ended. Indeed, the most notable dividend of all my China involvements, outside the experience of that land and culture itself, has been the joy of collaborating and working with so many faculty and students from Luther and other institutions, as well as making colleagues and friends from a wide variety of backgrounds and disciplines. I plan to continue “digging to China” in any way I can, including:

- bringing Chinese materials into courses not centrally concerned with Asia
- giving occasional presentations to high school and civic groups
- creating Asia-focused seminars in January under the terms of a new curricular plan
- collaborating with other Asia-focused teachers at Luther in a team-taught courses
- creating new internship and study abroad possibilities in China

In summer 2004 I will actively pursue the last goal by spending a month working with a group called China Service Ventures (http://www.chinaserviceventures.org). With about a dozen others, I will be teaching oral English to Chinese teachers of English in Henan Province. My Wartburg colleague, Lynn Peters, will visit our project this summer, and we hope that the work CSV has organized will open the way for continued internships, jobs, or study abroad possibilities for our students. At the very least, I’m sure I will meet many wonderful new colleagues and students and my teaching about China will be enriched.

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**China in Small Doses: Benefits & Challenges of Short Term Immersions**

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**Investments**

My personal and professional interest in China dates from the summer of 1994 when, in my second year on the faculty at Wartburg College, I was awarded an institutional grant to participate in a summer teaching program at Guangxi University in Nanning. There were no explicit conditions or expectations attached to this grant, but my first international experience was so fascinating and personally-rewarding that I began thinking almost immediately of ways that I might use China travel and study in liberal arts teaching. Two years later I traveled to China again with the support of the Lutheran Educational Conference of North America (LECNA) and the Lutheran College China Consortium (LCCC), which were attempting to promote interest in developing teaching/study programs in Hangzhou. This second venture into China was useful in a number of important ways, enabling me to visit areas of the country I had not seen previously and giving me the opportunity to nurture and deepen friendships I had established earlier in Guangxi. Of particular value was the opportunity to travel and establish supportive relationships with colleagues from colleges and universities with similar interests. Although many of us, as individuals, had an active interest in promoting China travel and study, few were true “China Scholars” or affiliated with institutions having established Asian Studies programs. The challenge for most of us has been to find effective ways of integrating China study into a more general liberal arts curriculum, working with scant resources, marginal institutional support, and untapped student interest.

**Returns**

For the past decade, Wartburg College has offered a broad range of study abroad options (including one in China), but many students have been reluctant to participate in a program that would take them away from campus for extended periods of time. The costs associated with international study, the complexity of arranging needed coursework around a semester or year abroad, and the limitations that such travel places on co-curricular activities make recruitment for long-term programs difficult (although incoming students now seem to be giving international study a higher priority than in years past).

Wartburg’s 4-4-1 academic calendar, however, presents an alternative option for international study during the Mayterm, a 4-week “mini-term” in the Spring when students enroll in a single short intensive course. Mayterm courses are typically creative, experiential, and geared toward encouraging students to explore subjects outside their major. Over the years, Mayterm courses have been developed by several different academic departments that include travel to Tanzania, Guyana, Israel, and various European sites. Working with the co-director of Wartburg’s Global and Multi-Cultural Studies Program (who shares my commitment to promoting interest in China), I developed, in 1999, a Mayterm course constructed around a 24-day visit to China that is now offered in alternate years.

The course, *China in Transition*, was created and offered as an elective option for meeting the “Diversity Across the Curriculum” component of Wartburg’s *Plan of Essential Education*. Courses in this tier of general education are aimed at developing in students a “greater recognition and understanding of the value of human diversity as an enriching aspect of life” and in preparing them for lives of service and leadership in a global and multi-cultural context. *China in Transition* was developed with three specific goals in mind:

1. To expand students’ understanding of the world via an introduction to Chinese culture and society.
2. To acquaint them, via an immersion experience, with the many and profound ways in which all people are influenced by their culture.
3. To encourage students to pursue other avenues for learning about Asia, possibly via more intensive semester-long programs or through post-graduate service and teaching opportunities.

