

TO: Committee on Educational Policy and Planning  
FROM: Cori Filson, Director of Off-Campus Study & Exchanges  
Michael Arnush, Chair of the Advisory Committee on Off-Campus Study  
DATE: March 5, 2014  
RE: **PROPOSAL TO TERMINATE THE SKIDMORE IN CHINA PROGRAM**

The Office of Off-Campus Study & Exchanges, with support from the Advisory Committee on Off-Campus Study, the Dean of the Faculty's office, and the department of Foreign Languages and Literatures, proposes that Skidmore College terminate the Skidmore in China program and, as a result, its affiliation with IES in China. This proposal is made after many months of discussion and deliberation and follows a substantive on-site program evaluation by Paty Rubio, Associate Dean of the Faculty, and Mao Chen, professor of Foreign Languages and Literatures. We propose that Skidmore develop a richer portfolio of approved programs in China, through a variety of schools and providers, to replace the Skidmore in China option. In this way, we will continue to offer opportunities in China but will avoid the ongoing issues we face by administering a Skidmore-specific program.

The program evaluation and subsequent proposal for termination grow out of several ongoing issues with the Skidmore in China program.

- Lack of sufficient and sustained student interest in the program. In order to maintain a Skidmore program in China, we must have a minimum of 10 students each fall. This is a minimum based on curricular and financial realities. We struggle each year to reach this goal and have had to cancel the program 2 of the last 4 years due to insufficient enrollments. We have met this ten-student minimum only once in the ten years we have run the program. (See appendix A for student enrollment history.) We have been able to run the program with lower enrollments in other years, but at a greater financial cost to Skidmore.
- High cost of maintaining a Skidmore program in China, as opposed to utilizing existing programs through other schools and providers. In 2006, we moved from hosting a program through Beijing University to partnering with IES Beijing in order to save costs. While we did save as compared to administering our own program (given fixed overhead and personnel expenses), we have been unable to attract sufficient students to realize significant savings. A comparison of the IES China regular program fees and the Skidmore program fees through IES shows that Skidmore currently pays approximately \$4,000 more per student than we would if students participated directly through IES China. Moving students to approved programs in China will allow us to realize a \$4,000-\$5,000 savings per student per semester.
- IES has been unable to truly "customize" their China program for Skidmore. When we developed the program with IES in 2006, we agreed that the Skidmore students would take regular IES classes in addition to two Skidmore-specific courses: language classes and an Understanding China class developed for and delivered to Skidmore students alone. We also developed a pre- and post-program "orientation" that was meant to bring the students from Beijing and Shanghai together to more fully explore the differences between the two cities

and programs. Finally, we were supposed to be able to guarantee Skidmore students housing with families. Unfortunately, these pieces were never fully developed or realized, leading to a program that in every way mirrors the IES regular program. Despite our ongoing work with IES to ensure the Skidmore in China program was distinct from the regular IES program, we have never seen a difference between the programs. The program evaluation report from Paty Rubio and Mao Chen confirms the fact that the IES program is not customized. We should not continue to pay additional fees for a “customized” program option that IES cannot “customize” for us.

- The quality of the IES Beijing and IES Shanghai programs with which we partner is uneven, making it difficult to support the Shanghai program. The program evaluation report from Paty Rubio and Mao Chen highlighted the weaknesses of the IES Shanghai program in detail, confirming what we have suspected for at least two years; the Shanghai program does not meet Skidmore’s expectations regarding academic quality and student support. At the same time, their report outlined the many strengths of the IES Beijing program and recommended that we maintain it as an option for our students. We intend to do so by adding the IES Beijing program as an approved programs option.
- The customized IES Shanghai program promised a diverse listing of internship opportunities that were never realized. The students who participated on this program were underwhelmed by their internship placements. Our proposed expanded list will now offer Shanghai students the quality internship placements with highly ranked companies that they did not have access to previously.
- The current available portfolio of strong programs in China eliminates the need for a Skidmore-specific, limited program. Students currently are limited geographically and academically by only being able to participate in the Skidmore in China program. While in China, Paty Rubio and Mao Chen visited several other programs that could be added as options for our students. They found several that are very strong and would offer students an expanded curriculum, including intensive Mandarin and strong internship and business options. While these options were “advertised” by IES, they were not strong options. This change will also allow us to add or remove programs as student and faculty needs shift, something that is not possible with the current program.

