



4-28-2008

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Recommended Citation

Block '09, Jessica, "Student to Study in India on Critical Language Scholarship" (2008).
News and Events. 249.
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/249>

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April 28, 2008

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Student to Study in India on Critical Language Scholarship

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – With the intent to pursue advanced studies of the Hindi language, Illinois Wesleyan University junior Kari Irwin will study at the American Institute for Indian Studies (AIIS) for 10 weeks this summer in Jaipur, India.

A religion and philosophy major from Palatine, Ill., Irwin took a course in intensive Hindi last summer at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she learned about the program in Jaipur.

In addition to her acceptance to the AIIS program, Irwin also received a Critical Language Scholarship, which is sponsored by the United States Department of State Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and is administered by the Council of American Overseas Research Centers.

Critical Language Scholarships are awarded to American students and recent graduates who wish to pursue various levels of intensive overseas study in “critical need” foreign languages. Recipients are expected to continue their language study beyond the scholarship period and later apply their critical language skills in their professional careers.

Irwin believes that a mastery of Hindi will “not only be useful, but will be necessary” for her research and desired profession. “Following my graduation next year, I hope to research the expression of popular religion in India before beginning by graduate studies in South Asian religions,” said Irwin, who hopes to eventually complete a Ph.D. in South Asian religions with the intent to become a professor.

AIIS Language programs are conducted in environments where the languages are commonly spoken, so that formal instruction is supplemented by the experience of using the language in daily life. AIIS offers courses in a variety of Indian languages including Tamil, Bengali, Punjabi and Sanskrit.

As the second most-spoken language in the world and as the language of Indian administration, media, education and literature, “Hindi is perhaps the most practical language for beginning to study the way people from several regions define and practice their faith because it

functions as a common ground across areas with different native languages throughout the subcontinent,” said Irwin.

Although her focus is academic, Irwin also wants to immerse herself in Jaipur’s culture. “I hope my host family will teach me how to cook some Rajasthani dishes, and I look forward to interacting with neighbors, visiting temples and observing religious ceremonies and rituals,” said Irwin. “I can’t wait to walk with my friends down the streets of Jaipur, getting to know the personality of the ‘pink city.’”

For additional information about the AIIS programs, visit <http://www.aiislanguagelprograms.org/p.php>. For additional information about the Critical Language Scholarship, visit <https://clscholarship.org/home.php>.

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