To: Dr. Alan Sweedler, Director, Office of International Programs  
From: Zheng-sheng Zhang, Associate Professor  
        Department of Linguistics and Asian/Middle-Eastern Languages  
Re: OIP International Travel Grant  
Date: August 28, 2012  
Cc: Paul Wong, Dean of Arts and Letters  
        Lei Guang, Director of Asian Studies

Report on OIP Supported Trip to China (Summer 2012)

This past summer, supported by an OIP grant and a Title VI grant for enhancing foreign language instruction and areal studies, I again traveled to Beijing China to lead a three-week long intensive summer program at the Capital Normal University (CNU) for the second year. With experience from the previous year, the program turned out a greater success.

Similar to last year, the goals of the 3 unit course entitled Chinese language and culture were two folds: the enhancement of knowledge and skills in both the language and culture of China. Taking place on the campus of Capital Normal University, the course took advantage of the authentic locale and maximally integrated cultural immersion with the intensive development of language skills.

Noteworthy features of the program:

1. The language component of the program concentrated on developing students’ oral proficiency. Thanks to the high quality instruction and intensity of the program (four hours of classroom instruction each day and five days per week), the students made huge strides in oral proficiency.

2. In addition to formal classroom instruction, there was daily one-one-one conversational practice with volunteers from Capital Normal University, which both consolidated classroom learning and allowed students to gain initial entry into the life of ordinary Chinese. On the excursion to the Great Wall and Ming Tombs, several of the volunteers were invited to come along. The interaction with volunteers was again unanimously considered one of the highlights of the program.

3. The daily ‘Culture Hour’ featured lectures given by me on the language, geography, and culture of China, as well as introduction to and logistics about the upcoming excursions. A number of guest speakers were invited to share their China experience, including Dr. David Moser, director of CET, Jeff Crowther, SDSU alum and CEO of a nutritional product company and former students Eduardo Vega, Richard Banh, Janelle Palermo, who are studying and working in China. A couple of hours were devoted to calligraphy practice and sharing of pictures from the trip.

4. Outside the classroom, many cultural excursions were conducted, which took us to the Great Wall, Ming Tombs, Forbidden City, Beihai Park (Winter Palace), Jingshan Park, Summer Palace, Yuanmingyuan Ruins, Temple of Heaven, the Olympic Venues, Yonghe Temple, the National Museum, the National Performing Arts Center and the Qianmen
Shopping District. Optional excursions included an acrobatic performance, a Peking Opera performance, a symphony concert, a visit to a Jazz club and a visit to a medicinal botanical garden, the home of a Chinese professor, the Silk Market Shopping Arcade and a giant Children’s Bookstore. Students also had ample opportunities to complete real-life tasks such as shopping, bargaining, meeting local people, and navigating the public transportation system.

5. Students were evaluated with a combination of in-class tests (both oral and written) as well as a portfolio consisting of audio/video recording and reflection essay/journal entries about learning Chinese and living in China.

Comparison with last year’s program

1. Greater enrollment. This year we had 15 students, 5 more than last year.

2. More excursions. More cultural sites were visited, such as the Yuanmingyuan Ruins, the Yonghe Temple and the botanical garden.

3. More cultural experiences. This year students were offered the optional Peking opera performance and the acrobatic performance, which turned out to be one of the highlights of the whole trip. Another nice addition was a visit to the home of Professor Zhang (professor at CNU and visiting scholar to SDSU last year), with demonstration of acupuncture by his wife Dr. Hu, a doctor of Chinese medicine, followed by a visit to the medicinal botanic garden nearby. The visit to the giant Children’s Bookstore was also a memorable experience. More public transportation was used. A deliberate attempt was made to show students the diversity that is characteristic of modern China, with the rich and poor, the modern and the traditional co-existing side by side.

4. Thanks to the Title VI grant and advance planning by CES, some budget was set aside for incidental expenses, such as for the welcoming banquet and graduation dinner, as well as occasional business meals.

5. This year, the Beijing program was wisely scheduled between the Shanghai and the Tsinghua programs. 7 students took advantage of this and participated in more than one program (2 in the Shanghai program and 5 in the Tsinghua program)

Areas for Improvement

1. We did not anticipate the increase in cost and kept the tuition at the same level as last year. This created some problem for funding the excursions, which had to be led by the faculty member instead of a travel agency. Better communication with the host university would have prevented this from happening.

2. The duration of the program was again felt to be too short by some students.