



Spring 3-28-2007

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Recommended Citation

Wallace, Sherry, "Students Chosen for Travel to Japan" (2007). *News and Events*. 3118.
<https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/news/3118>

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Students Chosen for Travel to Japan

March 28, 2007

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. - Two Illinois Wesleyan sophomores and a faculty member have been chosen to take part in the Technos Program, which will send them to Tokyo for two weeks in June to learn about Japanese culture. Sophomores Kari Irwin and Preston Prior will travel to the Technos International College of Tokyo from June 2 to 17, along with Nancy Sultan, professor of Greek and Roman studies at Illinois Wesleyan.

The program, sponsored by the college in Tokyo and the Tanaka Memorial Foundation, includes tours of cities, villages and the Japanese countryside, along with a four-day program of seminars and discussions at the college.

A religion and philosophy major from Palatine, Ill., Irwin's studies focus on Asian religion. She applied for the trip so she could educate others. "I think many people suffer from a lack of knowledge about Japanese culture, which means they cannot enjoy the beauty and richness of the East Asian advancement, art, philosophy and tradition," she said. Irwin is active in WESN, the Illinois Wesleyan radio station. She is a member of the IWU Outdoor Club and the Student Senate representative for the Residence Hall Association Executive Board.

A music education major from Benton, Ill., Prior has been interested in Japan ever since he heard his grandfather speak of living there following World War II. Prior wishes to use his experience in Japan to broaden his planned career as an educator. "A trip like this will enable me to enhance the curriculum in my classroom and educate our future students to be more accepting and understanding individuals," he said. Prior plays trombone for the Illinois Wesleyan Titan Band and Jazz Lab Band and trumpet for the Illinois Wesleyan Symphonic Winds. A member of the Music Student Advisory Board, he is a tenor in the university choir and for the area Cantus Novus Choir. Prior is also a musician and actor for the Pyramid Players Theater, a community theater group in southern Illinois.

Sultan, an instructor of Humanities 101 "World of Ideas" at Illinois Wesleyan, also plans to apply the Technos trip to her teachings. "Since my area is the ancient world, I am curious to learn more about ancient Japanese culture, so I can incorporate the art, architecture and history of these periods into the ancient world humanities class," she said. The program will also offer information for her Greek and Roman classes. "I see the potential for using Japanese Kabuki theater and Noh drama as a meeting ground to illustrate aspects of ancient drama that are alien to Western traditions," she said. "Comparisons can be made on multiple levels between the Kabuki and Noh, and Greek tragedy, such as the use of masks, stylized movement and dance, formulaic poetry and the use of chorus."

Students and faculty apply annually for the competitive program. The Faculty Development Committee chooses a faculty member, who then assists the International Studies Committee in deciding which two students will attend.

Now in its 16th year, the program was initiated by former Illinois Wesleyan President Minor Myers Jr. and Kenji Tanaka, a Japanese businessman and honorary Illinois Wesleyan trustee who is committed to improving and promoting international relations around the world. Technos is owned by the Tanaka Ikueikai Educational trust, which funds the trips.

For more information, contact the international studies department at (309) 556-3375.



Kari Irwin (above)
and Preston Prior

