

Report on the EU Study Tour 2006
by Anna Bretzlaff

I would like to express sincere and heartfelt thanks to the Centre for European Studies for providing me with the opportunity to travel to Europe and participate in the 2006 European Union Study Tour. The experience was life-changing and has greatly enriched and enhanced my academic experience at EURUS.

Truthfully, I had no idea what to expect when I first embarked upon this adventure. Even though I was well-briefed and provided with a detailed and extensive itinerary prior to departure, there was no way to predict what an incredible impact participating in the study tour would have on me.

I had already spent over six years studying European history and politics but I had yet to cross the Atlantic. Therefore, just landing on European soil to begin the tour was incredibly exciting for me. Being in Brussels, the pulse of the EU, one cannot help but be struck by the sheer size and complexity of its institutions and policymaking process.

During the three-week tour, our group of over 40 participants attended more than 90 presentations in Belgium, France, Germany and Luxembourg made by representatives from many different EU institutions, think tanks and NGOs. The speakers covered literally every policy area and issue relevant to the EU and its development: social cohesion, economic development, collective defence, expansion, integration, and gender mainstreaming. The presentations were incredibly informative and gave me an enhanced understanding of how decisions are made and how policies are formulated at the EU level.

In addition to the briefings and seminars, traveling and spending time with students from European Studies programs from across Canada was a valuable aspect of the tour experience. Exchanging ideas and sharing perspectives with participants as part of the daily debriefing was enjoyable and educational, helping us all to solidify and make sense of the vast amount of information we were absorbing.

Overall, the experience was life-altering and has provided me with a comprehensive understanding of EU development and policymaking. While my studies at the graduate level have provided me with extensive knowledge base, the perspective I obtained by seeing how the EU works first-hand was invaluable and obtainable only by *being there*. As part of the study tour's internship program, I remained in Brussels following the tour for an additional month, working with the Canadian Delegation to the European Union. The study tour and internship provided the practical experience needed to balance out my acquired theoretical knowledge. I now have not only a superior and well-rounded understanding of how the EU really works, but also a new-found appreciation for this truly unique experiment in multi-level governance, both of which have proved invaluable to the development of my master's research paper.