By Eric Robbins

Since I have been at Capital Normal University in Beijing for the past two months, I have had many different experiences and impressions of life here in China’s capital city. From the many people selling their diverse wares on the side of the road to the ubiquitous, distinctive Beijing dialect of Mandarin Chinese, one could effortlessly walk down the street and fill both hands pointing out the things that make Beijing unique.

To me, however, Beijing has become more than just the cartoonishly quirky, historically significant political capital of modern day China. Beijing has become just as much of a second home to me as the Westfield campus.

Of course, the various challenges of culture shock and language barrier have been much more difficult than I experienced acclimating to dorm life at Westfield, but overcoming these challenges has been more and more rewarding with every day here. The many friends I have made — American, Chinese, and most importantly, the myriad of other friends I have made in the cultural melting pot of a dormitory that all of CNU’s international students live in — have made my experience here in Beijing.

As luxurious as it is to be able to communicate fluently when I am with my American friends at CNU, we all agree that experimenting with our Chinese and even with the other languages of our friends has been the best way for us to gain the greatest appreciation not only of each other’s cultures, including that of the Chinese, but also of the many differences that we have each experienced in our lives here as expatriates.

When speaking with a visiting representative from Westfield, I suddenly felt very empowered about how far I had come as a foreigner in Beijing. This fact became most apparent to me when she and her colleagues had some difficulty understanding me, because as I had grown more comfortable in talking to them, I had begun to use some half English half Chinese slang that I had forgotten was only mutually intelligible between myself and my other friends living in the foreign student dormitory.

Although it has been two months already, sometimes each day is so fast paced that it only feels like two weeks, and I lose sight of how far my studies have brought me.

But to me, the best part about this experience is my ability to say just the same thing about all of my friends here at Capital Normal University, who come from every part of the world imaginable. I would have to accredit a majority of my daily ambition to all of my multicultural friends with whom I get to share the experience every day in the international building that we affectionately refer to as the “Tower of Babel;” without a doubt, Beijing has become a home for all of us.

Eric is a Business Management major, Class of ’13.
PROGRAM IN POLAND OFFERS UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE ON MIGRATION AND NARRATION

By Aleksandr Vlasenko

Studying in Poland through the Migration and Narration Erasmus Intensive Program exceeded my expectations and was richly rewarding. The learning experience, though only two weeks, was enough to walk away with feeling a sense of fulfillment and accomplishment. I attended substantial daily lectures and seminars interacting with students from Poland, Hungary, Germany, Sweden, Spain and UK, who represented various ethnic backgrounds including Irish, Iranian and Vietnamese – all bringing their own unique perspectives and personal and educational backgrounds. The program was a multidisciplinary approach, well equipped with highly accredited professors from all over Europe who brought their own experience and professionalism in a careful and personal way.

Krosno, Poland was a great place to host this program being surrounded and embedded in history and culture, a valuable part in learning from the history and current study of migration and narration.

I came to the migration and narration program with a political science background, initially thinking I would not fit in well. I quickly learned that my personal background and family’s story of migrating to the U.S. from the former Soviet Union not only helped me do just that, but allowed me the opportunity to share the story with others who had their own to tell. This developed into a fruitful educational experience and even made me address my own personal and national identity. Personally I believe that the program helped me bring a human element to my study of political science that may often be overlooked, giving me a more wellrounded approach in my future endeavors.

From the time of arrival to the all too sad departure, the Erasmus Intensive Program experience was one that will not soon be forgotten. I highly recommend it to students with history, social and cultural studies, literature and political science as their educational focus, but not limited to others who may have a unique personal background or interest concerning migration and narration. Overall it was a valuable experience from which a lot can be taken, and a memory to be cherished.

Aleks is a Political Science major in the class of 2012. Contact IPO for information about this program.

SHORT-TERM STUDY ABROAD COURSE ILLUSTRATES MIDDLE EAST HOSPITALITY

By Kristi Mientka

In May 2012, Dr. John Paulmann of the Communication Department will lead a shortterm study abroad course to Jordan.

Dr. Paulmann first traveled to Jordan in 2001 as a summer Fulbright participant. During his stay in Jordan, Dr. Paulmann had the opportunity to meet local artists, business owners, and women’s organizations. He said he was truly moved by the generosity and kindness of the people of Jordan.

