



Spring 5-25-2016

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University Communications
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Recommended Citation

University Communications, "Students Seize May Term's Immersive Experiences" (2016).
News and Events. 2785.
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/2785>

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Students Seize May Term's Immersive Experiences

May 25, 2016

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— From immersing themselves in the social upheaval of the upstart suffragist and labor movements in 1913 New York to seeing firsthand the masterful works of Renaissance Italy, students enrolled in Illinois Wesleyan University's May Term seized the opportunity to cover a semester's worth of coursework in one intensive, month-long course.

Here is a sampling from the more than 70 May Term courses offered this spring, as seen through the [eyes of students](#) who experienced them:

Experimental Physics; Associate Professor and Chair Bruno deHarak

On the first day of class, deHarak told the students he hoped to turn them into new people by the end of the course.

Fiona Breyer '17 noted she had previously taken six other laboratory courses in both physics and chemistry and had worked as a summer research intern here at IWU. "But, none of this prepared me for the level of professionalism and dedication that is required for Experimental Physics," she said. "I hadn't realized it, but my experimental methods for taking data [prior to Experimental Physics] were mediocre at best."

Taking data may sound straightforward, but in fact requires considerable skill, Breyer explained. "Not only do the results have to be precise and accurate, but the experiment needs to be repeated many times, the setup has to be reproducible, you have to be able to analyze your errors, correct the systematic errors within your experiment, and the list goes on."

Most of the experiments for this May Term's course involved the study of the behavior and properties of light. Breyer and her lab partners studied Fraunhofer (or far field) diffraction patterns and compared their experimental results to convolution functions of theoretical calculations. "We created almost every mechanical part in this experiment using tools and machines in the physics machine shop," she explained. "One of the most interesting parts of this class was learning how to machine different objects."

Breyer will take her new skills as an experimentalist to an astrophysics summer research position at the University of Wisconsin. She said she feels more prepared for the position after taking Experimental Physics. "Dr. deHarak's statement about turning us into new people could not be more true," she said. "When you are in a lab for more time than you are not in a lab, you quickly learn to change your methods."



Air Li '17 (from left), Alexis Liu '17 and Fiona Breyer '17 examine the setup of their diffraction measurement in Experimental Physics. The goal of their experiment was to quantify the diffraction pattern created by incident light on a double slit aperture using a photodiode.

Travel: Renaissance Italy; Associate Professor of French and Italian Scott Sheridan



Claire Hoverson '17 in Venice during the Renaissance Italy travel course.

Even the name of the course conjures images of magical cities, architectural treasures and romance. One of the 17 students on the trip, Claire Hoverson '17 did fall in love – with Italy itself.

The students received a first-hand introduction to some of the architecture, art, literature and history that represent a turning point in Western history. Visits to Rome, Venice and Florence were supplemented with jaunts to Assisi, Verona, Padua and Pisa, among other locations. In Padua, for example, the group visited the University of Padua, among the oldest universities in the world and, in 1678, the first to award a doctor of philosophy degree to a woman.

Hoverson was surprised to learn that Italy, at times, bears little resemblance to the images portrayed on film, such as Vespa scooters weaving in and out of speeding cars. "We assume film and pictures give us the right representation, but there is often that one little thing that is left outside of the lens that can change your perception," she said.

Experiencing the real Italy, Hoverson said she loved every moment of the course, from growing so close so quickly to her classmates to walking approximately 127 miles over the 15-day trip. One life lesson, however, stands out.

In Assisi — a hill town in central Italy's Umbria region and the birthplace of St. Francis — the guide for Hoverson's group shared not only the town's rich history, but his own philosophy for living a good life. "He asked if we had questions, and he told us where to take the best pictures," Hoverson wrote in her travel journal. "He also taught us one important lesson that really stuck with me: 'Without love, there is no life.'"

May Term Seminar in Marketing: Entrepreneurship; Visiting Assistant Professor of Business Administration Karen Bussone

“Women’s Power, Women’s Justice” is the annual theme Illinois Wesleyan has chosen for the upcoming academic year. Charged with creating an effective marketing strategy to raise awareness for this theme, Bussone’s class discovered the importance of working as a team, communicating with each other and adjusting plans around obstacles.

Branding themselves as Amplified Marketing, the class divided into four teams: creative services, social/digital services, project design services, and event planning/fundraising. Their marketing strategy included creating a brand identity, working logo, promotional videos, social media platform strategies, examples of event posters and retractable banners, special event strategies and plans and other materials in support of the plan. The class presented their work to a group of faculty, staff and administrators near the end of May.

Kayla Nowicki ’17 was manager of the creative services team.

“This project really showed the importance of communication within teams, within leaders and with the administration in order to accomplish all the tasks,” she said. “In one instance, a member of another team created ‘branding’ and did not inform us of specific fonts they were using. We were informed of this the day before our presentation and had to scramble to fix all of our materials. In the end we were able to do it and have them printed at the last minute, but we told the other teams that, for the future, they need to provide more notice when a major change is needed.”

Nowicki said she enrolled in the May Term “Seminar in Marketing” because she’d heard great reviews from other students about the experiences offered in the course.

“May Term courses offer a great opportunity to focus and put all your efforts into one course,” added Nowicki, who took “Seminar in Management” last year. “Completing a course in one month makes me feel very accomplished, and it’s also a great way to get to know your professor and classmates more.”

Women, Work & Leisure 1890-1930; Professor of History April Schultz



Students debate the merits of supporting labor or suffrage factions in Professor of History April Schultz’s course.

original historical documents. As the game’s publisher explains, in this tumultuous era in American history “suffragists are taking to the streets demanding a constitutional amendment for the vote... Labor has turned to the strike to demand living wages and better conditions; some are even proposing an industrial democracy where workers take charge of industries....African-Americans, suffering from the worst working conditions, disenfranchisement, and social segregation, debate how to support their community through education and protest, thereby challenging their continuing marginalization in both the South and the North. Members of all these groups converge in Greenwich Village to debate their views with the artists and bohemians who in the process of remaking themselves into the new men and new women of the 20th century.”

To effectively partake in these debates, students must be well versed not only on the characters they portray but on other characters in the game. Students receive Personal Influence Points (PIPs) for a range of activities, from publicizing their new identities, to wearing a red flower or scarf in support of labor, to learning and teaching the turkey trot, a popular dance in the early 1900s. Only students who have earned 15 PIPs can vote for either the labor or suffragist movements at the end of the course.

“In these kinds of games, students have to read primary sources,” explained Schultz. “They have to get into the minds of a character of that historical period, and not act in a way that is outside of that character. That’s difficult to do. The students also have to speak publicly.

“Through the years, I’ve found that classroom work that looks like fun, and play, can lead to deep learning,” she added.

Math major Yolanda Juarez ’17 said she was skeptical when Schultz first told the class the format they would follow. “It was not just knowing the information [about our characters] but actually having to use it to influence other people,” said Juarez, who has taken on the persona of Emma Goldman. “In high school, I stayed away from history classes as much as possible because I like working on things, not just listening to lectures. I’m going to remember what we learned in this class much more than if someone just told me about it.”

Juarez said she was fairly knowledgeable about the women’s suffrage movement before she took the course, but said she knew very little about the origins of the labor faction prior to May Term. “Some of the struggles the labor faction members talk about relate so much to today,” she said. “They were fighting for equal wages for everyone —and just think, that even now, we still don’t have equal wages for everyone. In that instant, I could connect my life today to the past.”



Social and digital media team members John Shipman '17 and Moyo Ajayi '17 present a promotional video.