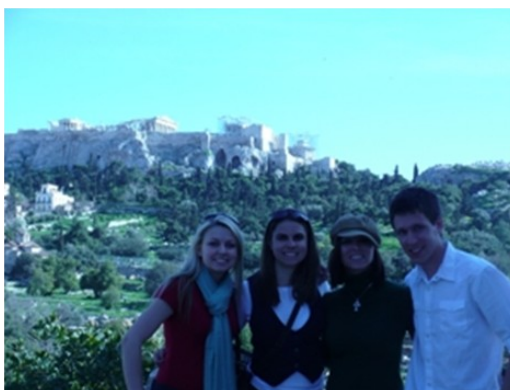
Program Update: Costa Rica

The spring Costa Rica program will be moving from Tibás, a suburb of San Jose, to San Isidro starting in spring 2009. San Isidro is a city of 20,000. It is located 9 miles from San Jose and 5 miles from Heredia. This move was recommended by our partners in Costa Rica for various reasons. One was a concern for student safety. Another was because there are a growing number of study abroad programs in Tibás and San Jose. With all the new programs in the area, it is harder to find host families who will host only one student. The program directors feel strongly that only one student should be placed with a host family to maximize language opportunities.

Australia, continued

discretionary time available to them. A high percentage of UW-Eau Claire students work while studying; in the U.S. there are 4,400 student jobs on campus alone, and many students work off-campus as well. While U.S. students are allowed to work in Australia, there is no system of student employment on campus, and part-time jobs in the community are hard to come by. And while many students get involved with Australian student organizations, few of them take on major responsibilities or leadership roles. So students find themselves with many more hours of free time while abroad than they have at home.

Finally, according to the National Survey of Student Engagement given each year at UW-Eau Claire, 46% of first year students indicate that they "never" talk about topics from class outside of the classroom, and another 40% say they "sometimes" do. Seniors discuss academics somewhat more often: only 27% respond "never", while 49% respond "sometimes." But given that academics are not high on the list of student conversational topics while on-campus, is it surprising that students returning from several months of new experiences abroad tend to talk more about cultural issues, new friends, and travel than they do about classes?



Brandon Scott, a social studies major, is currently studying abroad in the Czech Republic through the ISEP-Direct program.

Advising Your Students on Fulbright Scholarships

The Fulbright US Student Program offers approximately 1500 grants in 140 countries. More than 30 countries also offer English teaching assistantships. For country specific information visit this website: <http://us.fulbrightonline.org/home.html>. Full grants provide round-trip transportation, a room and board stipend, a research allowance, insurance, and tuition waivers, if applicable. The 2009-2010 Fulbright competitions open on May 1.

UW-Eau Claire has had the most successful Fulbright applications of any UW Master's-level institution (**11 awards since 2000-2001**), but relatively few UW-Eau Claire students apply. This past year, five students applied, and four advanced to the final stage of the competition. Two of them have received grants; the other two are still awaiting the final results. Please encourage your advisees with outstanding academic records and/or demonstrated research interests to apply.

Faculty and academic staff can play a crucial role in guiding their students through the Fulbright application process. You can access a handout explaining what roles faculty members can play in the process on our Web site at <http://www.uwec.edu/CIE/tra/index.htm>. If you or your students have additional questions, contact Cheryl Lochner-Wright, the campus Fulbright adviser, at lochnecb@uwec.edu.