

India Studies Program Associated Colleges of the Midwest (ACM) Catherine Benton, Lake Forest College

The Associated Colleges of the Midwest has sponsored the India Studies Program since 1969 in the city of Pune located in the western Indian state of Maharashtra. A city with a pleasant climate, Pune is home to many educational and cultural institutions including the prestigious University of Pune, Deccan College, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute and the international Iyengar Yoga Institute. For more than thirty years, the program consisted of a one-year curriculum divided into three terms, the spring term coordinated on an ACM campus in the U.S. and the summer and fall terms in Pune. However, in 2001, the program was restructured as a July-December program with all orientation and study conducted in India. Students take intensive language training in Marathi and choose from elective classes in Indian politics, history, music, sociology, and philosophy. Recently, in response to student interest, class possibilities have been added in geology, ayurvedic medicine, architecture, and the performing arts.

The ACM India Program is open to students from the fourteen ACM Colleges (Beloit, Carleton, Coe, Colorado, Cornell, Grinnell, Knox, Lake Forest, Lawrence, Macalester, Monmouth, Ripon, St. Olaf, and the University of Chicago), as well as to students from other colleges if there is space. Each year, a professor from an ACM college coordinates the beginning weeks of the program in Pune, working with students during July and August as they face an array of adjustment issues and begin their research projects. Indian administrators and faculty provide the administrative structure for the core program, and faculty from various educational institutions in Pune teach the ACM classes and mentor the students as they develop their independent projects.

After the first two weeks of orientation, students live with host families, several of whom have welcomed ACM students for many years. As members of Indian families, students become immersed in day-to-day routines and participate in family traditions from which they would otherwise be excluded. Year after year, students say that these relationships with their host families are one of the most meaningful elements of their Indian experience. As in any family, the interactions are not always smooth, but through the patience of the families and the guidance of the Pune staff, communication issues get worked out and students grow more sensitive to the values of Indian family life.

In addition to participating in academic classes and family life, students are encouraged to pursue extra-curricular interests such as learning to play the sitar or tabla, practice classical dance forms, study yoga, or apprentice with jewelers or other craftspeople. In the past two years, the staff has assisted students in securing mini-internships with such social service organizations as a Buddhist

community center, a Pune hospital caring for orphans in an adoption center, after-school enrichment classes at a local primary school, and a women's self-help organization supporting the entrepreneurial projects of low income women. These extra-curricular commitments help students to become more engaged in the life of the city and more understanding of the complex issues facing individuals and communities in Pune.

Having supported American students in India for more than three decades, the ACM India Program has created a significant pool of alumni who have earned graduate degrees in Indian studies, many of whom have continued the Marathi and Maharashtrian culture studies that they began as undergraduates during this program.

Like other study abroad programs, the ACM India program faces the intercultural challenges of introducing American students to a new cultural context. American students, used to a good measure of freedom and independence in their homes and on their college campuses, face a number of challenges when transported into a culture that expects certain demonstrations of respect from younger people. For example, Indian parents expect greater communication about the schedules and activities of their sons and daughters; professors expect students to take study on their own without a need for formal assignments, quizzes, or exams; and the society as a whole expects relatively modest dress, respectful behavior toward elders, and a level of decorum that is often completely new for American students.

Almost immediately, students find themselves inadvertently confronting social norms, surprised to learn that most Indian professors do not appreciate the type of familiarity expressed between students and professors on U.S. campuses, and confused when straightforward American questions lead to no answers or even to rebuffs. In addition, so much of what American students take for granted in terms of services provided for them by administrative staff at their colleges are simply not available to them in this culture where Indian students their age are often more independent (while paradoxically still living at home) and more academically focused. In general, American students can become frustrated as they realize that their language (no matter that everyone is speaking English) and their style of communicating do not work very well in India. Fortunately, the Pune staff and faculty are quite skilled in helping students adjust to their classes, families, and general confusions, and the program functions as a kind of greenhouse for students interested in learning to become more sensitive and understanding in a new culture.

While the family homestays and independent study projects remain the strongest elements of the program, they are also the most difficult to administer. Inevitable rough spots between students and family members must be ameliorated on both sides, and independent study projects (ISPs) are complicated by the need to maneuver in a new culture where patterns of behavior carry different meanings. For ISPs, defining the research topic is often the first hurdle. Students must articulate a feasible project within the constraints of transportation hassles, translating among several languages,

and exploring areas of life that are not too culturally or politically sensitive. Then, even after a topic has been settled, the student might have to revise it multiple times in response to exigencies of the research environment. When the pivotal person is unavailable to be interviewed or the temple priest refuses to talk about the rituals specified for the project, the topic has to be reworked around the information that is available. Fortunately, the University of Pune professors have been outstanding mentors for American students struggling to conduct worthwhile research in a culture that is still so new for them.

Having twice worked as the American Coordinating Representative for this program and as the faculty director for another study abroad program in India, I am impressed again and again with how the students' learning is enhanced within the structure of this program. Students, in their evaluations, describe their experiences as having changed their lives in ways they could never have anticipated, while clearly deepening their understanding of Indian culture.

While the program is well suited for students with particular interests in the humanities and social sciences, it can also work for science students who are willing to be creative in their independent research projects. More information about the program, as well as application forms to be downloaded, can be located at: www.acm.edu. Correspondence may be addressed to the ACM Program Officer who works with this program, Sarah Marino.



Photo courtesy of Cathy Benton

Davidson College Semester-in-India Program Job Thomas, Davidson College

Davidson's Semester-in-India Program provides students an opportunity to live as members of a group, learn from Indian scholars and travel to important cultural sites in a safe and comfortable manner. The Program, located in Madras, gives participants an intellectual and cultural experience that cannot be duplicated in the U.S.

Started in 1981 and offered during alternate years, 13 programs have been successively conducted. The Program in its entirety is under the auspices of the faculty of Davidson College. The Program Director is required to have spent significant time in India and teach courses significant to the region. He/she is also required to make a visit to India a year in advance to structure the program in detail.

The program is designed for 14 or 15 juniors and seniors; however, sophomores with exceptional preparation are occasionally included. Since the Program is advertised nationally, Davidson reserves approximately 25% of the slots for students from other schools. Admission is competitive with preference given to those whose academic preparation includes courses relating to the sub-continent.

The program contains three vital components: the academic program, travel within India, and living arrangements.

The Academic Program starts with a week of orientation prior to departure for India on the Davidson campus with lectures from Davidson faculty on the history, religions, art, society, economy, music, and environment of South Asia. In India, the academic program consists of four courses, the regular academic load for a semester at Davidson. Over the past 20 years, the focus of the courses has varied depending upon the quality of scholarship available in India and the Director's field of expertise. In Madras, the program has an advisory committee of academics and others who are familiar with Davidson. This committee advises the Davidson Program Director and his/her counterpart in Madras Christian College about resource personnel and field trips. All lectures are given by Indian scholars, and each course consists of about 20 lectures and contains at least two field trips relating to the lectures. The Director of the program will be assisted by a coordinator for each course. Speakers are drawn from all over India and many of them are alumni of Madras Christian College. Most have lunch with students, thus providing potential for further contact and resources.

The Fall 2004 program will offer the following four courses. 1) *India: Past and Present*. A series of lectures will introduce students to the cultural history of India viewed through the writings of Indian women. 2) *Issues in Contemporary India*: These lectures will focus on issues currently vigorously debated among Indian scholars. Topics include the condition of the environment, position of women, economic policies of the government and mass media. 3) *Public Health in India*. These lectures will view public health