Honors Experiential Learning Project Proposal Form – Global Studies

Project Information

1. Provide a brief overview/abstract of your proposed honors experiential learning project.

As an Industrial Design student, I am being thoroughly educated and apprenticed at creating helpful products, as well as enjoyable experiences, for the benefit of consumers, producers, and the earth as a whole. And by attending school at the University of Cincinnati, I have been able to take advantage of many beneficial experiences that the university has to offer. These include interdisciplinary classes, Honors Programs, and co-op opportunities. Co-op has taken me to three different employers, where I have had the chance to work with many influential individuals on many recognizable brands. I worked in Boston and Connecticut, which allowed me to get to know a new region of the country and explore major cities that I never would have had the chance to visit. By living that far from my home in Ohio, my time on co-op has been the most effective learning tool that I have experienced thus far in my life, both in my design education and my day-to-day life. And as a design student in DAAP, I have the ability to take advantage of the seamless exchange between UC and the University of Wuppertal, located in the city of Wuppertal, Germany.

From April through August of this year, I will be one of four students from my class who will be studying as full-time students abroad in Wuppertal. I have signed up for this study abroad semester to fulfill my growing interest in traveling the world and for the benefit of my design career.

My upcoming educational experience abroad will provide the new cultural perspectives that I have craved since declaring Global Studies as an Honors Program focus my freshman year. I first developed an interest in traveling to new places through family vacations to places in the U.S., notable for either historical importance or beautiful nature. And in the past few years, co-op has provided extended periods of time in new parts of the country coupled with a sense of independence and self-reliance. It was not until co-op that I pinpointed what I loved about travelling: the exploration of new places, cuisines, visuals, landscapes and trends is supremely intriguing and exciting for me. Even within the United States, I enjoyed walking new parts of town or driving down a new street to my co-op job. As the years have flown by, my traveling experiences have expanded in scope and independence, from childhood family vacations, to quarters on co-op when I live and work a full-time job on my own, to a two-week trip to a new continent and the country of Tanzania with my Humanitarian Design class in spring of 2011. And now I will be expanding further by attending college in Western Germany and exploring Europe for over four months.

I am looking forward to the independence that school at Wuppertal will provide. And because I know how I have enjoyed my time exploring even small cities such as New Britain, Connecticut, while on co-op, I cannot wait to arrive in Wuppertal and begin absorbing all that I can. Specifically, I want to witness the people in the city that I will be calling home this spring. Observing day-to-day life and how the citizens work, use public transit, shop for groceries, exercise, watch futbol, etc. will be intriguing. Then I can take what I see and apply my own cultural background and habits and become part of the community. As a student, getting to know my classmates’ and their styles of learning will be educational. With my interest in cooking, tasting food at restaurants (and hopefully meals at the homes of new friends) will expose me to new tastes and traditions. And as a self-proclaimed World War II buff, placing myself within the countries in which countless historical events took place will provide a new perspective on what I have read and learned. Besides finding intrigue in the daily life of others, I will be using the numerous historical and art museums, architectural sites, traditional festivals, and local music events to learn what makes Wuppertal, Germany, and Western Europe as special as people say. Even if I come out
of this trip discovering that Germans and Americans have more similarities than differences, it will have been a successful experience.

In today’s connected world, a worldwide perspective is crucial in any profession, and even more so in Industrial Design. In this career field, we design for the benefit of people. And if a designer places himself in a new culture, he or she can take what is learned from that culture and appropriately design for its people. In addition, the designer can use the values and personality of that culture and allow it to influence their designs for the improvement of lives back home. Studying abroad in Germany will allow me the opportunity to absorb all that I can from not only the University of Wuppertal, but the many varying cultures of Europe. I look forward to learning the values and preferences of the German people specifically, both in the design studio and out among the people themselves. The American design aesthetic has surrounded me my entire life, and I have studied it for the past four years in college. But the European design sense has a strong tradition that varies from that of the American taste. Specifically, Germans value a different set of design skills and fundamentals, including meticulous modeling. I have tasted a small sample of the differences between UC and Wuppertal design schools by befriending the German exchange students who have come to my studio in the past. And seeing what design skills they have and how they combine what they learn in their time at UC has been fascinating and is one of many motivators for me to study abroad in Germany.

This proposed experiential project will give me many new perspectives that apply to my personal interests and will be beneficial in my future career. Because placing myself in new environments and participating in varied experiences has given me a broader vision in my life thus far.

