Inaugural Exploratory Seminars Enjoy Successful Launch

The first PIIRS Exploratory Seminars were held this spring and met with enthusiastic reviews from program sponsors and attendees. The research initiative, announced this fall by PIIRS Director Katherine Newman, provides resources to Princeton faculty and their international colleagues to develop innovative projects in the humanities, social sciences, engineering, and architecture. The seminars are brainstorming sessions for exploring new frontiers, jumpstarting collaborations, and initiating future research plans. As Newman notes, “We seek to provide maximum freedom for intellectual exploration and ‘out of the box’ thinking.”

“Reception of Netherlandish Art in Asia in the Early Modern Period,” developed by Thomas Kaufmann, the Frederick Marquand Professor of Art and Archaeology, was held March 28–29. Kaufmann led a group of nine European and Asian scholars in the fields of economic and art history in an exploration of the Asian reception of European art in the 17th and 18th centuries. Emphasis was placed on artistic exchange between the Netherlands through the Dutch East India Company and parts of Asia, including China, Japan, India, and Sri Lanka.

According to Kaufmann, the meeting “was quite successful and exceeded expectations.” The scholars established the groundwork for further collaboration and are forming a research group with plans to apply as such to the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study.

The second seminar, “Sustaining the Global Commons: An Experimental Approach,” was held April 25–26. Proposed by Professor of Psychology Deborah Prentice, Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology Daniel Rubenstein, and the George M. Moffett Professor of Biology Simon Levin, this seminar explored human behavior and cooperation and its effects on the global commons in which we live. The Princeton professors led a group of 21 scholars in economics, education, political science, sociology, game theory, psychology, evolutionary biology, and environmental economy, including Nobel Prize-winning economist Eric Maskin from the Institute for Advanced Study, in an endeavor to expand the extant literature through experimental games to provide insight into the issues associated with sustaining the commons.

“Sigmund Freud and Art” was held May 2–3. Sponsored by Associate Professor of Spanish and Portuguese Languages and Cultures Ruben Gallo, this seminar gathered scholars from the United States, Europe, and Australia for a discussion of Freud’s extensive collection of archaeological antiquities—a collection of more than 1,000 works from around the world. This seminar examined the possibility of conducting a detailed analysis of significant parts of the collection and of exploring the relation between his writings and those objects.

The fourth and last of the spring 2008 exploratory seminars, “Genre and Tradition in Early Medieval China,” was held May 3–4. Martin Kern, a professor of East Asian studies, and Ping Wang, an assistant professor of East Asian studies, led this group of language, literature, culture, and civilization scholars from the United States, China, and Taiwan.

Applications are solicited four times a year with the goal of supporting 15 to 20 projects annually. The project proposals are vetted by scholars outside of the University and by the PIIRS executive committee.

The first of the fall 2008 Exploratory Seminars to be funded by PIIRS is “New Directions in Gender Studies and Medieval German Studies.” Slated for November 13–15, the seminar was proposed by Sara Poor, an associate professor of German. Poor’s seminar is an effort to extend and strengthen the international connections between North American Germanist medievalists and two leading young scholars working on gender in Germany.

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PROGRAM IN TRANSLATION AND INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION
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PIIRS has expanded its Princeton Global Seminars to include six-week programs in Kraków, Istanbul, and Hanoi this summer. The addition of the programs in Poland and Turkey and the continuation of the seminar in Vietnam for a second year is another step for PIIRS toward its goal of increasing study abroad opportunities for the University's undergraduates.

The Princeton Global Seminar initiative for undergraduate summer study was created to provide students with the opportunity to explore the international dimensions of their academic interests with an emphasis on subject matter rather than language. Students earn credit for one university course. The initiative is supported by PIIRS in conjunction with the Study Abroad Program.

