

# Evaluation of the Institute for Study Abroad (IFSA) 21<sup>st</sup> Century City Program in Shanghai, China

## *Including IFSA Response*

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Site: Shanghai, China

Programs: 21<sup>st</sup> Century City (with notes on additional IFSA programs in Shanghai: Intensive Chinese Language and International Business Program)

Evaluation Team: Dr. Margery A. Ganz (Spelman College), Ms. Sue Mennicke (Franklin & Marshall College), Dr. Andrew Dowdle, (University of Arkansas)

Ms. Amy Bartnick-Blume (IFSA office in Indianapolis) provided support.

Dates: 11-17 March 2017

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The evaluation committee arrived in Shanghai over the period of March 11<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup>, 2017, as scheduling issues prevented everyone from arriving together. The committee had several group conference calls in February to discuss how the review would be conducted and how they would divide materials and issues necessary for the evaluation report. Starting on Sunday morning, March 12<sup>th</sup>, Amy Bartnick-Blume and Margery Ganz spent the day with Christopher Van Velzer, IFSA Resident Director, Shanghai, and Dr. Pei Liu, IFSA Director for China Programs. Andrew Dowdle arrived on Sunday afternoon, March 12<sup>th</sup>, and Sue Mennicke arrived on Monday, March 13<sup>th</sup>.

## **Orientation**

### **1. The Pre-Arrival Orientation**

Pre-arrival orientation begins when students begin the application process with IFSA. From the beginning, IFSA staff in Indianapolis are involved in the process, interviewing

candidates, advising them and providing excellent information about the program and life in Shanghai. Students the committee engaged with spoke glowingly about the assistance provided by Indianapolis staff and shared with the evaluation team they were still in contact with the Indianapolis staff while in China.

As the date for arrival in China approaches, both Chris and Pei become more involved with pre-arrival activities. It is at this point that Academic Advising becomes central to the students' preparation. Potential course selections, language levels and internships as well as health and safety are the main topics for discussion. Specialized information dependent on program selection is also provided to students by staff.

Excellent advising material is provided to students before departure, including packing lists, information on visa costs and processing procedures, tips for how to reduce jet-lag (e.g. avoid alcohol on the flight), and so forth. Students are also advised of important logistical information, such as the group meeting spot in Pudong Airport. The country director (Pei) and resident director (Chris) have recommended deeper discussion of the capstone project component of the program and internship options with students prior to arrival, and the evaluation team concurs with this.

***IFSA RESPONSE:*** *We appreciate these observations and are taking action to respond to evaluator recommendations. The Student Services department is currently reviewing pre-arrival advising material directly related to capstones and internships to provide greater clarity and we plan to implement those changes during the 2018-19 academic year. Additionally, with direct thanks to Pei and Chris, we are currently piloting a possible long-term replacement project for the capstone project, known as an Integrative Learning Project (ILP). The ILP places greater emphasis on students' personal intercultural starting points and learning goals (culture identity*

*map), and will allow for the exploration of a professional connection (career conversation), include academic deepening (annotated bibliography), and a final presentation to articulate overall learning. We will evaluate the feedback on the ILP pilot from all stakeholders following the current semester (spring 2018).*

## **2. Arrival and Orientation**

On-site orientation is run by Pei, Chris and Dr. Qi Wang, Director of Language Programs. If students arrive during the designated arrival window, IFSA staff meets them at the airport and transports them to campus. If students arrive outside of that arrival window timeframe, they take taxis to campus. Students immediately move into their housing, which is located very near the IFSA office and classrooms. Students attend a group dinner that evening, and a five-day orientation begins the following morning. Orientation includes language testing, resume building (for internship students), and a heavy emphasis on health and safety. An excellent hard copy handbook with information on health and safety, visa issues, living in China and more is provided to each student. Orientation also includes a strong emphasis on communication skills and cultural adaptation, with student participating in several exercises around the idea of cultural difference. Students are advised step-by-step by staff regarding the required physical examination necessary for visa compliance, including special requirements for International Business and Internship students. Other items covered during orientation include: how to get SIM cards for students' cell phones, VPN lines, public transportation cards for metro and bus systems, how to rent bicycles (including for a full semester), and discussion of living with families for Intensive Language program who live in homestays during the second half of

the semester (those who live within an hour commute are expected to be home for dinner Monday through Friday, and each is provided a single room, internet and air conditioning).

### **3. Academics**

The IFSA Shanghai site hosts three semester-long programs that are “open” programs (i.e., the 21<sup>st</sup> Century City, the Intensive Chinese Language and the Intensive Business in China programs) and a collaborative program focused on international business in China for students from Mount Holyoke College. The programs share enough academic curriculum for all of these options to remain viable but are distinct enough to give students unique options to select from among these choices. While the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Program is the primary focus of this evaluation, the review team did meet with students from all four programs.