We intend to propose the following programs in China to replace the Skidmore in China program. These recommendations are based on the evaluation provided by Paty Rubio and Mao Chen.

- IES Beijing
- Associated Colleges in China (ACC)/Hamilton Beijing
- CET Shanghai

We will continue to offer the SIT program in Kunming: China – Languages, Cultures and Ethnic Minorities.

Despite the challenges we have experienced with the partnership with IES, Skidmore students have enjoyed a good experience in Beijing and Shanghai over the years. We certainly want to find a structure that allows interested students to take full advantage of the many benefits a semester or year in China can provide. Unfortunately, our current program has not developed as we had expected and does not offer the types of

academic and co-curricular opportunities we want for our students. We are confident that by moving from a Skidmore-specific program in Beijing and Shanghai to an expanded approved programs list with options throughout China, we will better respond to the students' academic needs and the College's financial realities.

## **APPENDIX A: Student Enrollment History**

Skidmore in China is a fall-only program.

Skidmore in Beijing with Beijing University:

- Fall 2004: 4 students
- Fall 2005: 6 students
- Fall 2006: 9 students

Skidmore in Beijing with IES Beijing:

- Fall 2007: 6 students
- Fall 2008: 9 students
- Fall 2009: 6 students
- Fall 2010: 1 student – program canceled
- Fall 2011: 0 students – program canceled

Skidmore in China with IES Beijing and IES Shanghai:

- Fall 2012: 11 students
- Fall 2013: 8 students

## **APPENDIX B: Program Evaluation Report – China**

November 18, 2013

### **Program Evaluation of IES-Skidmore and Non-Skidmore Programs in Beijing and Shanghai**

Dates of visit: October 20<sup>th</sup> to November 31<sup>st</sup>, 2013

Evaluators: Mao Chen, Professor of Chinese and Patricia Rubio, Associate Dean of the Faculty, Professor of Spanish.

Sites visited:

In Beijing: CET Academic Programs, IES, and Associated Colleges in China

In Shanghai: IES and CET Academic Programs

All visits were very productive: Mao and I met extensively with administrators, teachers, and Skidmore and non-Skidmore students and roommates; we attended classes at three locations, visited classrooms, dormitory and dining facilities. In Beijing we visited four campuses: Beijing Institute of Education, Capital Normal University, Foreign Studies University, and Minzu University (ACC). In Shanghai, Mao visited Chinese classes at Fudan and I visited classes at SuFe but we did not get campus tours. We were also at Donghua University in Shanghai.

As a result of our conversations, discussions and observations, Mao and I agree on following recommendations:

- Continue our affiliation with IES-Beijing without the customized program;
- Terminate of our affiliation with IES-Shanghai;
- Initiate the process towards establishing an approved program with CET-Shanghai; and
- Initiate the process towards establishing an approved program with ACC-Beijing for students interested in Chinese language only.

#### **Beijing:**

CET has two tracks, one in Beijing in intensive language, housed in the Beijing Institute of Education campus, and the other, with a focus on internships and service learning, at Capital Normal University. Both programs are autonomous administratively and programmatically. Beijing Institute of Education is located in an “authentic” neighborhood, surrounded by small stores, eateries and shops. The campus, however, is small –four buildings around two courtyards—and a small dining room/cafeteria. CET’s installations are OK but on the older side. The administrative staff was very welcoming and forthcoming. Students live in the same building where the offices and the administration are located.

We met with Andria Payne, Resident Director and Zu Li, Senior Academic Director, who has repeatedly taught in Middlebury's summer language program. Andria organized a meeting with four of the Chinese roommates which helped us to understand their motivations for participating in the program. We did not meet any American students, I am not sure why. Mao and I visited a segment of a 100-level class with two students, and Mao briefly visited a 300-level class. The program has a language pledge, which is strictly enforced. Although the language program seemed strong, in hindsight we decided that we had not been able to sit in classes long enough to judge the quality of the teachers and, by comparison, the installations were subpar to those of ACC. We thought that students interested in an intensive language program would do better at ACC.