He recalled the Bedouin people’s openness. As a nomadic people, living in tents (called “houses of hair”), they welcome anyone who needs shelter into their homes without question.

“It’s a poor country, but they gave us everything,” said Dr. Paulmann of his Fulbright experience.

Photofrom 2010 Jordan course, taken by Dr. John Paulmann.

Shortly after Dr. Paulmann returned to the U.S., the nation was struck by the tragedy of 9/11.

Remembering the overwhelming acceptance he felt as an American in Jordan, he devised the idea of the course in the years following. The first short-term Jordan course took place in May 2010.

Dr. Paulmann said he wanted students to have the opportunity to experience the kindness of the people of Jordan, to help counteract negative images of the Middle East in a post9/11 world. He said he believes students can benefit greatly from meeting families and individuals in another country, learning about their culture, and hearing their stories.

“Joy is in the process of discovering each other,” Dr. Paulmann said.
“It was just awesome,” declares Brooke Carney of her study abroad experience.

Brooke, who’s from Shrewsbury, spent her semester in Spring 2011 studying at the University of Limerick in Ireland, an experience she said she would happily do all over again.

As a psychology major, Brooke had the opportunity to take psychology courses at the Irish university. She also opted for several electives, including Irish step dancing and folklore, which gave her insight into Irish history and culture.

During her stay in Ireland, Brooke enjoyed exploring both the cities and countryside of Ireland. She said she loved the natural beauty of the Emerald Isle.

“Whenever you’re on a bus, you’re driving past fields of sheep,” she said.

“It really is as green as everyone says.”

Brooke found the locals to be friendly and welcoming. “Everyone is so happy and laidback,” she said. “Strangers will sit and talk to you in restaurants.” The kindness of the Irish people made her feel at ease—and at home.

Brooke also took advantage of the ease of cheap student travel in Europe. She visited several other countries on the continent, partaking in a nighttime bike ride through Paris, and sampling the local cuisine at an authentic Czech restaurant in Prague.

In her travels and studies, Brooke had the chance to meet many other students. In addition to her Irish friends, she befriended others from Hawaii, Michigan, Wisconsin, and even Iceland.

The study abroad experience, Brooke said, allowed her to become more independent. With thousands of miles between Ireland and the U.S., she said, “there was no going home on weekends. You have to figure things out on your own.” Traveling across Europe, she said, also left her with a deep sense of empowerment and confidence.

“It sounds so cliché, but studying abroad really is lifechanging,” Brooke said. “I wish everyone would do it.”
By Patrick L. Smith

Paris is not France as New York is not America. Both are fascinating cities, but they do not represent the whole. The same applies in China. Beijing is an extraordinary city, but it is not China. Neither are Shanghai, Hong Kong, Xiamen, Wuhan, or any of the other interesting metropolises whose names we may know. It is good to know this as you set out for a year on an exchange program. There are many Chinas; the trick is to learn as many of them as you can.

Since my own days as an exchange student, long years ago, I have learned the value of the art of getting lost. It has ever since proven the best way I know to learn a new country or a new locale. And in China, the opportunities are more or less infinite.

Were I fortunate enough to be a Westfield exchange student in Beijing or Zhuhai, I would equip myself with a map and make some plans—plans to get lost, that is—whenever a break in my studies permitted some travel. Here are a few of the destinations I would favor:

• If you are studying in Zhuhai, you may not make the long journey to Beijing. But you have no excuse for missing Macau, Xiamen, and Shanghai. They are very different, these three, but they share something in common: They are all places where East and West met at different stages in history, and the result in each case is a very engaging mix of two civilizations.

• Outside of Shanghai there are any number of fascinating places. The small villages in the Yangtze River basin are considered classic examples of Chinese rural culture as it was centuries ago. One I can think of straightforwardly is called Xitang. It is much worth the journey, with its small canals and rows of ancient houses.

• While you are in the neighborhood, spend a little time in Suzhou. It is the city of Chinese silk. It has what I consider the most dazzling collection of 1930s style neon anywhere in the world. It also has a famous garden known as “The Humble Administrator’s Garden,” and nearby a museum done in a superb East meets West style by I.M. Pei, the Chinese American architect.