### **4. Program Classes**

As with most IFSA programs, classes are all non-integrated and thus open only to international students. The visiting team evaluated the English-taught content courses, the capstone, the internship process (which will be discussed in Section 7), and the language classes (which will be discussed in Section 8).

#### **English-taught Content Courses**

Team members observed the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Program core course (SOC1 260), the International Business Program core course (ECON 360), the Mount Holyoke Program core course (ECON 371/FINC 370) on International Finance and Money, and an additional course (ARTH 260) on a Survey of Art in China among the English-taught courses. Considering the limited amount of time available for students in a single semester, these courses seem to provide

a good background to improve students' ability in understanding contemporary Shanghai. While students could cross-register in Shanghai University of Finance and Economics (SUFU) classes, almost none do. One area that is lacking coverage is urban studies, and including this would be helpful given the current direction of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Program.

SUFU has given IFSA almost complete latitude in hiring, evaluating, and retaining instructors. As a result, the program has been able to hire instructors with impressive academic backgrounds, and the program staff is committed to helping instructors improve their teaching. Overall, each of the individual courses was well-designed by the instructor. The professors articulated clear policies and expectations in the syllabi. The readings and graded assignments were appropriate for the classes and challenging but reasonable, especially given the variety of backgrounds of the students. The overall programs and individual classes also clearly meet Standards 2 and 3 from the Forum of Education Abroad.

Instructional approaches vary from instructor to instructor, with one class consisting primarily of lectures, one of a mix between faculty-driven presentation and more open discussion and a third consisting of a mixture of student-led presentations and faculty-facilitated class discussion. The SOCI 260 class session seemed to be a very effective example of a faculty member guiding students through a format and set of questions to examine in the presentations, as well as a great example of a faculty member tying student comments from the class discussions back to general themes and concepts. The more-lecture based classes presented a variety of material that was useful but proceeded at a rate that was probably a bit too fast for some students with limited knowledge in certain areas. Professors may want to look at the flipped classroom model where students might be able to look or listen to this information prior

to meeting while reserving class time for more applied discussion of these general topics through methods such as case study analysis.

Even though students had varying levels of knowledge of Chinese history, almost all wished that the program offered a course in that area. Instructors also commented on a lack of relevant historical knowledge among students. As a result, many of the classes contained some overlapping material in the first few weeks as individual professors addressed the deficiency. The professors did agree that they could identify one or two books that would help reduce this gap if students read the material prior to their arrival in Shanghai.

The English-language content professors also expressed some concern over whether the wage structure was competitive. They also requested more insight into the compensation process and wanted more feedback about their performance via the student evaluations. Revisiting and improving this process will help the Shanghai program to continue to meet the expectations laid out in Standard 7 from the Forum on Education Abroad.

**Recommendations: While curricular constraints might make that offering difficult, the review team thinks more additional preparation in Chinese history may be helpful, whether that is additional readings prior to arrival or the introduction of a new course.**

**Considering the vast amount of new material, students thought having access to the PowerPoint presentations in the lecture-based courses would be helpful.**

**In terms of professional development, new professors might be encouraged to visit classes of successful instructors to better prepare for a different audience than exists at most Chinese universities. We also do recommend IFSA review whether the current compensation is adequate in a very competitive market and try to provide more clarity to instructors over evaluation and wages.**

**IFSA RESPONSE:** *We appreciate the positive feedback on the high quality of our courses and academic structure, and we accept all recommendations for areas of potential improvement.*

- *We are having individual meetings with instructors to reinforce the strong teaching strategies that are evident. Instructors of courses that have, to date, been more lecture-based are considering ways to utilize teaching strategies that may be more student-led and discussion-based than that which is typical in China. PowerPoints and other learning aids are also being made available whenever possible.*
- *We are taking a comprehensive look at all courses to identify areas where overlap in the initial instruction of Chinese history may be occurring and will address them individually. The utility and selection of a pre-reading in Chinese history is under consideration.*
- *IFSA curriculum adapts and expands to areas of student interest and educational trends, and thus we have added Urban Studies to our list of potential courses to consider adding in the future.*
- *We are engaging in a compensation study to ensure that we are compensating instructors appropriately. IFSA is committed to providing competitive compensation and recognizing the skills and effectiveness of instructors as part of that practice.*
- *A new, standard online course evaluation was developed and announced in fall 2017, the process for which will ensure that instructors and resident directors receive direct and actionable feedback from students. This is part of our aim to be an organization focused on continual improvement.*

## Capstone

One issue that students and staff recognized was the execution of the capstone project. Students seemed divided on the mandatory nature of the requirement and all seemed to agree the actual implementation was problematic.

