

Global Partners Project
East Asia Regional Alliance
Off-campus study programs in China

The Global Partners Project aims at strengthening international education at its forty-two member colleges through collaboration. The Regional Alliances initiative focuses that collaboration on three specific regions—Eastern/Southern Africa, France, and East Asia. The agenda for each region is different, shaped by the priorities of the colleges and the characteristics of the region.

The East Asia Regional Alliance task force has found that the colleges' relations to East Asia reflect a wide range of commitments and resources. Some of the colleges have established East Asian Studies departments and long-standing off-campus programs in the region. Others are just getting started, using recent foundation grants. Still others are trying to patch something together, with limited resources and expertise. Across the board expectations for both on-campus and off-campus study are unclear, with many questions about curriculum and language study.

The task force looked at patterns of study abroad in East Asia and found wide regional variation. For Japan, study abroad is concentrated in several widely used and quite satisfactory programs, including the GLCA/ACM Japan Study program. In Korea and Southeast Asia, there is small, but growing, student interest, a limited number of options, and a desire to maintain Global Partners conversations about program availability. Interest in China is expanding, and the choice of programs is complex. There are mixed opinions about the best programs—including which programs are best for liberal arts students, and which are best for students with particular interests.

The East Asia task force decided to evaluate off-campus programs in China, with the goal of identifying the one (or more) that best serve liberal arts students. In the summer of 2004 Global Partners staff surveyed most (but not quite all) of the participating schools, asking them to list the numbers and destinations of students who studied off-campus, 2000-2003. According to that survey, seventeen colleges reported sending students to China in those years, using sixteen programs. Consortial staff asked off-campus study officers or Asian studies faculty at these colleges to comment on the programs they used, and to list the characteristics of an ideal China program.

Qualities of an ideal program

When the task force asked the responding schools the marks of an ideal program in China, everyone unsurprisingly wanted well-trained teachers, good orientation, and interesting excursions. Several stressed the importance of a resident director. Most all wanted non-language courses, with one respondent suggesting the option of direct enrollment in a Chinese university. One respondent saw value in affiliation with a Chinese university, and encouraged location “in one of the many very large cities where there is adequate health care, sanitation, etc.”

Since the colleges have different on-campus offerings and different curricular agendas, there were also differences of opinion. Some preferred programs that focus on language acquisition, while others wanted disciplinary courses. Some wanted programs that expected a high level of Chinese for entering students, while others wanted programs that welcomed inexperienced students. Some wanted experiential courses, while others wanted academically rigorous classes. One college that teaches Chinese on campus stated that it did not need courses

taught in English. Another college that does *not* teach Chinese put particular stress on teaching the language. A third, noting that there already are programs that provide good language training, suggested that the consortia should design a program that provides a quick but comparative look at China, targeted at students with little knowledge of Chinese. There were also disagreements over housing arrangements, with one school saying that homestays are not important, while another feels that they are. All encouraged as much interaction with local people as possible.

These differences in opinion reflect the two models for off-campus study in China. One is more language-focused, with some area studies coursework that facilitates language learning. The other concentrates on area studies, mainly taught in English, while providing language teaching. Institutions and students choose programs based on which model best meets their needs.

However, based on the generally agreed qualities, it is possible to identify the programs that best reach those goals. Of the sixteen programs, five are the most used. The next few pages summarize comments on those programs.

Associated Colleges in China

ACC is a consortial program, operated by Hamilton College in consortium with Oberlin and Kenyon Colleges and Lawrence University. It is based at the Capital University of Economics and Business in Beijing, where students live in the international students dormitory. It is focused on language acquisition. Four colleges commented on the ACC program. All agreed that it is extremely rigorous, with “cutting-edge pedagogy”. One respondent, however, felt that “it is a bit too intense”; another called the “language prerequisite inflexible.” Another reports that students describe the program as “Chinese boot camp”; they come away exhausted, but they also achieve more language progress than students from other programs. Two college representatives call ACC their programs of choice for China. One likes it because “it is small and personalized, sponsored by a peer institution, and offers an excellent level of academic rigor.” On the other hand, that commentator views the program’s isolated nature as a drawback; it “does not engage the students in many ‘experiential’ activities designed to expose them to Chinese life.” Those comments concluded that the program was not good for non-majors who do not plan to study the language to the highest levels. Another respondent also found the program attractive because of the quality of the students and their home colleges, the focus on language, and the high quality staff. It is, he concluded, “serious and intellectually focused.”

CET

CET got its start offering programs in China, but now operates study abroad programs in Vietnam, China, the Czech Republic, and Italy, focused mainly on language. It has multiple programs in China at three sites—in Beijing, Harbin, and Nanjing. This variety of sites was seen as a plus, allowing colleges to choose the most appropriate sites for individual students. Respondents commented most often on the first two sites.

In Beijing the program is based at a small college, which might be less intimidating than the larger universities, and more likely to create connections to the surrounding culture. Courses in Beijing focus on language acquisition, for levels from beginning through advanced, with an optional course on Chinese society.

