



OPINIONS

Study abroad list blocks students' options

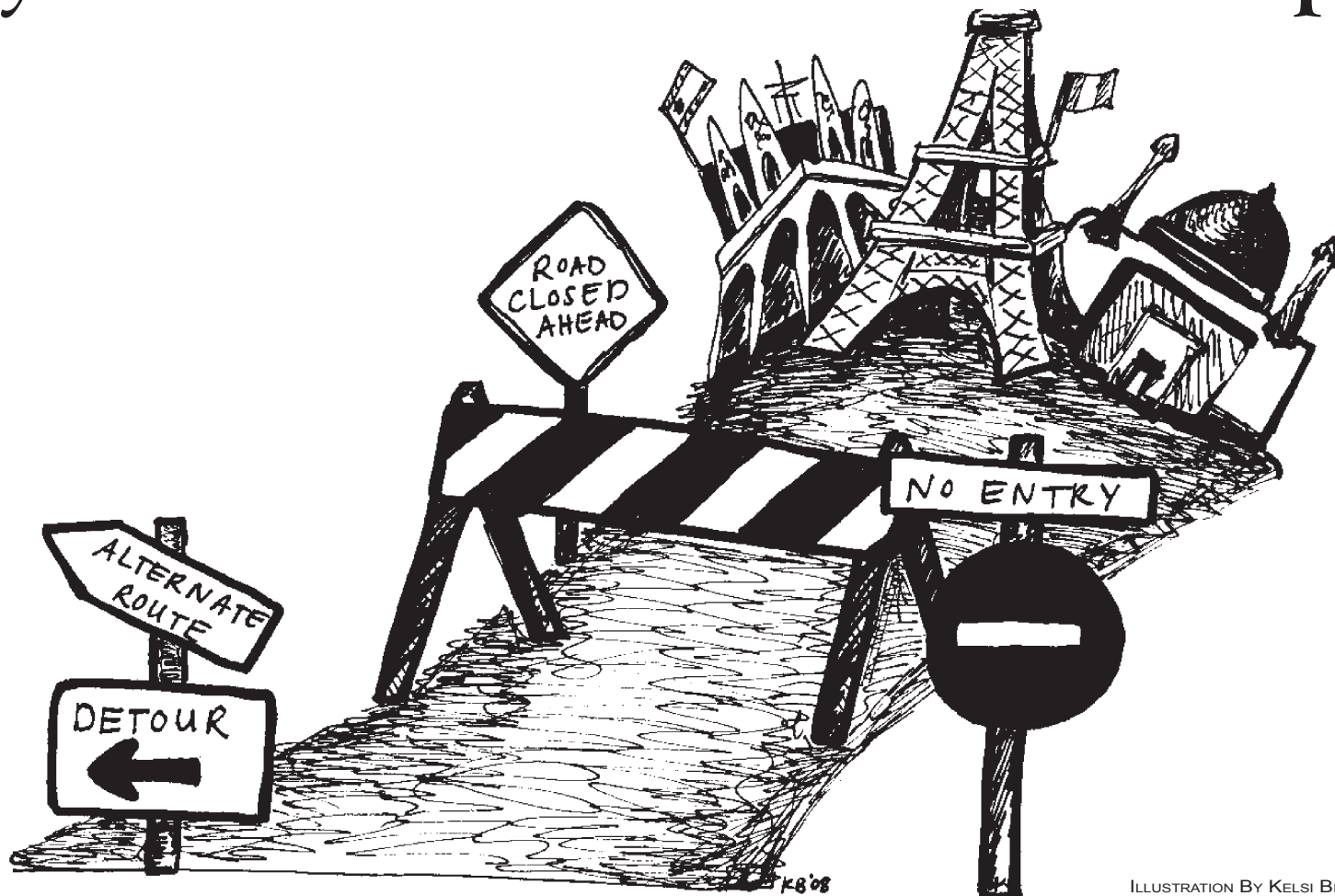


ILLUSTRATION BY KELSI BITGOOD

Studying abroad at Drew University just got a lot more complicated. The list of approved non-Drew study-abroad programs has been significantly downsized, from over 250 programs in 60 countries to 37 programs in 30 countries. A small liberal arts school like Drew facing huge financial issues cannot realistically support a list of schools numbering in the hundreds, so this move is understandable.

But what's alarming is the decision by the Faculty Advisory Committee for International and Off-Campus Programs to eliminate the petition process. This process allowed students to petition to attend study-abroad programs that were not on the approved list. For a school that strives to respect its students' individuality and intellectual freedom, it is alarming to find our options roadblocked.

Now students must choose from a list determined by FACIOP. Want to go to Paris next semester? It's not on the list. Have you researched alternative Paris programs and compared costs and offerings? These options won't be considered.

This radical change is upsetting to the student body, especially to freshmen and sophomores who were under the impression that many study-abroad options awaited them for their junior or senior year abroad. It is also a recruitment killer for prospective students who may want that one program not included in the 37.

The Drew International Seminars are still intact and, thankfully, have not been touched. And it is comforting to know that the Drew London and Brussel programs are not only continuing, but expanding to include more students. In an interview with *The Acorn*, Director of International and Off-Campus Programs Eric Krauss said, "We had a preference to avoid 'island programs,' where you only go with a group of Americans and hang out with them." He went on to use DISes as a defense to the cut programs. DISes are an important part of Drew culture and a wonderful experience, but groups of 20 students living in a country for only three weeks constitute the kind of "island programs" that Krauss described in the interview. This rationale doesn't work.

DISes cannot compare to the kind of experiences that a semester abroad would bring.

Drew should at least leave the option for students to petition on a case-by-case basis. It cannot be expected that all study-abroad programs will be approved. But stifling students' ability to choose where to study abroad—an experience President Bob Weisbuch cited as one of "the highlights of [a student's] college experience" in October 2007—is diametrically opposed to Drew's spirit of choice and unfettered learning opportunities.

Krauss said that the size of the new list is closer to the average for schools of our size. Do we strive to move closer to average? Or does Drew stand for excellence?



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THE ACORN
DATES OF PUBLICATION 2008-2009

FALL	SPRING
AUG. 29	JAN. 30
SEPT. 5, 12, 19, 26	FEB. 6, 13, 20, 27
OCT. 3, 17, 24, 31	MAR. 20, 27
NOV. 7, 14, 21	APR. 3, 17, 24
DEC. 5	MAY. 1

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