

# BATTEN BULLETIN

BATTEN HONORS COLLEGE NEWSLETTER

FALL 2019



## BHC Summer Highlights

Summer study away trips captivate Batten Honors College students in life-changing experiences. Read all about it here.

## Internship Experience

Read all about Kayleen's internship with Natural Resource Conservation Service here.



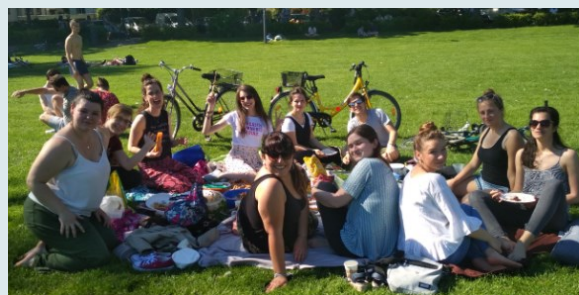
## WAC Highlights

Find out about Wesleyan Activities Council and the fun events they play from a current BHC student here.



## Service Opportunities

Click here to learn about the service opportunities at and around VWU from the perspective of a BHC student.



## Study Abroad

Danielle Gagnon shares her study abroad experience after spending a year in Germany. Read more here.

# BHC STUDENTS FAR AND WIDE

BY: SOPHIE GONZALEZ

Members of the Batten Honors College were able to embark on various trips around the world this past summer, including Peru, Alaska, and Germany. Each member of the honors college is required to take the Honors 200: Connections & Context course, allowing them to gain an immersive study away experience.

While in Peru, students were able to investigate and experience two long-interrelated areas of Peru. An off the grid excursion into the Amazon jungle, a mecca for biodiversity on our planet, allowed students to gain a deeper relationship

with their natural surroundings. Students also traveled high into the Andes to the heartland of the Incan empire, including a visit to Machu Picchu. They spent considerable time with indigenous peoples. Caroline Tryfiates '22 recalls visiting San Jorge, a community on the banks of the Amazon River, to be an important part of the trip. "While San Jorge has everything it needs for electricity, the community was never actually given access to power due to an abandoned government project. Supporting themselves through tourism and trade, residents staff and supply the nearby Pacaya Samiria Jungle Lodge, making it an important part of their economy." They also try to teach tourists about their culture via traditional dances, music, and weaving lessons. Being on the banks of the Amazon River, San Jorge connects to nearby communities which is a helpful component for economic sustainability.



The Alaska course centered on environmental and cultural sustainability. The travel to Haines, Alaska, allowed students to develop a deeper connection to the natural world while defining sustainability in a number of ways. Students learned about climate change while hiking the trail of a retreating glacier, studied the importance of salmon while rafting the Chilkat



River, identified flora and fauna during a hike in the largest temperate rainforest in the world, and discussed ancient and contemporary concepts and practices of sustainability with native Tlingit people. The transformative experience also connected students to local experts who served as guest speakers on topics of geology, ecology, fisheries, and indigenous Tlingit culture. The dramatic landscape of Southeast Alaska illustrated the interconnectedness between the major forces that have shaped our planet and how its inhabitants live their lives. For Ryan Westpfahl '22, it was "a reminder of what learning should feel like—dramatic!"

In Germany, students were able to focus on the political historical development of Berlin, which provided the background for different excursions in the city. The course, *Germany in a Changing World*, related historical developments in 20th-century Germany to global and international developments. Hailey Schumacher '22 was able to immerse in German culture while on the Berlin trip. She recalls that "one of the most fascinating experiences was meeting Peter Keup, a man who actually survived Stasi prison. He spoke to us about his life-changing experience and what it was truly like to live during the period of divided Berlin." On top of that, students were able to stay in a welcoming neighborhood. "The group did a graffiti tour in which we were able to experience and understand the culture behind street art," Schumacher says.



# WESLEYAN ACTIVITIES COUNCIL FUN

BY: KATHERINE RAMSEY

Afraid of being bored on campus? No worries! Wesleyan Activities Council, or more commonly known as WAC, and the Student Activities Office have you covered! The student staff members of WAC, as well as the staff in the Student Activities Office, work hard so that there is rarely a week where there's nothing to do on campus. WAC holds famous VWU traditions, such as Mud Games, Christmas Tree Lighting, Late Night Breakfast, Grocery Bingo,



and Airband, as well as many other events ranging from live music, karaoke, and comedians to make-and-take items, giveaways, and off-campus events. WAC has you covered with events you're sure to love!



