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Author: Jessie Schiewe, Staff Writer

Urban semester emphasizes teaching

The phrase "study abroad" is usually associated with sipping coffee in a Parisian café while discussing French philosophy or doing field research in the Serengeti. For a few students, however, it has meant living in a YMCA and teaching in New York City public schools.

The Urban Education Semester (UES) is an interdisciplinary academic immersion program that allows students to do fieldwork in New York City public schools as well as take graduate level classes on the subject of urban public education.

UES is open to undergraduates attending the schools that are in the Venture Consortium, which is comprised of nine schools, including Wesleyan.

It is a fully accredited Uni-versity study-abroad program, garnering each student three full credits for the fieldwork and classes, and a fourth credit if an elective course is taken. UES Program Coordinator for the University and Associate Director of the CRC Vicky Zwelling assured students that they can still study abroad before or after participating in the program.

According to the UES website, the program is designed for students interested in the field of teaching who want a more hands-on, real-life experience. The UES website states that the "semester-long immersion program of living and learning in the same setting as [participants'] students enables them to critically examine urban public education from the perspective of teachers and policymakers."

The program lasts a full semester and requires students to live in New York City. They attend classes at Bank Street College of Education and all are required to take two classes: Current Issues in Urban Education and Learning Practice and Theory.

"It's intense," said Mary Champion '07, an alumna of the program. "What makes it especially challenging is that you're in school three days a week during the night and then you teach during the day and then on Friday you usually take field trips."

Each student is assigned to a classroom in a New York City public school, where they observe and teach every day. Depending on the flexibility of the teacher, participants are allowed varying degrees of involvement.

"You really get to decide with the host teacher how great your role will be in the classroom," said Erin Moore '07. "The [participant's] role in the classroom changes a lot based on how you negotiate with the teacher and how much you learn throughout the semester. By the end of the program, I was given the chance to teach the whole class for a day."

Students generally complete a final project at the end of their semester in the city that pertains to the classroom and teacher they were assigned. Alumna Amy Ruiz '07 worked with a new teacher for her semester and her final project pertained to creating a teaching portfolio for the teacher to use in the future.

"I worked with a new teacher who taught an 11th-grade U.S. history class," said Ruiz. "My project was an ongoing assignment and I was basically collecting information, creating handouts, and taking notes on the class. After a while he let me create lesson plans."

During their stay in the city, the students reside at the 92nd Street YMCA, which has a kitchen, library, and gym. Students can live in either single or double rooms.

"It's sort of like living in a dorm," said Campion. "The distance is [ideal] because it is equidistant from all the places you need to go—to all the schools and to our classes."

One of the most powerful aspects of the program is what it teaches the participants about themselves.

"Because of this program, I realize that it is something that I want to pursue in the future. I'm now seriously considering being a teacher," said Satyawidya Wulansari '07.

Applications for the Fall 2007 program are due on March 26. For more information about the UES program, visit the CRC or go to <www.theventureconsortium.org/urban_ed>.