



Students who are majoring in hospitality and tourism management learned event management skills while working at one of the world's premiere events, the Cannes International Film Festival.

photo courtesy of Lorie Tuma

Students work at Cannes festival, walk red carpet

Sixteen students studying hospitality and tourism management spent two weeks in France working behind the scenes at the 69th annual Cannes International Film Festival.

The students traveled to Cannes May 7-23, coordinating events in the American Pavilion, where press panels, round-table discussions, networking and meetings took place, and where celebrities came to mingle.

The experience was sponsored by the College of Community and Public Service, and students were selected for the Cannes trip after an application and interviewing process.

Sarah Gonzales, a junior from Mt. Pleasant, said the trip to Cannes was her first time traveling abroad. She helped set up press panels, assisted speakers and helped prepare the conference room at the pavilion.

"We had to make sure the events ran smoothly, right down to making sure the technical equipment was working

properly," said Gonzales. "The experience solidified my love for coordinating events. It was an incredible opportunity to immerse myself in another culture while learning about event planning. That's why I chose Grand Valley — to get these unique experiences."

The students saw celebrities visit the pavilion, like Carrie Fisher and Woody Allen, who was with cast members of his movie, "Cafe Society," including Blake Lively, Kristen Stewart and Jesse Eisenberg.

Allison Bis, a senior from Midland, said helping with round-table events and answering questions helped her learn about French culture and made her feel more certain about her professional future.

"I was a biomedical science major before switching to event management," Bis said. "This experience made me realize I made the right decision and has given me more confidence as I prepare to enter the workforce."

Lorie Tuma, assistant professor of hospitality and tourism management, said students had the opportunity to work on their professional skill set and experience first-hand what it's really like in the industry.

"It's seldom when we have the opportunity to place students in an international setting to run an event," Tuma said. "Cannes is one of the most elegant and prestigious events in the industry and it's all impromptu. Students have to learn to be flexible while working with A-list celebrities. This type of experience gives them the skills they need to embrace the industry."

The students said one of the highlights of the trip was having the opportunity to walk a portion of the red carpet ahead of the celebrities.