U.S. Students Observe FM Overseas

BY DR. SAREL LAVY
There is an increasing number of facility management academic programs in colleges and universities across the world. Typically, the setting is such that students get to enroll in these classes every semester, based on the number of seats that a university or a department offers. Classes are either online or on-campus.

During 2019’s summer semester, undergraduate students from the College of Architecture at Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas, USA, had a unique experience offered by the university—they were allowed to enroll in a couple of FM classes while spending time abroad. This was part of the college’s requirement for each undergraduate student majoring in University Studies in Architecture. For the first time ever, Texas A&M University offered students an FM option for fulfilling the study-abroad requirement.

The university worked with Liverpool John Moores University’s Dr. Mike Riley, director of the School of Built Environment, and Dr. Matthew Tucker, Reader in Workplace and Facilities Management, for almost a year to develop the program for the two FM-related summer classes. Sixteen Texas A&M University undergraduate students spent five weeks studying FM in the United Kingdom.

The summer classes consisted of traditional face-to-face classroom teaching and site visits/facility tours. Classroom material was composed of typical FM basics such as terminology, history and growth, sectors and industries, project life cycle, maintenance management, project responsibilities and more.

Tucker lectured on topics including an overview of the U.K. built environment, the link between design and FM, FM procurement and contracts, productive workplace, building sustainability, and health and safety in FM. The highlight of this study-abroad program was facility tours and site visits led by FMs and owners from across the U.K.

The Hut Group is a British e-commerce company operating more than 100 international websites selling fast-moving consumer goods through its proprietary platform. Their facility is in Warrington, east of Liverpool. During the tour, officials from The Hut Group described its sales models, the efficiency of their automated shipping process, the security requirements of such a facility, energy saving initiatives and the process of managing numerous facilities worldwide.

Students also toured the Chester Zoo, near Liverpool. The zoo is among the largest in the U.K., spanning 125 acres, with more than 10,000 animals of 500 different species. Here, the FM spoke about having reactive rather than proactive maintenance strategies, and how the FM department worked closely with the zoo’s board to overcome a recent devastating fire.

Students later toured MediaCityUK in Salford, just outside of Manchester. MediaCity is a complex of several multi-purpose buildings, with a tenant portfolio that includes the BBC, ITV, Kellogg’s, Ericsson, the University of Salford and other companies. The complex offers a shopping center, restaurants and residential apartments, all within a short walking distance from each other. MediaCityUK’s estate manager and head of technical services discussed challenging aspects of their job, such as scheduling and conducting maintenance in the broadcasting studio rooms around and in-between TV and radio show times, dealing with fanatical fans when celebrities come on site, building sanitation and the importance of maintaining a constant humidity level to provide high sound quality.

Later, students toured the Royal Liver Building and the headquarters of Everton Football Club, both in Liverpool. The Royal Liver Building, which is one of the city’s most recognizable landmarks, opened in 1911, and has a pair of clock towers. The clock faces are 7.6m (25ft) in diameter and are the U.K.’s largest electronic clocks. The building is one of the first in the world built using reinforced concrete. Students heard a presentation from the Everton Football Club facilities and project manager, who shared some of the challenges in the planning, design and construction of a new stadium for the club, to be built in a historic city docks area. Facility personnel discussed how lessons learned from the maintenance and operations of the current stadium are implemented in the design of the new facility.

The next site visit included a trip to London, where students visited the Herman Miller National Design Centre. During this visit, students heard presentations on workplace design, employee comfort, wellness and productivity, and how the
company is working with its clients to improve furniture design. While in London, students visited Turner and Townsend offices. This presentation covered various roles and responsibilities that the company's FM department performs, such as maintenance and operations, project management, space management, the management of soft FM services, maintenance of interior offices, technology and equipment, and separating in-house and outsourcing of FM services.

Site visits also included Dynamic Earth, a state-of-the-art attraction in Edinburgh, Scotland, where an FM presentation covered space management, operations and maintenance, and planning. Students heard about what happens behind the scenes of the family attraction and conference venue to operate smoothly and stay open year-round.

While in Edinburgh, the group visited the Scottish Parliament, another UNESCO World Heritage Site. Opened in 2004, the building houses offices for 129 members of parliament and more than 1,000 staff members. Here, students heard a presentation about the unique design features of the building, how it incorporates various aspects of the Scottish culture, sustainable construction materials used for the building's construction, and the impact it all has on the day-to-day management and operations of the facility. Security measures, which are a major concern in such an environment, were also discussed with the students, as well as the different adjustments that the FM team made to accommodate Queen Elizabeth II during her visit a couple of years ago.
Each site visit featured a different type of facility with unique characteristics and challenges. While much of the presentations' subject matter could have been discussed in face-to-face lectures inside the classroom, students gained value by seeing it live and hearing from professionals who perform these tasks. Students engaged in observing fundamental FM concepts and applications and how different companies practice them.

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