Requiring students to propose, conduct, analyze and write up their results in such a short time period is a challenge, given that students take a full course load, travel and are adjusting to a new culture. Students have different levels of preparation in research design coming into the programs and different levels and types of research skill. While the length of the paper itself is reasonable (10-15 pages), a vast majority of the work happens in the stages prior to the writing of the paper and the workload would not necessarily be lessened much by shorter papers.

In contrast with the language assessment process, little work seemed to have taken place before and immediately after arrival. When the visiting team was in Shanghai during the fifth week of Spring Semester, some students still had not decided on a research question. Graduate assistants were readily available to assist students on a one-on-one basis but two students raised the possibility that graduate assistants might be able to offer short (30-60 minute) modules on different aspects of the research design process – both for the capstone and for other assignments.

**Recommendations: We recommend that program staff think more about how, or even whether, the requirement fits back into the program's overall mission. While the idea of having students do original research seems highly laudable, a better alignment between an assignment of this nature and program itself would yield better capstone projects and possibly create higher levels of student buy-in into the requirement.**

**The team also recommends that part of the discussion might be whether the capstone needs to be mandatory as well. A number of students the team spoke with during the visit said they would still want to complete a capstone project, either because of home institutional requirements or because it would be beneficial.**

**We would suggest that students complete some of this project, such as a 1-2 page proposal and literature review, as either part of the application process or prior to arrival. We also suggest that the graduate students work with students before they arrive to narrow down general topical interests into specific research questions. While we realize this step would require some additional compensation for the graduate assistants, we believe it is vital if the program decides to continue with a project of this magnitude.**

***IFSA RESPONSE:** The recommendations regarding the capstone project are tremendously helpful. As described above, we are currently piloting a replacement to the capstone, which is the Integrative Learning Project (ILP). We are hopeful that ILP will prove to be a richly rewarding learning experience for the students, and we feel strongly that it more accurately reflects IFSA goals for student learning – specifically as they relate to our commitment areas of individualized learning and enduring impact. As indicated above, we may be able to implement the ILP for Shanghai programs during the 2018-19 academic year. Evaluator comments on student outputs for such comprehensive and multi-faceted projects as the capstone and ILP are also well taken. We recently agreed to implement an assessment approach within these that allows for students to complete and receive timely, formative feedback on components in a building block approach; this leads logically to the completion of the project and ensures that students feel guided and supported along the way. Additionally, in the meantime, students*

*undertaking the capstone in its current form are being given increased support by instructors, graduate assistants, and IFSA staff.*

## **5. Host Universities**

One of the many assets that the program has is its working relationship with SUFE, the collaborating university. SUFE has considered the partnership an important one and has been accommodating in working with the program staff on a variety of legal and logistical issues. While the SUFE administration and the program are located on separate campuses, neither the program staff nor the SUFE administrators thought the physical distance negatively impacted the relationship.

Overall, both students and program staff felt that access to library resources was somewhat limited on site since SUFE's library had few English language holdings. However, neither group thought this potential limitation was an actual concern since students readily utilized their home institution's remote access resources. In a similar manner, there is limited technical support for technology but that potential concern did not seem to be an actual issue, since students were able to supply most of the hardware and software needed.

**Recommendation: While the lack of access to English-language research holdings and technical support in Shanghai were not cited by anyone as problems, we would still encourage program staff to inquire with Butler University about a contingency plan for utilizing its resources should the need arise.**

*IFSA RESPONSE: We are grateful for this creative idea from the evaluators. Unfortunately, our students in Shanghai are not able to avail of the technical resources of Butler University*

*itself, but we do have IFSA staff who can assist with certain needs and who have access to Butler University libraries and library networks. We will continue to think about this recommendation.*

## **6. Academic Advising**

Academic advising seems effective, and the program staff spent a great amount of time working with students and home universities to identify the best program for individuals and to insure that classes transferred back to the home institutions at an appropriate academic level. The written policies also clearly elaborate expectations for students prior to departure. Students in some of the past evaluations raised concerns that advisors may not have adequate access to transcripts but students in the current cohort did not see this as an issue.

Students also create learning plans with clear academic, language, cultural and personal/professional goals in mind. After a few weeks in Shanghai, students then revise their learning plans to include more concrete and obtainable goals. The resident director also communicates with students at least three times a semester to monitor academic and other progress.

