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Rachel Hatch
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Travel Courses More Than Visiting Landmarks

June 28, 2007

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – The idea of spending a month abroad may bring to mind images of bus tours and cameras snapping away at majestic castles. But for students who travel with May Term courses at Illinois Wesleyan, there is more to discover than famous sites and guidebooks. They find themselves immersed in the differing cultures, peoples and ideas.

May Term is a month-long opportunity for IWU students to study a single subject intensively. The concept is designed for total immersion in order to erase the barrier between in-class and out-of-class learning. Illinois Wesleyan professors take students on a wide range of locales across the globe, such as sociology

professor Teodora Amoloza, who journeyed to Hawaii with students to explore the cultural impact of immigration on a state has no majority group. Students of Scott Sheridan, associate professor of French, traveled to Italy to take in not only the art and artistry of Renaissance Italy, but the present-day lives of residents of the country.

This May Term, Professor of English Jim Plath took students to Ireland to study Irish poetry and art, which meant meeting with Irish artists. After visiting the tourist-friendly areas of Galway and Killarney, students stayed with Irish families in the remote village of Allihies. Near the village is the Allihies Language and Arts Center, where some of the country's most noted Irish artists and poets came to speak to the students. "There are two things to do in Allihies—talk to the locals or commune with nature," said Plath. "It's kind of a hippie area where you find farmers and artists, a rugged and beautiful part of the country."

Some of the students stayed with families who had no heat in their bedrooms or had to walk for 30 minutes to get to town, and cross a small river. "They all had their stories and adventures, and that's what writers seek out," said Plath, who believes the rural nature of the village drew students to the local culture and people. "When you rub shoulders with the locals and combine that with the dramatic beauty of the landscape—the wind, the rain, the mist—the students received an inspiration and an education that goes well beyond books," he said.

For Jim Plath's writing courses, mingling with locals is more than a bonus, it is part of the curriculum. "When you teach a class about writing, you look for things and people to write about," said Plath, who has taken students to Paris for May Term courses and required that students mingle with Parisians. "They could buy bread in the same place every day, or sit in a café and write. Students really embraced it," he said, noting one student became so popular at a gelato shop that he was asked to come behind the counter and help one day.

Traveling with May Term can mean gaining an insight into what is important to other people and cultures. Fred Hoyt traveled with a class exploring the geopolitical position of Australia and New Zealand. "It's important for students to understand how the world is changing around them," said Hoyt. "That means they need to understand the markets in Asia and the importance of Australia and New Zealand to them."

The associate professor of business administration helped lead 24 students in a class entitled Business in the Pacific Rim along with Ruth Ann Friedberg, accounting professor emeritus. The students spoke with professors and visited businesses such as a winery and a coal mine, but other lessons came without tours or meetings. "Every day the students heard warnings on the shortage of water," said Hoyt. "They learned the most valuable Australian commodity just by being there—water."

Overall, travel courses enable students to make classroom lessons and texts come alive. "There is something magical about sitting at the café where Hemingway wrote *Big Two-Hearted River* and discussing the book. It gives you a chill," said Plath. "Being there allows students to feel a connection to the writer and to literature they cannot get with just a book in their lap."



Emily Gustason '10 takes in the Irish landscape during her May Term travels.