In the afternoon we visited the CET Internship and Service Learning/Volunteering program, directed by David Moser, and housed at Central Normal University. Students take a non-intensive language class and a class called The Rise of China and do group projects and visit or work at various agencies. David has deep roots in Beijing and has many contacts with sectors of the business and cultural worlds. As we learned from the Shanghai CET director, the Beijing program is evolving from a volunteer service-learning model towards internships. Although the list of NGOs, companies and volunteer services in Beijing is long, it is not as robust as the one in Shanghai. Students in this CET track seemed OK but not terribly exciting and the program itself did not strike us as very rigorous. We were not particularly impressed with what the program is presently offering and could not see our students in it. We attended a lecture by a Chinese journalist, which was informative and hinted at the richness of co-curricular programming. We also met with 10-12 students and roommates, who spoke well of the program and the cultural opportunities it afforded them. The campus and neighborhood tour with Zuo Cui, a very personable woman, was useful. Although the facilities are much better and more modern than those of the Beijing Institute of Education, Central Normal did not have the campus feel of Beijing Foreign Studies University or Minzu University.

### **IES-Beijing**

We had a very productive day and a half with Jeremiah Jenne, the Center Director, and his staff. They were all welcoming, friendly, organized, informative and professional. Jeremiah appeared to have an excellent rapport with the students both in and outside the classroom; they spoke highly of him. We attended classes, spoke to students and had several meetings with Jeremiah and members of his staff: the academic advisor, the resident director and the head RA. The only downfall to the timing of our visit is that there were no language classes in session. Mao, however, spoke extensively with the language teacher. I attended part of the class on cultural diversity in China and Mao and I attended part of Jeremiah's class on Chinese history. In both classes, students were engaged and the content was interesting and textured. One of our students was taking the class and we met her again at lunch.

The facilities are very good, probably the best we saw in Beijing. The program occupies two floors of an international student building on the campus of Beijing Foreign Studies University. It is close to a metro station and has ready accessibility to above ground transportation. On one floor are classrooms and offices; on another, the dorm.

The space is very nicely decorated with works by an art professor at the university. There are several classrooms of varying size, plus the library that is also set up for seminars. The library, run by one of the RAs, is excellent with about 3,000 volumes about China's history, society, economy, geography, cultures, etc. The dorm facilities were much better, more modern, better lit, and more pleasant than the ones at CET- Institute of Education. (We did not see dorm accommodations at Central Normal.) They have, for example, a "drying room", an important feature, given the general absence of dryers in China. They also have a small kitchen where students can cook and a student lounge.

One of the distinctive features of IES-Beijing is that it has a team of five RAs, all of whom are alumni of the program and have returned for the year. The head RA took us for a very nice campus and neighborhood tour during which we had ample time to discuss aspects of campus and residential life, particularly related to excursions, co-curricular activities, the roommate program, student integration to the life of the university and the neighborhood, etc.

We had a 90-minute lunch with 7 students, including our own, plus one alum who is presently in China setting up a company and offering an internship to one of the students. Students were very pleased with the program and with Jeremiah's leadership. They had, however, a valid critique of the internship program: limiting the practicum to one day per week prevents them from performing substantive work or participating in projects that require more sustained involvement. Because Mao and I agree that this is a weakness of the program, we do not recommend it for students who are interested in a more extensive internship program. If students are interested in a blended program, i.e. one that offers language, culture, history and an internship 'experience', then yes, this is a good program.

The students talked for some time about homestays and the roommate program. Of the programs we visited, IES-Beijing is the only one that seemed positive about the homestay program. Jeremiah underscored the 5-6 year family longevity, which he attributed to their rigorous screening program and to their successful effort in integrating the families into the program's co-curricular activities whenever possible, with Halloween being a favorite among the children. Families provide a single room with a desk, internet and 2 meals/day; the distance from the center averages around 20 minutes by public transportation, although they presently have two families who are 30-40 minutes away. We met one student who spoke highly of his homestay. The program is flexible in adjusting living arrangements in case of problems: if a student finds that the homestay is not working for her/him then s/he will be able to move to the dorm. One of the RAs is designated to the work with homestay program.