Clearly, the Shanghai program exceeds the expectations set out in Standards 3 and 4 from the Forum on Education Abroad. In many ways, the team's evaluation of this section is incomplete given IFSA's new focus on Appreciative Advising. While none of the Shanghai programs currently relies exclusively on this method of advising, the transition to this process is occurring and additional training was taking place near the end of the official visit. Overall, the new advising process seems to fit well with both the program's goals and its past practices.

***IFSA RESPONSE:** We are glad for the observations of our strong pre-arrival advising processes and materials. Appreciative Advising is indeed our holistic approach to student advising, and it guides all of our student interactions. Its strengths-based, student-advisor rapport-building approach is proving to be effective, as students articulate and work toward realization of academic, professional and personal goals through their IFSA Learning Plans. We plan to continue developing our practices around Appreciative Advising. We are unaware of any concerns with regard to access to transcripts. Students submit their degree institution transcript(s) to IFSA as part of the application process, and participants and their degree institutions receive a Butler University transcript upon completion of the program.*

## **7. Internships, Field Research, and Community-based Learning**

Although internships are not part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century City program, the committee visited an internship site – Noah Holdings, a wealth management company located in China with offices opened in the US in 2010. Several students have participated in internships at this site, which requires a reasonably high level of Chinese proficiency. The presentation by HR staff at Noah provided a good sense of the company’s business model and where interns might fit in. The presentation left the committee with the sense that Noah is a very westward-facing company, in terms of work environment and style. Clearly, Noah would be a coveted placement, given the challenge inherent in the structure of the internship.

Evaluation comments from students on internships (all internship experiences) were somewhat mixed, but again, the committee did not delve deeply into this area, given that the review focus was the 21<sup>st</sup> Century program. Centre College is piloting a custom program with

IFSA Shanghai in Fall 2017 which requires an internship. Thus, there may be more to report on the experience in the coming years.

The committee did have the opportunity to talk with staff about some inherent limitations of the internship program. These include:

- 1) A student's Chinese level restricts whether s/he can be expected to successfully contribute in a predominantly Chinese-speaking environment. This means most internships tend to be sought for placements with supervisors that have a high level of English, and/or an international firm (where there are a mix of local Chinese/expatriate supervisors and managers).
- 2) Because of relatively new changes in Chinese internship visa laws, the timeline is extremely tight once students arrive to procure the proper documentation before starting the internship. This involves making sure the placement is already secure, of course, but then registering that host company with the partner university, which generates a document that is used (after 7-10 business days) to apply for an amendment to their residence permit. This part cannot be done prior to arrival, and in reality, it typically means students need to wait at least one month before they are able to start their internships. The fact that the process post-arrival is so time consuming makes it virtually impossible for students to switch placements if the initial placement is not satisfactory.

***IFSA RESPONSE:** While internships were not a focus of the evaluation, the information provided is valuable. A small working group of IFSA staff has been convened to think creatively about how to ease internship processes and strengthen related student advising.*

## **8. Language Commitment, Testing, Placement and Classes**

One of the program's major goals is to improve students' knowledge of Chinese. More importantly, the program has successfully incorporated this objective as part of its large mission of promoting inter-cultural competence. Overall, this goal is popular with students and seems implemented successfully despite a number of challenges. The review team concluded that this commitment is one of the strengths for the program, and that language instruction should be an area for continued investment.

Despite reducing language training from 9 credits to 6 for non-intensive students, the program still seems to be successful in achieving this objective. Students have embraced the importance of improving their language skills, and the program uses roommate and home stay programs, along with co-curriculars, to facilitate this process. Students overwhelmingly endorsed the classes and other methods as a great improvement over "similar" language training programs at their home institutions. Classes are small with 8 students as the maximum number, and most actual sections have fewer students. Classes are more discussion-based than their U.S. equivalent at a home institution, and the Shanghai-based classes seem to be more effective in promoting linguistic fluency as well.

The language director has seemed to embrace the challenges of student language placement by utilizing tools to assess student language abilities, both before and then shortly after students arrive in Shanghai. One of the challenges though is pre-determining the appropriate number of sections in a timely manner, though the language director has successfully dealt with this logistical issue. Another issue, though, is turn-over among instructors, partially because the program's location in Shanghai heightens competition for skilled part-time language teachers and partially because the instructors are graduate students whose legal residency status

often changes when they graduate. Because there is frequent turnover among instructors, as well as transferability concerns, a few students saw the language curriculum as somewhat overly structured in some instances and not flexible to instructor preferences in teaching style and material. However, this level of structure seems necessary to prevent these potential concerns we cited from becoming actual issues.

