

# Students CLAM Up on Study Abroad



BY SARAH BROWN

## MOST STUDENTS WHO STUDY ABROAD SAY THE EXPERIENCE IS LIFE CHANGING, BUT WHEN ASKED WHY, THEIR ANSWERS OFTEN FALL SHORT OF SATISFYING. NOT JUST VERBALLY, BUT THEIR PHOTOS, VIDEOS AND BLOG POSTS SHOW EVIDENCE OF AN INABILITY TO EXPRESS, EXPLAIN AND MAKE SENSE OF THEIR TIME ABROAD.

In a move to bridge this gap between what study-abroad students learn and how well they communicate about it in a variety of media, the College of AAH launched a pilot program in winter 2008 called Cultural Literacies Across Media (CLAM).

Professor of English Tharon Howard had observed the disconnect for years and proposed CLAM as a way to teach students “how to observe and interpret other cultures, how to capture images and compose different forms of narrative and how to present themselves eloquently and responsibly in the public domain.” Helping study-abroad students see what they see, hear what they hear and understand what it means was the goal of the CLAM pilot.

Randy Nichols, a doctoral student in rhetorics, communication and information design (RCID), was recruited to help develop – and then teach – the new course. Students selected for the pilot program began with a “digital boot camp” in December 2008. In the weeklong intensive program, students learned both the theoretical and practical framework needed to develop this new perspective. They studied thick description, framing and view. Award-winning photographers and videographers from Clemson taught participants to use advanced cameras and audio recorders. Thanks to the state-of-the-art Multimedia Authoring Teaching and Research Facility (MATRF), students gained hands-on experience with storyboarding and digital and sound editing.

With their breadth of new knowledge, CLAM students headed out to their respective countries

in spring 2009. While traveling across the world, they recorded their experiences in multiple forums including blog posts, bulletin boards and e-mail correspondence. Nichols regularly checked in with the students to encourage continued progress in cultural understanding.

From financial advice in Scotland to graffiti statements covering the streets of Brussels, students researched traditions within their particular countries. They interviewed locals and recorded their observations. Their newly found voices are most evident in their reflections about what study abroad means on a personal level. As junior nursing major Helena Williams says of her return home, “I actually went through more culture shock coming home than I did going abroad. It was like rediscovering my life all over again.”

The CLAM pilot program is just the beginning of a larger goal for Clemson. The students’ work will be featured in databases hosted within the College of AAH. Work is also appearing as YouTube videos, Facebook pages, PowerPoint presentations, digital posters and beyond. By sharing their work in this manner, CLAM students can teach their peers through digital narrative and engage in discussions with others outside the University. In addition, skills learned in this pilot apply to almost any field of study and any career setting, giving CLAM potential well beyond the study-abroad experience.

Howard knows of no other program that is teaching students cultural perspective while also providing the new media tools and conceptual

framework to put this perspective into practice. “New media is not just a fad,” he says. “If Facebook was its own country, it would be the fourth largest country in the world.”

Nichols and Howard developed an online version of the program to provide these learning opportunities to more students this spring.

The work of students in the pilot version of CLAM is available through several digital avenues including the following:

- YouTube – via the ClemsonOIA channel ([www.youtube.com/user/ClemsonOIA](http://www.youtube.com/user/ClemsonOIA))
- The Blogosphere – via connections such as Clam Soup blog ([clammysoup.blogspot.com](http://clammysoup.blogspot.com))

Tharon Howard has been teaching at Clemson since 1992. He received his B.A. in English from the University of Missouri at Kansas City and his M.A. and Ph.D. degrees from Purdue University. Howard is the director of both the Usability Testing Facility and the MATRF at Clemson. He is conducting usability testing research for Pearson Education and Longman Publishers, and his book *Design to Thrive: Creating Sustainable Social Networks and Online Communities* was just released.

Randy Nichols is a Ph.D. student in RCID at Clemson where he teaches composition and communication. His dissertation focuses on cultural narratology in digital compositions. Nichols will be highlighting the CLAM program in his presentation “Innocents Abroad: Cultural Mediacies in the Study Abroad Experience” at the 2010 Conference on College Composition and Communication. He received his M.A. in English literature from Rutgers University.

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*“I spent six days traveling in Morocco during Semana Santa, and it was truly an eye-opening experience. It was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. While traveling, within a matter of minutes we would go from desert-type landscapes to lush forests. This is something that I definitely was not expecting. I met some of the most incredible people here. I also learned more about myself and others (such as the interactions between people) than I could have imagined.”*

**Meg Sparkman**  
Language and international trade  
Studied in Seville, Spain

# Refining Our Worldview



Constancio Nakuma, associate dean in the College of AAH and professor of French, hails from Ghana and understands all too well the study-abroad experience. Nakuma, an avid supporter of the CLAM program from the beginning, believes in its ability to provide students with a toolkit to express themselves. “CLAM is a way to teach students how to reflect on the permanent message etched into them while they study abroad, that they are part of a bigger picture,” Nakuma says. “CLAM was designed to help our students learn how to paint themselves into that bigger picture consciously and as true to self as they can.

“Studying abroad allows students to gain a clearer picture of themselves using the mirror that ‘otherness’ holds up to them,” he continues. Having lived and studied as an “outsider” in France, where he obtained his Ph.D. in linguistics at New Sorbonne University, and in Canada, where he obtained an MBA, Nakuma thinks that students typically form a perception of others through their own construed filters. With CLAM, they can gain a better framework, making them aware of their input and helping them approach any situation with an open mind. “CLAM helps students evolve from where they are in a conscious way,” he says. “Students learn to understand their filters. They realize that they are not the center of everything. They are approaching otherness from an informed point of view.”

By making study abroad a centerpiece of all its programs, Nakuma hopes to see the College of AAH reinvent liberal arts education to reflect its original ancient Greek focus on civic responsibility. “Becoming an informed world citizen has to be viewed as a critical piece of being an educated person,” he says.

Nakuma also thinks CLAM would make an excellent addition to Clemson’s freshman Orientation. “CLAM gives students the skills to ask the right questions about who they are in relation to others. When asking the right questions, they are able to look for the right answers, opening the door to infinite learning,” he concludes.



*“It has been a huge learning and growing experience for me. In most instances it affected me in ways that I can't really put into words. People said the study-abroad trip would change my life, but I had no idea it would be like this. This was the perfect time in my life to take this adventure.”*

**Zach Cerny**  
Marketing  
Studied in Newcastle, Australia





*"During the fight, six bulls were killed by three toreros. The whole process was not nearly as gruesome as I had thought it would be."*

**Meg Sparkman**  
Language and international trade  
Studied in Seville, Spain



*"The Aussie friends I lived with and the others that I made friends with will be friends for life. They are some of the most considerate and kind people I've ever met. In small ways, I am definitely trying to implement their outlook on life into my life. I can only hope that I impacted their lives to the same extent."*

**Zach Cerny**  
Marketing  
Studied in Newcastle, Australia



*Pictured here are students who participated in the pilot CLAM program. Seated left to right are Laura Davis, Helena Williams and Melissa Whitman. Standing on the back row are Meg Sparkman, Jennifer Olney, Keith McGregor and Zach Cerny.*



*"Wow! This might have been the best weekend of my life. We stopped by Loch Ness and ran away from the monster. I did not realize what an amazing time I'd had until the prospect of leaving became a reality. Every day here has been adventurous because everything is different, and therefore, life over the last four and a half months has rarely been boring."*

**Keith McGregor**  
Finance  
Studied in Glasgow, Scotland