

Faculty Lead Study Abroad: Wood Engineering in Sweden

Abstract

Engineering is becoming more globally competitive; therefore, engineering firms competing in the global market must be able to overcome cultural barriers to provide the best solutions for their clients. Engineers must understand global competitiveness and be able to work within an international context to succeed. Currently, a very low percentage of engineering students at universities in the United States have any international experience. Structural engineering education should provide opportunities to expose students to engineering and construction practices in other countries along with the possibility to enhanced cultural sensitivity and to develop intercultural communication skills. At Kansas State University, the Faculty Lead Study Abroad program is one such way students are provided with an international experience. This program is an alternative to the traditional one semester or year long study abroad program. It is an intensive two to three week experience where a Kansas State University faculty teaches a course to KSU students at a foreign university rather than on the campus in Manhattan, Kansas. The course is usually enhanced through tours in the local area relevant to the course content and by guest lecturers from the host university or community.

The two week course *Timber Structures in Sweden*, has been taught as a Faculty Lead Study Abroad course in cooperation with the School of Technology and Design at Växjö University in 2006 and in 2007. Växjö University was selected because it is located in an area where the timber industry is very strong and because there is a current exchange agreement between the two universities. The School of Technology and Design also carries out extensive research and teaches courses in all aspects of wood and forest technology. The school also coordinates tours to nearby wood producers, manufacturers and construction projects. In addition, they also arrange for a number of local experts to give lectures on various aspects of the wood industry in Sweden. This is a great opportunity for the students from Kansas. Exposure to the wood industry is very limited since the university is not located near significant forests or wood producers. This paper details how this course was developed, outlines the content and shows how the cooperation between Kansas State University and Växjö University has provided for a successful international experience for the students, both academically and culturally.

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