**Recommendation: We do recommend that when IFSA reviews the program’s legal status as an entity, the evaluation include how altering the program’s standing would affect the part-time instructors’ residency status. We also recommend that IFSA review whether the current compensation is adequate in a very competitive market.**

*IFSA RESPONSE: We agree that our commitment to Chinese language and the instruction provided is among the greatest strengths of our Shanghai programs and appreciate this acknowledgement. The evaluators were spot on in their detection of the need for strong structure in courses wherein the turnover in instructors may be higher than we would like, due to the competitive landscape of Shanghai. We will continue to offer a robust instructor development program that ensures the quality of teaching remains strong. As explained above, we are undertaking an instructor compensation study and remain firmly committed to providing compensation at appropriate levels.*

## **Program Office**

### **9. Program Staff**

Dr. Pei Liu, Director for China Programs, oversees all IFSA programs in China. Pei is incredibly knowledgeable about China and Shanghai specifically, and she generously shares that

knowledge with her students. She is extremely approachable, and students go to her frequently with various questions and needs.

Chris Van Velzer is the Resident Director in Shanghai and has been in the field of international education for 15 years. He has a BA from Hamilton College, and MBA from Pepperdine University and is a PhD candidate in Higher Education. He has previously taught business administration and intercultural learning courses and is committed to providing students with an immersive intercultural experience. He conducts much of the AIM (Alliance Intercultural Mentorship) program and Appreciative Advising. The students adore him.

Wang Qi is the Director of Language. She is a graduate of Beijing Normal University with a BA in Chinese Language and Literature and holds an MA from Seton Hall. She taught Chinese at Brown University and University of Pennsylvania. She hires and supervises all language teachers.

Ding Zherui is the Program Manager and received her degree from East China Normal University. Her responsibilities include organizing the program excursions, and she enjoys sharing her language and culture with students.

Zhang Yingyi is Program Services Manager and joined IFSA in 2009 as lead Chinese Language teacher. She works with the Resident Director on logistics and program activities. She also coordinates with the collaborating university, SUFE.

**All of the staff are terrific and loved by the students. However, all are incredibly busy and coming close to exhaustion. As the size of the program grows and AIM and Appreciative Advising become more fully integrated into the program, the committee recommends more staff be added to the Shanghai resident office. The operations of the**

**program are very labor intensive, and there are not enough hours in the day for five staff members to do it all.**

*IFSA RESPONSE: We are so pleased that the high caliber and personal dedication of our staff was recognized, and we value them greatly. The observations regarding their capacity and workloads are taken seriously, and managers are addressing any concerns in individual meetings with staff and as departments. Currently, all IFSA resident offices are reporting increased ease and speed with the practices around Appreciative Advising, which seem to be resulting in efficiencies and higher comfort levels for staff.*

## **10. Office Facilities**

The IFSA office is in the middle of the program's housing facilities. The office is composed of two apartments situated across the hall from each other on the ground floor. There are two kitchens and two bathrooms in the facility. Each apartment has various rooms comprised of offices, a classroom and a lounge for students. The students use the lounge area very frequently. Hot drinks are available, and students often bring their lunch to eat in the lounge. Additionally, students use the computers and printers available to them in the lounge area. Mount Holyoke College students utilize the lounge area for one of the classes included in their customized program.

**Recommendation: The office is an excellent space, but IFSA will need more space as the program grows. The committee's discussion with resident staff involved some suggestion that the office may need to move to a less convenient location if additional space is required, though the committee feels leaving the convenience of the current space with local transportation, food stores and restaurants nearby would be a concern.**

***IFSA RESPONSE:** We hope to see the Shanghai program grow markedly and believe that the implementation of the IFSA Flagship model in Shanghai and all that it entails will give us a fresh and exciting opportunity to consider all issues around space and amenities.*

## **Co-Curricular**

### **11. Housing**

The majority of students live in the Tonghe International Student Village which is located in the area near the IFSA office. The facility is gated and contains restaurants, public transportation, food stores, Starbucks, a pharmacy and other shops. Students live in apartments with Chinese roommates or roommates from other Asian countries. Each apartment has bedrooms, a full bathroom, a kitchen, a balcony and a well-sized lounge area. There are elevators in each building, and the apartments are light, modern and spacious with simple furnishings.

### **12. Co-curricular activities and excursions**

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century program provides numerous opportunities for co-curricular activities, some of which are required as part of the program and others that are optional. Each is discussed below with participation rates noted.

#### **Required co-curricular components**

- 1) Field Study Trip to Yunan (International Business program travels to Hong Kong).

