

My first visit to Amsterdam was in 2005. I took a side trip from visiting partner schools to explore the possibility of leading a study abroad program there. The idea of this destination came from a colleague of mine who teaches the sociology course when we are there.

Having finished high school and college in the 70s, my expectations were for Amsterdam to be a dirty city full of hippies and stoners, people shooting heroin on the street corners, and a complete atmosphere of debauchery. I was hesitant to lead twenty college students to a place known for such decadence. Many of my colleagues questioned my sanity for even considering such an endeavor. I had a preconceived notion that after visiting I would put aside the notion of taking students there and return to leading programs to some destinations with which I had become comfortable.

What I found was far from what I anticipated. I discovered an extremely clean city full of history and culture. It provides an atmosphere to study many market structures and the role that public policy plays in the markets. It offers the opportunity to witness the importance of transportation to the development of a city and the location of economic activity. We get to visit the world's largest commercial building and actually see the world price for flowers being set. The program allows students to witness the role that international trade and exchange rates have on their daily lives.

Although it would seem that the people of the Netherlands are extremely liberal, they are actually a tolerant society that adopts a live-and-let-live attitude – do what you wish as long as it does not affect me. For the most part they believe individuals should take responsibility for their own actions and it is not society's role to determine what one should or should not do. One major exception of note is that the Dutch appear to be no more tolerant than the US when dealing with the use of hard drugs. Although they do not have as strict a prohibition on soft drugs as we have (with the exceptions of Colorado, Washington, Oregon, Alaska, and DC—where the purchase of marijuana for recreational use is now legal or in the process of being legalized), research shows the incidence of drug use and alcohol abuse is significantly less than that found in the US. The World Health Organization reports that the rate of cannabis use in the US is double that of the Netherlands. Cocaine use is reported at 2.2 percent in the US and 1.2 percent in the Netherlands. The rate for amphetamines is more than 4 times higher in the US.

Given its role as the trading capital of the world in the seventeenth century, the city continues to be a cosmopolitan city that attracts individuals from many countries. This provides a rich blend of cultures and cuisines for the students to encounter. We visit some ethnic neighborhood markets and see how individual cultures coexist in the country. The American culture is represented by McDonald's, Burger King, and KFC, so students will be able to get a taste of home if they really want it.

We intersperse the classroom experience with outings to understand the history of the region as well. We visit the Ann Frank House and actually see the ladder behind the bookcase and climb to the rooms that she and her family occupied. The Dutch Resistance Museum explores how some Dutch stood up to the invasion. The Van Gogh museum offers a remarkable collection of impressionist and post-impressionist paintings, including approximately 200 of the artist's own works. The Rijksmuseum houses a collection of Rembrandt paintings and those by other Dutch Masters. We see windmills and people who actually wear wooden shoes.

The housing we use is in dormitory-like apartments that are affiliated with the University of Amsterdam. There is a resident assistant on duty at all times. It is a secure building that requires keys for entry and

different keys for the individual apartments. There is a grocery in the building and a laundry room for the students to use at no charge. There is a medical doctor in the building next door and a hospital four blocks away. We have made use of the doctor and the hospital only once. It turned out to be a strained ankle. There is public transportation (subway, trams, and busses) right outside the apartments. It is a fifteen minute walk to the city center. The Zoo is within three blocks, and a public park is located across the street from the hospital.

Over the period of 2006-20013, my colleague and I have directed this program four times. It has always been rewarding to see the individual students grow through the experience.