New York Study Away
Is Sarah Fryer’s “Baby”

WRAC Professor Danielle Nicole DeVoss at upper right of the group looking at books, led the latest NYC Study Away program that included this visit and tour of Manhattan’s Whitney Museum of American Art.
As Sarah Fryer, then Director of Student Affairs and Advising in the College of Arts and Letters, was preparing to retire in 2012, she took a short break to talk about her “baby,” the College of Arts and Letters New York Study Away program.

Fryer, who holds a B.A., M.A. and Ph.D. in English from MSU, was wrapping up 26½ years of full-time employment with the University after teaching ATL (now WRAC) in James Madison College, and working in MSU Career Services, before ultimately landing in the College of Arts & Letters Undergraduate Academic Affairs offices. Along the way, Fryer earned an Excellence in Teaching Award.

Sarah was there at the beginning of CAL’s New York City Study Away Program, and was pleased to explain when and how the program got its start.

DEAN EXPRESSES INTEREST

“In 2008, Dean Wurst told me she was interested in creating Study Away opportunities within the College,” Sarah says. “Dean Wurst asked where I thought we should go, and I said New York City, noting that it is one of the greatest cities in the world, one that

is widely viewed as a key center of arts and culture. To me, New York was perfect for this new program.

“Students could explore and respond to the myriad cultural experiences that New York has to offer, including diverse cultural performances, landmarks, museums, and excursions. The program could focus on the study of music, art, film, and television, creative writing, theatre, and dance. Conventional classroom study could be augmented with a wide variety of field trips, instructional tours, live performances, and other active-learning experiences. In their free time, students could explore on their own.

“Dean Wurst said we should go for it.” Fryer says her first step was to conduct research. Sarah was fairly familiar with New York City, having grown up on Long Island. She had spent time in NYC, and her daughter lives there, too. Fryer began brainstorming with others in the College on what to include in the program, where participants would study and live, and what faculty would be needed.

“Actually, it was kind of serendipitous,” Sarah says. “I was walking back from an event with Rob Roznowski (Department of Theatre’s director of acting and directing), and he said he used to live there. So, then, I had someone with whom to brainstorm.”

“WHERE TO LIVE” WAS MAJOR ISSUE

Sarah says they began looking at what was needed, and realized one big problem issue would be housing. Browsing the Web, Fryer found International House, and arranged a visit in 2008, while visiting her daughter for Thanksgiving. She found out that while they normally house grad students in the summer, they could accommodate some undergraduates.

“The South Wing had individual rooms for studios,” Sarah says, “while the North Wing had small apartments for visiting faculty. Everyone thought that was perfect because the students and the faculty wouldn’t be tripping over one another. We put down a refundable advance deposit including a meal plan and technology fee.”

Fryer adds that the subway and bus systems were both close to International House, meaning that a low-cost Metro card would allow students and faculty to travel throughout the entire city.

DEVELOPING COURSEWORK

Coursework also needed to be addressed, so Sarah consulted with the MSU Registrar’s Office on off-campus study groups. Basing the program on study abroad programs, they determined that students could handle a maximum of eight credit hours from both an education and affordability standpoint.

“ATL 491 was born out of these meetings,” says Fryer. “It was billed as a common experience covering the history and culture of New York City including how it became a cultural center; as well as U.S. immigration and Ellis Island, and profiles on various NYC neighborhoods.”

Fryer says CAL faculty were primary in setting up the course. They wanted
a team approach with faculty and guest speakers for year one. This included Theatre 290—Study Away in Theatre—with on- and off-Broadway, little theatres, dance classes, and Integrated Arts and Humanities (IAH) work. Kirk Domer adapted his creativity class to fit the New York City Study Away program. Two credits were credited for common experience plus independent study in Theatre for 2009 with Kirk Domer and Rob Roznowski; Art History with Phyllis Floyd in 2010; and Writing, Rhetoric and American Cultures in 2011 when Professor Danielle DeVoss led the program.

“Students have one common course,” Sarah says, “with speakers and various site visits, and are told to come prepared to conduct on-site research. Theresa Walker handled the courses and scheduling, and Rob Roznowski and I worked on places, venues and the like as we each had travel experiences in New York, maps, travel books, and ideas.”

There is a classroom component, several times a week, which helps provide a hands-on approach. There are also numerous supplemental activities with experts, guest speakers, and tour guides.

**CREATING LASTING CONNECTIONS**

She adds that all three years of the program have included opportunities for alumni to come and speak, as well as job shadowing so students could interview people about their jobs. That has created lasting connections for mentoring and jobs. Students have always gone to the Metropolitan Museum and Central Park, as well.

“Most of the venues are absolutely delighted with our students,” Fryer says, “and many go above and beyond to provide meaningful experiences. In surveys, they say they like the sincerity, genuineness and interest of our students.”

As with Study Abroad, participating students cover their own expenses, extra food, souvenirs and similar items. Because the program is for credit, they can use financial aid, and Fryer says they do.

Sarah says that the program has always been a multi-disciplinary or inter-disciplinary program; truly part of the College’s Engaging Our World philosophy. Many students see New York City as a destination site in their careers, and some reported in their first year out of MSU and working in New York that they were even giving other people directions because they felt so comfortable in the city.

As for Fryer’s own opinion of the Arts and Letters New York City Study Away Program to date, it’s obvious that she is pleased.

“I’ve been delighted with the program,” Sarah says. “It’s exhausting for the faculty and students, but most everyone involved has said it’s been highly rewarding and valuable. And that’s precisely what we set out to do when this all began.”