The Yunan trip is meant to expose students to Chinese culture beyond Shanghai. Yunan is an excellent Field Study Trip for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century program, given the concentration of ethnic

minorities in this region. Content related to economic development and environmental concerns, difficulties associated with internal migration in China, tourism and its effects on local culture, and complexities surrounding relationships between ethnic minorities and the Han majority are just some of the topics that appear to be fruitfully interrogated during this Field Study Trip.

## 2) Chinese Roommate Program

The committee views the Chinese Roommate Program as critical to the goals of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century program. IFSA students are presented with a natural opportunity to interact with a willing and engaged Chinese student, opening avenues for sustained cultural learning in an “everyday” way. Although Shanghai is an exciting and challenging city, it is clear that it would be difficult for an American student with limited language and culture knowledge to meet Chinese citizens and experience the culture without the intentional facilitation represented by Chinese roommate program. IFSA students who spoke about their Chinese roommate experience were generally pleased with the arrangement, and all indicated that the Chinese Roommate Program was helping them to reach goals of language and culture fluency.

## 3) Language Pledge Days (2-3 per semester)

Although this is technically required of all students (pledging to only speak Chinese on designated days), it is not surprising that only a portion of the students take the pledge entirely seriously. Students study abroad with varying motivations and levels of tolerance for discomfort, so one would not expect complete compliance with a language pledge day, especially when students are used to experiencing the Center as a place to receive information, relax and feel comfortable. Still, the committee feels that Language Pledge days are important if only to remind students that discomfort in an intercultural situation is actually a good thing, and

that stepping outside comfort zones is almost always a precursor to meaningful intellectual and personal growth.

### **Other co- and extra-curricular opportunities**

- 1) City Museum Exploration – required as part of orientation. The City Museum Exploration in particular introduces students not only to art and museums in Shanghai, but provides an opportunity to learn to navigate the city (students complete this activity in small groups).
- 2) Final Banquet – river cruise. All students participate. This opportunity provides a sense of historical and contemporary Shanghai.
- 3) Sponsored Roommate Activities. Virtually all students participate. Stipends are provided for students to participate in an activity with their Chinese roommate.
- 4) Volunteer Activity (Committee attended debrief only. More on this in the next section).
- 5) Calligraphy Class. This four-week long commitment saw 16 students participate this semester. The committee observed students very engaged in this activity, and the professor struck just the right tone to make the class educational, fun and engaging.
- 6) Alumni Talk (once per semester). 15-17 students participate. Career advice is provided to students from program alums who are currently living and working in Shanghai. The program offers the opportunity for students to expand networks and hear more about the path towards living and working in China.
- 7) Chinese Martial Arts. 4-6-week commitment, 1.5 hour/wk. About 15 students participate.
- 8) Chinese Culture Workshop. Once per semester. About 25 students participate.  
Intended to introduce students to games, crafts and traditions, as well as offer an informal opportunity to speak Chinese with teachers and peers.

**Recommendation:** The committee spoke with students on several occasions. Infused throughout their conversation (regardless of topic) was an appreciation of the facilitated cultural engagement offered by the IFSA program. When the committee visited in March, it was apparent that students were beginning to find their own way (and that observation is borne out in student program evaluations). Even so, the expansive co-curricular program seems important to maintain and develop, and almost certainly launches students more quickly towards independence and confidence navigating Chinese language and culture.

*IFSA RESPONSE: All of the commendations and recommendations around housing, Chinese roommates, language pledges, and program activities are accepted. We are grateful for the evaluators' recognition of the thoughtful and intentional integration of intercultural engagement through all aspects of the student learning experience. As Intercultural Agility is one of IFSA's four commitment areas, we plan to continually attend to this kind of programming.*

### **13. Community Engagement**

#### ***Volunteer activity (1-2 times per semester, 8-9 students participate each time)***

This activity exposes students to a different cultural environment than the one they experience in the Shanghai in which they live. The committee attended a student debrief session after a visit to a migrant school. In addition to showing students the neighborhood, the activity was intended to provide background on the hukou household registration system and the ways this system limits the opportunities and choices that migrants have in school options. Students completed a background reading in advance of the activity to provide context.

The debrief demonstrated that students had engaged thoughtfully in the activity. Some students very much enjoyed simply playing with the children, but others voiced concern, both in feeling that they were treated as outsiders, but also that they indeed felt like outsiders, unable to effect any real change in the lives of the children. While not all students actively engaged in the debrief session, it was clear that the experience was meaningful.

***IFSA RESPONSE:** Volunteering activities can be among the most rewarding for students. We are resolved to providing as many opportunities for students to engage deeply and learn experientially as possible. The pre-reading/prep and debriefing that the evaluators observed is emblematic of the intentional approach we are now taking to student activities in all IFSA sites, to ensure that each includes intercultural learning opportunities.*

### ***Chinese Culture workshop, Sponsored Roommate Activities***

These could be categorized as Community Engagement, but are discussed in the section above on co-curricular programming.

