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## Nursing Students Studying Abroad through Unique Program at Illinois Wesleyan

April 2, 2013

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Seven Illinois Wesleyan University nursing majors are currently participating in a rare opportunity – the chance to spend a semester abroad while still fulfilling their nursing program requirements.

With the help of state-of-the-art Polycom technology, the seven are studying this semester in Barcelona through the IWU Spain Program.

Semester-long study abroad programs in nursing are rare, according to Vickie Folsie, associate professor and director of the School of Nursing, because required coursework in nursing must be taken in sequence and Illinois state law requires nursing students be supervised in clinical settings by a master's-prepared registered nurse licensed in Illinois. Thus, study abroad options for nursing majors are often limited to short trips or summer timeframes.



*Illinois Wesleyan nursing students pose at Tibidabo, a mountain overlooking Barcelona.*

Illinois Wesleyan's School of Nursing faculty deliberately selected study abroad to occur in the sophomore year, when clinical coursework requires far fewer hours than those of upperclassmen and is more easily arranged in a foreign country. Through the IWU Spain Program, the Barcelona nursing students are substituting observational clinical experiences for the direct patient care performed by students in Bloomington. After they return to Wesleyan, the Barcelona students will spend May Term working with patients to meet their course requirements for delivering direct patient care in a clinical setting, Folsie said.

Comparing hospital settings in Barcelona to the United States, two of the study abroad students notice some institutional differences. "There is much less bureaucracy here," said David Allen, who is observing at Centre Integral de Salut, a public hospital. Student Gisel Lopez agrees, noting the "relaxed ambiance" at Quirón, a private hospital, which serves as her clinical setting.

Both students said adjusting to a new way of learning via Polycom has been challenging. Their required courses – Nursing Foundations II and Pathophysiology and Pharmacology II – are delivered through a live video stream from Stevenson Hall on Illinois Wesleyan's campus. The seven Barcelona students interact with the instructor and their peers in Bloomington allowing for synchronous learning.

"It was a challenge at first focusing only on the screen because I am more of the type to learn better in the classroom," said Lopez. "But I have adjusted and it has brought the seven of us nursing majors together because we use each other for help."

IWU's Spain Program features elements designed to introduce students to the "real Barcelona." Students use public transportation to explore neighborhoods off the normal tourist path – part of the program's goal of an immersive experience in Spanish language and culture.

Conversing with locals has been relatively easy, the two IWU students said. “Outside of the hospital, I rarely encounter Catalan (one of three official languages of Catalonia),” said Allen. “I understand Spanish reasonably well, so I understand the majority of what people explain to me.”

Lopez said people in Barcelona mostly speak *castellano*, the term for the Spanish language used in Spain. “I haven’t had much trouble conversing with others, but it has been interesting to pick up words in Catalan here and there,” she said.

Those Spanish-language skills are expected to remain in demand in the United States. By 2030, it’s predicted one in five Americans will be Hispanic. Folse said the School of Nursing’s interest in teaming up with the IWU Spain Program was in response to the increased need for Spanish-speaking and culturally competent nurses.

Illinois Wesleyan also offers a Hispanic Studies minor for nursing majors. Both Allen and Lopez said they hope to minor in Hispanic Studies.

A semester-long immersion program forces students to engage in a multicultural setting, Folse said. All IWU Spain students live with host families in Barcelona and participate in excursions throughout the city and in neighboring areas that are designed to develop their self-sufficiency.

This spring marks the second year for the School of Nursing’s participation in the program. Five nursing students participating in last year’s Barcelona program described their experiences as “life-transforming, both with regard to their enhanced cultural sensitivity as future nurses and as global citizens,” said Folse.

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