The course initially was limited to twelve participants,
and was led by two faculty working in conjunction with International Programs staff at Zhejiang University of Technology (ZUT) in Hangzhou. Students in the class enter China through Beijing, and after three days of visiting the usual tourist sites in and around that city, travel via rail to Hangzhou, where they spend approximately three weeks at ZUT. Activities during this time include daily lessons in oral Chinese and lectures/lessons given by university faculty and community officials on subjects ranging from Chinese history and law to traditional music, art, and opera. The course includes one and two-day excursions to sites of interest or significance in the vicinity of Hangzhou, including temples and monasteries at nearby Tianti, social service/health care agencies, museums, and the city of Shanghai (approximately three hours away via bus). Students are housed in a hotel operated by ZUT that is adjacent to the campus, located at some distance from the center of the city.

China in Transition has been offered twice (2000 and 2002), and is scheduled again for the 2005 Mayterm. Some alterations to the course have occurred since its inception and others are planned to accommodate shifts in the College’s curriculum but the essential features remain the same.

Short-Term Courses as Immersion Experiences

Clearly, short-term courses such as China in Transition cannot provide the same depth as semester or year-long study abroad programs, but our experience has shown that there are ways to structure such courses so that they give students something beyond an ordinary “tourist” experience, in terms of important personal/cultural insights. Some of the more significant elements of the course that appear to contribute to the course in this regard are summarized below.

Single-Site Location. One decision that must be made early in the planning of a short-term course revolves around where to take students who are first-time visitors to China. For faculty who are seasoned China travelers, there is a temptation to take students to as many regions, cities, museums, and historical sites as time and budget will allow. Hong Kong or Beijing? The Great Wall or the Li River region near Guilin? Urban Shanghai or the minority villages in Guangxi? Given the limited time available and our principal course goals, we decided not to spend our time traveling around the country but instead opted for a single site where students would have opportunities to observe “ordinary” Chinese life and interact daily with “real” Chinese people. Spending enough time in one city to gain some sense of the rhythm of everyday life has been invaluable as a teaching tool.

For our purposes, Hangzhou presented many attractive possibilities as a site for our course. A medium-sized city in east China, it is large enough to hold students’ interest yet small enough for them to travel about on their own with ease after a few days. It is a relatively modern city that is not inhibiting to inexperienced international travelers who might otherwise need considerable time to feel comfortable enough to venture out on their own. While Hangzhou is complete with sites of scenic beauty and cultural significance, and has a long and rich history, it is not overrun with Western visitors or the tourist industry that caters to them. Students must be cautioned against drawing too many conclusions about all of China based on their experiences in one location, but a medium-sized city such as Hangzhou seems to present a reasonable cross-section of Chinese society in a manageable teaching environment.

Finding and developing a compatible host university. Placing students in a university environment during their visit to China greatly facilitates intercultural learning in several ways. Chinese universities are well-positioned to host small groups of American students, having logistical support, teaching resources, and some sophistication in understanding the educational goals of an immersion course. Most importantly, a university provides an environmental context that is central to the daily lives of American students, giving them ample, familiar bases for learning about China via comparison with their own personal experiences.

Many universities in China are eager to host short-term groups; in fact, Zhejiang University of Technology was one of several institutions that were considered as a site for our course. Hosting American college students brings prestige, money, and exciting learning opportunities for Chinese students. We found that smaller universities provided the best match for Wartburg College; in our case, the prestige of a host institution was not nearly as important as its flexibility and willingness to invest the time needed to accommodate our specific needs at an affordable cost. Universities with large numbers of international students and affiliations with multiple foreign counterparts typically are not as interested (understandably) in partnering with a small liberal arts college with only a modest investment in Asian studies.

The nuances of Chinese culture favor the development of long-term business relationships, and academic partnerships should be forged with some commitment to a more or less permanent arrangement. Our initial meeting with staff at ZUT occurred in 1996, and in the ensuing years we have developed a degree of trust and understanding that can overrides barriers of language, culture, and distance.

