



ADVENTIST COLLEGES ABROAD

A few years ago, I met in southern California with a large group of La Sierra and Loma Linda University students who had just returned from a year in the Adventist Colleges Abroad (ACA) program in France. After the meeting, we decided to have dinner in a restaurant. While waiting to be served, we had an animated conversation in fluent French.

As we shared our European experiences, the young waiter called out loudly, "Welcome to California. I take it you are all tourists visiting the area." He was surprised to learn that the students were all Americans and asked why we were all speaking French. The students told him of their fantastic adventure of spending a year in France, learning a foreign language, acquiring cross-cultural awareness, traveling around Europe and getting better prepared to thrive in a multicultural world. The young waiter, a student himself at the University of California, was so fascinated by our story that he decided to join the ACA program at Collonges, France.

Some months later, I was traveling with a colleague from one

A Well-Kept Secret in Adventist Education

of the European colleges to Walla Walla University (College Place, Washington) to promote the ACA programs. We were at the departure gate for a connecting flight when we heard an announcement: "Is there a passenger here from Adventist Colleges Abroad?" We were quite startled, as we could not imagine how anyone at the airport would know about us. Soon I was amazed to see a United Airlines employee displaying one of our large banners announcing "Adventist Colleges Abroad: Learning Without Borders." The banner had apparently fallen out of its display case during the previous flight, and they no longer knew to whom it belonged. I ran to the counter and reclaimed the banner, thanking the representative.

To my surprise, he started asking me about the program. Could students who are not Adventists join in? Could I give him some information for his daughter? We exchanged e-mails, and eventually his daughter did study in Spain, where she had a magnificent experience.

Opportunities for spreading good news can occur anywhere,

BY O D E T T E F E R R E I R A



Clockwise from top left: ACA students contemplate nature in Germany (Friedensau Adventist University). River Plate Adventist University ACA students on a historical tour in Argentina. The beautiful campus of the Adventist University of France in Collonges is one of the European ACA study sites.

anytime, even at an airport. The good news of salvation can be shared in many ways, and I believe that the ACA experience is a powerful spiritual tool, not only for those who don't know God, but also for the ones who already do and are seeking a closer walk with Him.

A Brief History

Adventist Colleges Abroad is a study-abroad consortium comprised of 14 Adventist colleges and universities in North America and 13 colleges and universities abroad. These 27 institutions work together to prepare students for foreign-language fluency and cross-cultural awareness.

In 1961, La Sierra University sent the first group of American students abroad for language study to Collonges, France. After that group of 90 returned with glowing reports about their experience, Pacific Union College (Angwin, California) sent a group to Spain. Other North American Adventist colleges and universities recognized that language programs abroad could greatly enhance the international aspect of their curricula, and soon several other institutions joined in the venture.

Eventually, the idea of a consortium emerged to ensure uniform requirements for all participating colleges. The first organizational meeting took place at Andrews University (Berrien

Springs, Michigan) in the summer of 1961 and resulted in the formal creation of Adventist Colleges Abroad.

The ACA's headquarters is located at the North American Division Office of Education in Silver Spring, Maryland. ACA programs are monitored and supervised by a director and ultimately by the ACA Board of Directors. Its chair is the NAD vice-president for education; and its members are the presidents, vice presidents, registrars, and modern-language department chairs of the Adventist colleges and universities in North America.

Having the full support of the church has greatly enhanced the consortium's chances for success. Because of ACA's link with the denomination, both parents and institutions feel safe in sending their students abroad. The link to church headquarters provides assurance that someone is monitoring the programs and caring for the students while they are in a land far from home—giving attention to their academic programs and achievements, to their well-being and cultural adaptation, as well as to their spirituality and other concerns.

The ACA Edge

As the Seventh-day Adventist Church faces inter-cultural demands on a global scale in achieving its mission, this produces a number of challenges. To help students become global citizens



Clockwise from top left: To learn Russian, ACA students enter through this gate at the Ukrainian Institute of Arts and Sciences.

Study tour of archaeological sites in Athens for ACA students enrolled at the Athens Study Center in Glyfada, Greece.

Happy ACA students in Thailand (Asia-Pacific International University).

of the 21st century, we must engage them in learning that prepares them to think and behave in more sensitive ways. International experiences will be crucial to the cognitive, affective, and behavioral development of graduates as they go forth into lives that will increasingly demand intercultural competence. ACA can and is helping the world church accomplish its global mission.*

Developing intercultural competence is a vital part of higher education today, but this does not come by accident. Walking the streets of Paris does not magically make one fluent in French or an expert in European literature and culture. A well-constructed academic curriculum is needed, and that's what ACA provides. Some programs abroad offer only three hours of class per week. Students in such programs may benefit from sightseeing in the host nation and make new friends, but they often return home knowing hardly a word of the language and ignorant of the country's culture and history. But ACA has an edge. Tourism is not its primary component; rather, it emphasizes learning in a different cultural milieu—by immersing students in an intensive program that demands 25 to 30 hours in class each week. In addition, the fact that the Adventist Church has a consortium of excellent col-

leges and universities abroad that are ready to go the second mile to make this experience a positive one in the lives of students creates an opportunity that cannot be underestimated.