Running off of a college kid's budget? No problem! All WAC events are fully-funded so everything is free, giving you one less thing to worry about for a fun time! In the Student Activities Office, students also have access to information and staff members ready to help them into clubs, organizations, and Greek life. VWU's Student Activities Office is jam packed with all you could ever want for a great time while you're at VWU!

## SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES IN BHC

BY: CASSIDY BRAITHWAITE

Last school year, I was given quite a few opportunities to donate my time to helping something greater than myself. Personally, I've always been quietly involved in community service, so it hasn't at all been a stretch for me to fulfill my community service requirements here.

My experiences with community service in the Honors College have ranged from assisting the direct community to helping the world at large. As our first service project, I went to the local Red Cross building with some other members of the Honors College. The Red Cross as an organization is about a lot more than just donating blood - they provide hurricane relief efforts, CPR and other emergency training, and even help first responders at local house fires. There was a lot of work for us to do!

Our first task was the heavy lifting part. We sorted out items and filled entire trailers with emergency relief equipment, such as boxes of mugs, blankets, cots, and chairs. Our trailer had minor issues with counting, but was the most well organized (not that it was a competition)! We then sorted items in the building, and took lots of recyclables to the bins outside. As we



worked, we had our fair share of joking around, but we also recognized that we were doing a valuable service to our direct community. It would have taken days for the volunteers who regularly work at the building to do what we had accomplished in just a few hours.

My other main community service experience this year was *Dress A Girl Around The World*. Dress A Girl sends thousands of simple shift dresses to places where girls may not have the opportunity to get new dresses. The Batten Honors College, Wesleyan Engaged and VWU Women's Resource Center partnered to bring multiple sewing machines and bolts upon bolts of fabric to Boyd. We sat there and cut fabric, pinned, ironed, and sewed for hours. We ended up finishing 14 dresses that day and started another 37 dresses, which were later finished before being sent to Honduras.

Dress a Girl was especially meaningful to me, because it was a service experience that allowed me to use one of my hobbies: sewing. I've always appreciated having the opportunity to put my hobbies and talents to good use, and though I came in with prior experience on a machine, I was able to learn some new tricks as well. I'm definitely going to inquire about having this event again this year!



# A YEAR ABROAD IN A NUTSHELL

BY: DANIELLE GAGNON

This past year I had the amazing opportunity to study abroad for two semesters in the wonderful country of Germany. It was a unique experience, as not many students have the chance to embark on one - let alone two-semester abroad, and I am extremely grateful to have been selected for it. As a double major in German Studies and Biology, this opportunity



broadened my horizons, furthered my career path, and allowed me to positively contribute to my college career at Virginia Wesleyan. For my first semester, I was at a language institute in Düsseldorf called "Goethe Institut." It is a world renowned language school with many locations worldwide that is known for teaching the highest standards of German. I took four one-month long intensive language courses that gave me assessments along the way in order for me to track my progress. When I first arrived, I thought my German was relatively good, but I quickly realized that I still had a lot to learn. As the four months progressed, I made new friends in each class and got to explore a lot of Düsseldorf and the so called "Ruhrpott" region that lies next to it. I learned to be self-sufficient and independent in a country that calls for it, and am proud of myself and the work that I accomplished. I had to learn how to maneuver a big city without the car that I would typically have, and it instilled in me a sense of self-sufficiency that I had never felt, not even back in America when I went away for school.

My favorite experience during my semester in Dusseldorf had to be the

entire month of December. From the last week of November until Christmas, Germany (and a large chunk of the rest of Europe) hold what are called Christmas markets, or a "Weihnachtsmarkt." Almost every town in Germany has their own Weihnachtsmarkt, but the more popular ones take place in larger cities. Düsseldorf has a very big and well known market. There are these little booths set up down all the streets selling Christmas cookies, ornaments, Bratwurst, candies, Glühwein, and all other things Christmas. There are even Christmas fun houses and rides for children. Exploring a Christmas market is like being in a maze. You wander around every corner and crevice of it, not knowing where you started or where you've been. That's the predicament though: you don't want to miss a single thing. I actually went to the Christmas market in Düsseldorf three times in order to see all of it, and visited a smaller one in the neighboring city of Bochum.

My second semester, I relocated to southern Germany in the state of Baden-Württemberg and attended the Pädagogische Hochschule Heidelberg (Heidelberg University of Education) in, you guessed it, the gorgeous city of Heidelberg. This semester was more along the lines of a typical German college experience: I was at a German university, living in a student apartment, studying with German students, and taking classes taught in German. I was lucky to have my first semester as a sort of preparatory phase for when I would be taking more intense courses that didn't only have to do with German. For example, I took two biology courses (Botany and Zoology) completely in German. It was an amazing experience, especially since the courses were geared towards German, and other European, plants and animals. I got to learn not only how to identify certain wildlife, but also which wildlife are specific to Germany and the state of Baden-Württemberg itself.



