

# College is the opportune time to travel



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Everyone enjoys a good trip. However, the time and money are harder to find. For students who will soon search for a job in a declining economy, a better opportunity to travel is not in the near future.

But thanks to UNC Asheville's Study Abroad options and the International Student Exchange Program, students looking for a change of scenery can travel the world with relative ease.

"With the ISEP, students pay tuition, fees and housing to UNCA. They pay exactly the same in their country of choice as they would here," said Diane Royer, a university programs specialist working to send and receive students internationally.

While around 150 UNCA students a year take off to other countries, Royer encourages everyone to take advantage of the often life-changing experience. It just gets harder for people to travel once they get wrapped up in the world of jobs and mortgages, she said.

"After graduation people don't have the assistance, financial aid or tuition rates of the school. They would have to pay all of the costs there, get approved for a visa and that sort of thing. Here we set that all up for students," Royer said.

Participating in study abroad programs such as ISEP greatly reduces the high costs of traveling for six months or a year. Students who meet the requirements generally only have to produce a plane ticket and pocket cash, if university-housing and meal plans are acceptable.

"My semester abroad in Australia was ridiculously tight," said Scott Szymanski, a senior who spent the spring of his sophomore year on the Gold Coast. "I lived in a dorm, but it was more of an apartment. I didn't have to share it with anyone," he said.

While knocking out coursework toward his major, Szymanski said he spent his free time traveling around the country surfing, jumping off waterfalls and hiking

in rainforests with friends he met along the way.

"It was one of the best cultural experiences I've had. Anyone who can go somewhere while in school should do so," Szymanski said. "All it takes for most students is gathering the extra funds for a flight, paperwork and planning ahead," he said.

Since UNCA requires that students maintain a 2.0 GPA to remain in good standing, the 2.5 required by most university exchange programs should not be out of reach. However, in a foreign university, achieving less than a C transfers home as a zero, yet a C or better will fulfill requirements without affecting a student's GPA.

For those already proud of their GPA, studying abroad can be a good way to keep it where it is while still fulfilling requirements for their major.

"Studying in another country should not extend students' graduation time at all; it just makes students' time that much richer," Royer said. She also recommends 12 credit hours while abroad so students have time for travel and recreation.

Choosing Australia, one of the English-speaking options through ISEP, allowed Szymanski to bypass the foreign language requirements common to some other countries and universities within the program.

"Some students like experiencing the culture without the stress of having to study in a different language. There are nice options for these students," Royer said. However, fully experiencing a culture is easier with a firm grip on the language of the locals, she



Photo Courtesy of Scott Szymanski

Senior Scott Szymanski spent a semester studying in Australia.

emphasized.

Of the 39 countries offered through ISEP, 29 have schools accepting English-speaking students. New Zealand, Japan, Italy, the Netherlands, Thailand and Sweden are all among the countries offering English-speaking curricula. Countries lacking prerequisites enable students to travel as soon as their freshman year.

"To study in a foreign language, four semesters of the language are required," Royer said. For these exchanges, students must be at least a sophomore or take a proficiency test available for students who already know a second language.

"The most difficult thing for me was the first two weeks. The language, getting used to the courses and everything was kind of overwhelming," said Christina Zopf, an exchange student from Austria attending UNCA this semester. Zopf met the English requirements of her school at home, Salzburg University, and said she was placed at her first college of choice.

"It helps a lot that we came with an international group. We

eat, hang out and study together, which gives us support," said Pauline Lopez, an exchange student from France and friend of Zopf's. Since their initial hectic period, both said they are settling in well and meeting lots of interesting people.

Two of the main differences Zopf and Lopez notice here are the same things many UNCA students find frustrating.

"It's easier in Europe to get fresher, healthier food around campus," said Zopf and Lopez, agreeing with UNCA students who struggle with the available dining options.

The other difference the two exchange students point out is the ability to drink alcohol legally.

"In Europe and most other countries, the drinking age is usually 18. A lot of students like to drink when they go to these places. We just ask them to be responsible in what they do, as they are representing both UNCA and the USA," Royer said.

Stop by the Study Abroad office in University Hall, room 248, for more information.