



Spring 5-29-2015

From Tea to Trompe L'oeil, May Term Offers Immersive Experiences

University Communications, Illinois Wesleyan University
Illinois Wesleyan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news>

Recommended Citation

University Communications, Illinois Wesleyan University, "From Tea to Trompe L'oeil, May Term Offers Immersive Experiences" (2015). *News and Events*. 2648.
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/2648>

This Article is protected by copyright and/or related rights. It has been brought to you by Digital Commons @ IWU with permission from the rights-holder(s). You are free to use this material in any way that is permitted by the copyright and related rights legislation that applies to your use. For other uses you need to obtain permission from the rights-holder(s) directly, unless additional rights are indicated by a Creative Commons license in the record and/ or on the work itself. This material has been accepted for inclusion by faculty at Illinois Wesleyan University. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@iwu.edu.

©Copyright is owned by the author of this document.

From Tea to Trompe L'oeil, May Term Offers Immersive Experiences

May 29, 2015

BLOOMINGTON, Ill.— From taking afternoon tea at London's Kensington Palace to staging an ancient Greek comedy, students at Illinois Wesleyan University immerse themselves in a single course meeting daily during May Term. The May Term experience is designed to push the boundaries of a normal classroom setting. Following are four of the courses offered in May Term 2015:

"The Bloody History of Afternoon Tea" – Professor of History Thomas Lutze

An unquenchable thirst for tea – a staple of British life for nearly 350 years – led to horrific human costs, especially in China and India, according to Professor of History Tom Lutze. He led the May Term travel course, "The Bloody History of Afternoon Tea," with London as home base of students' learning and exploration. One of several excursions was to Liverpool, where students visited the International Slavery Museum to learn how slavery and sugar plantations both expanded in service to tea drinking. A visit to Amsterdam included exploration of a 17th-century Dutch trading ship and learning about the Dutch East India Company Lectures at the University of London focused on the impact of the tea trade on Asia.



Students explore a 17th-century Dutch trading ship during their travels in Amsterdam.

"A gratifying element of the course is that students really seem to be allowing themselves to feel what it was like to live the lives of others in history – to empathize with Africans packed in shackles aboard slave ships headed to America, with Dutch sailors facing scurvy during their voyages to Asia in the 1600s, and with Chinese government officials or peasants who faced British merchants and soldiers who were determined to foist opium on China – at the point of a gun – so as not to have to trade silver for the tea so coveted back home in England," said Lutze.

"For me, the best part of the course has been to see students engage important issues they haven't much considered in the past," he added. From the ethics of economic botany to a nation's right to cultural practice, Lutze said it's been rewarding to listen to the students develop their ideas on these and other thorny questions.

"Scene Painting" – School of Theatre Arts Director Curtis Trout

It's 2:30 p.m. on a sunny Tuesday in IWU's McPherson Theatre, and Professor of Theatre Arts Curtis Trout's students are immersed in May Term, both literally and figuratively. Three students maneuver around the wet paint on a backdrop taped to the McPherson stage floor, while another sketches an outline of an ancient Greek temple. Color studies of green, purple, blue and rose are draped over the rows of seats. Along the walls, students have taped charcoal drawings utilizing the trompe l'oeil technique. From the French meaning to "deceive the eye," the technique creates the optical illusion that the depicted objects exist in three dimensions.



Student work in Curtis Trout's "Scene Painting" course.

This highly organized chaos that has allowed the 12 students – an art major, an acting major, and a math major among them – to progress from their first 5- x 6-foot pencil drawing four weeks ago to producing painted backdrops of classic Greek temples. These backdrops were used for students in Professor Nancy Sultan’s “Greek and Roman Comedy” May Term course in their presentation of Aristophanes’ “The Birds.”

Through a series of exercises, students learned layout methods, surface prep, color manipulations, faux finishing techniques, and other techniques culminating in the production of the scenes for Sultan’s class. “Everything cumulates throughout the course,” Trout said of the skills that begin at fundamental levels and progress to creation of scenery for the stage.

“Greek and Roman Comedy” – Professor and Director of Greek and Roman Studies Nancy Sultan

Even though he enrolled in a class with the word “comedy” in the title, Colin Gogoel ’18 (Elgin, Ill.) never expected to find ancient Greek plays so funny. Gogoel said Professor Nancy Sultan’s classroom atmosphere makes it comfortable for students to discuss the vulgarity, sexual innuendos and puns within works dating from the fifth century B.C. He particularly enjoyed the plot line of Aristophanes’ “Lysistrata,” in which the women of Greece withhold sexual privileges to force their husbands and lovers to negotiate peace in the Peloponnesian War. The course also included comedies written by Greek and Roman writers Menander, Plautus and Terence.



Students re-create the Great Dionysia, an ancient religious festival.

A business administration major, Gogoel most enjoyed moving out of his comfort zone to participate in the students’ staged reading of “The Birds” by Aristophanes. Originally produced at the Dionysia in 414 B.C., the play is a conventional example of Old Comedy. Gogoel and several classmates comprised the props team, and reveled in discovering IWU’s cache of props from decades of previous productions.

“We had so much fun going through a whole warehouse of props, which I didn’t know existed,” said Gogoel. “I was not familiar with these plays, and I talked to my high school English teacher before May Term started and told him what we would be reading. He said those would be a lot of fun, and that has been the case.”

“Ape Sapiens: Wild Minds, Captive Dignity” – Assistant Professor of Psychology Ellen Furlong

For most people, their only first-hand view of a gorilla or an orangutan occurs within the confines of a zoo. What ethical obligations, then, do humans have to treat these and other highly intelligent primates with dignity?

Assistant Professor of Psychology Ellen Furlong’s class attempted to answer this question with direct observations at the Louisville Zoo and at the Primate Rescue Center in nearby Nicholasville, Kentucky. Furlong led her class in designing and building cognitively appropriate enrichment items, which are used to support the behavioral, physical, social and psychological well-being of primates such as chimpanzees, gorillas, orangutans, siamang and several species of monkeys. The class then assessed the effectiveness of the enrichment items.



Direct observations of orangutan behavior helped students design appropriate enrichment items.

Biology major Jessica Kraut '16 (Frankfort, Ill.) said she was surprised to learn even the animals' caretakers underestimate the animals' cognitive abilities. While building one of their enrichment items for the gorillas at the Louisville Zoo, Kraut recalled the caretakers were adamant that only one of the gorillas would be able to use sticks found in their enclosures as tools in order to obtain the food reward within the enrichment puzzle.

"It turned out almost all the gorillas used tools to get the food reward," said Kraut. "The keepers realized that they had been underestimating gorilla intelligence and that the gorillas were much more capable than they thought."

Although she took the course because she is passionate about animals, Kraut said she did not expect to become so emotionally attached to the primates after observing them for hours at a time. "It was fascinating to observe their different personalities and how each one is an individual."