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May Term Provides Travel Opportunities, Fast-Paced Courses

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — While spring signals the end of the school year for many students, some Titans chose to immerse themselves in a single topic or collect unique cultural experiences by enrolling in Illinois Wesleyan's May Term.

A variety of condensed courses are offered during the term's 4-week window, including topics on nutrition, politics, history, drama, literature, language, design, technology and science.

Students also have the opportunity to experience May Term through travel courses, combining sight-seeing and education under the guidance of an IWU instructor.

Assistant Professor of Marketing and Entrepreneurship Gavin Leach led a travel seminar titled Exploring Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Cultural Immersion in Spain and Italy. Nineteen IWU students enrolled in the course, traveling to the Canary Islands, Barcelona, Naples, Sorrento, Pompeii and Rome.

“It was a complete joy to provide students with academic, cultural and personal opportunities for growth and development,” said Leach.

A stop at Tenerife, the largest of Spain’s Canary Islands, was not originally on the seminar’s schedule. It was international student Victoria Ballesteros-Gonzalez '25 who saw an opportunity to bring the entrepreneurship class to her home island and town of Adeje — a visit she said would be mutually beneficial for the IWU class and the economy and visibility of her community.



Students hold an IWU flag after exploring Barranco del Infierno, a nature preserve in the Canary Islands. The trip was part of a May Term travel seminar titled Exploring Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Cultural Immersion in Spain and Italy, taught by Assistant Professor of Marketing and Entrepreneurship Gavin Leach.

“I was committed to designing an itinerary that adhered to IWU's values and goals, like the ‘Do Well, Do Good’ saying. I also aimed to ensure that Adeje and Tenerife showcased their broader value beyond being sun-and-beach destinations to the students,” said Ballesteros-Gonzalez, a political science major.

She pitched the idea to Director of The Petrick Idea Center John Quarton, who accompanied Leach and the class during the travel course. Quarton and Leach immediately recognized the value in adding a stop at Tenerife. Ballesteros-Gonzalez then met with government officials in her community to determine logistics.

“Victoria proposed a seven-day itinerary, complete with learning objectives for each visit, and miraculously arranged with local government officials and business leaders to cover the cost of lodging, meals, ground transportation, and attractions for the entire week for our group,” said Quarton. “Victoria reinforced a valuable lesson I learned many years ago: What initially may sound like a crazy idea can become a reality when passionate people are determined to find a way to make it happen.”

The class explored forests and nature preserves, met with local business owners and government representatives, toured historic sites and visited a renowned zoo and water park. Though she wasn’t enrolled in the May Term course, Ballesteros-Gonzalez chaperoned the group during their visit to her home island, occasionally serving as a translator and tour guide.

By gaining a personal introduction to Tenerife, Ballesteros-Gonzalez said she hoped her peers understood the potential of the island community and how it can attract investments and generate opportunities for growth and knowledge.



Students enrolled in Gavin Leach’s travel seminar on entrepreneurship made a stop at the Colosseum in Rome during May Term.

“I also hope their perspectives were broadened, fostering interdisciplinary thinking and increasing their awareness of the potential for innovation and entrepreneurship in different parts of the world,” she said.

During the remainder of the trip abroad, students visited businesses in Italy and Spain while learning about intercultural communication, the region's economy and touring historical sites.

Leach said his goal leading the course was to provide students with a greater understanding and appreciation for business practices in Europe, as well as the chance to gain skills that can be applied to their professional and academic lives.

Back on campus, marketing and psychology major Annika Altekruise '24 enrolled in Energy and Society, a course taught by Professor and Chair of Physics Narendra Jaggi. Altekruise said the class served as her final required general education course before graduating in December.

“It was great having the opportunity to finish a semester-long course in a more concentrated timeframe. May Term is a great opportunity to not only stay on track to graduate or get ahead, but to dedicate full focus to a single course rather than managing multiple at a time,” said Altekruise.

Jaggi’s course on energy and society focused on the basic physics underlying various energy technologies such as wind, solar, coal, gas, nuclear and geothermal and the impact of those technologies on the environment.

“I love the opportunity it gives me to simultaneously challenge and support students in an immersive environment; it fosters a type of intellectual fearlessness that is priceless,” said Jaggi.

Math major Zihan Nie '23 was drawn to the physics course because of her family’s past experience in energy-related product research and business. She said she enjoyed Jaggi’s teaching style and that each class was full of thoughtful discussions.

“[May Term classes] give you an opportunity to focus on only one thing and allow you to think deeper regarding some particular interest of yours. An intensive pace can be challenging, but can also keep you actively participating which leads to better understanding,” said Nie.



Professor and Chair of Physics Narendra Jaggi, right, sits with students while listening to a presentation during his May Term course on Energy and Society.

Adjunct Professor Lyudmila Kizer offered a May Term course on the fundamentals of acting, a class she said is designed for non-majors who are interested in an arts class with a focus on acting and live theatre. Kizer said students are not only introduced to the profession of acting in her class, they are encouraged to step out of their comfort zone by improving public speaking skills.

“One of my main objectives, beyond sharing my passion for live theatre, is to enrich my students’ experience by acquainting them with a diverse range of artistic works and numerous exercises that can be beneficial for their future,” she said. “It brings me great pleasure to observe that in such a short span of time, my May Term students become more open to new perspectives about life and themselves.”