Virtual International Project Team

The College of Engineering at the University of Iowa (UI) is partnering with the Universite Aix-Marseille (UAM) in Marseille, France to develop an international project experience for undergraduate Mechanical and Industrial Engineering students called Virtual International Project Teams (VIPT). The VIPT program involves substantial interaction between the students on collaborative projects that last for two semesters. Regular communication on the Internet, combined with travel to the partner institution, provides a realistic, intense level of partnership on a common project. The goals of the VIPT program are: 1) Provide undergraduate engineering students with a team-based project experience, 2) Gain an understanding and appreciation of engineering standards, common engineering practices, and cultures in other countries, 3) Develop personal skills necessary to work on a team with students from another country on a common project, and 4) Understand and master the difficulties of communicating clearly and concisely through electronic media. 5) Fulfill the senior design project requirement for MEs and IES.

The program involves interdisciplinary, inter-institutional teams each consisting of engineering students from the UI and from the UAM. The global teams are provided with a common project that i) requires a collaborative effort to complete, ii) can be completed in two semesters of work, and iii) draws on the student and faculty expertise and unique facilities of UAM and the UI. Each institution provides faculty advising and the laboratory and computer facilities necessary to complete the assigned projects.

Throughout the academic year the teams make substantial use of the Internet and other electronic means to communicate, transfer technical documents and drawings and conduct videoconferences. In addition to the technical requirements participants will also learn about the culture, economy and educational systems of their international partners. UI students travel to UAM in May after graduation to participate in a one-week exchange component to interact with their UAM counterparts, learn of UAM research activities and tour global companies. The UAM students will travel to Iowa during the school year to participate in a one-week exchange component with their UI team members. A faculty member at each institution will closely monitor all programs to assure the students meet the stated goals.

For the trip to UAM UI students are housed in a hotel in Marseille. Travel expenses for the UI student participants are paid using alumni and corporate gifts to the College of Engineering. Expenses covered by the College of Engineering include the following: round-trip transportation to and from France. Expenses covered by the students include: hotel (double occupancy costs about 60 euros per night), passport, meals and other miscellaneous travel expenses. All students are required to purchase health insurance through the UI while studying abroad. The cost is about $1.15 per day.