“Islam, Empire, and Modernity: Turkey from the Caliphs to the 21st Century” will provide an analysis of change and continuity in Turkish society with a focus on history and on the major cultural transformations. Developed by M. Sükrü Hanioglu, a professor of Near Eastern studies, and Erika Gilson, a senior lecturer in Turkish, the seminar will be held in Istanbul at Koç University’s Research Center for Anatolian Civilization from June 21 to August 2.

“An enhanced understanding of late Ottoman history is indispensable not only to comprehend modern Turkey, or even the vast geographic area that was once ruled from Istanbul,” says Hanioglu, “but it is also essential for the study of European and world history. The Ottoman experience may serve as a superb laboratory for an examination of the impact of modernity in non-European settings.”

In addition to undertaking course work structured around the history, culture, language, and literature of Turkey and classes in the Turkish language, the 15 Princeton undergraduates participating in the seminar will visit sites within Turkey, Greece, and Macedonia. Students also will be involved in community service projects with two foundations: Turkish Volunteers for Education Foundation, which runs summer camps in poor neighborhoods; and the Mother-Child Education Foundation.

According to Gilson, the seminar is being held “during a very fascinating and crucial time” for Turkey. “Hopefully it will inspire some of our students to seek a better understanding of issues confronting civil societies today,” she says.

Thirteen rising Princeton sophomores, juniors, and seniors will participate in the Polish seminar, “Eastern Europe through Film and Touch,” to be held at Kraków’s Jagiellonian University from July 16 to 25. Led by Petre Petrov, an assistant professor of Slavic languages and literatures, and Elżbieta Ostrowska, a lecturer in the English and film studies department of the University of Alberta, the course will instruct students on the cultural makeup of Central Eastern Europe and give them insight into the ways the current “face” of the region has been shaped through recent history (particularly Poland, Hungary, and the former Czechoslovakia). This background will allow students to develop an understanding of the major impulses and restrictions that determine the character of film production in the region.

In-class activities include film discussions, screenings, and lectures by the instructors as well as by Polish scholars, public figures, and cinema personalities. Polish language classes will be held each morning before the seminar begins. Field trips are scheduled for Kazimierz, the old Jewish district; Nowa Huta, an example of socialist architecture; Auschwitz-Birkenau; Prague; and the Polish resort, Zakopane.

According to Petrov, “A film course of any kind fills a significant gap in the general curriculum at Princeton, where cinema is somewhat of an unrepresented subject.” Kraków, he points out, “is a fascinating intersection of histories and cultural traditions.” The community service component of the seminar was being worked out at press time.

In 2008, PIIRS marks the second consecutive summer for the Global Seminar in Hanoi. “America and Vietnam at War: Origins, Implications, and Consequences” will be held from June 6 to July 18 and will be led once again by Desaix Anderson ’58. Anderson, a former diplomat in the U.S. Foreign Service, developed this course to provide students with the opportunity merge their Princeton education with a “foreign environment of great significance to American history.”
One year after its inaugural run, Princeton in Dar es Salaam returns to the University’s summer study abroad curriculum a stronger, more refined course offering.

Thanks to the efforts of Program Director Mahiri Mwita, a lecturer in comparative literature, 10 Princeton undergraduates will spend eight weeks from June 2 to July 25 in Tanzania at the University of Dar es Salaam’s (UDSM) prestigious Institute of Kiswahili Research, studying intermediate Swahili and volunteering in community service projects. The course combines in-class language study, small group tutorials, sessions with teaching assistants and UDSM-based native speakers, and immersion in the daily life and culture of this East African region.

Intensive classroom work that reinforces the reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills acquired in elementary language courses on campus in Princeton is coupled with a daily volunteer requirement. Mwita has worked hard to match student interests with the needs of local schools, hospitals, orphanages, and youth groups. This year Mwita is making arrangements for students to volunteer in more than one place.

“I’m very concerned that the students don’t burn out,” he says. “If a student is volunteering at an orphanage, for example, some of the work with the children may be very demanding. It is hard on the students to face the same situations for eight weeks. I’m hoping to change them out every two or three weeks so that they can get a variety of experiences.”

