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International Cooperation Study Abroad Experience

Upon arrival to Belgium, we had to attend CIEE Orientation immediately. Although everyone may appear to be a bit jet-lagged, we managed to stay alert! This was only the beginning.



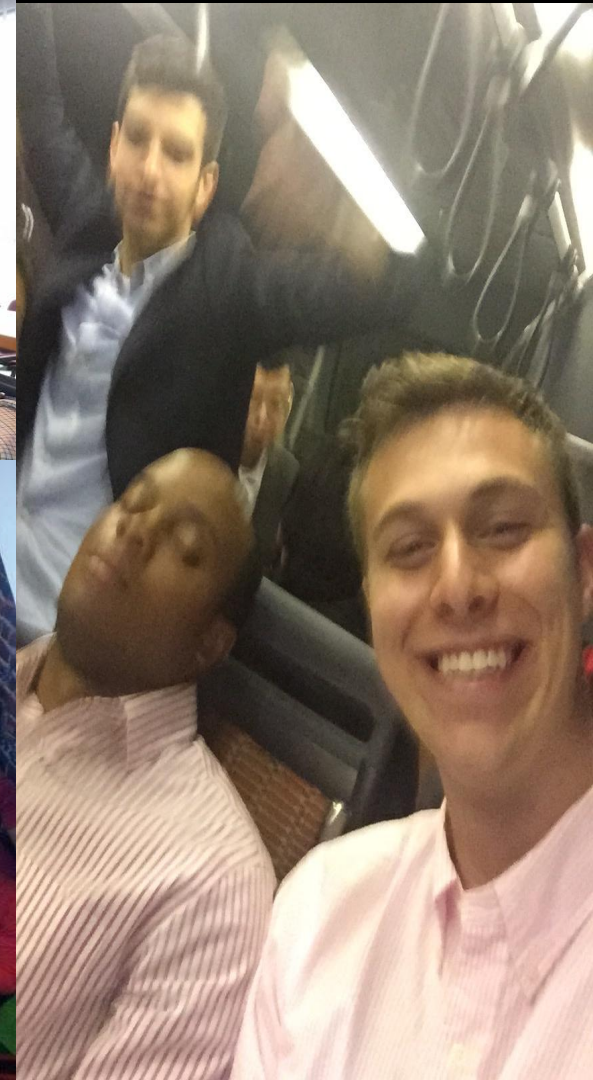
The first day was used to keep us awake and explore Brussels. It was a beautiful, old city with a lot of character. On the right is one of the oldest churches in Brussels, St. Nicholas Cathedral. To the left is a typical side street in Brussels with shops lining the bottom floors of each building.





After sightseeing on our first day, we tackled learning how to navigate Europe. The destinations ahead of us were endless, but our first stop was the Universite Catholique de Louvain.

At our visit to the Université Catholique de Louvain, a lecture was given on understanding European Cultural Diversity. Presented by Marie-Therese Claes, we discussed how much variation there is throughout the European cultures. That night we went out to dinner as a class, however some students were still a little jet-lagged on the bus ride to the restaurant.



On our third day we visited NATO's SHAPE in Mons, Belgium. We had two amazing speakers discuss the missions and purpose of NATO in our current international climate and enjoyed a delicious three course meal afterwards!



SUPREME HEADQUARTERS ALLIED POWERS EUROPE



06 May 2015



The fourth day of our trip we visited the European Commission for the entire day. We heard lectures on the security situation and the governmental structures of the European Union.



After program events during the day we were allowed time to explore the city and create our own adventures. We stumbled upon some interesting places and definitely some interesting people.





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This is the Manneken Pis. We were able to take a detour to see the most famous statue in Brussels. Beautiful right?



MANNEKEN-PIS Dressing Room - [Wikipedia](#) / [Architectural](#) / [Brussels](#)

We looked sharp in Brussels and the Hague every day. We were certainly dressed to impress. On this day we visited the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and were able to ask questions regarding our research projects directly to NATO officials. To the right is Julieta. She was our guide throughout Brussels and showed us to each site.



At night Grand Place illuminated to an assortment of different colors. This is one of the most important squares in the city and is the main tourist attraction for many who are visiting.



This was Europe Day. We were able to gain access to a lot of EU institutions and tour the buildings.



Buckingham Palace: One of the greatest symbols of the United Kingdom. During the program we had a free weekend in which groups were allowed to venture off to different places. Some of us were able to go to London and Paris in the same weekend!





Paris



London





Being able to get firsthand commentary from guest lectures served as an excellent source of information for the research the class was conducting. Here, we were at the European Commission listening to a guest speaker on topics of our choice.



Also, being in the presence of a court hearing of this magnitude was incredible. A different kind of court hearing and a different kind of perspective made this trip life changing.

Sadly however our trip had to come to an end in Den Haag in The Netherlands. While here we visited the ICC, ICJ, and other international legal entities. With The Hague being the capital of international law this was the perfect place for such tours!



Changes in current events require quick thinking and fast acting institutions. NATO is a prime example of this. Getting the opportunity to ask NATO policy members questions regarding the current situation between Russia and Ukraine was an enriching experience.



From NATO institutions in Brussels to international courts in The Hague, we saw it all. Europe in the 21st century is reliant on international cooperation and at the heart of this are institutions that we saw and visited.



Programs such as this one allow UC students to immerse themselves in a hands on experience that advances their knowledge of a subject and cultural awareness at the same time.



This program could serve as a model for future short term study abroad programs. Students were able to gain access to many governmental institutions that covered areas in security, economics, and politics, in just ten days.



While high costs and longer time commitments may deter students from studying abroad for a year or semester, short term programs allow for a cheaper and less time-consuming experience abroad while still giving students the opportunity to learn.



Programs like this are beneficial for students from all different majors and areas of interest because they teach a wide variety of practical life skills that cannot be adequately conveyed in a classroom. There's nothing quite like navigating public transportation in the middle of a foreign city where you don't speak the local language. Programs like this one teach you how to think on your feet.



Experiences like this challenge students to re-think their approach to learning because the point is not to cram facts into your brain in order to pass the next test. Instead, study abroad is about engaging all your senses, and learning through lived experiences.

