Comp Sci Students Gain Academic, Cultural Experience at "Summer University"

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Where do you go to meet people from abroad, experience cutting edge technology in your field, and earn course credits?

"Summer University," an innovative program hosted this year by California State University, Long Beach for computer science students from colleges in Switzerland, India and the United States, including SJSU.

The Swiss Board of Higher Education of the Canton of Vaud created the program as a way to help students cultivate cultural exchanges and establish international professional connections for future collaborations, said Jon Pearce, chair of SJSU's Department of Computer Science.

"Traditionally, engineering and science students don't get to participate in an international program because they have such a heavy unit load," Pearce said. "This opportunity combined international exposure with the computer science curriculum."

Computer science students from India, Switzerland, SJSU and CSU Long Beach take a break from summer studies to see the sites including Universal Studios (photo by Rafael Alvarez-Horine).

Students earned units from classes on topics including programming, multiprocessor processing, and artificial intelligence. Swiss and U.S. professors taught the courses, including SJSU professors Soon Tee Teoh (computer graphics applications) and Cay Hortsmann (Scala, a modern multi-paradigm programming language designed to express common programming patterns in a concise, elegant, and type-safe way).

Summer University has also been held in Switzerland, Mexico, Singapore and India, and has focused on all kinds of disciplines including business, enology (study of wine), health care and education. In addition to classes, the program offers company visits, guest speakers from industry, and cultural activities.

Computer science grad Ralph Alvarez-Horine was one of three SJSU students who participated this year and blogged about his experiences while at CSULB.

On Academics

"Overall the academics have been harder than I anticipated so I am spending less time at the beach and more time studying. One highlight is that we are learning how to program using a computer language currently being developed by a Cal State Long Beach professor (according to him, we are the first class who has ever used his language). It's been challenging, but it is cool to think that we are the first!"

On Cultural Activities

"We went to watch a baseball game where the Angels beat the Mariners (for the Swiss it was their first time at a baseball game). We had a tour of the [NASA] Jet Propulsion Lab in Pasadena where we not only got a tour of the facilities (including Mission Control), but also attended a lecture given by one of the Mars [Exploration] Rover drivers on the use of computer-aided visualization. We visited the USC Computer Science Department and got a presentation by one of their graduate students specializing in Game Development. We looked into Artificial Intelligence at Comic-Con in San Diego and also got a tour of Dreamworks Animation in Glendale, which included a presentation on the process of creating an animated movie."

On Cultural Exchange

"The Swiss students have been very fun to be around and it has been neat to see the U.S. through their eyes. Every Swiss student I spoke to has enjoyed visiting the U.S .and has expressed the desire to keep exploring and meeting people (Some are actually planning on staying in the U.S. after the program to continue traveling). They have been very impressed with the 'openness' of Americans in general, as many Swiss tend to be very reserved."