• Moving westward, The Yangtze River valley is filled with extraordinary sights and cities. My favorite is Chongqing, a city built on hills with a funicular running across the river.

As you move west in China, you move away from the highly developed sections of the country and into the underdeveloped regions. These are fascinating, too. You will discover how varied the Chinese population is, despite the fiction that it is composed solely of Han Chinese. No, the minorities are many, and it is interesting to see how, over many centuries, Han culture blended with aboriginal culture and even Islamic culture in a city such as Xian, which was the terminus of the Silk Road.

I once sat and talked with Ai Weiwei, the noted Chinese artist. When I told him I wanted to discuss China he replied, “Which one?” As you move about in China, you will see how intelligent a question that truly is.

Dr. Patrick Smith is visiting Asian Studies scholar at Westfield State University and teaches in the Political Science and Communication departments.
By Kristi Mientka

In January 2012, Westfield faculty members led three short-term study abroad courses to Costa Rica, Nicaragua, and San Francisco. During each course, which lasted about two weeks, students had opportunities to participate in unique learning experiences outside the classroom.

Eighteen students attended the Costa Rica course, taught by Dr. Tim Parshall of the Biology Department. On this course, students learned hands-on about tropical ecosystems. In addition to observing the diverse animal and plant life of the rainforest, students hiked and went ziplining and rafting.

The Nicaragua course was headed by Kathi Bradford, Director of Alumni Relations. Twenty-four students worked at a local high school in the San Ignacio Barrio in Granada to build a new classroom. Prior to their departure, the group had raised over $7,000 to build the classroom. They collaborated with La Esperanza Granada, a volunteer organization committed to children’s education in Granada.

On the San Francisco course, led by Dr. Marsha Marotta, Dean of Undergraduate Studies and Nanci Salviodio, Interim Vice President of Alumni and Community relations, 14 students participated in a Service Learning opportunity through the GLIDE Memorial Church, which works to fight poverty through community involvement. The students learned about the politics and culture of San Francisco and visited historical sites around the city, including Angel Island and City Hall.

Several more short-term courses are scheduled for May 2012, including Costa Rica, Ireland, Jordan, and Vietnam.


SIGNATURE STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS OFFER EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITIES

In addition to four International Exchange programs in China, Ireland, and Poland, Westfield State University offers four Signature Study Abroad programs. Three of these programs offer excellent opportunities for students to enroll directly in institutions abroad, and one is a unique chance to learn while sailing the globe.

Located in the historic market town of Ormskirk, Edge Hill University in the North West of England offers a $500 scholarship to all Westfield students who enroll there. Edge Hill’s campus combines modern classroom and athletic facilities with rural space encompassing fields and a lake. Educational facilities include state-of-the-art science labs and a library with over 250,000 items. Edge Hill offers a wide range of courses, including criminal justice, psychology, communication, music, computer science, and biology. Ormskirk is within half an hour’s train ride of Liverpool, one of England’s most historic cities. Manchester and London are also within easy reach by rail.

A second Signature Program, at Dublin Business School in Dublin, Ireland, offers excellent academics in an urban setting. In addition to business, DBS offers courses in subjects ranging from psychology to law to drama to journalism. While at DBS, students have options to live with a local host family or in a student apartment. The university is located in the heart of the vibrant city of Dublin, and a short trip away from the beautiful Irish countryside, where students can partake in a host of outdoor activities.

Westfield State University has also partnered with the Umbra Institute in Perugia, Italy, to offer Honors Program students an opportunity to complete Honors coursework while studying abroad. The experience includes: life in a college town that’s a cosmopolitan city, a central location in Italy, student activities and excursions, and Honors Courses each semester. Honors courses are distinguished by higher academic standards; extensive study in the

(continues on page 6)
The first domestic short-term travel course brought fourteen Westfield State University students to San Francisco, California; I was fortunate enough to be one of them. This was also the first short-term course to be offered as Honors credit to students in the Honors Program.

Several students, myself included, worked with the course leaders to create individual Honors components. As part of the course, all students were required to write a research paper on a topic of their choice. Majoring in Political Science and Communication, I centered my paper on the ranked-choice voting system employed by San Francisco’s city government. As part of my research, I sought Westfield students’ opinions on the voting system.

