Regional Seminar

Section A: Tradition, Change, and Cultural Resilience (Andes and Amazon). This course is designed to immerse students in the myriad cultures of the Andes and Amazon and their relationship to the land. Through a combination of hands-on experiences, workshops, guest speakers, collaborative lessons, reading and writing assignments, as well as independent work, students come to know this material well and the importance of it in the Andes and Amazon. This course moves briefly and broadly through a variety of important ancient civilizations, with a focus on their present-day impact. South America’s colonial history is also examined, and the role the region played in the Spanish empire and then the liberation of the region from Spanish rule. Present-day Andean culture is studied, analyzing the effects of a variety of political forces while looking at racial and social conflicts that Bolivia and Peru have experienced. A special focus is placed on resource extraction and modern themes of sustainable development, human rights, and globalization. Students are required to complete various writing assignments throughout the course and prepare a final research paper on a social issue of their choice. Section B: China in Transition. This course provides students with a solid background in modern Chinese history, setting the stage for a grounded understanding of the myriad social issues that China faces today. Issues related to education, public health, the environment, civil society, economic development, law, gender, ethnic minorities, human rights, and popular culture are surveyed. Taught by instructors and guest lecturers, students engage local experts in discussion, including local professors, development workers, business professionals, health care practitioners, scholars, and artists. Special guests enhance formal classes by guiding students in lessons in various Chinese arts and pastimes, such as calligraphy, martial arts, ink painting, and culinary design. Each hands-on experience addresses the importance of these art forms in modern Chinese society. Lectures are supplemented with readings, films, and field trips to schools, health clinics, and local non-governmental organization (NGO) project sites. Students are required to complete various writing assignments and prepare a final research paper on a social issue of their choice. Section C: Diversity in the Himalayas. This course presents an overview of one of the most ethnically diverse regions of the world. Through selected readings, guest lectures, field trips, research method assignments, a village ethnography study, classroom discussions, and a service project, students explore the myriad ethnicities and religious traditions that constitute the region, and the development issues that they face. Social inequality is looked at from the perspective of the environment, public health, education, human rights, caste, history, and the status of women. Students are introduced to the religious traditions that make up the Himalayan region to further understand and appreciate their philosophies and values, and how they have evolved and influenced other systems of belief. Students are provided with an extensive introduction to Hinduism and to Mahayana Buddhism, in particular to the Tibetan tradition. As part of the latter, students participate in a ten-day meditation retreat. Section D: Life Along the Ganges River. This course provides students with an in-depth introduction to the cultures and traditions along the Ganges River, with a focus on Varanasi (Banaras). Each week, professors from Banaras Hindu University (BHU) and local experts present lectures to students on such topics as the role of women in a Hindu and Muslim country, economic issues of the caste system, and environmental sustainability. Substantive readings and response papers are assigned weekly to give important historical context to these lectures. Then, utilizing the experiential learning potential of India’s oldest-living city, students also visit important sites in and around Varanasi. Students gain an understanding of some of the traditions, religious practices, history, and contemporary lifestyles of the people who make the cities and villages along the Ganges River their home. In addition to these field studies and family stays, students meet with locals who conduct research, perform in the arts, or serve as religious and/or community leaders.

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