2. Clearly state how each of the following elements will be exhibited in your work (refer to the first two pages of this document with the full description of what is expected in each of these areas).

1. Substantial Content and Quality within Global Studies Theme

At the end of my time in Europe, I will have spent over four months as a full-time student in a culture that is currently foreign to me. However, my time in Wuppertal will also be a stepping stone to the surrounding countries and cultures that can provide me a new perspective for my design career and worldview.

   By attending school at the University of Wuppertal, my experiential learning project will apply to the third Global Studies Objective: *Interact with individuals from different cultures and express a sensitivity towards, appreciation of and respect for the complex range of experiences of diverse peoples.* At Wuppertal, my peers will vary from those in Cincinnati. The student body of Wuppertal’s design school is typically older in age than the average UC junior, for university students in Germany spend years working after high school to determine their proper calling in life, before college. This creates highly focused students with a strong yearning for success: a great environment in which to absorb. Also, many other countries, including China and Korea, send design students to Wuppertal. I look forward to crafting friendships with new people, and hopefully travelling to other places with Germans and other students who can provide a more authentic, personal experience. In the classroom, the opportunities for group project collaboration will be very educational and fascinating. These group projects will allow me to see first-hand how other design schools educate their students and allow me to demonstrate the American techniques and styles that I have crafted for four years. This semester, I will be experiencing a truly diverse environment. And that is before I step foot outside the classroom.
Though English is spoken frequently in Germany and Western Europe, I myself do not know German. However, this semester abroad will be well worth the language-barrier struggles. I look forward to placing myself in new and unknown cities and cultures, and experiencing trial-by-fire immersion in the search for international learning and travel. I have elected to take German language courses while at Wuppertal, mainly so I can participate in the day-to-day living of my new classmates, as opposed to making them cater to my lack of language ability. As I learned from my Honors trip to Tanzania in spring 2011, not understanding a language and finding oneself in a foreign environment makes a person listen; listening in the physical sense and listening in the psychological sense. When communication between people of differing languages and backgrounds meet, the conversation alters. Focus is placed on the differences at first, in a way that encourages consideration of more than what the person is speaking. The other’s personal background, body language, and culture are considered. In a way, one will listen more when placed in a conversation like this.

All people can benefit from some form of listening skills practice. In the business of product development, industrial designers are the advocates of the everyday person. We listen to those who will be using the things we create and consider their constraints before following the constraints of the manufacturer or CEO. An immersion abroad such as this will develop my listening skills for my everyday relationships and for my future career. It is through this listening and language immersion that I will learn more about the cultures and interpersonal values of the people, and leave with an even greater sensitivity towards people of backgrounds that differ from mine. This is why my experiential learning project also applies to the first of the Global Studies Objectives, for I will leave with substantial knowledge of specific cultural beliefs, values and sensibilities that might affect the way that [I] and others think or behave.

2. Connection to Academic Goals and Theories

My time spent learning and competing in design school has motivated me more than any experience before it. Never have I been so engaged and enthusiastic with my education, in and outside of the classroom. And entering the DAAP program was the best choice for me, because it encourages continual professional development in my field and prevents complacency. And now I have placed myself within an educational institution that will teach me how to become a true professional in industrial design, in a way that will be highly complementary to my education in Cincinnati.

After returning from my first design co-op, I drafted a motivational “game plan,” and named it Operation Full Potential, or O.F.P. The name was inspired by my boss, who encouraged daily practice and involvement in design, in addition to normal school and co-op tasks. The goal of this plan is for me to become the best designer I can by pushing myself to do all that I can while I am in school, and even after graduation. And it is my belief that studying abroad at a top school of design is one of the most impactful actions I can take to make sure I push to discover my full potential.

Specifically, the University of Wuppertal will provide design education in an environment both similar to and different from my courses at UC. As written above, the students of Wuppertal are a highly motivated and mature peer group. Classes and studio courses will have fewer students and will be taught by professors who are regarded as strong presences in the local design community and own their own design firm within the city. Within the classroom, I will be educated on the aspects of design that I have yet to experience to the fullest in American design school. These include: end-stage product development, engineering technologies, German simplicity and details, and a heavy importance placed on realistic model-building. Within Germany and Europe as a whole, a wealth of design-applicable experiences is available for exploration. These include: design museums, art
museums, architectural tours, urban planning experiences, tours of famous manufacturers, local

design events, and traditional local craftsmanship.