During the course, we met for regular class discussions about our observations of the city and its people. The Honors students met for further discussion of our excursions and on topics related to our Honors components. The small size of our group allowed for more student involvement in discussions and constructive feedback for Honors component development. Additionally, the experience of creating a research plan and working closely with a faculty member serves as preparation for Honors students who are interested in starting their Senior Honors Projects.

Though I appreciate the intellectual engagement of my Honors courses, the travel experience was especially enriching. The knowledge I gained from living and learning in San Francisco played an important role in helping me understand the politics of the city and its effects on the community. Everywhere I went in San Francisco, I found opportunities to challenge my beliefs and see the world from a new perspective.

Brittany is a member of the class of ’14.
By Kristi Mientka

To Janie Duchesneau, who lives in Canada, a big snowstorm is nothing out of the ordinary. But a bout of winter weather offered her a surprising perspective.

Janie, who hails from St. Jean sur Richelieu, Quebec, spent the fall semester studying as an international student at Westfield through the National Student Exchange program. She said her overall experience, enhanced by a strong sense of community, was an excellent one she would highly recommend to others.

“I really like the sense of everybody knowing each other,” said Janie, who studies at L’Université de Sherbrooke in Quebec. “It’s really a community.”

That tightknit community feeling, she said, was reinforced after the Oct. 29 snowstorm.

During the massive power outage in the region, Westfield staff went above and beyond to offer help to students and area residents alike. “It was really nice to see that,” Janie said.

She said she developed an even greater appreciation for the Westfield community after seeing the response to the storm.

This support made her transition easier. The cultural adjustment involved with living in the U.S., Janie said, was greater than she had anticipated.

However, the difference was significant. She said she immediately noticed that people at Westfield were friendlier than at her home university. “People are really interested in hearing what you have to say,” she said.

Janie also pointed out the helpfulness of Westfield faculty and staff, especially of her major, the Psychology Department. Her professors also gladly helped to explain things, especially English words, that she had trouble understanding.

She said she took advantage of the wealth of resources offered on campus, especially the Reading and Writing Center, which helped with her language skills.

Speaking English all the time, rather than her native French, proved a challenge.

“Some of the English expressions were difficult to translate,” she said.

“Like ‘What’s up?’ At first, I thought, ‘What do I answer to that?’” By the end of the semester, however, Janie and her roommante Audrey Allard—also an international student from Canada—had been able to improve their English so much that they didn’t even speak French with each other.

“We really committed ourselves to this experience,” she said.

Janie said she enjoyed the sense of belonging she felt here on campus.

“Even if you’re not a Communication major, you can join the Comm Club,” she said. “There’s this feeling that you’re welcome everywhere.”

That welcoming atmosphere, she said, is what made her semester here worthwhile.

Janie already knows for sure that she will be returning to Westfield for a visit in the future.

“I’m amazed by this place,” she said. “I’m going to tell everyone that I can, ‘If you want a good experience, go to Westfield.’”

For more information on National Student Exchange, please visit www.nse.org.

FROM QUEBEC TO WESTFIELD:
AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT’S PERSPECTIVE

In October, Westfield’s International Student Advisor, Vera Vlasenko, traveled to the Caucasus region to participate in recruiting events for the international network EducationUSA.

Supported by the State Department’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, EducationUSA consists of over 400 advising centers around the world. One of its main missions is to promote higher education in the U.S. globally.

One EducationUSA conference that Vera attended was held in Baku, Azerbaijan, and the other in Tbilisi, the capital city of the Republic of Georgia.

At these events, Vera met with many students from the region who are interested in studying in the United States. She shared information about Westfield to promote the university as an option for students seeking to further their education in the U.S.
PHOTOS FROM SHORT-TERM COURSES, JANUARY 2012

The finished classroom, which was named Aula de Westfield State University.

Rev. Cecil Williams’ office at GLIDE Memorial Church. Photo courtesy of Bradley Calandrella.

Westfield students working on a classroom in Granada, Nicaragua. Photo courtesy of Kelli Nielsen.

INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS & STUDENT EXCHANGES AT WESTFIELD STATE UNIVERSITY

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The International Programs Office staff, From left: Kristi Mientka, Vera Vlasenko, Danielle Emerson, and Cynthia Siegler.