The roommate program is very competitive as Chinese students are very interested in meeting students from the US, honing their language skills, and accessing living accommodations limited to two instead of six or eight people per room. The program screens the roommates carefully according to motivation, cultural sensitivities and knowledge, and responsibility. The questions they utilize are based on the E-harmony dating program and have served them well to identify the best matches. We thought that both residential arrangements were an important part of the success of the program.

Jeremiah also briefed us on health and risk prevention protocols, which include a behavioral response team, a crisis team, and access to Beijing United Family Hospital. Doctors at BUFH have international experience or have trained abroad.

**Academics:** IES-China has two programs: a Language Intensive course that include 6 credits of area studies, and a Contemporary Issues programs with a less intensive language component. The language intensive program has a history of 22 years. As the strongest in language curriculum of all the IES programs in China, it offers a total of 10 credits for language study plus 6 credits for non-language courses. The program has a language pledge. Mao had a meeting with Zhao Ning, Associate Director of the program, who gave a comprehensive briefing of the language curriculum. The program uses a collection of selected texts and compiles them into several IES readers for different level of language courses. Some of the materials correspond with the texts we also use at Skidmore. This program usually has 30-50 students, whereas the Contemporary Issues program usually has 12-15 students. The Contemporary Issues program is structured around modules –government, ethnic studies, international relations, economic issues, one of which is held off site, this year in Tibet. In this program students take 4 credits of language. An important component of dorm life is the language pledge, which is strictly enforced as well as a strict attendance policy, the repeated violation of which may result in suspension.

**Customized program:** Skidmore’s customized program consists of an intensive language class plus the customized area studies course. Both, the customized and non-customized area studies course are taught by Jeremiah which increases their congruence. When we asked him how the Skidmore course differed from the non-customized version, he indicated that students “got something special”, that there was “value added”. We were not convinced. In fact, we thought, and students in Shanghai corroborated it, that the customized course isolates them further from the other students in the program and that the group can be too small for rich discussion and debate. One student in Shaghai said that the customized course was redundant with much of what they covered in other courses. As one student put it, all courses about China “cover the same general material”, and differences are few.

We think that IES-Beijing can continue to serve our students well without being customized for Skidmore. In fact, we believe that having a Skidmore program does not help the students to fully integrate into the overall IES program and we do not believe that the questionable ‘value added’ claimed by Jeremiah justifies the additional cost.

### **Associated Colleges in China**

The program is located on the campus of Minzu University, which is quite nice and accessible by public transportation. Mao and I attended classes separately and were enormously impressed about the quality of instruction. The language instruction in ACC was outstanding and we are persuaded that this would be the best language intensive program. The instructors were very well prepared, energetic and demanding. They were also approachable and had an excellent rapport with the students. Every minute in class was fully utilized and students were kept alert with ample opportunities to use the language. It is clear that those instructors have been carefully selected and trained with language pedagogy. The program has a strict language pledge.

Yin Zhang, the Field Director, was very informative and personable and spoke highly of the Skidmore students who had studied at ACC. Students live in the foreign students’ dormitory with other international speakers. In order to increase their practice of Chinese, students are assigned host families with whom they visit on weekends; they

also have language tables on Fridays with their teachers, as well as field trips, local excursions and events. In this respect, the program is not as robust as those with roommates or homestay living arrangements.

As we indicate above, this program is ideal for students who only want to pursue intensive study of Chinese. The program does not offer separate English based culture courses.

### **IES-Shanghai**

This was the most disappointing of the five program visits we completed on this trip. The structure of the program is the weakest in that students live in (very nice) apartments with other US students and thus have limited contact—they said almost no contact—with Chinese students. Homestays are available, but only 3 students this semester chose it—none from Skidmore. The program offers a language partners program that is not very useful, according to the students, because it feels artificial and it is difficult to find time to meet with their Chinese counterpart. Students are not reimbursed for inviting their partners to lunch, coffee or tea (the director was very surprised at the suggestion). Unlike all the other programs, there is no language pledge at the Center and the director was not receptive to the idea of imposing one, arguing that students are at various levels of proficiency. Much like IES-Beijing, one day per week is dedicated to internships but only about 50% of the students participate in the program. Placement is at times problematic because of students' low language proficiency. Aside from the internship seminar, the director does not teach any classes, so he is not really involved with the academic program. He is not particularly welcoming and was obviously not entirely pleased with our visit. He asked us about our visit's goals - a question that we took to be rude and defensive.