Focused study abroad, in a program such as ACA provides, prepares young people for many job opportunities that demand multilingual skills. ACA also opens employment opportunities in international organizations, foreign service, and international enterprises. Many of those who complete the program choose to work for the global mission of the Adventist Church.

ACA participants and their parents offer glowing recommendations of the program. This is obvious from quarterly ACA evaluations. One student from Michigan wrote: "I have met God in Argentina. I will never forget my roommates' examples of faith. There is so much joy in their spiritual lives. It is contagious." Recently, two parents from southern California contacted the ACA office, expressing the same feelings about their children's experience on the first Sabbath at River Plate University in Argentina. A young person from Andrews University who was studying in Spain answered one of the questions about the spiritual environment on the campus of Sagunto College by saying: "I do not know enough Spanish yet to be able to evaluate the quality of the sermons preached on Sabbath, but I know that the spirit of God is here, as it is revealed by the great love and care that the Faculty

* Anne and Keith Chambers, *Developing Intercultural Competence and Transformation* (Sterling, Va.: Stylus Publishing, 2008), p. 128.



Clockwise from top left: Young people who enroll in ACA spend 25-30 hours a week in class, far more than in most study-abroad programs. The students shown here are at the Spanish Adventist Seminary in Sagunto, Spain. ACA students enrolled in Bogenhofen Seminary take a cultural tour of Austria. Brazil Adventist University ACA students visit a cave.

and Staff show us every day.” Another student from Southern Adventist University in Tennessee wrote from Villa Aurora, Italy: “The ACA program has opened my eyes to the world.” She went on to explain how this experience had helped her to embrace differences, respect others more, and better prepare for life.

The ACA Impact

Although ACA prepares students for a better understanding of the world in the 21st century and provides strong academic and cultural components, its core mission is spiritual development. Currently, many former ACA students are working for the church all over the world using their linguistic and cross-cultural skills. According to surveys conducted by Adventist Colleges Abroad, about 40 percent of ACA students decide to serve the church.

Since its beginning in the 1960s, about 20,000 college students and quite a number of academy students have studied abroad in ACA’s program. Many of our denominational leaders, university presidents, professors, secondary school teachers, pastors, and other church professionals are ACA alumni. They concur that the year abroad was one of the best of their lives, very often defining their future careers and decisions to serve the church. One student from Pacific Union College, returning from a year of study in France, said: “I know I am no longer the same person but I feel

that I am a much better one now.” A former La Sierra student credits her government position in Washington, D.C., to the fact that she studied at the Spanish Adventist Seminary and achieved fluency in Spanish. A successful lawyer in the D.C. area attributes a large portion of his success to the two years spent as an ACA student at Bogenhofen, Austria.

The ACA Programs

At present, ACA offers summer and/or academic-year programs in Spanish, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Japanese, Chinese, and even Greek and Hebrew (for religion students) at participating colleges in countries around the world—from Asia to Europe, and Central and South America. While ACA only accepts college students during the academic year, qualifying academy students can enroll in its six-week intensive summer programs.

ACA students can complete majors and minors in languages and art as well as combined majors in a variety of areas: business, political sciences, international studies, and others. All ACA credits are automatically recognized by Adventist American universities and a growing number of public universities. The ACA programs also prepare students for external state examinations leading to recognized diplomas. Such diplomas in



Above: One of the many benefits of ACA: the opportunity to study art in Florence, Italy.

Right: Majestic building at Newbold College in England, site of one of the newest ACA programs.



foreign languages equip ACA alumni to teach a foreign language when they return to their home countries. The ACA students from most of the programs regularly achieve a success rate of 90 percent on these demanding examinations. Take the case of the DALF (*Diplôme Approfondi de Langue Française*) offered by French universities, for which students prepare at Adventist University of France in Collonges-sous-Saleve: The linguistic and cultural level is so high, the certificate states that whoever has succeeded in those exams has acquired the proficiency of a national! The IFLE (French Language Institute at Collonges) is one of only 30 private institutions of higher learning in France that has received the renowned “labellisation” from the French government.

Furthermore, ACA European programs not only conform to the Common European Frame of Reference for languages (CEFE) set by the Council of Europe and by the Bologna Convention, but also fulfill the foreign-language requirements of all North American Division colleges and universities. ACA students can return home with a diploma in Business French (TEF, supervised by the Chamber of Industry and Business of Paris). The Spanish Adventist Seminary in Sagunto prepares students for diplomas certified by the University of Salamanca, one of the oldest institutions of higher learning in Europe. The

Spanish ACA program also has a partnership with Alcalá de Henares, one of the most prestigious universities in the world.

The ACA school at Villa Aurora, Italy, prepares students for the PLIDA (Italian language certificate examination) with the Dante Alighieri’s Institute of Florence. Students interested in art cannot find a better place to study, as Florence is a world-renowned art center. Students can now earn a minor in art at Villa Aurora, as well as minors and majors in Italian language and culture. Bogenhofen Seminary in Austria offers the ÖSD (Österreichisches Sprachdiplom Deutsch), a diploma that includes knowledge of the three varieties of German spoken in Austria, Switzerland, and Germany. Friedensau Adventist University in Germany offers preparation for examinations with the famed Goethe Institute.