Student Learning Partnerships. The feature of the course that seems to contribute the most to a deeper level of cultural learning has been the matching of each American student with a Chinese counterpart for the duration of our time in Hangzhou. Indeed, course evaluations show that our students tend to use knowledge gained via classes, lectures, etc. to reinforce existing opinions about China; personal interaction, especially with Chinese peers, is much more likely to challenge their beliefs and perceptions. The Chinese student partners are usually recruited through the university’s Foreign Language Department in advance and are formally introduced to the American students upon our arrival. A few social events are arranged for the partners but most of their interaction is informal, occurring in the evenings and during “free time.” For our students, these partnerships provide opportunities for friendships and free-ranging conversations unimpeded by formalities; most of them are invited for home
visits, giving them a glimpse, at least, of Chinese family life. Chinese students, in turn, gain the opportunity to hone their English language skills with native speakers. ZUT was a bit skeptical initially at the prospect of allowing student interaction outside of a controlled environment, but it has come to view these partnerships as a unique, valuable learning experience for its own students.

**Pre-Departure Preparation and Individualized Learning.** Careful attention to preparing students for the trip is critical to effective intercultural learning. *China in Transition* participants are required to take a pre-departure seminar course that is aimed at maximizing their readiness for learning once the Mayterm course is underway. There is often a tendency to overload first-time China visitors with more information than they can possibly digest, and it is important to remember that much of what they might encounter prior to the experience of traveling to China will likely be lost simply because they have no real frame of reference. At worst, much of what they read or hear in a short pre-departure course could simply engender or reinforce attitudes and stereotypes that are barriers to real learning. In the best of all worlds, our students would also take a post-visit seminar, where discussions about China and the western perceptions they usually encounter in written records could be examined through the lens of their own experience (limited, though it may be). Presenting too much information prior to the course, however, is counterproductive.

An important goal of the pre-departure seminar is to work through issues of “group process” so that individual idiosyncrasies and interpersonal differences can at least be recognized and (hopefully) managed to some degree before the beginning of the immersion course. All groups pass through identifiable stages of development and require a certain amount of time/interaction before they can function (or learn) optimally. Much of the learning in an immersion course of this type occurs in a group context; allowing participants the chance to become acquainted via exercises and shared experiences, acknowledging leadership and other important roles as they emerge, and creating a sense of shared purpose all help to create a productive environment for supportive intercultural learning.

It is also important to recognize and accommodate individual differences in student interests and capacities for intercultural learning in a short immersion course. Some students, by virtue of temperament or previous experience, eagerly seek out new challenges and opportunities to explore a different culture; others may find simple risks such as riding a bus or purchasing a piece of fruit from a sidewalk vendor to present a formidable challenge. Differences in student learning styles are worth considering, as well. Some will gain more from lectures and formal lessons, while others will benefit from less-structured activities. Course leaders should take these differences into account and assist students in setting individual goals that are challenging, yet attainable.

**Assessment of Student Learning**

Evaluating the success of a short immersion course and gauging its real impact on student participants when post-trip contact with them is limited makes for a difficult task. Some sense for what students have learned can, perhaps, be gained from journals or reflection papers. The following excerpts from *China in Transition* student journals provide some evidence of intercultural learning:

*(This experience) taught me that by being kind, loving, compassionate, etc., you can learn to communicate with other people who may be quite different from yourself. And after you begin to bridge the communication gap, you find that people can be quite similar to yourself...*

**The stereotypes I learned concerning China as a child are not at all the reality today.**

*I came to realize that I take my culture for granted because I’ve never done anything to really broaden my worldview. I felt kind of silly when my Chinese friends would know more about American culture than I did!*

*I now know what it feels like to be on the “other side,” that is, a foreigner. I think being in that position will make me more sensitive to foreigners in the U.S. I’ll be able to empathize with those who can’t speak English and (understand) how lost they must sometimes feel.*

Whether *China in Transition* students have come away from the course with a heightened interest in China is also largely a matter of speculation, but at least two students have returned for additional study, and two of our graduates are now teaching in Chinese secondary schools. The modest success of this Mayterm course has also brought institutional interest and support for additional China-related study, service, and post-graduate placement. The future is bright. While Warburg College likely will never implement a formal Asian studies program, courses such as *China in Transition*, developed within the framework of the College’s mission and liberal arts curriculum, can be valuable avenues for intercultural learning.