Harbin is a smaller provincial city, providing a more genuinely Chinese environment; on the other hand, the site at Harbin Institute of Technology might not be the best match for liberal

arts students. One respondent wrote that the city is very cold, culturally limited, and has significant social problems. Another felt, however, that Harbin was the strongest of the CET sites, while Beijing is improving. At Harbin the language courses are for intermediate to advanced students; the program enforces a strict Chinese-only pledge, and offers special attention to the needs of heritage students. In addition to language coursework, it features one-on-one tutorials on student-chosen subjects.

The Nanjing program is based at the Hopkins-Nanjing Center, providing a summer-only language immersion, with ethnographic practica. In addition to these programs, CET operates a program with Middlebury in Hangzhou, which provides language training for advanced students as well as culture courses.

Finally, in fall 2005 CET will begin offering a Chinese Studies program in Beijing, with less emphasis on language and more on area studies courses, taught by US and Chinese faculty. Students will live with Chinese roommates and have cultural immersion opportunities.

Five colleges commented on one or more of the CET programs. All respondents felt that the programs were of high academic quality. They appreciated the programs' flexibility, providing several levels of language instruction, and one-on-one teaching. Some colleges have been able to negotiate particular programs for their students, such as cultural courses or independent research projects. Previously CET focused on language instruction. One respondent wrote that "this is not a program for students who want to study economics or political science in English as it does not offer these types of courses." The availability of Chinese roommates was seen by several respondents to be a plus.

Council on International Educational Exchange

CIEE is a long-established provider of off-campus study programs, with sites all around the world. It has three sites in China—Beijing, Nanjing, and Shanghai, each offering semester or year long programs. It also operates summer programs in Beijing, Shanghai, and Hong Kong. It seems to be the biggest operator of American off-campus programs in China. The Beijing program is based at Peking University and focuses on intensive language teaching. Students are expected to have at least a year of Chinese before participating. They live in a foreign student dormitory. The Nanjing program also focuses on language, but also includes area studies courses. Students live with Chinese roommates or families. The Shanghai center is based at East China Normal University, accepts beginning language students, and includes more area studies courses. Homestays are an option. The Oberlin faculty reported that "the program in Beijing is seen as the only acceptable one."

Comments about the CIEE programs were mixed. In general they seem to be well reviewed by students, but faculty feel that they are not of the highest academic quality. The faculty at one college felt that CIEE's "language teaching quality is very uneven: for instance, some language teachers speak English with the students in class. CIEE programs lack a clear teaching pedagogy or standard; students sometimes return to the U.S. with *reduced* fluency." Representatives of another college found the programs less intellectually focused, less intense in liberal arts focus, and less rigorous in language training. Unlike CET and ACC, however, CIEE offers both language and non-language courses. That might make the programs "acceptable for students with no previous language study and who require a 'relaxed' language learning method," a faculty group concluded. A respondent felt that the CIEE programs were good "for non-majors who do not plan to study the language to the highest levels. Such students are looking for a more relaxed, experiential type of program." After visiting the program, one

college's evaluator found that it had "excellent group dynamics and staff experienced in working with generalist students."

Institute for the International Education of Students

IES is another large program provider, with sites all over the world. It only has one site in China, however, in Beijing. It advertises itself as providing both language classes and areas studies classes in English. It is located on the campus of the Beijing Foreign Studies University. One respondent thought the program was a good choice for students who wanted classes taught in English but also wanted to learn Chinese. Another wrote that IES was a good choice for non-majors who do not plan to study the language to the highest levels. Students have evaluated it well.

An off-campus study director praised the program's field trips. "I'm impressed by how extensive and integrated the trips are with the overall program." She also noted the availability of internships. On the other hand, she felt the content courses were uneven. She acknowledged that while program students "do not live with Chinese students, this is pretty standard, and truthfully, most US students would not do well living in regular Chinese student dorms." A few respondents suggested that the program varied in quality as the staff changed. One praised the program highly, describing it (unlike other respondents) as language intensive. Her students also praised the field trips, staff, and orientation, while missing the opportunity to live with Chinese students.

School for International Training

SIT is the fourth large program provider, with fifty-six programs around the world, focused on field-based learning and independent study. This experiential method is different from some of the more academically-focused programs considered here. It has two programs in China—a language and culture program and a summer program on public health and traditional medicine, both in Kunming in Yunnan province. The semester program specializes in intense cultural immersion, including rural homestays. Classes are taught in English.

One college's representative called it "a good general culture and development program." As with other programs, however, the program's quality varied with the academic director; others concurred. She added that students "with some previous knowledge of Chinese seem to enjoy it more and benefit more." The Hope representative thought that SIT programs in general were right "for the right sort of student—able to work independently, has traveled some, etc." Another respondent highly recommended the program because the homestays and other program elements help students to really learn about China. An evaluator who had visited the program said that the SIT program was not a good choice for language acquisition, but provided a unique location for studying dualisms of tradition and modernity, removed from major cities. It would make a fine area studies complement to a more language-focused program.

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