

Faculty-Led Maymester Abroad

Q&A Billy H Wood, Senior Lecturer, Engineering Design and Graphics in Dublin, Ireland



What is your area of expertise? What research or special projects are you currently working on?

I am both an engineer and an architect. My area of expertise is design. I am not a research faculty. My current areas of interest are water reclamation and rapid prototyping.

What are career achievements or recognition are you most proud of?

I was involved in weapons testing for the army and I was the range designer and project engineer for the first surface to air missiles.

I have been selected as outstanding mechanical engineer 10 times during my teaching career. I am proud of helping to start the study abroad programs in engineering at the University of Texas. After ten years of trying to convince faculty to initiate study abroad programs, I initiated my own program. I have been leading a custom program for over ten years and my student alumni have the highest percentage of repeat study abroad participation in the Cockrell School of Engineering.

What motivates you to lead this study abroad program? (feel free to also acknowledge the sacrifice made in professional and personal life)

Engineers are highly underrepresented in study abroad attendance and programs. The majority of companies that recruit at the University of Texas are multi-national or have international subsidiaries. I am doing all I can to expose as many student engineers to study abroad through my program as possible. I encourage large enrollments (34 in the 2019 Freiburg program) and schedule visits to as many engineering companies abroad as I can fit into the schedule. While being away from family for six weeks each summer is regrettable, it is important to me that I expand my program internationally. Additionally I have made lifelong friends at the various destinations I choose for my program. My students tell me that my program is a life changing experience and that keeps me motivated to continue.

What makes your study abroad program unique?

My program is unique in that the course that I offer is for incoming freshmen engineering students. There are few programs for students completing their first year. By targeting students in their first year

of university studies and providing for them a dynamic and intense experience, my students have time to plan for an additional semester abroad while completing their degrees.

What will students gain from participating in your study abroad program?

My students gain important international experience by participating in my program. A very high percentage of my students have never been abroad. My students gain language skills in German. They have the opportunity to network with international engineers and learn about international opportunities for when they graduate. Each group of students that travels abroad with me bonds together and schedule classes together when we return and become study buddies as well as lifelong friends. The students develop a camaraderie that does not happen when taking classes in residence. My students learn how to be responsible adults in a foreign culture. I see the students mature as adults and gain a new perspective on their studies. Traditionally I see my students excel academically. While it is true that engineering is not for everyone and the transfer rate to other majors can be high, that is not the case for students that study abroad. Most every student that comes abroad with me completes their engineering degree.

What does a typical day or week on campus look like for you?

As a fulltime adjunct faculty not involved in research I teach four courses a semester. I spend half my week in class teaching. I spend an additional six to ten hours a week in office hours. I run a rapid prototyping lab for reverse engineering projects. I feel faculty involvement in student outside of class is very important. I am the faculty advisor for several professional student organizations which requires me to meet with organization leaders, attend organization meetings, and be available to speak, judge an event or offer advice. I attend a variety of recruiting activities throughout the semester to present about my program and the benefits of studying abroad in any of our programs.

If you had a day off, how would you spend it?

What is a day off? I actually teach on a Monday thru Thursday schedule. Those days are full of classes, office hours and meetings. On Friday I have time to work in my office with limited interruptions. Friday is my day to be productive. However on the rare Friday that I do not have an appointment or a deadline and can refrain from coming to the office I work on my hobbies. I restore old Volvos, I make stained glass artwork, I paint and sketch and I read for enjoyment.