IES Shanghai has the weakest language curriculum of all the programs we visited. Mao went to visit all the language courses, and discussed students' levels and textbooks with language instructors. This program uses a series of "short-term oral-based language textbooks", which do not teach students enough reading and writing. The instructors explained that they wanted students to experience a "crash course" only. The language curriculum was not consistent, as it only requires students to learn oral based sound system for the two 100-level courses, and offers elementary literacy only at the 200-level. The classes are on the small side—5 or 6 people in each. Paty saw two classes and, given her full ignorance of the language, she could only observe class dynamics. Particularly complex was an upper-level class with two students, one US ethnic Chinese and one from a non-Chinese background. The students should not have been placed together because the ethnic Chinese student had the oral fluency the other students lacked, but lacked the grammatical accuracy the American student possessed. The teacher tried her best but it was an obvious case of students with very diverse backgrounds placed together when in fact they needed to be separate in order to develop the areas of proficiency in need of further development.

We met with our students for lunch (thank you OCSE!!); they had very little positive to say about the program. Their main critiques were as follows: 1) The program is veritably an island program, and the customized program isolates them even further; students need to make an effort to meet Chinese people. 2) The program is not rigorous enough, and it does not meet the expectations set up by brochure and literature provided

by IES. The classes at SuFe are simplistic and un-interesting. Students indicated that “work was light” although they had been told that they would have to work very hard. Classes at Fudan are much better particularly those focused on MB subjects; their marketing and management courses are very good. 3) There is no coordination between the customized course and those they take on China at Fudan and SuFe which means that the overlap is considerable. (The director, btw, acknowledged the overlap.) 4) The internship program is disappointing due to its weaknesses. Several students indicated that they had chosen IES- Shanghai because of the number of companies listed as offering internships. When they arrived, however, they found out that not all listed entities were active or that they required higher levels of language proficiency. They also agreed that the internship seminar was useless and unrelated to the internships themselves. One student indicated that the seminar is supposed to count as one of his MB major requirements, but that it has nothing to do with the content of the required Skidmore course. As a result, he will need to re-take it at Skidmore because it is essential for the major. The seminar meets every 2 weeks for one hour. A student indicated that she gets more out of the one day in the field than from the seminar as a whole. (BTW, we asked for the syllabus but the director was not receptive.) The internships in general were not very interesting because students work in their placement only one day a week and thus no in depth or interesting work requiring continuity can be accomplished. The experiences are superficial and limited.

Mao and I met for an hour with Mr. Jia, the professor who teaches the customized course. Although he is a very interesting and knowledgeable man he is not connected to Fudan or SuFe so he has no way of designing the course in such a way as to avoid duplication with the Chinese culture or history course(s) at the universities. We were also struck by the fact that he lamented students’ inability to access the NYT, although they do read the London *Financial Times*. We asked him whether he included any of the English language Chinese newspapers and he said that he didn’t. We also asked him how he utilized the city in his course and he had a hard time coming up with examples, except for a visit to the Jewish Refugee Museum and the Urban Planning Museum. We thought that it was a mistake. It would only have taken a little of imagination on the Director’s part, to design a course on the economic, cultural and social history of China as exemplified by Shanghai, particularly because students study the history and culture of China in the other general courses they take either at Fudan or at SuFe. Both Mao and I agreed that students gain little from the customized course and that it isolates them from the other students in the program.

Students spoke very highly of their RA who is a Chinese student from Fudan. They indicated that he was the “to go person” for everything, much more effective and efficient than the director. We met him briefly and indeed, he seemed very nice.

### **CET-Shanghai**

Both Mao and I are very enthusiastic in our recommendation to add with CET-Shanghai as an approved program to replace IES-Shanghai. The administrative staff is dynamic, friendly, welcoming and, most importantly, very knowledgeable. We were picked up at the hotel by Noah Shao, Assistant Resident Director and a Shanghai native, who also gave Paty a campus tour. The program is located on the campus of Donghua University, formerly Shanghai Textile College, located in the general proximity of our

hotel, and ample with access to public transportation. For a couple of decades now Donghua has been expanding its offerings to include careers in management and business and computer information systems. CET students live in the international student dormitories where they share a double with a Chinese roommate. Paty visited one of the rooms, which was adequate in size and included a private bathroom with a shower, two beds, two desks, two small wardrobes, a flat-screen TV and internet.

