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Thursday, January 20, 2011

## Midshipmen Study Abroad in Chile

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From the International Programs Office

During the fall semester, two Naval Academy midshipmen were selected to participate in the semester exchange at the Escuela Naval Arturo Prat in Valparaíso, Chile.

Midshipmen 2nd Class Mark Ditlevson and Nicolas Woods left in July to begin their studies while two Chilean cadets arrived in Annapolis to study at the U.S. Naval Academy.

Immediately upon arriving in Chile, Ditlevson and Woods were assigned duties comparable to the Chilean cadets, and soon they and their Chilean classmates were deployed and heading south to navigate the channels near Puerto Montt in southern Chile.

“I had a great time experiencing firsthand the inner workings of a foreign Navy. The Chileans are not that different while underway from our operating procedures and this similarity made for an easy transition,” said Woods.

Back in Valparaíso, Ditlevson and Woods began taking courses in systems and electrical engineering as well as leadership.

“I thought learning Spanish would be challenging enough, but taking the technical courses took it to another level and dynamic,” said Ditlevson. “It was challenging at first, but I was soon on par with my Chilean classmates.”

The midshipmen continued to meet with challenges during the weekly classes, watches and extracurricular activities, but found that their hard work paid off by the time they reached the weekends.

“The Chileans are a very warm and friendly people. The social interaction that we routinely encountered during the weekends accounted for half of our learning experiences,” said Ditlevson. “Without fail, the Chilean cadets would introduce us to their culture and way of life at every opportunity. They were very



Photo courtesy of the International Programs Office  
 Midshipmen 2nd Class Nicolas Woods (left) and Midshipmen 2nd Class Mark Ditlevson stand with U.S. ambassador to Chile Alejandro Wolff and his wife Alexandra at an event Nov. 6 while studying abroad in Chile.

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friendly and warmly welcomed us into their homes to share experiences with their families.”

Studying a semester abroad provides exchange students the unique opportunity of becoming fully immersed in a different culture while learning the language, traditions and culture of a country.

Living and working in Valparaíso allowed for exposure to the Chilean culture. The surrounding hills of the city are rich in history and literature. Being within close driving distance to the nation’s capitol Santiago, the mids were able to make frequent trips. They welcomed these excursions as a break from the daily routines and academy regimen.

Additionally, throughout the academic semester, the two midshipmen travelled to other parts of the country, including Torres del Paine near Punta Arenas in the south, the remote Easter Island home of the mysterious Moai, and the oasis of San Pedro de Atacama.

“Seeing all that Chile had to offer was unbelievable. Who knew that one country could hold such a beautiful and diverse landscape,” said Woods.

At the end of the semester they also travelled to the southern cone of South America for a month to visit Bolivia, Peru, Paraguay, Argentina and Uruguay.

“Living in a foreign country for five months and then traveling around the continent brought a nice close to our semester abroad experience,” said Woods. “Our academic studies, in addition to the many opportunities to travel, completed the entire experience and helped put into perspective the true value of South America and what it has to offer.”

While attached to the Escuela Naval, the midshipmen had the opportunity to view and experience firsthand the daily operations of the Naval Section, Valparaíso. This military group is an integral division attached to the U.S. Embassy.

“Meeting the U.S. naval officers who interact daily with the Chilean navy and seeing how they help foster relations between the two nations was educational,” said Ditlevson. “I never knew much about being a Foreign Affairs Officer, but I am glad I had the opportunity to learn about this part of the U.S. Navy.”

On their last day in Chile they had the opportunity to ride in a Chilean navy helicopter.

“Flying over the town we lived in for the past five months gave us a new perspective,” said Woods. “Experiencing naval academic life from the Chilean midshipman perspective made me appreciate the educational experiences offered at Annapolis. This exposure was especially enlightening since I am undecided in my service selection and the Chilean exchange program gave me new insight into various fields such as flying helicopters. ”

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