BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AT HUAZHONG NORMAL UNIVERSITY

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Augustana College, '96

Karla Loveall double majored in East Asian Studies and Communications. Her narrative describes the long-term results for herself of the Asian Quarter travel-study course at Augustana College. This course is the basis of the ASIANetwork Freeman College in Asia grant that is making possible travel to Asia by five teams of ASIANetwork college faculty and administrators during the summers of 1998, 1999, and 2000. The intent of the program is to establish the kinds of relationships in Asia that have been the backbone of the Augustana course. Norman Moline, Geography, Augustana College is the director of the ASIANetwork Freeman College in Asia program.

Loveall is the outreach coordinator for the elementary and secondary education programs on China and Japan for the Teaching East Asia Program at the Social Science Education Consortium in Boulder, Colorado.

I experienced East Asia for the first time in the fall of 1992 while enrolled in the Asian Quarter course at Augustana College. I traveled and studied in Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China with seventy-nine Augustana College students and six professors. I never would have imagined how far this experience would take me.

China had a great impact for the complex nature of the country intrigued me. Before we even left China to return to our Rock Island, Illinois campus, I knew I wanted to learn more and that I wanted to come back someday. I began to fulfill my goal by majoring in East Asian Studies and studying Mandarin Chinese.

Huazhong Normal University

Augustana College and Huazhong Normal University in Wuhan, China have had an active exchange program since 1987. Huazhong Normal University is one of six universities designated by the government of the People's Republic of China as key teacher training institutions. With its traditional ties to the Middle Yangtze region, Augustana College developed the exchange with Huazhong Normal University to enable students and faculty participants the opportunity to live and teach in a city somewhat removed from the coastal and urban areas most frequented by Westerners, yet one rich in history and significance.

During my studies at Augustana I was fortunate to have Chinese teachers from Wuhan. Patiently I watched as graduates and fellow Asian studies majors went to Wuhan one by one. I eagerly kept in touch with them and with the status of their successes and failures. I was anxious to explore the country I had briefly encountered, face the challenges of living and working there, and test my past three years of preparation. Early in my senior year, I seriously began to think about returning to China.

My eager anticipation turned to excitement when I was chosen to represent Augustana at Huazhong Normal University for the 1996-97 academic year. With my departure date approaching quickly, I began making travel preparations and final arrangements in May of 1996. Late in August I arrived in Wuhan. Now I was alone, and the true test began. I was teaching in the English Department and had twelve hours of class per week. A Chinese colleague and I worked side by side creating lesson plans for 150 sophomore English majors. As expected I was nervous on my first day, but I managed to create an open and relaxed atmosphere. I had expected the silence I found in the classroom as others had told me how difficult it might be to get Chinese students to talk in class. Being prepared and understanding some of the difficulties made my adaptation to life in China easier. With the help of my Chinese colleagues and fellow foreign teachers at Huazhong Normal University, I quickly thrived in the classroom.

Combining Western and Eastern teaching methods

Of course I encountered challenges. Teaching methods between the East and West vary greatly. Students were accustomed to the "spoon fed" method of learning. Teachers were responsible for giving knowledge, and students were responsible for reciting it back. Many of my students wanted more information from me, more vocabulary to memorize and a quick way to help improve their English. At first I did not know how to accommodate their needs with my Western ideas of learning. I also found it difficult to focus narrowly on just oral English activities in a two-hour lesson. Language learning is compartmentalized so
reading, writing, grammar and oral skills are taught separately. Luckily there were brave students who helped me understand their needs. Using a combination of Western and Eastern teaching methods was the best solution.

After Spring Festival and well into the second semester I started to think about plans for the future. Teaching was becoming less complicated, and I began to explore and become more creative. I traveled through China, by train up North and down South, and by boat through the famous Three Gorges. I even had a chance to help harvest rice in the countryside. My Mandarin was improving, and I now was a regular face on the streets around campus. I had found my place. I felt a part of the community. The idea of staying to teach another year became more appealing. I did not want this all to end. I wanted to learn more and continue to grow.

