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In Conversation With the World

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In conversation with the world

Linfield expands its international footprint as it upholds a 90-year global tradition

By Kelly Williams Brown

A GLOBAL VIEW: Students visit the Palace of Versailles during a 2024 January Term off-campus course.



he first time you travel internationally, there is a moment when something small feels enormous — a deeply new and different detail that serves as evidence you have left

the world as you knew it to be.

For 18-year-old Michele Tomseth, it was the clouds. As she peered out the airplane window somewhere above southeast Sweden, they looked impossibly big, fluffy and so different from the tiny wisps she'd always seen in the skies over her native central Oregon.

It was 1989, and the recent high school graduate had been on an airplane only once before. But now, via a year-long Rotary Exchange to Sweden, she was setting off into the world by herself.

"I remember just taking a breath — it was so exciting," she said. "I was on the verge of this huge adventure. Everything was different: the light switches, the door handles, the toilets and how they flushed."

"Studying abroad gives them so much — comfort with cognitive dissonance, comfort with challenges. They develop strength for solving problems, critical thinking, understanding people and thinking from perspectives beyond their own."

—Gennie VanBeek, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

Nearly 35 years later, as director of international programs and coordinator of off-campus January Term classes, Tomseth continues the university's decadeslong emphasis on being in conversation with the world.

"I cannot think of a better or more completely transformational experience students can have at Linfield than studying abroad," said Gennie VanBeek, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. "It widens their worldview, and helps them understand other cultures and even their own culture much better because they have something to compare it to."

It also, she said, goes hand-in-hand with a centerpiece of a Linfield education.

"The goal is to create global, well-educated thinkers who can be prepared for anything that's going to happen over the next 30 or 40 years," she said. "Studying abroad gives them so much — comfort with cognitive dissonance, comfort with challenges. They develop strength for solving problems, critical thinking, understanding people and thinking from perspectives beyond their own."

'It's not a language challenge, it's a meaning challenge'

But getting students prepared for that type of learning is a process in itself. Tomseth begins working with those who are heading abroad months before they even make a packing list. Part of that is practical — she sends students articles to read about their soon-to-be home, they attend an orientation about the process and so on.

"We do our best to prepare students; that's part of our responsibility," she said. "But the students have a responsibility to prepare themselves as well."

The differences that are so exciting at first, she said, can quickly become daunting. This can be especially marked, she said, in students who travel to English-speaking countries and may not realize that cultural barriers go far beyond language.

"The students traveling to Anglophone countries are not expecting that just because you understand the words doesn't necessarily mean you understand what they're



saying,” she said, mentioning how difficult it can be for students to transition from a very direct American culture to an indirect one, such as the United Kingdom.

“That’s something we (Americans) have to work at, to read between the lines and be more sensitive to what they might be thinking,” she said. “It’s not a language challenge, it’s a meaning challenge.”

‘Every moment ... is an opportunity to take in new ideas’

During his tenure, former president Miles K. Davis’ strong international bent was expressed in a many ways: building an international capstone project into graduate degrees, establishing new ties with Pacific Rim universities, proposing scholarships for Jamaican and Afghani students, and hiring a full-time international recruiter. But he is far from the first Linfield president with a global view.

Elam J. Anderson, who was Linfield president from 1932-38, had previously spent 14 years in China, first as a professor of music and education at the University of Shanghai and later as principal of the American Shanghai School. In his 1933 “New Linfield Plan,” designed to create “educated” and “useful citizens,” Anderson introduced an international emphasis that called for the study of contemporary civilizations, world literature and foreign languages. He also began actively recruiting Asian students.

That global awareness became a foundation of Linfield’s educational identity. One of President Charlie Walker’s first initiatives in 1976 was to create Linfield’s first formal relationship with an overseas sister institution, Kanto Gaukin University in Yokohama, Japan. Nearly 50 years later, students from both institutions continue to be welcomed at each other’s campuses.

LEARNING ACROSS BORDERS: This January Term course focused on the impact of sports tourism in France and Austria. Here, students visit a Parisian exhibit on the history of sports in the city.

Searching the world for future Wildcats

Linfield invested in its global focus when it hired Danielle Kanclerz, an international student recruiter, in January 2023. Kanclerz brings more than a decade of international recruitment experience at institutions including Stanford and University of California, among others. This marks the first time in nearly a decade that the university has a full-time recruiter focused on regions outside of the United States. Based in the Bay Area — close to three international airports — she traveled to China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Thailand, Macao, Singapore, Malaysia and South Korea in her first year at Linfield.

