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Kurtzman, Barcelona Study Abroad Experience Welcomes IWU Students

December 8, 2010

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – As he wanders the tree-lined streets of Barcelona, passing cafés and *tiendas* selling churros and café con leche, Illinois Wesleyan alumnus Rich Kurtzman feels at ease navigating the capital of this region of Spain, a place he has called home since 2002.

Kurtzman, who graduated from IWU in 1998, came to Barcelona to work as a recruiter and adviser for IES Abroad, a study abroad company with a program in Barcelona. Now, eight years later, he is the director of his own study abroad company, Barcelona Study Abroad Experience, which will partner with the Illinois Wesleyan Barcelona Program in the spring of 2011.

Last year the University decided to shift studies in Spain from Madrid to Barcelona. The University saw benefits of situating the program in Barcelona, said Director of the International Office Stacey Shimizu. "With Barcelona, the city's physical location—on the Mediterranean, close to France—and its multicultural history and nature means a wider range of faculty can design courses that take advantage of its resources, courses that perhaps take a more comparative or cross-cultural perspective."

Starting in January, 18 IWU students will spend four months abroad with the new IWU Barcelona Program, taking classes through Barcelona SAE. The program will take place each spring semester. According to Shimizu, "Barcelona SAE was able to offer a program much like IWU had administered in Madrid, but addressing all the issues of concern, such as lower-level language classes, housing assistance and financial sustainability."

Situated on the Mediterranean Sea, with white sand beaches just miles from the bustling downtown and towering steeples of La Sagrada Familia, Kurtzman said that, "Barcelona is more cosmopolitan, more international than other cities in Spain. It's like walking around in a museum. You've got all the Gaudi architecture as well as the modernist architecture. I would always choose to live in Barcelona."

Kurtzman, who founded SAE in 2009, first realized his passion for languages and travel after studying abroad in Madrid and St. Petersburg while at IWU. "When I graduated I thought study abroad was a good mix of my interests," said Kurtzman, who graduated with dual degrees in Spanish and Russian and a business minor. "I liked education and I liked business but I didn't just want to fully study in one area. International education is a good mix of the two."

After working for IES Abroad for four years in the United States while earning his master's degree in Spanish applied linguistics from the University of Illinois-Chicago, Kurtzman was transferred to Barcelona where he worked and taught for various study abroad organizations.

After a few years of experience, he decided to branch out to form his own company, launching SAE.

The IWU students traveling with SAE will stay with host families selected by Kurtzman, fulfill IWU general education requirements and take upper-division Spanish classes taught by faculty at Barcelona International College (BIC), located in a residential neighborhood in the heart of the city.

The students will take classes Monday through Thursday, spending the weekends traveling on cultural and educational trips, which include two weekend excursions outside of Barcelona and visits to the Dali Museum, the medieval city of Gerona and the Roman ruins of Tarragona.

Kurtzman also takes the students on weekly city excursions to experience the sights, sounds and smells of Barcelona. They visit neighborhoods, taste and create the Spanish and Catalan cuisine, and take salsa lessons with the locals, among other activities.

"I want students to experience the authentic Barcelona and make them feel like they have made the city their home while they are here," said Kurtzman.

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