
Academic returns to his Belgrade *alma mater*

An innovative European education scheme known as the Brain Gain Program has allowed a Macquarie University academic to return to his homeland to lecture to students isolated by their country's difficult political history.

Associate Professor Sasha Pavkovic of the Department of Politics and International Relations returned to the University of Belgrade in Serbia late last year to teach a unit on state creation and secession to undergraduate philosophy students. Pavkovic was born in Belgrade and later educated at the University, where he also taught between 1976 and 1985.

"The classroom I taught at is in a 19th Century building, the first University of Belgrade premises, in which my late mother attended classes in the late 1930s and in which my wife and I, who was then only a fellow student, attended classes in 1968. So this was a return in 2006 to the classroom of a family," he says.

The Brain Gain Program, run by the Austrian branch of the World University Service, is aimed at

breaking the academic isolation of universities in South Eastern Europe following the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. It invites qualified academics originating from the region to guest lecture courses not available at the local universities, with a range of flow-on benefits.

"Now that Serbia is mostly surrounded by European Union countries, the visa regime makes it very, very difficult for students to travel," he says. "This is in great contrast to my youth when, although the regime was communist, it was very easy to travel under the Yugoslav passport. So for these students, access to information and literature from outside the country is very important."

The University of Belgrade.
Photo by Masan Bogdanovski.

