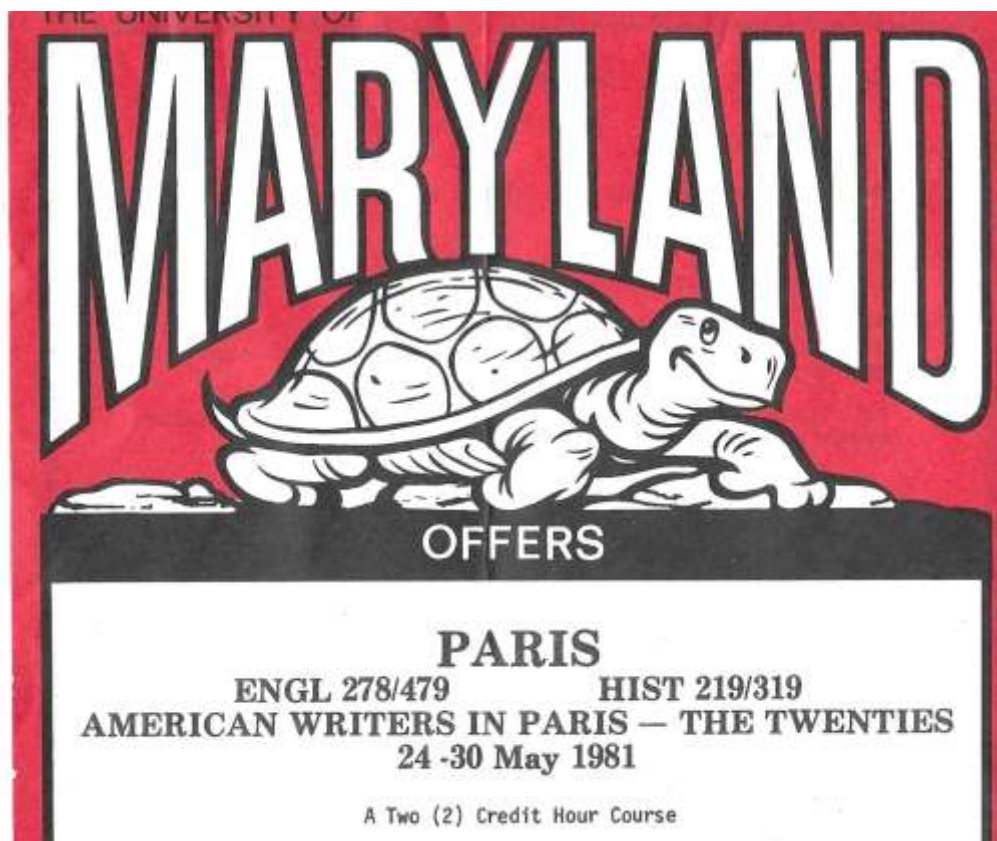


The Memoirs Project: Field Study Courses

Pauline Fry
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Among the little I have saved from my years of teaching for University of Maryland's European Division are a sheaf of pamphlets advertising courses:



These flyers represented and advertised a unique program the European Division initiated. I think the first was a Shakespeare class in Stratford Upon Avon, England taught by Claire Baker in the late 1970's. She also taught "The History of London." Her classes inspired me and a colleague, Sebia Hawkins.

In the fall of 1980, we were both teaching at a Navy Base in Naples, Italy; she was teaching a class in modern history and I modern literature. In all our conversations, topics and themes overlapped. Once after a lecture, Sebia quoted William Shirer: "civilization seemed to have reached a shining peak here in Paris" in the 1920's, and I laughed. I had just introduced students to Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, mostly set in Paris in the 1920's. "So, said Sebia, in her wonderful southern accent, "why are we teaching all this material here in Naples?"

Almost three months later we submitted a "Special Topics Course Proposal" to our Area Director, Wally Knoche and the Academic Coordinator for English, Robert Speckhard. This included course title, credit hours, upper or lower levels of study, instructors' qualifications, suggested texts, a thorough bibliography, the structure of the proposed course, and the work expected of students.

As I look back, even with Speckhard's voice still ringing in my ears ("This is not a study tour, but a class!"), I realize what incredible freedom we had. As the pictured flyer shows, the university agreed to 2 credit hours; the course was approved for one week of study, and we were expected to deal with all the logistics-transportation, housing, and classroom.