I am not only studying abroad for an impact on my design education, but also for my experiences

through the Honors program. After seeing how many opportunities the university provides for

students to see the world, I declared Global Studies as one of my focal points. In preparation for my

trip, I have assembled literature and other tools relating to Germany, Europe, and national design. I

am currently on co-op, and one of my O.F.P. goals after the work day is to introduce myself to the

German language through the Rosetta Stone software. Hopefully this will prepare me for

conversations with non-English speakers and my German language course at Wuppertal. I have

purchased Lonely Planet’s *Europe on a Shoestring* travel book, which is a large volume with

information on every European country and associated information. This will be crucial for

navigating new cities and finding locations of local design. In addition, I have marked a few design

books for review before departing: *Dieter Rams: As Little Design as Possible* (a biography on the life

and lessons of Germany’s most recognized designer), *The Authority of Everyday Objects* (a cultural

history of West German Industrial Design), and an alternative to the regularly taught lessons of

European product design called *Scandinavian Design: Alternative Histories*. When online, I have

found articles relating to the current European Union crisis, of which I was previously uninformed.
The best resources for laypeople are a BBC timeline of the crisis events

(http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-13856580) and a simple YouTube video quickly explaining the

crisis in Greece (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttuXQWV_dhQ). And looking ahead to where I

will be exploring, I reviewed the websites of two famous design museums within a reasonable

distance from Wuppertal: The famous Bauhaus school

(http://www.bauhaus.de/index+M52087573ab0.html) and the Vitra Design Museum

(http://www.bauhaus.de/index+M52087573ab0.html). With almost two months left until my trip

begins, I have plenty of time to familiarize myself with these and other sources and to introduce

myself to the German language.

3. **Initiative, Independence and Creativity**

I will be travelling to Germany along with three other classmates of mine in Industrial Design.

Though we are all motivated enough to apply for the exchange program and are qualified enough to

have been accepted, I am the only one involved in the Honors program at UC. I feel that choosing to

submit this trip as an experiential learning project commits me to a more focused and purposeful time

abroad. All four of us are planning where we would like to travel during our spare time, but I have

focused my time mainly on places and events mentioned above that relate to my travelling interests

and my professional field, as opposed to selecting destinations based solely on fun. I travelled Europe

two weeks with my family before college, so I am looking forward to this trip because I can see

and experience Europe through the eyes of design that I have developed over the past few years. So

not only will I be leaving Europe in August with a new perspective, I will be returning to Europe in

April with a new perspective.

4. **Reflection & Dissemination**

As a design student, assorted media will be the best outlet for me to document my trip, reflect on what

I see and what I learn, and share with the UC community. In addition to personal gain from this trip, I

can bring back what I learned from the classroom and travelling to the students at UC. Since I am

going to Wuppertal to learn German culture and design techniques, I can create media and

presentations that directly compare and contrast the daily life of students in Cincinnati and Wuppertal.

First, I will maintain a public blog online that students and members of the Industrial Design Society
of America (IDSA) Student Chapter will be made aware of. This blog will highlight the lessons that I learn in class that may vary from the life of an American design student and any assorted thoughts and insights that I produce on a daily basis. Also, I will be taking photos at most locations over the four month period. While abroad, I will make a presentation to the students of Wuppertal describing what life is like for design students at UC and why they should consider studying abroad at UC themselves. For this, I will advertise and prepare an oral presentation that accurately compares and contrasts design school at UC and Wuppertal. And for the students back at UC, I will be creating a mini-documentary that highlights Wuppertal’s industrial design program. This video will give a tour of the school facilities, the city of Wuppertal, classroom lessons, and most importantly, studio life. I will use this video in presentations to the students at UC, and copies will be made for the Honors office and DAAP to be kept as a reference resource. Upon returning to UC, I will be making a formal oral presentation with a slideshow of photos and the documentary to explain my experience abroad. This presentation will be made in DAAP and for various Honors programs. By doing so, I will be advertising UC’s travel education and study abroad experiences to the student body and highlighting the exploration of a new design culture. Finally, I will assemble the trip photos and create a small tabletop booklet to be kept in the Honors office. This book will be professionally printed through blurb.com and will be an item that can be flipped through in the waiting room.

My reflection and dissemination to the UC community will technically end with completion of the Global Studies reflective essay prompt and posting to my iWebfolio after the project above is completed. The book, presentation materials, and videos will be compiled and shared digitally during my last semester of co-op from August through December of 2012. I will then perform the in-person portion of this dissemination when I return to UC in the spring semester of 2013.

5. Advisor
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UC International Office Travel Grant: -$800.00

Total: $8200.00