

Strategic Initiative Proposal

Proposal for a J-Term London Trip

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For many of our students, spending a junior year abroad is one of the most valuable experiences that Smith College has to offer. Regrettably, many do not take advantage of it, often because they are unable to fit a JYA into their requirements for the major.

Students who are unable to spend a semester or a year abroad might be interested in a 10-day J-Term or a month-long Summer Study Trip, especially if it were to provide at least partial credit and could be meaningfully linked to a number of full credit courses in the semester preceding or following the trip.

London would be an ideal destination for a short-term trip that would benefit many departments in different ways. A financially attractive, short-term London experience is already offered by a number of schools. We ought to consider something similar, perhaps a more affordable version of the London Theatre Trip we are now already offering to our alumnae.

The London Theatre Trip in March 2006 was splendidly organized by Liz Bigwood, from the Alumnae Office, and London Arts Discovery. Our guests attended lectures on plays and playwrights before attending performances in major London theatres. Afterwards, many stayed for discussions and curtain talks. They also participated in interviews with political journalist Polly Toynbee, accent coach Joan Washington, and theatre critic Michael Billington; chatted with actors Angus Wright and Jeremy Irons; and visited famous theatres and museums. I was guest lecturer on that trip and could only think of how our students might benefit from a similar program.

A London program for students would include a backstage tour at the National; a visit to the Globe; visits to museums, walking tours through literary London; interviews with directors, actors, and journalist-critics; and meetings with former Smithies who work and live in London. Students would keep a journal and a scrapbook about their visits to The Tate Modern, St. Paul's, The Victoria & Albert Museum, the Houses of Parliament, etc. They would attend five or six plays preceded by an informal lecture/introduction and followed by a discussion session, led either by a faculty member or by an actor or director. The trip could be linked, for instance, to a course called "London Stages," an in-depth study of recent productions at the National, Royal Court, Royal Shakespeare, the Donmar, the Bush, and so on.

Financial aid should be made available so that no students are turned away for lack of funds. The cost of such a trip still needs to be explored. It costs UNC about \$3,500 for each of the 60 students they send over on a month-long London summer program each year. This includes hotel, breakfast and theatre and museum tickets (but no airfare). A ten-day trip, even with a smaller group, would be less expensive.

To enhance this London experience, a number of departments (English, Theatre, Art, Government, History...) could send guest lecturers and offer linked, perhaps team-taught, courses. I have spoken informally to colleagues in English, Theatre, and other departments who have responded enthusiastically. Janie Vanpee and Tom Rohlich are also proposing short-term travel experiences for our students. So there is clearly much interest. The English Department would be willing to set up an ad hoc committee to explore our options.

Respectfully,

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