**Recommendation: Any and all opportunities for community engagement seem central to the learning and growth of students studying in China. The committee recommends continuing these programs and exploring any opportunities for expansion, within the limits of the Center's resources.**

***IFSA RESPONSE:** We fully agree. As mentioned above, intercultural learning (which we internally refer to as "C&C" for "community and culture") is embedded wherever possible in IFSA learning environments. Validated by these evaluator comments, we will continue to design*

*orientation, advising sessions, cultural events, and learning activities with the aim of facilitating students' development of Intercultural Agility in mind.*

## **14. Cross-Cultural Learning and Student Transformation**

It is clear that the IFSA Shanghai staff are deeply committed to and truly thoughtful about student learning and development. The “Alliance Intercultural Mentorship” (AIM) program and the infusion of learning goals from the formal Culture and Community course provide students with a healthy balance between challenge and support as they navigate the Shanghai environment.

The AIM program is clearly Chris Van Velzer's passion. Chris takes an effective approach with students, conveying a warmth and friendliness while also continually challenging them to engage thoroughly and thoughtfully. The Shanghai program presents a conundrum for a director interested in students' cultural immersion and learning: On the one hand, the challenge for culture learning and cultural integration is arguably greater in China than in, say, the UK or another more “traditional” education abroad location. On the other hand, precisely because China represents a steep learning curve for the visiting student, the possibilities for growth are arguably greater than in a more “traditional” location. Comments on student program evaluations reference the struggle of Chinese language and culture learning as a deeply meaningful experience. It is a credit to the IFSA staff that so many students come to understand challenge as a path to learning and discovery, rather than as something that should be “fixed” to make the experience easier.

***IFSA RESPONSE:*** See later comments regarding the AIM program. We appreciate the recognition of our goal of including challenge and support (as in Sanford’s student development theory) in our global environments, as we feel it is integral to a meaningful learning abroad experience. We could not agree more fully with the final evaluator comments in this section regarding the wonderfully rich, while not always easy, learning opportunities presented by China.

### ***Online Culture and Community course***

The committee spoke with several students enrolled in the online Culture and Community course, an academic and experiential learning opportunity that connects IFSA students around the world in a common academic learning environment. The students were happy they had chosen to enroll in the course and were actually surprised at how relevant the material and activities seemed, and how much they enjoyed engaging with other IFSA students. Students did comment that the online format made it difficult for them to go too deeply in to any topic.

***IFSA RESPONSE:*** We are very pleased to hear the positive feedback from the students who were taking the IFSA online course, *Exploring Community & Culture in a Global Context*, while participating in our Shanghai programs during the evaluation visit. Their thoughts on the relevancy of the course reflect what we are hearing from other students in the course. The course is optional and available to students anywhere a face-to-face version of the course does not exist. Students are placed in “global cohorts” – i.e., discussion and work groups with IFSA students in other locations worldwide. In recent semesters, we have implemented specific strategies for increasing student engagement, such as requiring an initial assignment that causes students to

*reflect on the process of physically reaching their host country, and we have been building the emphasis on integrative learning and related activities (causing them to make constant cognitive connections between their learning in the course and their overall undergraduate careers).*

### ***Culture and Community “infusion”***

As IFSA continues to develop Culture and Community (C&C) concepts as foundations for general learning outcomes across its sites around the world, C&C infusion is informing program structures and activities at a number of sites. The IFSA staff have taken this infusion seriously, and carefully considered how all activities meet C&C goals. Using C&C infusion as a guideline is an excellent way to ensure programmatic coherence among all IFSA sites, while allowing for variance and flexibility at each site around the world.

### ***Alliance Intercultural Mentorship (AIM)***

AIM is a program unique to IFSA Shanghai. Its goals are fairly straightforward (paraphrased here):

- Students develop an understanding of their own cultural background and how it influences their interaction in and perceptions of a Chinese cultural context.
- Students move towards an ethno-relative position in their interactions with Chinese culture.
- Students increase their intercultural competence as demonstrated by building knowledge, skills and attitudes.

The AIM program is in development and is structured in response to the unique challenges students face when studying in China. AIM currently hosts 15-20 students per semester in formal individual mentorship sessions, but all students in the Shanghai program benefit from the

work being done by staff to develop the program. AIM is meant to help students develop through a variety of avenues, including academic curriculum, cultural activities, individual mentor relationships with program faculty and staff. Thus, the program is a step ahead of a typical “cultural enrichment” program and is designed to be infused throughout the student’s experience in Shanghai. Eventually, the hope is to conduct comprehensive assessment to measure students’ growth and development beyond simply asking open ended questions.

