

Princeton In Beijing

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This summer, I participated in an 8-week total immersion Chinese language program hosted by Princeton University. The program was held on the campus of Beijing Normal University, one of the leading teacher education universities in China. During these 8 weeks, I connected with around 150 other Chinese students from top U.S. colleges and universities.

Although I grew up in Maine I am ethnically Chinese and have always been interested in learning more about my Chinese heritage and the experience of living in China. When I came to Bowdoin, I thought I might want to try taking Chinese. I took Elementary Chinese during my first semester, and it turned out to be one of my favorite classes. After taking two years of Chinese at Bowdoin, I was able to take third-year Chinese this past summer.

At Princeton in Beijing, students study two semesters' worth of material in 8 weeks. The program strongly emphasizes accurate pronunciation and grammar for language proficiency. Every day, we had 4 hours of class and an hour of individual sessions. Each class had about 5 students per teacher, which, along with the individual sessions, allowed students to receive personalized help and form very close relationships with their teachers. Each level had a head instructor from a U.S. college, along with several local teachers. Many of our teachers were still students themselves at BNU, pursuing Chinese language education. Every student and teacher was incredibly hardworking, passionate, and committed to their work in learning or teaching Chinese. I believe this aspect is what made this experience truly special. Living in Beijing and adjusting to the local lifestyle, having daily conversations with the local teachers, along with talking with Chinese locals outside the classroom were some of the most enriching experiences of the program.

Throughout the summer, we participated in cultural activities such as traditional Chinese calligraphy, painting, and Tai Chi. We visited many important tourist attractions, including the Great Wall, the Summer Palace, Jingshan Park, and more. The program also arranged for students to see an Erhu performance at the National Center for the Performing Arts and a traditional Chinese acrobatic show. In addition to these traditional activities, the program offered tours of famous Chinese e-commerce, automotive, and phone companies to learn more about the modernization of China.

Upon my return to Bowdoin, I intend to take fourth-year Chinese and complete a Chinese minor. This opportunity allowed me to meet many people who share my interests in Chinese language and culture and strengthened my passion for studying Chinese at Bowdoin and beyond.



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