

2015 Study Abroad Programs Site Visit Report

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I am very thankful for having received the CLTA Study Abroad Site Visit Grant, as it enabled me to visit four study abroad sites in China during summer 2015. I went to ACC, CSI, CET-Beijing, and CIEE-Shanghai. These visits not only revitalized my own teaching, but also inspired me to further reflect on how to better encourage the students at my university, Iowa State University, to study abroad. The site visits to the four very rigorous and respectable programs afforded me many rich experiences from which I gathered tons of information. Due to the length requirements of this report, I will only be able to write down a very small portion of the information that impressed me the most.

ACC.

The first site I visited was ACC, Associated Colleges in China (美国各大学联合汉语中心). As Zhang Yin laoshi, ACC Field director, and I had agreed, I arrived at ACC located at Beizhi Building at Minzu University of China (MUC) at about 7:45 on June 29, 2015. Zhang Laoshi had already prepared the itinerary for me.

Based on the visiting itinerary, I observed Jiang Laoshi's fourth year big class (大班课) and Du Laoshi's third year small class (小班课). Both were extremely successful. The textbook for the third year is *China scene: An advanced Chinese multimedia course* (中国社会文化写实). For the fourth year large group class, they used authentic materials. In the class I sat in, they were learning from Lung Ying-tai (龙应台)'s "中国人你为什么生气?" from *China's Peril and Promise* (中国的危机与希望), an article closely related to today's negative social



Jiang Laoshi at ACC teaching 400 level students

phenomena that can trigger heated debate about the Chinese national character. These classes were carried out with a content-based approach: they impressed me not only by the intensity of information, but also the close association of classroom instruction and the application of real life situations. In addition, I was impressed by the numerous opportunities for students to practice and apply what they had just learned.

After the class observation, Zhang Laoshi introduced the general info of ACC and the teaching approaches of the program. Then she gave me a tour of the lodging and dining places at MUC. ACC values their contact with the local community. They made their students' oral presentations and writing assignments based on the contacts they made in the community. The students had the chance to visit different local communities talking with various groups of people, such as high school students and seniors. After each activity

students were required to write an article in Chinese to reflect on their experiences. Each student has a Chinese language partner to guarantee a total Chinese-immersion experience. For this purpose they all made a language pledge to converse only in Chinese. In addition, the program (and another two programs I later visited, CET and CIEE) also made teacher training an on-going process: there were always two or more teachers sitting in the classroom to observe and help. It appeared that whenever the teachers were not teaching, they were benefiting and learning from other teachers. In my view, this on-the-job training arrangement is highly effective and efficient. After learning about ACC in general, I conclude that it is a very well-organized and highly efficient program.

CSI.

Amid the beautiful campus of Beijing University, there sits the CSI program (Chinese Studies Institute associated with American University). CSI is the second site I visited. Although it took me a while to find the correct red building (文史学苑楼) among several similar buildings as well as the right (unlocked) door through which to enter, the historic architecture itself lends a culturally rich setting for students to learn about China. Overall the student-learning environment has old-fashioned attractiveness and charm.

Sun Youli Laoshi, Li Long Laoshi, and Huang Houju Laoshi were very busy, but they took the time to talk with me about their program and Li Laoshi took me to visit the dorm where the students live. They provided me with the summer immersion program schedule and allowed me to observe whichever class I wished. I observed Zhou Ying Laoshi's 211 comprehensive class, Huang Houju laoshi's 411 comprehensive class, and Yao Jie laoshi's 411 drills meeting. All of them demonstrated a student-centered teaching style and a lively atmosphere among students.



CSI Students learning Chinese

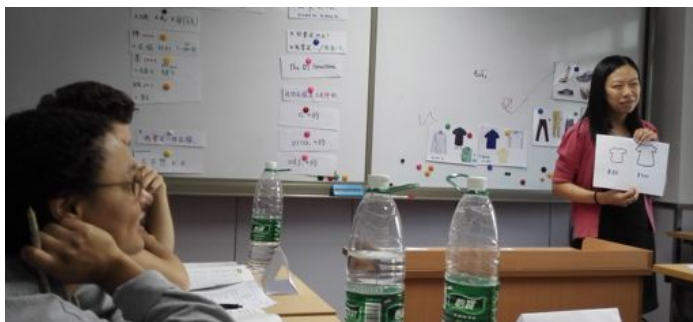
CSI summer classes consisted of one-on-one, comprehensive practice, drills, spoken class, and a weekly quiz. The schedule was tailored to suit the learners' habit of living (going to bed late and getting up late) and they made the one-on-one session in the morning from 9 to 11:50. The spoken Chinese class was added to the summer immersion program especially for students to learn more practical expressions, with which students can function well in their daily interactions with local Chinese people. The program is so successful that quite a few students had returned to the program to continue their learning. Besides taking Chinese language, students can choose courses in their major as well.

