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HUNGARY | FALL 2006 STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM EVALUATION

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MAJOR1: Mathematics
MAJOR2: Physics
ABROAD: Fall 2006

PROGRAM: Budapest Semesters in Mathematics

COURSES: Program

COMBO_EXPLAINED:

COURSE_EVAL:
Set Theory: This class had a manageable workload with between 2 and 4 problems every week (along with a couple of challenge homework problems). The problems for this class were so interesting that other students often became jealous. We had roughly a dozen students in the class. Grading was generally fair; some credit was always given for partial solutions. We had two exams: one midterm and a final. Both were fairly difficult, though in each you only needed to solve 5 out of 7 problems to earn an A. At each of our two weekly meetings, the professor would lecture for 70 minutes; then we would have a ten minute break, followed by an office hour. On two occasions we had to make up missed classes due to unforeseen circumstances, and so we would have four hours of set theory in a single day, which was rough.
Number Theory A:
Homework consisted of a few problems each week that were usually pretty easy; they were only assigned to check a basic understanding of the material. In fact, the homework did not really contribute to our final grades. We had about 20 students in this class, of varying backgrounds and abilities. The grading in this class was for the most part very fair. Your final grade depended largely on the grades you got on the two midterms and the final exam. Even if you screw up on one of the midterms, you still have the chance to make up for it on the final.
We met twice a week for two hours: one day was devoted to straight lecture, and the other was a special "problem solving session," during which we would work together in pairs or groups to solve as many problems as we could in the allotted time. The idea was not necessarily to solve every single one on the first try, but rather, by the end of the session (during which solutions were given), to be understand and be able to solve each one.
Combinatorics 1A: We had 8 problems assigned each week, each of which would take from a few seconds to a few hours to solve. On average it probably took most students several hours total to complete each homework assignment. You did not need to get an 8 on every homework to earn

an A, but partial credit was not usually given unless you almost the whole problem correct. Also, out of 13 homework assignments, the lowest three grades were dropped.
We had roughly a dozen students in the class. One midterm and one final exam. They were very manageable if you were a student who kept up with the homework. Even if you did not get every problem on your first try, if you understood it once it was explained, then you could do well on the tests. (In fact, many of the test questions were simply old homework problems.)
Graph Theory: We had five problems assigned for homework every week; and while a couple of them may have been pretty easy to solve if you gave them some thought, in general most were very difficult! We were encouraged to work together on these problems; our professor even agreed that it might be best for us to see the solution from a friend if we had tried and tried without making any progress at all. As long as we made and effort and understood the solutions in the end, our teacher was happy. There were 7 students in this class.
Grading was based on homework and the three open-book, open-note exams (with your final grade depending heavily on the final).
We had two midterms: the first was in-class and pretty manageable to complete in the allotted time, especially if were staying on top of the homework. A few students got perfect scores, so our professor judged that it was not too difficult. The second one was much more difficult! It was a take-home, for which we had about a week. Though a few students scored very highly, it was pretty beastly, considering the time commitment (>10 hrs in some cases). The cumulative) final exam was in class and we had about two hours. It was on the easier side, maybe around the same level of difficulty as the first midterm.

CLASS_COMP: We were all students attending universities or colleges in the US or Canada. Most were Americans themselves, though a couple were from elsewhere (e.g. China, Indonesia, India).

TEACHING_EVAL:
Quality: For the most part the professors at BSM are top notch!
Teaching methods: Lectures were twice a week, with an office hour immediately following one of the class sessions. In some classes, we would have in-class problem sessions, too.
Attitudes: Generally our teachers were very encouraging; you could tell they wanted us to understand the material and do well.
Accessibility: Most of the teachers were very accessible, even outside of the designated office hours. Even the very few who were strict about when they could meet for extra help took their time and were patient in explaining.

ACADEMIC_PREP: It is best if you have had both linear algebra and either intro to analysis or abstract algebra. Having all three obviously could not hurt. The latter two are offered at BSM if you cannot take 28 or 26 at Amherst. As a precaution, though, it might be fair to say the vast majority of BSM classes are more difficult then the classes at Amherst.

HOUSING_MEALS: I was living with a Hungarian host family in Buda. Everything was great, except for the commute to school. I was given my own room, workspace, computer (with internet connection); my laundry was even done for me every week. On the other hand, it took a FULL HOUR to travel, by public transit, from home to school door-to-door every morning, and just as long to return in the evening. Most students choose to live in apartments, which are generally much closer to the city center.

HOUSE_HELP: The BSM office arranged this home-stay for me.

LIVING_COSTS: ~ $1800

MEDICAL: I really don't know... No serious accidents happened

PROG_SERVICES:

LEARN_HOST_COUNTRY: Try to learn Hungarian! More importantly, make conversation with people on the tram and metro. Above all, if possible try some extra curricular activity in the city. I, for instance, fenced at a club in downtown Pest

DISCRIMINATION: No.

TRAVEL: Many students took time almost every weekend to travel, and it is really easy considering our location in Europe. Only a couple of small tours of the city were planned by the program, and I think they were only for students who participated in the language program.

RECOMMENDATION: Yes, I would recommend the program to other Amherst students, especially if you are really interested in math. It is certainly a great opportunity to learn about another culture. You probably will not have a terribly good time, though, if you do not make the effort. You also will have the chance to see the beautiful sights in Europe, given the accessibility and cheap prices of railways and airlines.

SUMMARY:
Attending BSM certainly broadened my outlook on mathematics as a discipline. Since there are SO many classes offered, with so many great teachers, it is enlightening to realize how much more there was to math than you might have thought, having just taken a couple of courses at Amherst. I am more excited about math now than I was before studying in Hungary. My experience taught me that while it is still a possibility, math grad school is probably not for me. Becoming a math teacher is still something I might want to do, but I personally am leaning toward physics. Having done only a little traveling myself before living in Hungary for four months, I believe my desire to travel and meet new people in other countries has only been enhanced.