

Global Mindset: Studying Chinese with Princeton in Beijing

Mairead (Maisie) Campbell, Class of 2019

This summer I attended an intensive Chinese language program in Beijing, hosted by Princeton University. In the span of eight weeks, we covered an entire year of a Bowdoin language curriculum. The daily structure of the program consisted of four hours of class every day, one hour one-on-one sessions with a professor four days a week, weekly lectures and Chinese table meals exploring local restaurants. This immersive program integrated both classroom learning and real world practice once stepping off campus into the city of Beijing. Additionally, teachers are available for two hours every night for office hours to help students with homework or answer other questions. And that is only the classes. We will also take several trips to monuments and unique places in order to enhance students' understanding of Chinese culture and history.

Not enough praise could be said of Princeton in Beijing's teachers. Mostly graduate students from all around China, these teachers bring a down-to-earth, realistic component to our daily lessons. The program has an excellent student-teacher ratio, about 2.5:1. As such, each day we had two teachers co-teaching the day's lesson, with the teachers rotating each day through the five student classes. But the most valuable aspect of the program were the hour long one-on-one conversation sessions with a teacher. These conversations were a time where we students could truly put together the grammar structures and vocabulary in a discussion. Not to mention, these conversations are engaging and encourage students to apply their learning to topics that interest them. While my topics have ranged from environmental issues to regional differences within the United States and China, politics to popular movies, rarely did I leave my session without a sense of accomplishment (and a couple laughs, too).

This summer in Beijing has certainly left its mark on me—beyond a dramatic improvement in all areas of my Chinese comprehension, it was hard not to begin to feel at home in the middle of this strange, yet familiar culture. Nothing compares to the appreciative surprise of a store owner as he/she switches to Chinese after you respond in Chinese to all his/her English inquiries. And you actually understand. While my main aim in this program was to study Chinese in order to further my understanding of China's environmental issues, I found much more than I bargained for in developing an appreciation for Chinese history and culture. Climbing 长城 (the Great Wall), eating traditional roundtable Chinese cuisine, and so much more, these experiences have helped me to begin understanding a nation so different from that which I was raised in.



Featured: PIB sponsored wushu class (first row, 4th in from the right: Maisie Campbell). 7/5/17.

Faculty Member: Songren Cui

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