The course is divided into two four-week sessions. A cultural field trip is scheduled at the end of each session. The first is a four-day trip to historic Zanzibar Island, and the second is to Mikumi National Park, the fourth-largest game park in the nation.

Tanzania, says Mwita, is regarded as the “cradle of Swahili” because Swahili is its national language and is used both officially and informally, unlike in nearby Kenya, from which Mwita hails, where English is more common. “Tanzania is also attractive because it is currently undergoing a transition from socialism to capitalism,” Mwita explains. “It is interesting for the students to experience firsthand the accompanying problems of transitioning from one economic system to another, in addition to the challenges that already exist in this post-colonial African state.”

Dar es Salaam, a seaport city, is the nation’s most expansive urban area and its commercial capital. UDSM is the oldest and largest university in Tanzania with an enrollment of 5,000 students. The UDSM campus is 10 miles from the city’s downtown.

Swahili has been a formal language course offering at Princeton since 2002. Mwita joined the faculty in 2004. That year, he says, four students enrolled in the introductory level class. In the 2007–08 academic year, the number increased to 20.
Justine Burns, a senior lecturer at the University of Cape Town (UCT) School of Economics, was a fellow with the Global Network on Inequality (GNI) for six weeks this spring. At UCT, she teaches courses on microeconomics and institutional and behavioral economics. As a visiting fellow at Princeton, Burns cotaught “Race, Class, and Inequality in Post-Apartheid South Africa” with Jeremy Seekings, a UCT professor of political studies and sociology, and continued her research on the impact of ethnic diversity on the provision of public goods and on the impact of social networks on employment prospects. She spoke to PIIRS News about experimental economics and using games to look at how gender and racial identity affect behavior.

Would you explain your area of interest?
I’m a behavioral economist, attracted by social psychology, and use experimental economics to look at poverty, inequality, and discrimination. I want to go beyond data sets and econometrics and measure people’s actual responses to each other. Economists hold very dear the notion that people are rational and self-interested. Games predict what people should do based on the economic model and allow us to observe how people really do behave. There’s quite a lot of difference between the two. The question becomes, what drives those differences? Trust? Altruism?

What do you hope to accomplish with your research?
This is the million-dollar question! I think that in a country like South Africa, where racial identity has played such an enormous role in the past, it’s important to be able to monitor the extent to which such identities continue to influence social interactions over time in the post-apartheid society.

Obviously, one’s hope is that the importance of race diminishes over time, but there’s no way to know this unless we try to measure these kinds of behavioral responses. I think it’s also important to try to understand the ways in which race interacts with class and how people rationalize their reliance on racial cues to make judgments about people. For example, people often make racial statements in response to affirmative action based on their sense that they have been the losers in the post-apartheid society. This “sense” is not due to the fact that the society has become more competitive as artificial restrictions to the labor market have been lifted, but because such people believe they have the wrong skin color. This is a scary position to be in since one feels as if he or she has no control over his or her own destiny. These are important aspects to bring to the surface in discussions on race for a society that is trying to escape its past racial legacy.

How does your research fit in with the Global Network on Inequality program?
I became involved with GNI through its May 2007 conference on discrimination. Since studies of inequality invariably have to deal with issues of racial discrimination, my work fits quite nicely into this framework. And I think the rather intuitive appeal of experimental economics makes it easier for my work to be of interest to a broader interdisciplinary audience.

What will come out of your time here?
Fortunately, there were a number of other GNI researchers visiting PIIRS at the same time, including Nadya and Antonio Sergio Guimarães of Brazil, and that has afforded us the opportunity to start working on collaborative research proposals that will be funded by the GNI program. In particular, we hope to undertake a comparative study in Brazil and South Africa of the impact of affirmative action in higher education on the welfare outcomes of both the participants and their future generations. These will be fairly large-scale projects that will require us to track individuals over time—as they enter and exit the university system and engage in labor market activities. I have also had a number of opportunities to attend interesting seminars, present my own work, and talk with other faculty members at Princeton, and this has been excellent in terms of allowing me to make progress in my own research. So I have completed a few papers and begun work on some new ones.

