Notes from Abroad
Everyday cultural gems from Braunschweig, Germany

My name is Colleen Grinham and I am a fourth year IEP student in German and Civil Engineering. I am writing to you from Braunschweig, Germany. As my Mom put it the day I left for Germany: ‘This is the day that you have been waiting for your whole life.’ And so far, it has not let me down!

As with everything, change is, well, different, and Germany is no exception. From small things like the different grocery store protocol, which includes bringing your own bags, to the big things like a new language that you might not always understand, every day is an adventure. I feel like every time I leave my room, I have a new and interesting story to tell when I come back. An example of this would be one that happens at least once to every student who comes to Germany: the confusion of “Einbahnstrasse”. When trying to navigate where you are, it does not help to tell someone to meet you on that street or to ask directions of how to get from Einbahnstrasse to the mall. In German it means “one-way street”, of which there are about a hundred in Braunschweig. Small things like that keep the average day abroad interesting.

Overall, I am finding this experience to be a great one. The opportunities that you have when you are abroad are incredible. For example, just this week I travelled to several countries in five days. Not only does living in Europe have its perks, but studying in Europe also does. Taking both engineering and German courses at the Technical University, and working for one of the University’s Institutes has exposed me to learning material and hands-on experiences that I would not have otherwise had. These experiences will not only put me ahead in my studies, but also allow me to further specialize in my field of interest, wastewater treatment with a focus on renewable energy.

To those who have studied and lived abroad, I hope that you have come home with just as many anecdotes from your travels as I hope to. To those of you who are thinking of going abroad: get ready for the most adventurous, spontaneous, and overall humorous year that you will remember for the rest of your life.

Scholarships

Demers Scholarship for the Study of Foreign Languages: For all IEP students, especially those going abroad. Application is online at www.rfoundation.org, and due by January 31, 2011.

DAAD Scholarships and Awards: German Academic Exchange Service has undergraduate scholarships available. The application must be postmarked by January 31, 2011.

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. / Engineering Scholarship: for female college students in RI. The application must be postmarked by January 5, 2011.

Deadlines are fast approaching! For more information go to: www.uri.edu/iep/scholarships

Director’s Note

Dear friends,

This summer and fall have been very busy for all of us in the IEP. I am eager to share some good news with you: we have a fabulous new IEP Coordinator, Katie Zimmerman, who will be an asset in reaching out to new recruits and in marketing the IEP.

As the first decade of the 21st century comes to a close, the academic world is abuzz with getting our students ready with the skills they need to thrive in the global workforce. Hence, all the IEP directors attended the recent ACTFL (American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages) convention in Boston. The primary topics of focus were assessment and standards in second language acquisition. As I was listening to the results of a World Languages Survey on how the five C standards (communication, culture, connections, communities) had been implemented in high school and college curricula, I could not help but think that the IEP model is already fully in sync even with those standards that were the most challenging for teaching professionals. Through our study and work component, we do provide an authentic context for communities and we do connect our student learners in a powerful way with various realms of target language usage. During discussions on how to motivate students who study a language in high school to fill the college language course pipeline, experts agreed that language learning must have a purpose, applicability and lead to career prospects. In addition it should provide the sheer pleasure of expressing yourself in a new language and taking on a new identity. Again, the IEP is already right there, fulfilling all those demands.

We have begun to focus more strongly this year on the assessment of learning outcomes. We sent a first group of students to Germany, testing their oral proficiency before going abroad, and will test them again upon their return, eagerly awaiting results. We sponsored faculty participation in Oral Proficiency Interviews workshops. We are aiming at implementing OPI standards in our curriculum. Furthermore, what needs to happen is the development of assessment tools which measure direct enrollment and internship experiences abroad. Although various surveys and indexes exist, they are not necessarily geared towards the particular applied engineering experience our IEP students get.

Finally, we are making big strides in adding a fourth major to our language portfolio. Thanks to our Chinese Language Flagship Director Wayne He, Associate Director Wen Xiong, and Department of Modern Languages Head Norbert Heckel, the proposal for a major in Chinese has passed the first two hurdles. We hope that it will be approved by the faculty Senate and the Board of Governors soon, so that we could have it on the books by the end of this academic year.

Have a wonderful, healthy, and peaceful holiday season!

~Sigrid Berka, Executive Director

Director’s Note

The IEP extends a warm welcome to Katie Zimmerman, our new coordinator! She arrived just in time to assist with preparations for the 2010 Colloquium. Katie comes to us from a background in foreign language education and teaching. She received her undergraduate degree in French with a minor in Music from Skidmore College during which she studied for a semester in Paris. After graduating magna cum laude from Skidmore in 2002, Katie took off to Southern France where she taught English to primary school students for a year in several rural public schools. She completed a Master of Arts in Teaching Foreign Language from Boston University in 2006. She received the Lisa P. Lob Fellowship, which allowed her to travel throughout Belgium, Switzerland, and France for one month following graduation. Most recently she taught high school French at Weymouth High School in Massachusetts and served as lead teacher of the Foreign Language Department. A teacher of eight years and fluent in French, Katie is eager to apply her talents to the position.

Welcome to the IEP Family, Katie!
The Colloquium was a big success; it attracted a total of 185 participants from 8 different countries and 22 states. With the guiding topic of “Moving Forward”, we had four packed days of lively discussions and collaboration. We were honored to have Senator Jack Reed of Rhode Island engage in a supportive keynote address on opening night. Executive Director Emeritus John Grandin introduced Sen. Reed and remarked on his continued support for global engineering education. Senator Reed once addressed students of the Deutsche Sommerschule am Atlantik when he was running for Congress the first time, in 1989. He spoke about how best to educate students globally. Senator Reed underscored the growing urgency for building bridges with China and other countries. He felt that one of the things that distinguished him from the other applicants was his proven ability to work well with professionals and engineers from various disciplines.

The second year of the URI/Chinese Summer School attracted 20 URI students for eight weeks of intensive Chinese language learning and cultural experiences. The summer session is based on the Chinese International Engineering Summer Program, started in 2006, and students can earn eight credits. Led by Dr. Wen Xiong, the Chinese Summer School offers intensive Chinese courses ranging from beginning to advanced levels. Students study for four weeks at URI followed by four weeks in China at our partner, Zhejiang University. In addition to the URI faculty members, a visiting lecturer was also invited to teach this summer. Students took Chinese language classes in the morning followed by either Chinese cultural workshops or site visits in the afternoon. While at URI, students experienced Chinatown in Boston and saw the Chinese exhibit at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, MA. During their time in China they visited industrial sites such as Coca Cola, the Wahaha Beverage Company, and Motorola. Their cultural excursions included trips to the silk market and a tea farm. The students also spent the weekend in Shanghai and saw the 2010 World Expo pavilions.

The Chinese Summer School has become an important device in recruiting and retaining outstanding students in the URI Chinese program, Chinese Flagship Program, and the CISP. The program is not only a big step on the road to proficiency in Chinese, but greatly enriches the students’ understanding and appreciation of China and its cultures. For more info or to sign up visit: un.edu/chineseflagship/summer