Study abroad semester at Curtin University 2013

Prior to my arrival at Curtin University in Perth Western Australia I attempted to gain a scholarship with the Bayer Foundation. I was fortunate to have an interview but was not successful. After this I applied for the PROMOS Programme proposed by the DAAD at University of Duisburg-Essen at the Faculty of Education and was supported. I believe that this support was because as a future school teacher in the field of science, I wished to go abroad. I made contact with my pending supervisor at Curtin University in Perth Australia Professor David Treagust, while he was on a research visit at the University of Duisburg-Essen with Professor Hans Fischer, so that I could plan my visit. I also thank the support of the foreign exchange office at University of Duisburg-Essen who helped me with the paperwork. Unfortunately no advice could be given on Visa requirements which were at first stage quite a challenge. It would have made a lot easier for me. In the end a 3-month visit was the best option for me.

During my three months’ time at Curtin University I engaged in the following activities in the Science and Mathematics Education Centre (SMEC) where I participated (but was not formally enrolled) in the following classes:

1. SMEC 612 Curricula – designing curricula in science
2. SMEC UNIT 622 Classroom Climate – evaluating the learning environment of science classrooms
3. SMEC Unit 627 Research Methods – different approaches to designing studies and conducting research
4. Doctoral Colloquia – a seminar and lectures series about SMEC students and their studies

To broaden my skills, I also participated in a Curtin Business School class

5. Communication Skills in Business CBS 4 classes – group discussion about reading business articles

While looking on my experiences I can say that it is a lot better from the monetary perspective to study in Germany as enrolment fees are very expensive (for Australian teachers a masters degree by coursework and project costs almost $16000). Living costs are quite high in Perth compared to Germany. Sadly the University doesn’t have a central Canteen (Mensa) and food on campus is quite expensive. Due to this, I brought my own food every day and usually joined others at the SMEC who also brought their own lunch. So this was the normal lunch routine. The people who I have met on Campus are all very polite and interested to learn what I was doing at Curtin.

The courses I have attended give me a new perspective compared to what I have experienced at my home University and let me think more ‘out of the box’ and I believe that will greatly contribute to my studies in Germany. I wrote an assignment in English for the first time on “The influence of teachers attitudes and behavior on prospective engineering students’ classroom learning environment”. This assignment will help me to proceed with my studies when I return to the UDE. The 3-month stay at Curtin gave me the opportunity to work with well-regarded scientists in the field of science education research and to get to know education research first hand.

In the classes I attended I got to know several students from a range of foreign countries. It is astonishing how quickly a cooperative and supportive environment was created and also how group dis-
discussion in the classes developed so easily. As a visiting researcher I met every day for lunch with SMEC staff. Also socialising between the students and the faculty took place on a regular basis, usually at the end of class sessions, when some one was departing after finishing his or her studies or a new student joined the research group.

Looking at the distance I had to travel every day I needed about one hour to get to the University Campus. Accommodation was organized privately. I can recommend that future students who go to Perth should consider the high living costs. Three months are a short time and this time is needed to develop a socialising basis. Now I have to leave but really I would like to have stayed longer. During my stay I had the opportunity to take a week off to see something of Australia’s beautiful country and seaside.

I can only encourage other fellow students to take the step to experience a study stay abroad.