The academic program includes an internship requiring students to spend 8-10 hours per week at the internship location, an intensive language program (10 hrs/week –3 credits) and one elective, taught in English, on Chinese economy and Asian economy integration, Politics and governance, or History of Shanghai in the Modern Era. All students are required to take the internship seminar, which is taught by the Jeremy Friedlein, the director. Much like IES-Beijing, the program enforces a language pledge.

Mao attended five language classes while I talked to the director for over an hour and a half. Classes ranged between 3 and 6 students. The program uses *Integrated Chinese*, the same textbook that we use in our Chinese Program for the elementary levels. There are a total of seven full-time language instructors. The curriculum seems well structured, with regular quizzes and tests. The language courses are offered five days a week in the morning and follows the same schedule: 10 minutes for quizzes, 100 minutes of instruction. The director of the language instructors, Ms. Qu Zheng, seems to be a well-organized and competent administrator.

Mao and I also met for about 30 minutes with 6 students, two of whom participated in the campus tour. After the tour, Mao and I had lunch with another two students, both of whom spoke highly of their internships and the program at large. In the afternoon, the director took us to the headquarters of Meliá's Asia Pacific operations, where we met with the 3 interns, the CEO and the Executive directors. It helped that the CEO is an outgoing and energetic Spanish man who is quite enthusiastic about the internship program as they are in dire need of young talent in their expanding Asia-Pacific operations. After the internship, Jerry, Mao and I, went back to the hotel to continue our discussions of the program and our interest in it. He was most interested in the possibility of Skidmore sending students to CET-Shanghai at Donghua.

The professors who teach the electives in English come from Fudan and are authorities in their field, particularly Bala Ramasamy who teaches the Chinese economy/business class. Students spoke very highly of him; we very much enjoyed one of the students complaining about prof. Ramasamy's "bias" against capitalism and only representing the Chinese and Asian perspectives of western capitalism. The student was made very uncomfortable about his preconceptions and intellectually stretched in ways he had not foreseen.

The internship course, which Jeremy insisted is not a 'professional skills development course', meets one hour per week and is organized around 5 components: 1) Goal setting and mission accomplishment. Students briefly explain what their goals for the week were and how they accomplished them. 2) Lessons learned. In preparation for this part of the class, students submit a short log or a Twitter message every day after their internship. Also, in order to avoid negative in-class group thinking, students who have encountered problems, discuss them with Jeremy before the class. This part allows him to do a quick quality control check. 3) Guilt trip, i.e. why didn't you invite one of your Chinese co-workers for a cup of coffee, or to have lunch together? Jeremy works 1:1

with shy or passive students; he also has 1:1 with students who do well to avoid singling out those in the first group. 4) With Nova, discussion of urban anthropology issues, for example, local perspectives on Chinese youth, slang to discuss with co-workers and roommates, etc. 5) How to engage Chinese people in public settings: do not wear an iPod, talk to old people, ask for directions even if you know how to get there, etc. 6) Websites to consult in order to learn about biases in the reporting of Chinese news, complexities of Chinese political and economic system, its cultures, etc. 6) Students are required to post comments on three news stories that have a connection to the work they do at their internship placement. Students write a final essay. Attendance to their internship placement is strictly enforced. Students not wanting to complete an internship, which is quite rare, can take two English based courses. These students may do an 'informal' internship that is not for credit. What I liked best about this part of the CET program is that the director is in charge of the whole internship program: he has developed the relationships with the various agencies, companies and NGOs; he teaches the course; and he supervises students' progress in their experiences. Not much is left to chance and it therefore works. We did not hear any negatives from the students; granted, they were not Skidmore students, but they seemed to be quite content with their assignments. We were very impressed by how solid and well-conceived this program is and by its leadership. We enthusiastically recommend adding it to our list of approved programs. We believe that all our students would benefit from it, particularly those interested in political science and management and business with a focus on China.

Last but not least, thank you very much for affording both of us the opportunity to do this work on behalf of OCSE and we hope that our recommendations will further strengthen the study experiences we offer to our students in China.