Most students consider summer break a chance to sit back and relax. But during the past summer, ten students in the Department of Landscape Architecture and Environmental Planning at Utah State University returned exhausted yet satisfied as they spent over a week bicycling around Germany, learning about German culture, visiting universities there and analyzing public spaces.

An international travel experience is a requirement for students wishing to graduate with a LAEP degree from USU. The department believes students should experience projects and innovation from around the world. This year, Barty Warren-Kretzschmar led the trip and selected Germany as the destination. As someone who worked in Germany as a landscape architect for many years, Warren-Kretzschmar was able to give the students an in-depth trip to really explore German culture.

In an effort to give the USU students a glimpse of the German education system, the Aggies met and worked with landscape architecture students from three German universities. Together, the students worked on landscape projects, presented new ideas and techniques, and forged future professional networks.

“It’s about more than landscape architecture,” Warren-Kretzschmar said about these collaborations. “It’s about getting out of your bubble and experiencing everything in a new light.”

The students saw first-hand how cities in Germany strive for sustainability. One way they accomplish this goal is by emphasizing accessible transportation. Every street is bike friendly and trains connect the entire country, making even rural areas reachable. There is a large focus on convenient public transportation and alternative forms of transportation—an ideal that the USA is slowly embracing.

This was especially important to Jenna McRory, a trip participant and recent graduate of the LAEP program. While in school, McRory worked on transportation projects and was curious to see how the techniques used in Germany could be used in America.

“It was nice to see a high-functioning public transportation system,” McRory said. “It was interesting to experience what transportation should be.”

The group was able to spend a day exploring German historic landmarks. They visited the Berlin Wall, the Sachsenhausen concentration camp memorial and the glass Reichstag dome on top of the German parliament building. Warren-Kretzschmar cited the day as her favorite from the trip and said that Germany is an example of moving in the right direction, changing from a war-torn country to “the conscience of Europe” and a great model for sustainable efforts.

Though the learning and networking opportunities were certainly valuable to the students, Warren-Kretzschmar said the impact of the trip was much deeper than that.

“Travel changes them. It changes the way they think and it becomes a source of inspiration for developing their own ideas,” she said. “The more we travel and see other cultures, the more we reflect on our own society. And I believe that is a very good thing.”

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