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A lot more went on this semester than just learning. I had an amazing time studying in German and I am very proud to be able to keep pace with native speakers, but the semester was not made up of only academics; it consisted of experiences and life-altering changes in perspective. To start, I had the opportunity to play volleyball with the students at the university. I made a lot of friends playing, and also learned some really fun volleyball vocabulary that I could only have picked up on the court. I also got the chance to visit so many festivals and try so many different types of food thanks to the wonderful international nature of Heidelberg and the amazing trips that my school planned for its international students.



As for my shifts in perspective, I learned to be more eco-friendly in Germany. Heidelberg is a very green city, with over 260 kilometers of bike paths. The citizens are very adamant about using them, and over 26% of all travel in Heidelberg is done by bike. I

decided to look into the typical university student option and buy a bike, and it changed my life. I was free to travel whenever I wanted and take whatever path I so desired, but I was doing good for the environment and myself while doing it. It was my time to just be in my own head, enjoy the scenery, and take a breath. I am also much more passionate about taking care of the planet that we live on now. Plastic bags are not used there, so I purchased reusable bags—and was even given one by the town hall when I moved there. After realizing how easy it was to cut one simple environmentally unfriendly thing out of my life, I was inspired to try to live my life more like the German way: clean. I recycle, I don't use plastic bags, I walk where I can (although it's very hard in Virginia Beach), and most importantly: I try to spread the word to others here in America.

Even though I changed my habits for the better, the best part of my entire year abroad was by far the friends I made, specifically in Heidelberg. I made friends in Dusseldorf too, but as the classes were each a month long, people were constantly rotating through for only a short time. My friends in Heidelberg were more long term; some of them were German and some were international students like me. We shared a multitude of classes, played sports together, and spent our free time together. We really were our own little family, and we all loved it that way. I was so heartbroken when I had to leave them. I felt like I was leaving a part of me with them. Even though I miss them, I am still so glad to have had the opportunity to meet them in the first place. Luckily, we all still keep in contact, and I know we will for the rest of our lives, because that is what an experience abroad gives you: lifelong connections that span an entire world.

# AGRICULTURE INTERNSHIP

BY: KAYLEEN MEINEN

Over the summer, I had the opportunity to work as a Soil Science Student Trainee with the Natural Resource Conservation Service branch of the United States Department of Agriculture. After taking Introduction to Soils in the Spring 2019 semester, I developed a strong interest in learning more about Soil Science and was excited to apply what I learned in a professional setting. I worked with Soil Scientists Allison Leopard and Greg Hammer to delineate wetlands for land-owners throughout Coastal Virginia. I learned to do this through two ways: in the office using GIS mapping and in the field using tools like augers, probes, and shovels.

Doing offsite delineations was nice on rainy or stormy days, but when the sun was out and there was work to be done, we were out in the field. Field days consisted of meeting at the office early, loading the truck up with equipment and plenty of ice water, and driving



anywhere from 30 minutes to two hours to get to our site for the day. When making onsite wetland determinations, we examined the area for three key wetland indicators: hydrology, vegetation, and hydric soils. Using premade maps showing imagery, elevation, and soil type, we ventured into the property

searching for indicators. At some sites, getting around was a quick and simple stroll across cut trees and flat land. In others, it was a battle with rolling slopes, thick mud, and/or tall, dense vegetation with sharp briars and thorns that would easily cut through pants that weren't thick enough (a lesson I quickly learned).

Once the specific spot in the site is reached, the process of examining for wetland indicators begins. To examine for hydric soil indicators, we typically used an auger to dig out soil and lay it in a profile. We then used Munsell Color Books to determine the soil color and used our hands and the occasional flow chart to determine texture. In addition to color and texture, we also tested for the presence of reduced iron. To examine the vegetation, we used common knowledge and field guides to identify the specific type of plant as well as its wetland indicator status. After noting vegetations from the different strata (trees, saplings, shrubs, grasses, vines, etc.), we calculated the percentage of vegetation that points towards the area being wetland. To examine hydrology, we looked for indicators like algal mats, standing water, high water table, or debris that had been washed in. Each of these factors gave us clues to figuring out if the area was a wetland or not.



Being able to participate in this internship program has truly been a life-changing experience and has shown me a career path that is both fulfilling and fun. Working with the NRCS impacts local communities by connecting with farmers, and it impacts the environment by protecting soil health. I was able to meet and interact with countless people, from fellow NRCS employees to the farmers who worked the land. Every day was a new adventure with new ways to learn, and I can't wait to return!