Just off the Champs-Elysees, 49 rue Pierre Charron, Pershing Hall was built by the Count of Paris at the end of the 18th century to house his mistress. What a townhouse! Gilded doors, huge mirrors, 18th c. parquet floors. No wonder in 1917, General John Pershing, arriving in France to take charge of the Allied troops during WWI, made this townhouse his headquarters. The US government then bought the building as an American Legion memorial to WWI and a French-American alliance. It housed a USO (United Service Organization) as well. Through the American Legion, we rented classroom space for a nominal fee; the USO helped students find places to stay. (In 2001, the same year all faculty were given ranks by UMUC, Andrée Putman turned Pershing hall into a five star hotel, two startling upgrades.)

The idea of a "field study" class was that students would complete a reading list at least a week before the course, which was held in a major city. We sent out pre-tests to guide students' reading. A field study was always scheduled between Maryland terms, usually during a two-week break. Class would be divided into lectures and walks in the city to relevant historical and literary places.

The reality, Sebia and I found out that first year of teaching a field study, was that students often signed up late, books didn't arrive on time, and some of the hotels were a complicated metro ride from the classroom, so students were often late (there were no portable phones or google maps in those days). None had done much reading ahead, so we begin with the pre-test, had to give more background than expected, and scheduled longer hours to cover all the material!

We had been reminded that "contact hours" were extremely important. In a standard geared to the military 8-week class for 3 credits, we met students twice a week for 3 hours, thus 48 hours total. In a one-week field study, meeting 48 hours meant meeting students for 7 hours a day for 7 days. Our first class was approved for 2 credits, but by the end of the week students were bleary. We'd met 8 hours for six days, ending

with a morning exam on the seventh, since students had to travel back to bases all over Europe.

Sebia left Europe. I continued to teach field study courses with another colleague Toni Sepeda, and then on my own. They got a bit easier, though logistics were always a nightmare. We learned that students needed to all stay in the same hotel, that we had to be sure they got books before the course, read before the course, and we developed information packets which covered everything else they needed to know about the city they were studying in.

Our "Expatriate Writers" expanded from Paris to Rome, Venice, and southern France, always focusing on the city, our "field study," which inspired the authors whose works we were reading.

Other faculty developed amazing and varied field study classes: "Van Gogh in Amsterdam" Jean Mandola, "Renaissance Art in Florence" and "Baroque Art in Rome" Linda O'Brien; "Dublin: A Brief Literary History" and "Scotland: Literature, History, and Culture," Alison Goeller and Tom Tulloss; "The History & Culture of Naples," Barbara Nucci; "Greek Drama in Athens," Karen Olsen and Chris Mooney; "Voices From the Front: World War I and Cultural History" Pauline Fry and Catherine Healey; "Berlin: Its History and Its Art," Bruce Hull. (I have not named them all! There were courses in Berlin, Egypt, and as I recall, in Russia. Forgive my imperfect memory.)

I became a Field Study Peer with Maryland, meaning I coordinated field study courses, helped faculty develop new courses, and oversaw the yearly schedule.

Students were changed by field studies. They left military bases and learned cities. They read and applied what they read as they walked through historical and literary landscapes. They learned how 'to look' in museums, and how to describe their experiences. They lived in foreign cultures. The Field Study Program was unique. The university supplied the flyers, yet it was the field study faculty which developed and maintained the programs. I thank them all!

Overlapping with being Field Study Peer, I also served as a Faculty Representative for the Mediterranean (Italy, Spain, Greece, and Turkey) in the late 1980's through 2008. Ron Schlundt and Bruce Hall have covered the Faculty Advisory Committee we all served. We had a fairly open atmosphere in Heidelberg when I would fly in for meetings from Rome, usually in the fall and spring, to meet with the Director. Ron usually led the questions. Bob Hollweg who lived in Heidelberg often filled me in on developments I hadn't yet known of, teaching in southern Italy. Discussion were lively and we were listened to; things did change. Pay raises, expense vouchers, gas coupons, insurance, syllabi, new courses: we spoke for the faculty we represented.

A lot has changed since those early days. As the military downsized, so did UMUC's program. In 2007, area directors in Heidelberg were let go, without much warning. By 2014, many professors, including me, were told their jobs were over. We were given a lump sum upon departure.

My only regret, as I look back, is that the loyalty to an institution I served for 39 years is gone. The early years were family years. We worked together. That's worth remembering.

- Pauline Fry August 1, 2020