

To the Frontiers: The Ricci Experience

A Project Proposal

CONTEXT

Frontiers and Globalization

Tradition has it that as he prepared to travel as a missionary to the East, St. Francis Xavier was instructed by St. Ignatius to “Go forth and set the world on fire.” Thus established a proud and storied history of Jesuits serving at the frontiers, a theme that has been renewed by the Society of Jesus and recently affirmed by Pope Francis.¹

One such frontier can be found in one of Loyola’s Grad at Grad goals – the commitment to diversity. More specifically, the commitment to diversity in a time of globalization means that our students must be able to do more than appreciate and show respect for people of diverse backgrounds here at home. They must have the intercultural and interpersonal skills to adapt and thrive in a world of *global* voices and perspectives. This proposal aims to provide one outlet for students and educators to develop this increasingly important sense of international mindedness and global citizenship.

Why China?

China boasts the world’s oldest continuous civilization, the world’s largest population, and one of the world’s largest and fastest growing economies.² Having already lifted more than 300 million people out of poverty in just 25 years, the nation aims to nearly eradicate poverty by 2050.³ Whether or not it achieves these ambitious goals, China’s global influence - political, economic, and cultural - will only continue to grow in the foreseeable future.

Despite these realities, most schools in the region, including Loyola, have few initiatives to expose students to Chinese language, society, or culture. Exposing students to China would therefore provide Loyola with an opportunity to be an educational pioneer both in the region and in our Jesuit network.

The Beijing Center for Chinese Studies

In 1998, Jesuits and administrators from most of the Jesuit universities in the United States established a study abroad program in Beijing, now known as The Beijing Center for Chinese Studies.⁴ Students from Jesuit universities around the world now attend the program for summer, semester, or year-long programs.

The Beijing Center has expressed interest in inviting high school students to participate in summer programs. These programs would be focused primarily on exposing students to China and generating interest in learning Chinese. They are well suited as a support partner for students. TBC’s staff and administration have 20 years of experience in providing housing, food, travel, and academic experiences for American students who have little or no knowledge of China. The program is flexible enough for us to design both academic and formative outcomes to be attained (e.g. knowledge of China and intercultural sensitivity training). Finally, TBC’s presence as an educational institution run by the Jesuits makes it unique as the only official Jesuit presence in mainland China.

EXPERIENCE

For the past two years, Loyola Blakefield run The Ricci Experience, an interdisciplinary summer program designed to expose students to Chinese culture. The heart of the program is a two-week excursion to China in collaboration with The Beijing Center for Chinese Studies, a Jesuit-run study abroad program based in Beijing.

Students receive credit on their Loyola transcript in Theology (Chinese Religion) and History (Chinese History). In order to receive this credit, students need to attend classes prior to departure and submit a research paper about a week after our return.

¹ “Jesuits at the Frontiers.” <http://www.jesuits.org/story?TN=PROJECT-20131219102311>

² “China profile – overview.” <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-pacific-13017879>

³ “China’s powerhouse vision for 2050.” <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2006/feb/10/china.topstories3>

⁴ www.thebeijingcenter.org

The program costs \$4,000. This includes program costs at The Beijing Center, tuition for credit in Theology and History, the roundtrip flight to China, international health insurance, accommodations for two weeks, and a 3-day trip to Shanghai (including transportation and accommodations). Students are asked to organize fundraising efforts for this program. An itinerary of the program along with a course overview of the Theology and History classes are attached here.

REFLECTION

The program has been successful on many fronts. Students expressed high levels of engagement and learning, as seen in their assessments, reflections, and post-program evaluations. We would like to sustain the program in the long term, and hopefully reduce the overall cost per student.

The Beijing Center was similarly positive about the program and expressed desire for us to share our experience with other Jesuit high schools.

We then have three objectives that we are hoping to achieve:

1. Create long term sustainability with the program
2. Reduce cost of the program.
3. Share our experience with other Jesuit high schools.

ACTION PROPOSAL

We hope to achieve all three objectives by inviting another Jesuit high school to partner with us in this program. This would mean that students from this school would take classes in Chinese Religion and / or Chinese History and would join our trip to China. This would achieve the third objective of sharing the experience, and bringing more students into the program reduces the per-student cost.

In order to operate the academic portion, our proposal is to partner with the Arrupe Virtual Learning Institute (AVLI). Students would take the Chinese Religion and / or Chinese History classes online prior to the experience. This also means that the teachers of Chinese Religion and Chinese History do not have to always come from Loyola – they can be anyone that JVLA selects. This is another aspect of long-term sustainability, as now the program doesn't depend on any one teacher.

We invite any Jesuit school to:

- collaborate and communicate with Loyola Blakefield to design, execute, and evaluate the academic program.
- advertise the program to students and select five students to join.
- select one faculty or staff member who will chaperone students to and from China and serve as an on-site coordinator for the online class with AVLI. This faculty or staff member need not have any specialized knowledge of Chinese language or culture.

EVALUATION

The program is to be evaluated by all parties involved – Loyola Blakefield, The Beijing Center for Chinese Studies, Arrupe Virtual Learning Institute, and any other Jesuit high school that wishes to participate.