

To: Professor Susan Griffin, English Department Chair

From: Professor Suzette Henke

Re: English Department London Program, May 9-29, 2011

Date: July 18, 2011

Inaugurating the London summer program was probably the most challenging project I've undertaken in two decades of teaching at UofL. The main compensation lay in the excitement, enthusiasm, and wonder that the fortnight in Britain evoked for participants. The program seemed to be a fabulous success for the majority of students, despite a number of problems associated with the first iteration of this ambitious study abroad course. I quickly realized that I was trying to do too much--with 3 hours of class in the morning, field trips most afternoons, and theater productions many evenings.

This group of ten exceptionally gifted women students emerged from their two week modernist excursion abroad with a plethora of new sensations, as well as an entirely revised understanding of British life and culture. For almost all participants, studying in London proved an amazing, life-transforming experience that expanded their personal, intellectual, and cultural horizons in unprecedented ways. Nine of the ten students returned to KY on May 29, and one remained until late June for extended travel in Europe.

Since this was the first iteration of the program, there were a number of issues that might be better addressed in future years. Most of the feedback has ranged from extremely positive to effusive. Many students complained about a heavy work load and found it difficult to endure 3 hours of class per day in London. In retrospect, I agree that a 3-week program might be far too intense and rushed, despite the reasonable air fares available in the month of May.

Here are some recommendations:

1.Preparation. English Department faculty who volunteer to teach on the London Program should be aware that group leadership requires a ten-month commitment to organization, recruitment, and advertisement of the program. Beginning in late August, the faculty member should work closely with Professor Diane Pecknold, head of IDOP, in planning the summer program. Dr. Pecknold's patient and meticulous attention to detail in planning the budget, working on the contract and liaison with IES, and assisting student participants was simply remarkable. She was the mover and shaker behind the 2011 program, and this particular group leader owes her an enormous debt of gratitude.

The inaugural program was especially challenging, since it involved starting from square one and negotiating our initial contract with the Chicago-based **Institute of European Studies** for the 2011 program, as well as for future years. Structuring the inaugural budget proved another hurdle that will continue to require a good bit of creative planning.

The English Department group leader has major responsibility for student recruitment. Aside from study abroad fairs, the principal mode of recruitment involves visiting English 300-level and 500-level classrooms—almost a dozen in December and more than a dozen in January. We held two **Informational Meetings** in Fall semester and three informational meetings at the beginning of Spring semester. My research assistant, Kennie Rose, prepared an excellent "Prezi" that offered an attractive digital slide show to prospective students who attended the informational presentations.

2. Institute of European Studies: I would strongly recommend that UofL continue to work with IES to set up customized summer programs on an annual or biennial basis.

IES is terrific in terms of setting up the classroom in Bloomsbury, taking care of insurance, providing safe student housing, offering remarkable guest lecturers, and attending to a multitude of details. Claire Kibblewhite is extremely competent, patient, affable, and helpful in assisting faculty with program organization. IES arranges an invaluable two-week travel (bus and tube) pass for student/faculty transportation for the duration of the program. Students and faculty have excellent health and accident coverage, 24-hour emergency contacts, and physician availability throughout the program.

There was only one slight glitch with the IES schedule distributed at orientation, which listed the Globe theater production as 7:30 rather than 6:30 p.m. on Sunday May 22. I'd caught the error in an earlier email and asked for correction, but unfortunately, the change had not been made on the IES schedule distributed to students on arrival. Since the time was correctly listed on the course syllabus and on theater tickets, most students arrived in good time. Future faculty leaders should proofread the IES program carefully both before and after its distribution, and IES staff and faculty might try to work together more closely in synchronizing their published schedules, as well as in determining practical bus/tube directions for field trip destinations.

A major student complaint involved the distance between the Chelsea residence hall and the IES Center in Bloomsbury. This problem should soon be ameliorated, as IES has now sold the Chelsea facility and will contract for newer—and closer—housing in future years.

