

'Semester at sea'

Shellea Ewig visits ten countries on a floating classroom

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The Pendulum

To some, the living quarters in Elon dormitories seem like a tight fit, but imagine living with 700 people on a 450 foot ship... Shellea Ewig, an Elon College junior had this experience when she spent the fall semester exploring different countries around the world. She participated in a "Semester at Sea" program sponsored by the Institute of Shipboard Education.

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Pendulum: How did you find out about the Study at Sea Program?

Ewig: Through a friend of my family. He went on it two years ago and had a great time. So I called University of Pittsburgh and they sent information to me.

Pendulum: Was this a major decision in your life? What made you decide to go?

Ewig: Yeah it was, traveling around the world by myself, not knowing anybody. Visiting other countries, not knowing the language, and knowing almost nothing about any of the countries that I visited. It was hard leaving school for a whole semester. I knew that I had to go because I love to travel and it would give me the opportunity to visit cities that I wouldn't normally go to. It was a time for me to grow up and experience other cultures that would broaden my horizons. It was a big decision, but it was worth it.

Pendulum: Where did you visit during your semester at sea?

Ewig: We set sail from Vancouver, Canada. The first place we went was Japan. It took us two weeks to sail across the Pacific Ocean. Then we went to China, Taiwan, Malaysia, India, Kenya, South Africa, Brazil, and Venezuela, and then the day before Christmas, we came home to New Orleans. The entire trip took four months.

Pendulum: Was the ship similar to a college environment?

Ewig: It was a big ship, about 450 feet and it was exactly like a campus. They call it a floating campus because they had classrooms, a computer center, a library, a student union, a theater and other things. It was just like a normal campus but it was on the water. Also, there were organizations aboard the ship like the Student Union Board and the Student Government Association and a Yearbook staff.



Shellea Ewig

Pendulum: How many students traveled on the ship with you and where were they from?

Ewig: The ship can hold 450 students, but with the economy, our ship wasn't full, we had about 415 students. The addition of crew and professors brought the total number of passengers to 700 people. The students were from everywhere. I think every state was represented.

Pendulum: What kind of academic curriculum did you follow while on the ship?

Ewig: They advise you to only take 12 hours because it is so difficult being on and off the ship. Students are presented with the challenge of trying to soak in countries while keeping up with the books. I took History, Oceanography and Anthropology.

Pretty much all of the classes that you would want to take were offered. Each class was worth three credits each. There was one class that everyone on the ship had to take, it was called Core Class. It met everyday, you had lectures from the professors whose specialty was the country we were going to. We also learned about each country, from family to traditions before we got there.

Pendulum: What was your most memorable experience?

Ewig: All of the countries were my favorite, but the country that had the most impact on me was India - because it's a third world country, it's so poor, it's so sad, and it is so dirty. It's unreal, the begging and the stealing, it's just so incredibly poor.

Pendulum: Why would you encourage other students to attend a study at sea program?

Ewig: First of all, you are seeing countries that you would probably never go to in your entire life. I have learned so much about myself. You learn how to push your limits. Here, I got on a ship not knowing anyone, and I got off knowing 415 people very well. You are on your own in those countries, you have nothing to fall back on. In these countries the people look different, there aren't any similarities. To me, the whole experience was worth it.

Pendulum: What type of student would be a good candidate for this type of program?

Ewig: Someone who's adventurous, open-minded and willing to take risks. They should be outgoing and stable enough that they are able to handle different cultures and different situations.

Pendulum: How often were you able to talk to your family? Were they always just a phone call away?

Ewig: There was a phone on board the ship but it cost ten dollars a minute, so nobody used it. In the countries, I tried not to call my parents. I talked to them three times during the whole semester. It was hard to get connections to the United States and it was just too expensive. I did a lot of letter writing. I wrote to my family in every country.

Towards the end of the trip, when it seemed that I was so far away from home, I wished I could have picked up the phone and called. The ship tried to keep us as busy as possible.

Pendulum: What was your most embarrassing moment in a foreign country?

Ewig: We were in Venezuela talking rudely about some people who were staring at us. We thought they couldn't understand what we were saying, but they understood every word because they were Americans!

Pendulum: Did you ever get claustrophobic while on the ship?

Ewig: I would only get claustrophobic when we were on the ship for long periods of time. We would all be anxious to get off the ship. The longest length of time we were on the ship was for two weeks when we went from Canada to Japan.

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