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Julee Holcombe Associate Professor of Arts (COLA) travels to China

Julee Holcombe

University of New Hampshire - Main Campus, julee.holcombe@unh.edu

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Julee Holcombe

Associate Professor of Arts ~ travel to China

With the support of my CIE Grant, on May 13th I left UNH and travelled to the Sichuan Province of China for two months. The CIE grant funds helped to support my faculty teaching exchange with Chengdu University, my research to investigate the different fine art practices and pedagogy in China, and lastly, to support my own photographic research and studio practice.

Joined by UNH Art faculty Brian Chu and his wife, Shiao-Ping Wang, we were invited into this collaborative teaching exchange through Chengdu University. The majority of my time and research was spent in Chengdu, with the exception of a handful of trips to Shangli, Lujian, Dejingling, Dujiangyan, Qingchengshan, Roergai, Sanxingdui, the Songpan Valley and Northern Mt. Prefecture.

We spent many days on landscape painting and material collection (photographing) on our teaching excursions in various locations in the Sichuan Province. During these outings, I was able to observe their teaching styles, explore the local culture and photograph the local landscape, people, and architecture. Since 2007, I have been working on a body of photographic collages entitled, Chimerica. Because of the support of the CIE Grant, I look forward to incorporating images from this trip into future works of art.



Shiao-Ping Wang (in white hat) and Brian Chu (back right, facing group) with class in Shanghai



Student group in Shanghai; front row: Brian Chu (second), Shiao-Ping Wang (third from end), Julee Holcombe (second from end)

Throughout our time we were able to interact with some of the most talented, kind, giving and thoughtful Chinese faculty members and scholars within several different departments at CDU. In the six weeks, we attended meetings, observed classroom teaching, gave lectures and workshops, conducted critiques, went on teaching excursions, and attended many dinners. During the course of these different forums and experiences, we were able to develop relationships and share ideas both formally and informally. In the future, I continue to look forward to working with and developing an international collaboration with scholars from Chengdu University.

In the six weeks that I spent working with the faculty and students at Chengdu University, we learned how the students prepared for the College entrance exams, known as Gaokao. In learning the history and traditions of the academic framework and background of the Chinese educational system, we learned the challenges and impact that such structure causes for the students and the faculty teaching in higher education of the arts. The American and Chinese school systems and pedagogy are vastly different. Although I respect these differences, there are many aspects of the traditional Chinese approaches to the teaching in the arts that I would personally avoid, there are also many methodologies to developing respectful, independent and responsible students in the Chinese classroom that caused me to take notice.

For example, the Chengdu University students who are in their senior year are required to arrange and coordinate a ten-day teaching excursion for the class and instructor. They develop a budget that they all feel is feasible, which they then are responsible for choosing a location and developing an itinerary based upon their budget. As well, the students delegate two class leaders, who serve as excursion coordinator and the program's treasurer. The two ten day teaching excursions we participated in were executed without a hitch, including finding the location, booking the hotel, meal plans, and bus transportation. These were enjoyable trips and wonderful experiences for both students and faculty. Fostering leadership, responsibility and independence in this way is definitely something that I plan to continue to integrate into my classroom teaching. As well, I hope to continually expand, explore and expose students to all of the cultural similarities and differences that exist in the world of fine arts, and arts education in an effort to better foster and support more "globally ready" students here at the University of New Hampshire. Lastly, as the number of exchange students here at the University continues to grow, my ongoing efforts to become a more culturally literate and adept instructor will enable me to discuss and address current topics and issues within my course work and with my students.

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Hood House • 89 Main Street • Durham, NH 03824 • Ph 603-862-2398 • Fax 603-862-0169
Thompson Hall • 105 Main Street • Durham, NH 03824 • Ph 603-862-1288 • Fax 603-862-0844

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