

# THE BENEFITS OF STUDYING ABROAD

Mark Twain said, "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime." (The Innocents Abroad).

As I write this editorial, I am seated in my office in Florence, Italy. The spring session of Harding University in Florence (HUF) has just been completed, and about forty students are on their way back to the United States. This is perhaps the twentieth group with which my wife Frankie and I have worked overseas. Each time we are reminded of the large number of dedicated Christian young people we have in the church and of the Christ-centered homes from which they come. What a blessing to be associated with them!

A number of our church-related schools and an even larger number of both private and public institutions offer overseas programs. For example, there are more than forty American University campuses in Florence, Italy alone. Many schools have established study centers in multiple countries. For example, Harding students have the choice of studying in Australia, Chili, England, France, Greece, Italy, Switzerland, and Zambia. Eventually, many parents of college students are going to be asking whether or not a period of overseas study would be a good option for their children.

I am in agreement with Mark Twain that there are numerous advantages to be gained from travel (and of course study!) abroad. One has to do with the vast amount students learn about themselves. In a situation where they are forced to become family with a large group in a confined space, they find quickly that they cannot control their space and contacts as they have been used to doing. Instead, to survive, they must learn how to enter into a spirit of give and take, and how to do a lot of sharing and giving up of personal freedom. In the process they become less self-centered and more mindful of others.

Students also learn a lot more about this shrinking world we live in. They begin to see people of other nations as persons much like themselves. They warm to the many occasions they have to get into the languages and lives of individuals whose history and customs are different, but whose hearts are like ours.

They also receive an education which cannot be duplicated at the U.S. campus setting. This includes planning and finding their way to many foreign places, visiting historical sights, benefiting from museums, operas, concerts, and many other culturally enriching experiences.

Most of all, students have an opportunity to see the need of sharing Christ with intelligent, friendly, caring people who either do not know Him, or whose knowledge of Him is obscured by tradition and lack of access to the Bible. Also, since they worship with local Christians, they soon bond with them in the love of the Lord. A high percentage of our students go home committed to being more active in their faith as a result of what they have seen. Some eventually return to work in the foreign setting in which they have lived and studied.

I will conclude by saying that after having traveled and studied abroad with many hundreds of young people over a thirty-six year period, I have yet to hear one student say that it was not educationally and spiritually worthwhile!

**Carl Mitchell**