3. 5-week summer program: We might consider inaugurating a 5-week summer program, with **3 weeks in Louisville and 2 weeks in London**. Some of the heavier lifting (longer works of fiction, research papers, etc.) could be reserved for the KY segment, with the fortnight in London devoted to attending theater performances and discussing plays, as well as to shorter writing assignments. Although I had utopian visions of students reading longer texts prior to the London excursion, such pre-emptive preparation wasn't entirely practical for many of the participants. The major complaint had to do with the amount of reading and work assigned. If I were to organize this class again, I would surely assign less work and take care to front-load assignments at the KY end.

4. Field trips: I would suggest including the price of at least three **field trips** in the program fee, but asking the students to finance their own travel between the airport and the city. Visits to **Westminster Abbey & the Tower of London** are among the top choices, along with a **Thames boat trip to Greenwich. The British Museum, the Victoria and Albert, and the Museum of London** are all free.

Re the class schedule and field trips, I would recommend that a 5-week program organize the two weeks in London as follows: fly on Saturday to arrive on Sunday, then schedule **classes for two hours per day on MTThF**, with **Wednesdays reserved for field trips**. A possible configuration for the Wed. explorations of London might be:

First Wed., Westminster Abbey in the a.m., with a boat trip leaving from Westminster pier at 1:00 p.m. (City Cruises or Thames River, round trip to Greenwich).

Second Wed., Museum of London in the a.m., Tower of London in the p.m.

Our **Saturday excursion to Charleston and Monk's House on May 21** was outstanding, and one of the most successful experiences of the program. I was able to organize this Bloomsbury field trip, via train and taxi, at less than half the cost IES had proposed for train and Charleston only. A superb excursion to the Sussex countryside!

5. **Theater budget:** Double the theater budget and possibly work more directly with IES in selecting plays and booking seats for appropriate performances. Because our initial theater allocation was so frugal, we ended up being partially restricted to offerings available at the National Theater (with great group discounts through the Discover program), in addition to a west end splurge and trips to the Globe and the Royal Court. It's certainly possible, however, for individual faculty members to set up an excellent line-up of theater productions by using the resources of the National Theater, the Royal Court, the Globe, and the Old Vic. Perhaps try to include an NT production at the more intimate Cottesloe theater, or select a musical as one of the offerings.

6. **Laptop computers:** IES does not allow its own students to use laptops in class and can turn off wi-fi access in classrooms. I would strongly recommend that colleagues consider this radical option, as lots of (uncontrollable) facebook activity around a circular seminar table can prove terribly distracting to students and professors alike (especially since most students, for security reasons, do not bring laptops to class and have to suffer the irritation of neighbors wafting off on the web). I feel that the greatest mistake I made in organizing the program was to allow the use of laptops in class. Students who brought computers seemed to spend a shocking amount of time on facebook, and this practice was difficult to monitor from across the room.

7. **Faculty Housing:** I arranged my own housing by booking a serviced studio apartment at Endsleigh Court, located at Upper Woburn Place just north of Tavistock Square. The flat was more than satisfactory and within easy walking distance of the IES classroom.

8. **Conclusion:** The program, as a whole, seemed to be a resounding success for most of the participants. The two-week experience in London offered all the students a new perspective on modern British Literature and a unique set of opportunities for cultural exploration.

One Honors student was inspired by the program to plan to apply to graduate school in pursuit of a doctorate in English, with a focus on Modern Literature. Here is the concluding paragraph of a heartwarming email sent after her return to Louisville:

"Thank you for all of the hard work you put into London. It was the best experience I've ever had in my life. There are many days I think back to the cool air and the hustle and bustle of the London streets. Without you, I wouldn't have these wonderful memories and an expanded sense of culture. Like I said, going to London and seeing the places mentioned in Woolf's work as well as the Bloomsbury Group's old romping grounds has inspired me to make them my life's work, if at all possible. . . . Thank you for exposing me to so many wonderful things. I owe it all to you."