

## The Mellon Presidential Project for Global Learning

Board of Trustees Meeting 27 October 2017 [prepared by John Cramsie; Director of General Education]

### OVERVIEW

The *Project for Global Learning* brought together 25 faculty members dedicated to transforming the Liberal Arts experience at Union through developing cross-disciplinary experiences with global perspectives. We recruited faculty of all ranks from Asian Studies, Biological Sciences, Classics, Computer Science, Economics, English, Electrical & Computer Engineering, Environmental Studies, Film Studies, Geology, History, Library Sciences and Special Collections, Mathematics, Mechanical Engineering, Modern Languages and Literatures (Chinese & Spanish), Music, and Political Science.

The ten-day study tours were centred in and around Beijing (2016) and Berlin (2017). Faculty participated in seminars and workshops led by experts from academia, the public and private sectors, and civil society; they also engaged in field visits and experiential learning opportunities. Programming focussed on fundamental, in some cases existential questions, from multi-disciplinary and global perspectives. We particularly studied the complex challenges to create and preserve sustainable societies and tackle the fundamental questions of social justice woven into them.

### CHINA (2016)

In and around Beijing, faculty participated in workshops and lectures on environmental law, public participation in solid waste management, the ethnic politics of migrant Labor, China's cultural ecology, trans-ethnic Music, the invisible Queer film, and China's rising middle class its impact. The lecturers came from a wide variety of backgrounds and included Western scholars living and researching in China, Chinese scholars, and Chinese activists advocating environmental sustainability and social justice for ethnic minorities and the LGBTQ community. Union faculty participated in many excursions; the most notable included an overnight stay in the village of Li'erkou in Shanxi Province, a trip to the Migrant Laborer's Museum (an NGO devoted to documenting the abuse of migrant laborers and addressing their needs), and visits to the Friends of Nature NGO, the Little Donkey organic farm, and the coal mining museum near the Datong Grottos.

China faculty completed an instructional-curricular design retreat in August 2016 led by the Director of General Education. This was a crucial step for embedding and sustaining the study tour experience in the Common Curriculum. The workshop yielded draft courses and course content:

- Three new First-Year Preceptorials for 2017-2018 ('Narratives of Migration and Immigration', 'Confronting China's Challenges', and 'Made in China')
- Two new/revamped Sophomore Research Seminars for 17-18 ('Electrical Communication and Society' and 'Middle Ground: Common Ground?')
- A revision for 17-18 of MTH 061 – Math in the Public Interest to focus on metrics and data analysis integrating environmental, sociocultural, and economic sustainability.

- The incorporation of China-related modules beginning with Fall 2016 in the following courses and curricular initiatives: ENS 100 – Introduction to Environmental Studies; EGL 280 – Nature Writing and Environmental Writing; Preceptorial ‘Literature, Ethics, and the Environment’; proposal for a team-taught Common Curriculum lab science course in Chemistry; courses in Transnational Cinema and Documentary film-making; a possible

The China study tour benefited from the creative energy of Union’s own filmmaker in residence Jim de Seve. Jim’s film documents the incredible experiences in Beijing, Datong, Hubei, and Shanxi. From turbo-capitalism, migrant workers, and coal mining to organic farming, the environmental activists of Friends of Nature, and other exciting fusions of tradition and modernity in China today. <https://vimeo.com/183800382>

## **BERLIN (2017)**

In and around Berlin, faculty participated in workshops and lectures on the reunification of Germany, including the privatization of state assets in the former East Germany, sustainable development challenges and inequality, the development of an inclusive civil society in the former East; contemporary migration experiences in Germany, government policies, and local responses, media coverage and biases; the Turkish-German community, integration policies, gendered politics of education and identity among women of Turkish descent; Islam, Christianity, and religious politics in Germany, including meetings at the Omar Ibn Al-Khattab mosque; the politics of history and memory, including field work at the Stasi archives; a day-long seminar at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt an der Oder on the Polish border, including examination of border communities and interactions, economic redevelopment, and grass roots activist groups challenging xenophobia and the new right in the former East; community-led sustainability initiatives in Berlin (through numerous site visits) including green and cooperative housing, urban gardens, policies to combat gentrification and ‘social cleansing’, and a guided visit to the former Tempelhof airfield to discuss development politics; an exploration of Germany’s imperial past and its new influence on post-unification history and memory at Potsdam; the German energy transition; readings by the poet Jenny Erpenbeck and remarkably illuminating discussions about the continuing divides of culture and memory between East and West in Germany.

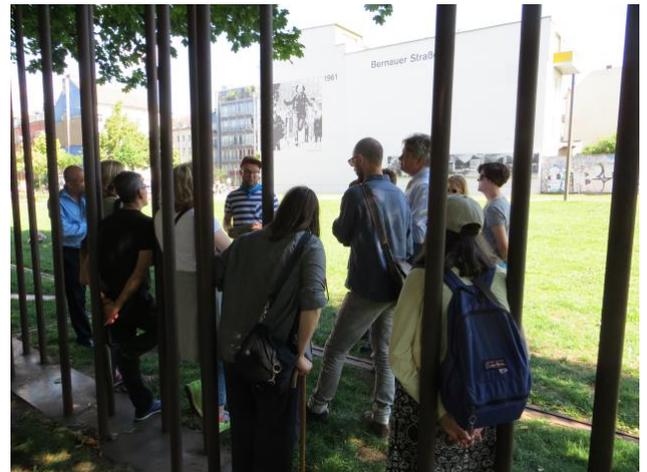
Berlin faculty completed an instructional-curricular design retreat in August. This was a crucial step for embedding and sustaining the study tour experience in the Common Curriculum. The workshop yielded draft courses and course content:

- First-Year Preceptorial: a revised FYP for Fall 2017; *Narrative Medicine* (grounded in the German experience, especially among immigrants and refugees). A new FYP for Fall 2018 on Identity, Culture, and Society that integrates related issues from Berlin/Germany.

- Sophomore Research Seminars: a new SRS for 2018-2019, *Political Identities in Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States*. Integration of German media and cyber-security policies and attitudes into a Fall 2017 SRS on privacy and cyber-security.
- A new SRS for 2018-19 exploring the cultural discourse and politics of waste and disposable societies.
- Three new courses in comparative global history that integrate both Berlin/Germany-related content or the theoretical and conceptual content of the study tour about sustainability, social justice, migration, climate change, urbanism, and history and memory: HST 109 – A History of Sustainability; HST 204 – Wine: A Global History; HST 205 – Clash of Civilizations?
- New modules for MTH 113 – Calculus, MTH 056 – History of Mathematics, MTH 061 – Math in the Public Interest that combines quantification with other the analytical discourses about sustainability.
- The incorporation of Berlin/Germany-related and global learning modules beginning with Fall 2017 in the following courses: ECO 101 – Introduction to Economics; ECO 228 – Environmental Economics; PSC 112 – Introduction to Global Politics.



*An urban cooperative farm and community farm-to-table cafeteria in Berlin Kreuzberg*



*Faculty at the Berlin Wall Memorial*

The experience helps us as faculty understand how to forge connections across disciplines that create for our students and ourselves an integrated understanding of complex questions. By focussing on the Common Curriculum, our general education ‘major’ in the Liberal Arts, we can engage student learning across diverse settings and courses, from languages and literatures to math in the public interest to ‘citizen science’ and more. We are building the expertise and experience to reimagine general education around multi-disciplinary perspectives about and capabilities for engaging issues of global significance. In doing so, we pave the way for renewing a Union Education itself around a deliberate, conscious, outward-looking mission for the liberal arts and our students in global societies