

NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier University



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WLU geography students travel to Portugal and Dominican Republic

Waterloo, Ont. (Aug. 23) — Mike Volk wishes he could be in two places at once: Portugal and the Dominican Republic. He's one of 54 geography students at Wilfrid Laurier University leaving in just days for a two-week field study in one of the two countries.

Beginning Aug. 28, 26 students will travel through three regions of Portugal to study land use, agriculture, human impact on the environment, and transportation. On Sept. 3, another 28 students will arrive in the Dominican Republic to study tourism development and natural resources.

For 15 years, the elective field studies course has been a highlight of the final year of the undergraduate geography program and has taken students to countries as diverse as **Costa Rica**, Barbados, Venezuela, Scotland, the Netherlands, Germany, Greece, and Spain. For the first time, the large size of the fourth-year class has allowed it to travel as two groups to two destinations.

The students themselves vote to recommend three countries to the department chair who determines the destinations based on cost and other factors.

Professor Ian McKay, who is overseeing the trip to Portugal, says the goal of the credit course is to integrate what the students have learned in other courses. "It's an opportunity to learn about conducting field research in a different culture and different physical environment."

(More)

"These field study trips make an invaluable contribution to the students' general education," says Scott Slocombe, who is escorting the trip to the Dominican Republic. "Learning about a very different country benefits them both academically and personally."

Volk's enthusiasm could only be higher if he could go to both countries. He was attracted by the diversity of Portugal's regions but opted for the trip to the Dominican Republic because one of its emphases is tourism development.

"I think it will be a really worthwhile experience," says the 23-year-old. His project group will interview government officials and others to collect information on factors influencing tourism development such as government support programs and the work force.

Student Shawn Hodges, who will concentrate on the landscape and its effect on land use, decided to go to Portugal to learn more about the roots of the Portuguese population in his hometown of Cambridge.

Arriving in Porto, the students will travel to Coimbra, Evora, Faro, and Lisbon with field work primarily in the Dao and Mondego valleys, and the Evora and Algarve regions. They will stay in university residences.

In the Dominican Republic, the group will visit Puerto Plata and some of the island's natural areas.

To complete the course, the students have done assigned readings in advance of their departure and, upon return, will write a major paper of 15 to 30 pages and present their findings as a seminar.