Chu He’s Final Report to IUSB Curriculum Development Grant

In November 2014, I received an IUSB Curriculum Development Grant to design a future Ireland Overseas Program (Dublin, Galway, and Derry). This grant enabled me to travel to Ireland in the summer 2015 to research sites, activities, and accommodations for our students, which is the necessary groundwork I did to prepare for a future overseas program in Ireland. Although I did not end up shadowing Lee and Kyoko’s London-Edinburgh program due to some unforeseen incidents, overall I have achieved the objectives of the project since I have researched all the resources in the three Irish cities, collected first hand important information about transportation and housing possibilities, and made preliminary choices of program sites and activities for students to visit and do while they are in Ireland. The major activities I did are as follows:

London:
Our initial plan is to meet Lee and Kyoko in London and shadow their London-Edinburgh program for 2-3 days to learn about designing overseas instructions. However, due to a severe car crash on the highway to Chicago, Lee, Kyoko, and their students were trapped in the traffic and missed their flight to London. Given the hassles of rebooking their flights and rescheduling their activities, we did not get a chance to shadow their program. However, Kyoko was kind enough to find some time to talk with Shawn and me about planning overseas program. We discussed the major issues and problems unique to overseas program and Kyoko shared with us her experiences and the lessons she learned. For example, from her we learned the necessity of Wifi when we look for affordable, safe, and convenient housing.

Dublin:
In Dublin, I checked out the summer housing possibilities at Trinity College Dublin, which seems an ideal accommodation for our students given its downtown location, reasonable price, and various facilities. More importantly, it has many common rooms and meeting areas for us to hold classes during our stay. I also researched possible sites for student activities such as Book of Kells, Jeanie Johnston Tall Ship, Dublinia Museum, National Library, etc. Students could learn about early Christianity, Famine and emigration, Viking history as well as their own Irish heritage by visiting those sites. I also met with Shawn’s friend who gave us a walking tour of Dublin, explaining to us the significance of the historical architectures and showing us the development and changes of the city over the time, which will deepen our students’ understanding of Dublin a lot. What’s more, we also went to Maynooth and had a guided tour of the splendid Chapel at Maynooth University. This talk and tour will tremendously inform our students of Christianity in Ireland. As for transportation, Dublin is mostly a walking city, but considering our American students are not used to walking all day, I still looked into the bus and train system and collected much information about their schedules and routes, which can be very useful in the future.

Galway:
In Galway, I found out that the summer housing at National University of Ireland Galway was not a good choice for our students due to its distance from the downtown and its limited shuttle service. As a result, I researched several more hostels in downtown area in terms of their facilities, wifi services, and prices so that we can compare them later to find the one that best meets our standards. In Galway city, many restaurants and bars offered folklore-telling and traditional music and dance performances. For example, the one I went to focused on Irish mythologies, ballads, and music, which would benefit our students and help them learn more about traditional Irish culture. Due to limited means of transportation, I could not make to Dan O’Hara’s Homestead. However, if students use their free day to explore Connemara, they would see ancient Irish cottage, bog land, turf-cutting, and peat along the way. I spent a day on the Aran Islands, which is a good site for our students to visit if they want to know some Gaelic-speaking villagers and learn about their traditional life styles in a harsh island environment. On the Aran Islands, students can also visit J. M. Synge’s old residence, which has been turned into a Synge museum. I also collected information about the tours to Cliff of Mohers because our students are very likely to visit this world-famous sight when they are in Galway. Since all the sites are distanced from the city of Galway and takes up a whole day to make the trip, we need to look into the transportation and our schedule carefully to plan our program.

Derry:
In Derry, the housing choice becomes simple: there is only one hotel in the center of the city, which means, within the city walls. Although it costs a little bit more, with the inexpensive housing in Galway, we hope we can still make the ends meet. During my stay, I researched all the sources available, which included a walking tour of the City Wall, a guided tour of the People’s Gallery, a visit to the murals on the other side of the city (the Protestants), the Guildhall, the Museum of Free Derry, and the Tower Museum. Those turned out to be wonderful sites for our students to learn about the history of the conflicts between the Catholic and the Protestants, from the early sieges of the city to the late Troubles. Students will witness not only a still divided city but also the city’s efforts towards peace and healing. Since Derry is recovering from its wounds and the tension still lingers, I would discourage our students from late night outings. Since we needed to fly back from Dublin, we had to go to Belfast first as there was no direct bus or train from Derry to Dublin. Such inconvenience will cause problems for our students, especially with heavy luggage. Shawn and I need to reconsider the routes among the three cities (Dublin, Galway, and Derry) to plan an easier, more convenient trip in Ireland.

With all the invaluable first-hand experiences and information, Shawn and I will be able to put together an overseas program in Ireland. We are right now in the process of designing it. We plan to propose this overseas program in 2016 and then launch it in 2017 or 2018. Without IUSB Curriculum Development Grant, I won’t be able to make the trip to Ireland and do the necessary groundwork for a future overseas program so I’m very grateful for this support!