

29th September 2023

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Open Day last Saturday was a most special time: students and staff welcoming families, host families, supporters, alumni, members of the German National Committee and the public onto campus. I was pleased to meet several parents and grandparents, brothers and sisters – and remembered that many, many more families would dearly have loved to be here if circumstances would have allowed that. Thank you to all who helped make it a special day.

### Project Week

I try and write to parents and guardians at the time of the first Project Week of the academic year (there is a 2<sup>nd</sup> Project Week near the beginning of February 2024). At one level project weeks are about the Projects themselves – from working on different social service projects, this year to learning about refugee disparities in Germany, to learning how to windsurf. At another level Project Weeks are about planning and then the execution of plans, together with the final accounting as each group submits its receipts for the week away. Almost all the Projects are student-conceived and student-led, and the groups learn about risk assessment, how to find safe but budget-priced accommodation and public transport. Project Week also is about travel, for many of our students to visit places they have heard much about (for instance Berlin, Vienna and Zagreb) and for most to discover new places. For most it is learning to come out on a strict budget of €190 per student for the week including safe transport and accommodation, food and any other costs associated with the Project. In some parts of the world €190 is a lot of money, maybe enough to sustain a family for a month. In western Europe this is a modest amount if one is not staying at home. Project Week also is learning to work in a team. Putting all these factors together, you will understand that the ‘Project’ aspect of Project Week is not always as rigorously planned for or achieved as would be the case for a School Study Outing, and that the learning always is much more than the stated Project – important as the Projects are.

Not all students were assigned to the Project Week they hoped for. I remind students that the majority did not have RBC as their first choice of UWC! In life, we come to treasure many things that were not our first choice.

Why does RBC allow and even encourage student-led Project Weeks? I have been a school Head for over 30 years. It is my observation that schools and other institutions, particularly those in the global North, are doing more and more to ensure the safety of young people while within the confines of the school or institution. It is hard to argue against this type of approach, but this type of approach has unintended consequences. One unintended consequence is that young people are less and less equipped to navigate safely those places where they are not under the strict supervision of adults. One cannot teach people to be autonomous, responsible young adults without at some point letting them be autonomous - and hoping that one has prepared the ground well enough that they are responsible. There comes a time when there isn't an authority figure standing in front to sort everything out if something needs to be initiated, if a group needs to be pulled together, if something goes wrong. Far better that this happen in a context of relative safety (in global terms, most parts of Europe are relatively safe),

where adults have had a degree of oversight over the planning and (light) risk assessment, where adults will be checking in with each group on a daily basis, and where there is a team on call in Freiburg to mobilize support quickly if something more serious goes wrong - if needs be to travel to the group. Naturally, RBC insists on a member of staff being part of a group if the Project involves heightened physical risk (for this Project Week, for example, a strenuous road bike cycling Project mainly in Switzerland).

Year after year our students and our graduates report that their RBC Project Weeks were periods of intense learning and discovery, periods of transition into their assuming adult roles. I wish all our students a week of great learning starting Sunday, hopefully also a week of relaxation from the academic and (for 2<sup>nd</sup> year students) university application pressures of the last weeks.

Parents and Guardians with a particular interest in RBC's approach to growing student autonomy, competence and relatedness might be interested in the following academic (but easily accessible) article by Peter Gray, David F Lancy and David F Bjorklund, published in the February 2023 edition of the Journal of Pediatrics:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368794518\\_Decline\\_in\\_Independent\\_Activity\\_as\\_a\\_Cause\\_of\\_Decline\\_in\\_Children's\\_Mental\\_Wellbeing\\_Summary\\_of\\_the\\_Evidence](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/368794518_Decline_in_Independent_Activity_as_a_Cause_of_Decline_in_Children's_Mental_Wellbeing_Summary_of_the_Evidence)

### University Visits to RBC

After Project Week, I will write more fully about RBC students and their forthcoming university choices. But, an introduction is warranted due to the many university visits that RBC has received in the last two and a half weeks.

The first thing to remember is that almost half of RBC students do not have the opportunity to further their studies without significant scholarship support, even if they were to return home to attend a university in their country. The great privilege of students in Germany and several other parts of Europe to study for (almost) no tuition cost is by no means universal (I remind students, it is not for free – the taxpayers carry the real cost). Scholarship support for undergraduate study is often very hard to secure. In this regard, UWC graduates have the extraordinary benefit of the financial generosity of Shelby Davis, who has partnered with around 100 US universities and colleges to make it financially possible for UWC graduates to receive scholarships that meet their financial need for both tuition and accommodation. (Given the cost of especially private higher education in the USA, most of these universities and colleges need to provide generously from their own funding sources, to supplement Shelby Davis' extraordinary support, and we thank them for this.) In 2022/23, there were 3982 UWC graduates/Davis Scholars from 165 countries receiving the level of scholarship support that they needed for their undergraduate studies at 99 US universities and colleges. There are some undergraduate scholarships at specific universities in for instance Canada. But for a student who needs a scholarship to continue with their studies - circumstances which apply to almost half of RBC's students - by far the most likely route forward is as a Davis Scholar in the US.

In the US, a college is an institution of higher learning that concentrates on undergraduate studies, and awards Bachelor degrees. Private colleges typically have

relatively small student bodies (typically, from 1000 to 3000 undergraduate students, spread over four years). I am a great fan of the colleges as outstanding places for learning and living for UWC graduates, and will explain why in my next letter to Parents and Guardians.

The methodology of student recruitment especially for the private US universities and colleges is much more personalized than for universities in most parts of the world. For the Davis partner schools, typically, admissions staff travel to schools from which they wish to recruit, make presentations to interested students, and often pre-interview prospective students. By contrast, in my final year of school, I simply applied to the universities in South Africa in which I was interested. No admissions officer came to my school to tell me more about their university, let alone to interview me!

The numbers of visiting admissions staff, the amount of information that becomes available, the possibility and indeed advisability of signing up for an interview, in addition to creating opportunity puts a significant degree of additional pressure on our students, your children, especially in their 2<sup>nd</sup> year at RBC. We need to recognize this while still celebrating the tremendous opportunities open to our students.

In the last two and a half weeks, RBC has received visits from admissions staff from the following (all from the US unless otherwise stated):

Universities: Case Western Reserve, Chicago, Florida, Oklahoma, Richmond, Princeton, St Lawrence, and Tampa

Colleges: Bard (Berlin), Barnard, Bates, Colorado, Concordia, Davidson, Earlham, Franklin and Marshall, Idaho, Lake Forest, Middlebury, Mt. Holyoke, Pomona, Ringling College of Art and Design, St John's, St Olaf, Wartburg, Whitman, Williams, and Union.

For Parents and Guardians wishing to read more about the Davis United World Colleges Scholar Program, the annual reports are a good way to start:

<https://www.davisuwcscholars.org/scholars/annual-reports>

If you wish to write to me, please feel free to do so in a language of your choice.

With best wishes,

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