Tech's new study abroad program in Valencia offers Biology, History, Technology and Society courses. Twelve sophomores, juniors and seniors are currently studying overseas as part of the program's inaugural year.

Valencia, Spain's third most populated city, is the capital of the autonomous community and province of Valencia. It is located in the Spanish Levante, on the Mediterranean shore. Students enrolled in the program are out of the country from May 22 to July 8, each receiving six to nine credit hours. Terry Snell, a Tech professor of biology, is the program organizer and supervisor of undergraduate research. Snell has had a research collaboration with several scientists at the Institute of parasitology for more than fifteen years.

His personal connections and knowledge of the facilities and regional ecosystems formed the launching pad for this program. Snell also teaches Biology 4803, Mediterranean ecology for the program. Students have opted to do undergraduate research, and twelve are taking Mediterranean ecology and HTS 3041 Modern Spain, taught by John Tone, a History, Technology and Society professor.

"Mediterranean ecology is primarily a field course with several field trips to mountains, rocky coast, marshes and rivers where students are expected to collect and analyze data, and then complete a presentation poster of their findings by the end of the semester."

The Modern Spain course also includes several field trips, such as visits to cathedrals, museums, castles, Roman ruins and sites with Neolithic cave drawings.

Sophie Patten of the year Biology major, said she had originally looked into the Oxford program, but decided it was not the best fit for her major. "My advisor told me about this program, and everything clicked," she said.

Because Valencia is not a true tourist city, according to Fisher, students must really immerse themselves into the Spanish culture. In her free time she has spent a four-day weekend in Seville where she visited the Real Alcazar (the royal palace in Seville), viewed the cathedral, and attended Mass.

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Foreign student enrollment in American universities has started to drop recently, however, as part of a nationwide trend, while surging in Europe and Asia where tuition costs are heavily state-subsidized. This trend is making the U.S. higher education system just as vulnerable to the demands of globalization as its counterparts in industry.

Friedman quotes a New York Times education report written in 2004 that stated a drop in foreign student enrollment in American graduate schools “for the first time in three decades,” but does not expand his treatment to discuss the potential vulnerability of these schools themselves in any detail.

What could the U.S. higher education system offer, apart from the promise of higher wages, to entice foreign students? Based on his knowledge of global education systems, Gary Schuster, dean of the

“[Inquisitiveness] may become the foundation for demanding wages that are four or five times higher than those in China or India.”

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Dean, College of Sciences

College of Sciences, believes it’s work in a liberal academic environment that other countries’ education systems tend to suppress. “I’ve traveled extensively in China and India and one of the things that the U.S. higher education system currently offers which China and India do not, is a competition of ideas (instead of) a competition of status. That makes students in the U.S. inquisitive and willing to challenge all of the answers . . . (which) may become the foundation for demanding wages that are four or five times higher than those in China and India.

The liberal social environment that surrounds exchanges between students and professors, despite hierarchical differences, is what Shyam Sesodia, a fourth-year Electrical Engineering student, believes could be worth the price in American education.

Having studied in Bombay and Atlanta, Shyam recounted his amazement when he compared the average exchange between a professor and a student in India with one typical of the Tech campus.

“I compared an e-mail I wrote recently to my professor here. His message, even if it was regarding a trivial request, would start out with ‘Dear Sir/Madam’ and end with ‘Sincerely’ and would be apprehensive and formal throughout. I don’t feel inhibited by hierarchy and formality anymore in talking with professors,” he said.

He also said that it contributed to an open exchange of ideas in his academics.

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Fisher explained that much time is spent simply wandering about the city. “Valencia has that park that used to be a river until they diverted it, and it’s gorgeous and fairly clean, so sometimes I walk up and down it,” she said.

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in its infancy, Snell had significant expectations. “My hope is that the students will gain maturity as biological scientists by observing new ecosystems, experimenting with new plant and animal groups, and observing how scientists in another country execute research. I further hope that these students will develop an appreciation for the historical events that have led Spain to its current position in Europe and the world as well as the delights of Spanish food, monuments, music, dance, landscape, beaches, and people,” she said.

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