The time was right, said admission director Lisa Knodle-Braigel: International recruiting became more competitive in the last two decades, and global perceptions made recruiting to Linfield’s small-town setting more difficult in the recent past.

“It wasn’t so much a matter of what Linfield was doing or not doing, but the influences of U.S. and world political and economic conditions,” Knodle-Braigel recalled. But in the wake of the pandemic, she said, two of Linfield’s qualities shone more brightly in the eyes of prospective students and their families.

“There’s a growing desire to be in an extremely safe location and to be at a school that values connection and partnership,” she said. “The heart of why we’re all here is to bring people together as a community and really, a family.”

Kanclerz’s goal is not sheer numbers but right fit. For many international students, she said, the ability to explore academically and personally is a huge draw.

“The liberal arts are something not widely available for students in Asia,” she said. “Many love the opportunity to come and study a range of subjects. They also love the hands-on emphasis as opposed to lectures, and for many, the ability to pursue undergraduate research is huge.”



WILDCATS 'ROUND THE WORLD: Students flash the Linfield 'L' during a semester abroad in Ireland.

To make study abroad accessible to middle- and working-class students, Walker also declared that Linfield would pay their airfare — a promise that is kept to this day.

Ultimately, international exchange, exploration, travel and dialogue, VanBeek said, is the heart of education itself.

“One of the central tenets of a liberal arts education is that you’re taking in so many different perspectives and ideas to develop discernment — what is good about this, what is not so good about this, how do these differences impact outcomes and the human experience?” she said. “On campus, students explore ideas through faculty lectures, reading and experiential learning. But in the context of international study, every moment of the experience is an opportunity to take in new ideas and perspectives.”

‘Isolationism and provincialism are simply no longer options’

In 2023, Linfield leaned into its Pacific Rim identity as opportunities for partnerships arose. Sias University in Zhengzhou, China, was founded in 1998 by Shawn Chen ’87 with the goal of incorporating Linfield-like liberal arts traditions into a Chinese higher education setting. Sias has more than 36,000 undergraduate students, and offers both Chinese and American bachelor’s degrees.

In September, after months of discussion with Chen and other Sias leaders, a delegation of Linfield’s academic leadership traveled to China — and returned with a partner in international education.

“It’s crucial for our students to expand their horizons and understanding. It’s equally important for us to welcome international students to Linfield.”

–Beth Concepción, provost and vice president for academic affairs

The memorandum of understanding calls for the development of a joint-supervision dual degree program. Linfield and Sias hope to launch a small pilot of the program in 2025. The agreement calls for explorations of mutual exchanges starting as soon as fall 2024.

During the trip, the delegation also visited Tongji University, a national public university in Shanghai, to explore similar partnership possibilities for the School of Nursing.

“I’m very excited about these possibilities — a robust exchange would create so many academic and experiential possibilities for our students,” said Beth Concepción, provost and vice president for academic affairs. “There is also the possibility of collaborative faculty research with Sias and Tongji universities.”

VanBeek believes the pairings would be ideal for Linfield students.

“There are some very exciting study abroad possibilities, both at Sias and Tongji, and such an incredible environment for learning,” she said. “For students to experience such a different culture, with thousands of years of history — it’s wonderful.”

Concepción added that if Linfield is not preparing students for a global world, it is not living up to its mission.

“It’s crucial for our students to expand their horizons and understanding. It’s equally important for us to welcome international students to Linfield,” she said. “Isolationism and provincialism are simply no longer options in the world as it exists now, or the world our students will inhabit in the decades to come.”

Worldwide learning

While “study abroad” is often used as shorthand, a variety of programs expand global learning at Linfield.

Going there ...

January Term: Four-week international courses offered by Linfield faculty each January are focused on a specific subject.

Semester- and year-abroad programs: Students can study at universities in 13 countries, earning the same credits they do at Linfield.

Graduate-level international capstone: In lieu of a thesis, M.S. in business students complete a yearlong project with an international organization and spend a week with their client.

Wine studies 3+2 program: Students can earn a bachelor’s degree and an International Vintage Master degree in five years from Ecole Supérieure d’Agriculture (ESA) in Angers, France.

Coming here ...

Short-term international students: Many international students come to Linfield for a semester or a year as part of an exchange or on grants like the Fulbright.

Degree-seeking students: International students also fully matriculate, earning their Linfield degree.

Visiting scholars and teaching assistants: Various programs throughout the university welcome professors, scholars and instructors from other countries.

Read more online at magazine.linfield.edu

- **International students on what they thought America would be like – and what they found.**
- **Faculty members on what makes a great January Term course.**