United Board Freeman English teaching program

In the spring of 1997, the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia awarded grants, through the Freeman Foundation, to five small liberal arts colleges that would enable each college to create a relationship with a university in China. Two students each from Drake University, Kenyon College, Union College, Wellesley College, and Augustana College were selected to teach English. The program provided round trip airfare, a monthly stipend, a one-month training session in Beijing and a mid-year conference. I applied and was accepted as one of the two representatives from Augustana. Although Augustana's relationship with Huazhong Normal University had already been well established, the United Board's involvement helped sustain this valuable exchange program.

The graduates of Drake University teach at Northeast Normal University in Changchun. Those from Kenyon College are developing a relationship with Hangzhou University in Hangzhou; those from Union College are at Capital Normal University in Beijing. Wellesley College graduates are teaching at Ginling Women's College in Nanjing.

My second year proved to be as rewarding as the first. I taught 180 students oral English and was now accustomed to the oversized classes. The questions and situations began to repeat themselves from the first year. I was even more prepared and able to create my own style of teaching. I continued to foster the relationships that I had created with my students from the year before. This was when I really began to notice some of my contributions. Shy students from day one had opened up and were now sharing their lives and thoughts with me. The stereotypes that many students brought into the classroom began to shatter. Students often told me that I was not like an American. Many students told me that I had adopted Chinese characteristics. Of course they soon realized that not every American was the same.

China's future lies with the students

At the end of both years I would say farewell to my students. During those final weeks many students asked how I felt towards China. They wanted to know what I saw in the future for China. My response varied, but the main idea remained the same. I saw good things for China because the students were the future of China. I thanked them for being my teachers. Sometimes I felt guilty for learning more from them. Saying goodbye was not easy.

Now the future is uncertain for me as I have just returned and have begun to create my life here in America. Although my career path is not clear, I am certain I will continue my relationship with China. While in China I learned that relationships are very important. I also learned that mutually beneficial relationships are the best kind. The friendships and memories will last a lifetime. The decision I made during my second year at Augustana to embark on this path will definitely take me even further.

Bibliographical note: The ten United Board Freeman English teachers had a month of orientation in Beijing. Readers whose students are embarking on teaching English abroad will be interested in passing along to them the following bibliography from the orientation.

General


STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

CET Academic Programs

Chinese Language Programs
Deadline, May 15, 1999 for the fall term; rolling admissions for most programs
Beijing: for beginning through advanced students.
Students may live with Chinese roommates from host university and enroll in innovative language course.

Harbin: for high intermediate and advanced students. One-on-one and one-on-two instruction. All students live with Chinese roommates and abide by a Chinese-only language pledge. With few English-speaking foreigners, Harbin's environment provides opportunities for immersion.

January Term in Beijing: for intermediate and advanced students. Prepares students for continued study in China. Intensive classes and structured outings contextualize students' language skills. Emphasis on pragmatic competence. All students live with Chinese roommates.

Japanese Language and Internship Program
Deadline, April 15, 1999 for fall term
The seventeen-week program combines intensive language study, immersion in contemporary Japanese society, and an exploration of the Japanese work environment.

Contact: Janice Levitt or Mark Lenhart; 1000 16th St. NW, Suite 350, Washington, DC 20036; Tel.: 1-800/225-4262; <cet@academic-travel.com>
www.cetacademicprograms.com

St. Lawrence University

St. Lawrence University has student exchange programs in Japan at International Christian University, Tokyo, and Nanzan University, Nagoya. Students' academic credits taken abroad are accepted by the respective institutions. St. Lawrence students going to Japan, for a semester or a year, must have a basic understanding of Japanese. They take further Japanese language instruction and courses in English. They may select housing in a dormitory or with a home stay family. Japanese students coming to St. Lawrence take all of their courses in English.

Contact: Yoko Chiba, St. Lawrence University, Clinton, NY 13617; <ychi@ccmailink.stlawu.edu>

Cornell-Nepal Study Program

The Cornell-Nepal Study Program offers academic study, independent field research, and cultural immersion in a country known for its ecological and cultural diversity.

Courses include Nepali, contemporary issues in Nepali studies, and research design and proposal writing. Courses are taught in English by faculty from Tribhuvan National University of Nepal, and students live and take courses with Nepalese students in residential program houses.

Contact: Cornell Abroad, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853; Tel.: 607/255-6224; <cuabroad@cornell.edu>
http://www.einaudi.cornell.edu/cuabroad