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The World Is Their Classroom

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The world is their classroom



The Colosseum in Rome



Students visit the Roman baths in Bath, England

When students leave Linfield to study abroad, the walls disappear and the world becomes their classroom. And when they return from a month, a semester, a year abroad, they have grown and are transformed. Their lives will forever be colored by the experience.

By Mardi Mileham

Linfield has long taken pride in the fact that more than 50 percent of its graduates study abroad at some time during their educational career.

But if Peter Richardson had his way, it would be 100 percent.

He doesn't care if it's in the coffee bean plantations of Costa Rica, the Buddhist temples of Japan, Korea or China, or the art galleries in any one of a number of European nations. Students need to engage in a culture different from their own.



Peter Richardson

“Studying abroad takes them out of their natural environment,” said Richardson, a professor of German. “These students have every advantage – homes, families, sports teams, church groups or whatever it is that has defined them. When they go abroad, they don't have those things anymore and they have to ask themselves very specific questions about what their values are, about who they are. They face questions they can no longer avoid. It helps them define who they are and what they really think. And once their eyes are open to the world, they will never again be closed.”

Linfield's study abroad program began nearly 30 years ago, when the college began exchanging students with Kanto Gakuin University in Yokohama, Japan. Now opportunities for international study are offered through three options: semester programs at universities in 11 countries in Europe, Asia and Central and South America; academic year abroad for language majors; and January Term, with its popular four-week intensive courses, led by Linfield faculty at some 15 international locations annually.

Ecuador is the latest addition to the growing list of study abroad sites offered through Linfield. The new program, geared specifically for science and environmental studies majors, will be launched this fall, and will include an opportunity for field work on the Galapagos Islands or at Tiputini, a rain forest reserve in the Amazon Basin.

“The biodiversity of Tiputini exceeds that of the Galapagos,” said Marvin Henberg, vice president for academic affairs and dean of faculty. “With only 1,500 acres, Tiputini is home to more than 500 different bird

species. Contrast this number with a species count of 650 for all birds in all of North America, and you have some idea of the scale of opportunity for Linfield students in biology and environmental studies.”



Shaik Ismail

Linfield’s international focus has grown in other ways, said Shaik Ismail, director of International Programs. The college now offers a Japanese major and an Asian Studies minor. And agreements with two other schools in Japan have expanded opportunities for students. Chinese courses are offered and scholars from Chinese universities regularly spend a year teaching at Linfield. Nursing students also have the opportunity to study health care practices through courses offered during January Term in Mexico, China, Southeast Asia and Ghana.

Study abroad doesn’t just mean sitting in class halfway around the world. Or just visiting Paris, Madrid, Rome or London. It can also mean working side-by-side with people in their homes and villages, helping to improve their lives and learning about their lifestyles and cultures.

Ismail is trying to enhance the service learning component of the study abroad experience to provide students with a combination of academics and community service.

Ismail is guiding Linfield's program in an era of growth and change. His goal is to build upon an already strong study abroad program and expand it across the curriculum, embracing students in all majors from the arts to the sciences, and offering students more interaction with local residents.

Whenever possible, Ismail wants the students immersed in the local community, where they will sharpen their language skills as well as engage in the lives of local people.

“Participation in a service project has an impact and it can be a life-transforming experience,” he said. “Students need to give something back to society and one way to do that is to get involved when you study abroad. That’s why we build community service projects into the curriculum.”

That’s already happening in Costa Rica and Mexico, where students worked on a Habitat for Humanity project and in an orphanage (see related stories).



Tower Bridge in London



Kim McGough '05 learns traditional basket weaving with palm fronds during a field trip to San Miguel Tequixtepec, Mexico.



Melissa Schmeer '04 holding up Stonehenge.



Students in the stairwell of the Melk Monastery in Melk, Austria.

Richardson agrees that the service approach provides an opportunity for students to see the practical application of their language skills.

“Too often language is taught in a vacuum,” he said. “What we all want to do is make the world a classroom and the walls disappear. And it needs to be a credible transition from what goes on in class to what goes on when students are involved in using their language out in the world where it's spoken naturally.”

Ismail cited January Term courses in Mexico and Ghana, where students interact with local residents. Vivian Tong, professor of nursing, is developing a course for India next January, which could be a preamble to a study abroad program there. Such a program could offer students an in-depth look at alternative medicine, how healing is practiced, and the relationship between healing and religion.

January Term also provides an opportunity for professors from dif-

ferent departments to collaborate on a class, such as combining history and political science for a class in Russia or religion and anthropology for a course in Ireland.

“If you have two faculty, it's as if you have binocular vision,” Richardson said. “The world is not divided into sociology and chemistry and literature. With two professors, you see depth and contour and you see many more manifestations of the culture than you would if you were with just one person, no matter how good that person is.”

Another important part of International Programs at Linfield is the international students who study here. This year 66 students and scholars from 21 different countries are sharing their culture and lifestyles with students and staff as well as community members. But they also take with them a better understanding of U.S. culture.

“These are people who return home to positions of leadership and responsibility,” Richardson said. “If a president has a cabinet made up of

people who have studied in the U.S. and who have friends here and who are professionally and intellectually engaged with important parts of American culture, the better our relationship is going to be with that government.”

One key component of the study abroad program is a re-entry program for students who return from a semester or year abroad. They have a much harder time re-entering this culture than entering the culture they studied or lived in, Richardson said.

They see their country in a different way. They are more engaged in the debate about important political and social issues. The questions they ask themselves are fundamentally different from the ones that were important to them before, Richardson said.

“They have added a layer of understanding and insight into the people they are becoming,” he added. “They have grown into their adult selves in a fundamentally different way from what would have happened if they had stayed here. All of a sudden issues that were not important to them before are terribly important now.”



Posing at the Ming Tombs in Beijing, China.