

A Cultural and Educational Adventure

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The experience of expanding cultural horizons came true for 40 students of the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez and other UPR campuses when they embarked on an unforgettable journey through Europe last summer.

Students walked through historical cities, visited museums, appreciated art, saw iconic monuments of humanity up close, and lived each and every one of the cultures of the countries they visited. These included: London, Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, Sweden, Munich, Salzburg, Venice, Florence, Rome, Assisi, Pompeii, Delphos, Meteora, Athens and The Greek Isles. Such experiences transformed the majority of the group in ways they never thought possible. Some students even considered moving to London or France in order to pursue studies, thereby expanding even more their cultural horizons.

This exceptional journey was part of the Humanities Department course, HUMA 3115, a three credit elective or socio-humanistic course.

Dr. Carlos Casablanca, resurrected this magnificent program, which had not been offered since 1999. “The trip is academic, but the amount of culture absorbed is overwhelming,” assured Casablanca, who was in charge of the preparation process.

“We had to revive it, we had to present a new proposal with additional requirements,” stated the Humanities professor who was in charge of a similar trip to Paris for 13 years. Casablanca added that at the time of choosing the excursion company, the quality of hotels,

meals, and transportation were taken into consideration as well as the overall cost of the trip to ensure that students could afford it.

The adventure began last March, with conferences about the various attractions that students would encounter such as museums, cathedrals, and ruins. Professor Iliana Guilfucci, trip co-coordinator, noted that the idea was for students to arrive at their sites with the necessary historical knowledge. It is for this reason that Casablanca and Guilfucci are proposing the idea of incorporating actualized videos with modern perspectives of these places.

The group of College travelers embarked on their journey at the end of May. “The educational trip is an unforgettable and enriching cultural and educational experience. Walking through Greek temples, Pompeii, the Roman coliseum, passing through historical castles, palaces, museums and cathedrals was a journey across time” said Guilfucci.

Casablanca explained that the evaluation of the course was based on the development of an essay on the museums visited and a final paper about the highlight of the experience and recommendations. Casablanca added that at the end of the adventure, the enthusiasm was such that the students began writing their essays on the way back to Puerto Rico.

“We had a very nice trip, with very capable people. The students thank us for the experience they have acquired, the ample cultural horizon that they now have and because they now think in global terms,” emphasized the professor.

Examples of two very grateful students are Glori Ann Rivera and Víctor Irizarry. For these two students the most impacting part of their experience was discovering “another world” that before seemed inaccessible. Irizarry describes the experience as “unique and unforgettable” and

recommends it to his peers. Glori Ann now thinks about moving to one of the many countries visited, which impacted her culturally.

Rivera and Irizarry recalled how the group was impressed after seeing the Eiffel Tower in Paris up close and being in Athens, Greece. “When we arrived to the Acropolis, the one we always see in books, I was speechless, I was there and I couldn’t believe it,” exclaimed Rivera.

“The students experienced all kinds of emotions throughout the journey. From total astonishment as they stood before the Eiffel Tower, to distress in Anne Franks’ home and the concentration camp at Dachau, and enjoyment at the salt mines and playing with snow at Mount Pilatus,” said professor Guilfucci.

Casablanca exhorted students and staff from RUM, other campuses, and the general public, to participate on the trip, expand their knowledge, and obtain credits in continuous education and professional improvement.

“We feel satisfied with contributing to the formation of the character of these young adults. We are happy to help them expand their cultural horizon and better their view of life”, stated Casablanca.

Anyone interested in participating on the next trip “Europe 2008” can write to: carlos.casablanca@gmail.com.

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