By its nature, AIM is labor intensive. Staff acknowledged that it is simply not possible to devote the amount of time necessary to give each student an optimal experience with the program. Currently, staff are exploring ways to offer this enriched, integrated experience to all students, without an unmanageable work load. It is clear that staff are very committed to ensuring that students receive an intensive culture learning experience, and have an energy and passion that is infectious for how best to achieve the most meaningful and challenging student learning experience.

**Recommendation: The committee recommends supporting Shanghai staff in further developing the AIM program, or whatever intensive co-curricular structure best serves the purpose of AIM. IFSA Shanghai could truly separate itself from other study abroad programs offered in China by making AIM a centerpiece of the student experience. Many of the components in AIM are present in the services and programming offered to students. Formalizing these elements would serve IFSA well and would create a unique program brand for IFSA Shanghai.**

*IFSA RESPONSE: The AIM program is an example of the kind of innovating thinking that IFSA values in staff. Chris’ personal passion for the program is recognized, and we appreciate the*

*energy that all Shanghai staff who are involved devote to it. Expansion of the AIM program will be a topic of conversation between the Program Management and Development department and Academic Affairs at future meetings. For now, we can state firmly that we believe in the values evident in the program, including academic mentorship, student-advisor relationship-building, integrated learning, cultural engagement, valuing the local community, and fostering student curiosity.*

## **Health and Safety and Policies**

### **15. Health and Safety**

Health and Safety is the top priority for IFSA. The center in Shanghai is incredibly well organized, especially for these issues. The student handbook is full of invaluable information both for emergencies as well as everyday happenings. The students feel secure. The team saw no evidence of student hesitation about asking the Shanghai staff for help. A staff member always goes with a student for doctors' appointments to make sure they get all the information needed. There is good discussion in the handbook and orientation materials about how to make sure they keep themselves both healthy and safe, and excellent medical service is available in Shanghai. IFSA has arrangements with medical personnel/providers as well as mental health professionals, and students are advised to use United Family Hospital and Clinics. Staff places emphasis on safe eating as well as the importance of staying hydrated and advises students they cannot drink water from the tap and must only use bottled water. Again, the handbook provides good advice about foods that should be avoided. The hygiene tips on page 35, which include instructing students to take a minimum of one shower per day, wash feet after coming in if wearing sandals, and watch out for infections are excellent. Additionally, students

are given good advice on dealing with the potential problem of bedbugs. One of the program safety requirements is students always having their cell phones with them and to keep them fully charged, so they can always reach the staff, and staff can reach all students. Staff also provide students with wallet safety cards that contain relevant information and phone numbers in case of emergency. Staff provide students with good advice about traveling. Every student receives CISI insurance.

## **16. Emergency Plans**

IFSA has a strong reputation in the field for safety and risk management. All the plans for the programs are ready and have been shared with students and staff. Everyone knows what to do and where they should go.

## **17. Policies**

All policies are clearly articulated in the program handbook. All were discussed as part of orientation. Included in the list are policies on sexual harassment, drugs, alcohol, violence, attendance, intellectual integrity, health and safety etc.

***IFSA RESPONSE:** We are grateful for this recognition of our robust health, safety and security plans and practices, headed by a dedicated department in Indianapolis. We are devoted to ongoing staff development and refinement of protocols and communications. Student safety will always be a top priority for IFSA.*

## **Summary**

The committee agrees the IFSA Shanghai programs are very strong, and all committee members would be happy to send students from their own institutions to attend the programs. The students attending the customized program for Mount Holyoke College in Economics also seemed happy, and the students in all four of the programs in Shanghai are involved and fully integrated into the collaborating university, SUFE. All students are making great strides in the language and immersing themselves into the culture. While the programs are a great success, the committee believes this site can expand, causing the need for more staff and space. One concern the committee discussed with the leadership at SUFE is expansion in terms of space. As previously stated, the main concern would be that the IFSA offices and accommodation would be unable to remain in Tonghe International Student Village, as there is no room for expansion. Moving from the current location would change the nature of the staff interaction with students.

***FINAL NOTE FROM IFSA:** IFSA would like to sincerely thank the evaluation team for their time and dedication to this very important project. Through their generous sharing of knowledge, experience, expertise, and advice, we have actionable feedback that enables us to improve our programs and operations for the benefit of IFSA students, staff and partners. We therefore reiterate our deep appreciation to Dr. Ganz, Ms. Mennicke, and Dr. Dowdle.*