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Walsh College students go global and green

By Terry Oparka

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Graduate students at Walsh College spent two weeks immersed in commerce and culture in Paris, Milan, London, and Zurich, then came home to get their hands dirty at an urban farm as part of the college's study abroad program.

Linda Hagan, professor and chair of Walsh's business communication department, explained that C&A, a global clothing retailer focused on sustainability and based in Zurich, charged the business students to take a 75-euro grant and put it to the best use in the community.

"So the business students got their hands in dirt," Hagan said.

Troy resident and Walsh student Adam Hanson said the students brainstormed on how to put the C&A grant to the best use and decided to focus on urban farming in Detroit, and donate the grant and volunteer at Earthworks Urban Farm in Detroit, near the Capuchin Soup Kitchen.

"As business becomes global, it's important for us to see the world more," Hagan said.

This is the second year Walsh has offered the two-week study abroad program following completion of an 11-week course.

Last year, Walsh students traveled to Latvia.

Hanson, who is in the Master of Science in finance program, traveled to Latvia last year and elsewhere in Europe this year. Walsh students visited Europe in May this year.



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Hanson said via email that when he first heard about the opportunity, he thought of it as “more of a chore, but one that would look good on a resume and also give me class credit and the chance to see Europe. I thought of it as an investment of time and money, not realizing I would have a great time and become friends with my fellow students and professors.”

He said that last year, students toured government institutions and businesses.

“Latvia is an emerging market. This was a more cultural trip,” he said of this year’s program, noting that touring Versailles in France was a high point for him.

Students visited Bilfinger GVA in London, England’s largest commercial property consultancy; Hult International Business School in London, for a lecture on the impact of culture on international business success; SAP Solutions in Paris to learn about information technology practices; Corriere della Sera, Italy’s largest newspaper, to learn about news gathering and supply chain management; and C&A.

Hagan said the two-week trip time frame, rather than a whole semester, allows students — the majority of whom work full-time jobs — a chance to get a global perspective.

She said the students learned about the life cycle of a pair of blue jeans at C&A, from growing organic cotton through how many times the jeans actually need laundering, from a sustainability perspective.

“It was interesting for our students to think about sustainability,” she said, noting that the diverse group of Walsh students became tightly knit by the end of the trip.

“We were all different ages and backgrounds,” Hanson said.

Travelers ranged in age from 21-49, including single people and married individuals with children, representing all disciplines taught at Walsh College.

“When I attended the informational meetings and began to decide in favor of going on the trip, I presumed that the other students in the meetings would remain shallow acquaintances throughout our time abroad,” Hanson said, via email. “We actually became good friends, and remain good friends. We keep in contact and get together occasionally.”

He said he was slightly surprised to learn that people in Milan don’t depend on electronic information for news, but prefer to see it on paper.

Hanson said the students decided to spend their grant money on urban farming in Detroit and to volunteer at Earthworks Urban Farm.

According to the Capuchin Soup Kitchen website, “The Capuchin Soup Kitchen’s Earthworks Urban Farm is a 2.5-acre certified organic farm located in the city of Detroit. We seek to build a just, beautiful food system through education, inspiration and community development. As a working study in both social justice and in knowing the origins of the food we eat, Earthworks strives to restore our connection to the environment and community.”

Hanson said they asked farm organizers what they needed, then used the grant to purchase supplies. Hanson said he helped in the gardens.

Next year, students in the study abroad program will travel to Israel with Richard Chasdi, associate professor of the management department.

“Travel experiences are highly memorable. You learn so much about yourself — you test your own patience. Travel tests you emotionally, physically, mentally, and that’s where the growth is,” Hagan said. “Plus, you learn about different people and gain awareness and insight.”

“It was such a great experience,” Hanson said.

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