ACA students obtain a total of 18 credits each quarter, for a total of 54 quarter hours per academic year, or nine quarter hours for the six-week intensive summer programs. In one academic year, a student going abroad who enrolls at the intermediate level will almost totally complete his or her major, with only the last three courses needing to be taken at the home campus. Minors can be completed during two quarters abroad.

An important feature of ACA programs is that most students can spend one year abroad and still graduate in four years. Such students are usually enrolled in the humanities, but ACA attracts

Summer Sites (six-week intensive study):

- Athens Study Center, Glyfada, Greece
- Bogenhofen Seminary, Bei Braunau am Inn, Austria
- Brazil Adventist University, Sao Paulo Campus, Sao Paulo, Brazil
- River Plate Adventist University, Libertador San Martin, Argentina
- Adventist University of France, Collonges-sous-Saleve, France
- Italian Adventist College, Villa Aurora, Florence, Italy
- Saniku Gakuin College, Chiba-Ken, Japan
- Spanish Adventist Seminary, Sagunto, Valencia, Spain
- Asia-Pacific International University, Saraburi, Thailand
- Ukrainian Institute of Arts and Sciences, Kiev Region, Ukraine

Academic Year Program Sites:

- River Plate Adventist University, Libertador San Martin, Argentina
- Friedensau Adventist University, Moeckern-Friedensau, Germany
- Bogenhofen Seminary, Bei Braunau am Inn, Austria
- Brazil Adventist University, Sao Paulo Campus, Sao Paulo, Brazil
- Adventist University of France, Collonges-sous-Saleve, France
- Italian Adventist College, Villa Aurora, Florence, Italy

- Spanish Adventist Seminary, Sagunto, Valencia, Spain
- Newbold College, Bracknell, Berkshire, England (a new program just added to ACA)

All ACA cultural tours are a part of the academic programs and are included in the tuition.

Entrance Requirements

Summer Courses

- No language pre-requirements; beginners accepted.
- Minimum GPA: 2.5. Four levels offered in most programs

Academic Year

- French and Spanish, one year of language learning required
- Minimum GPA: 2.5
- Good citizenship in the home college/university in the U.S.
- Placement tests are given upon arrival abroad to determine linguistic level.
- Students from non-Adventist institutions are also accepted.

students from other areas of studies as well: sciences, pre-med, business, law, religion, nursing, art, etc. Even if the majors are in a totally different area, ACA students can still return to their home campus with enough credits for a double major or a minor.

ACA also offers a wide choice of internships in a variety of locations: in art at museums and art galleries in Florence, working with refugees in Spain; preparing for diplomatic careers at the United Nations, involvement in public health with the World Health Organization, and engineering and scientific research with the European Organization for Nuclear Research, all in Geneva; business internships in Germany and Austria; health professional internships in Argentina; communication internships in Brazil, etc. Each ACA institution offers a number of opportunities and choices.

Financial aid applies to these programs. For a relatively low cost, students can spend a summer or a year abroad, with all credits counting toward their degrees in the United States.

Professors, physicians, and other professionals also enroll in the ACA programs, as many of them need to learn a foreign language for research. Ph.D. candidates join ACA programs because they need German or French for their degrees. Religion students join the programs in Greece for the joy of learning Greek abroad and for the privilege of reading the Book of Revelation on the Island of Patmos.

A Place in Adventist Higher Education

A strong mission emphasis is an integral component of the ACA programs. For ACA teachers and program planners, the students' spiritual well-being is as vital as their academic achievements. ACA is blessed with committed directors and faculty. Loving care is a vital part of each program. Every time we hear one student expressing his or her desire to serve God, to be baptized, to give the testimony of how his or her heart was changed through one of these programs, we can rejoice and say: "It's well worth it."

Studying abroad tends to bring students closer to God. The ex-

perience, however, does not occur without struggles and problems. For some, the battle with the language is difficult; for others, the culture shock is disorienting; and for many, being far from family and friends can be traumatic. But in the end, most students readily affirm that this was the best experience in their lives. In fact, study abroad provides a solid preparation for many aspects of life. Resilience, greater maturity, more patience, acceptance of what cannot be changed, increased self-confidence, and developing a positive attitude in the face of adversity are six of the most-often mentioned qualities developed while studying and living abroad.

Human beings naturally tend to resist changes, differences, and the unknown, and to be suspicious of what they do not understand. Contemporary society has a compelling need to develop a common basis for dialogue among nations and cultural groups. This will happen only if we can overcome the barriers separating us. There is an urgent need to learn how to live in harmony in this complicated world. The new generation can and must understand and implement this better than its elders.

The world started with one language, and it will end with one language. In the meantime, communication skills, including foreign-language and cross-cultural competence, need to be a part of any serious curriculum, both in K-12 and in higher education. ACA provides one such tool to help young people acquire cross-cultural, multilingual skills. As one ACA alumnus remarked: "If you cannot go ACA for a year, go for a quarter or a semester. If you cannot go for a quarter, go for a summer, but just go!"



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