CET.

CET is the third site I visited. During my visit to CET, Feng Yu Laoshi, the academic director of the summer program and Wang Weilun Laoshi, the resident director introduced the CET summer intensive program in detail to me and showed me all the facilities and the dorm.

Feng Laoshi even sat in a class with me to observe the teaching. I attended three classes. Feng Laoshi also organized a meeting for me to talk with three of the Chinese roommates of the students. In addition, I learned that, in order to better accommodate students' varying levels of Chinese, CET offers courses at regular levels with such courses as 150 and 260, and yet still "fine-tune" each level into two different groups/classes for students at varying levels to interact and to learn better from each other.

CET is unique in many different ways: firstly, they offer first level class for students with no prior background in Chinese. I observed a 100 level class and was very impressed. After only fifteen days of Chinese class, the beginning students were able to use very accurate tones and grammar to talk about their family members, friends, shopping experiences and clothes preferences: they were even able to "argue" in Chinese. In the 200 level class I observed, the instructor, Du Laoshi spoke at a normal speed to talk about complicated things and the students responded very well. In the 300 level class, students discussed in Chinese how to protect the environment.



CET 100 level students talking about clothes preferences



Another unique feature of CET is that it is the only program with foreigner learners at the main campus of Capital Normal University (their College of International Education is located elsewhere) so that the students can honor their language pledge throughout the learning period. There is also an apartment building that belongs to CET (they call this building the "China house" 中国房子), which makes it easier to monitor CET students' use of the target language. (Note: I met with Zhu Li laoshi, the CET-Beijing academic director, the day before I came back to the U.S. During our meeting, I learned more about how thoughtful and attentive CET is to their students. I also learned a lot about the theme-based teaching approach adopted at CET-Beijing.)

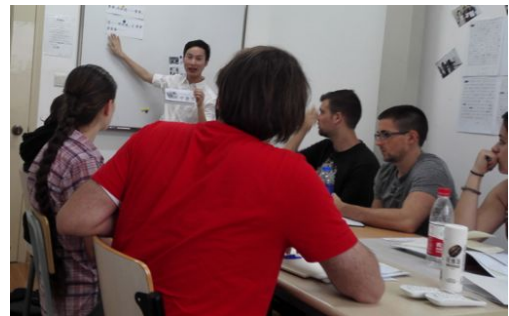
Besides all the extra curricular activities (such as the Chinese table, Ping-pong matches between Chinese and American students, dumpling-making sessions, a Wechat photo competition, a singing competition) the program also helped organize the China-US education colloquium and the China-US College students' colloquium in order to give the CET learners an opportunity to practice what they learned during their time at CET. In the later colloquium, the learners will discuss current issues such as the value of RMB in relation to the



influence of Chinese language in the world and the “Belt and Road initiatives”. Without a doubt, these arrangements will not only give learners opportunities to put what they learn to use, but also to make them better understand the meaning of learning.

CIEE.

I came to CIEE on the second day after the summer intensive program started. Despite their busy schedule, Dr. Steve Chao, Dr. Jianling Liao, Ms. Barabar Burner and Ms. Qianrong Tang gave me a chance to understand CIEE and arranged my visit to different classes and to tour student apartments. They created “a home away from home” for the students, where there is a small cozy library and a computer lab in the teaching building. They offered VPN-online-pre-departure orientation one month prior coming to China and on-site orientation session as well, airport pick up, different housing options that included living with a host family (who resides within 45 minutes’ walking distance from campus), or living with a Chinese roommate who is a CFL major student. They arranged different tours to big businesses through connections of the director and other professors. Since none of their instructors is Shanghainese, the instructors, therefore, could spend more time with the students. To differentiate learning, CIEE separates heritage learners from non-heritage learners.



CIEE students learning Chinese

Conclusion.

During these visits, I learned a lot and now have more ideas on how to improve my own teaching. I am touched by the devotedness of all the faculty members of the four programs to Chinese education for American students. Each of the programs has its own unique features. I learned how to better recommend to my students which of the four programs to go based on their different needs: I feel assured that they will get the best no matter which program they choose.

For my Chinese program, I have gained better ideas of how to develop a faculty-led study abroad program to China if this is possible and/or feasible at Iowa State University. My colleagues in the Chinese program, the department advisor and I have planned to make a flyer or brochure, and to hold an information session for our students so that they can have clear ideas about where to go if they are thinking about studying abroad.