What’s next?
I return to Cape Town and go back to my usual teaching load, but I hope to start a number of new experimental projects that look further at the impact of racial identity and class on social interactions. Stay tuned!
As the Program in Translation and Intercultural Communication concludes its first year, Director David Bellos is excited about its future and pleased with the student interest in it.

Bellos, a professor of French and Italian and comparative literature, describes the program as a wide-ranging, demanding education in the role, function, nature, and complexity of communication in the world today. Grounded in the history and problems of linguistic translation, the program enables students to explore a variety of types of communication—between cultures, media, and epochs—with a sophisticated grasp of what is involved and with the appropriate technical language for thinking about it. In 2007–08, student participants included seniors, juniors, and sophomores, who, as members of the Class of 2010, will make up the program’s first cohort of certificate recipients.

In addition to core courses, classes in translation practices and issues, and independent work, the certificate requires a minimum of six weeks of study abroad. “Of course, competence in a language is also required,” says Bellos. “What has been extraordinary is the range of languages that a random collection of Princeton students possesses.” In its first year, 16 different languages were spoken by a group of 20-some undergraduates in the introductory course, he reports.

Funded by PIIRS because of its emphasis on the role of ideas, texts, and culture in the process of intercultural/international contact and transmission across boundaries, the Program in Translation and Intercultural Communication was proposed by Sandra Bermann, chair of the Department of Comparative Literature, and Michael Wood, the Charles Barnwell Straut Class of 1923 Professor of English and Comparative Literature, with committee members from a variety of departments including computer science, religion, politics, and East Asian studies.

According to PIIRS Director Katherine Newman, the Program in Translation and Intercultural Communication “is a humanities-based program that is deeply committed to international and intercultural communication. PIIRS was looking for a way to incorporate the humanities more fully than had been the case in the past, and this new program seemed the perfect vehicle.”

With its support for speakers, workshops, and seminars, PIIRS funding enables the subject of translation to have more visibility on campus.

Bellos, who emigrated from the United Kingdom, joined the faculty of Princeton in 1997. He discovered his facility with languages at an early age. He has written books in the field of Balzac studies and articles on the history of fiction and the book market of 19th-century France, and also has translated works by the French writer Georges Perec as well as many novels by the Albanian writer Ismail Kadare. In 2007–08, Bellos taught the Program in Translation and Intercultural Communication’s introductory course “Thinking Translation,” among others, and a graduate-level comparative literature course.
April 25–26
PIIRS and the Bobst Center for Peace and Justice conference: “Dictatorships: Their Governance and Social Consequences” with Carles Boix and various scholars.

April 25–26
Exploratory Seminar: “Sustaining the Global Commons: An Experimental Approach” with Stephen Pacala, Deborah Prentice, Daniel Rubenstein, and various scholars. Eno Hall.

May 2–3
Exploratory Seminar: “Sigmund Freud and Art” with Ruben Gallo and various scholars. Burr Hall.

May 3–4
Exploratory Seminar: “Genre and Tradition in Medieval China” with Martin Kern, Ping Wang, and various scholars. Burr Hall.

May 6
“Do Autocracies Perform Better Than Democracies? Evidence from Russia” with Michael McFaul, Stanford University. 4:30 p.m., 219 Burr Hall.

May 9–11
Conference: “The Pain of Words: Narratives of Suffering in Slavic Cultures” with Serguei Oushakine and various scholars. 1 p.m. Friday; 8:30 a.m. Saturday and Sunday.

May 21–22

June 6–8

November 13–15
Exploratory Seminar: “New Directions in Gender Studies and Medieval German Studies” with Sara Poor and various scholars. Burr Hall.