Most students at IUPUI's Herron School of Arts have never traveled outside Indiana, where the majority of the student body comes from. This past summer, three different groups of students went abroad—one to Ireland for the first time, another to France for the third time, and the third group to the People's Republic of China. These trips are part of a series of steps that the nationally renowned art school is taking to extend its reputation beyond America's borders.

Robert Shay, dean of the art school, hopes that such travel is merely the first step in broadening Herron's horizons. “Our first priority is to send Herron students abroad,” he said. “Our second is to work up some faculty exchanges, and third is to bring foreign students to Herron.”

The three-week trip to China was led by Herron faculty members Ed Manetta and Robert Eagerton, with Carolyn Dederer of the IU Foundation’s Indianapolis office, and nine students. Part of the stay was spent touring Beijing, Xi’an, and Shanghai. “Everything is different in China—the sights the sounds, the smells and tastes—our senses were constantly bombarded with taking it all in and sorting it out from our Western perspectives,” says Dederer.

It was when they spent some time in residence at Hunan Normal University in Changsha that they felt they were experiencing the “real China.” Changsha is situated in the agricultural heartland of the country, where the local population is not used to seeing foreigners. At Hunan University, they were able to observe an entirely different tradition of teaching art, based on a system of prescribed rules for painting and sculpting which students must learn in order to produce a traditional piece of Chinese art. Dederer noted the highly regulated and restricted interaction between the Chinese authority figures and their students. In turn, these students admitted to admiring Western ways of being free and easy in talking and joking, while recognizing that it would not be acceptable for them to adopt such styles.

Shay is planning a trip to Hunan Normal University later this year, where he hopes to formalize an exchange program between the two institutions. To support the expansion of such overseas travel and foreign exchange programs, Shay hopes to raise scholarship money to pay the costs. He knows that it will be money well-spent, because the programs play such a pivotal role in the personal and professional growth, both of the students and the school itself. Says Shay, “It is critically important that our students be exposed to cultures other than our own.”

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— Robert Shay, Dean of Herron School of Arts

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example of a business communication. “But that just doesn’t apply much any more. Communication is so rapid and taking so many new forms that companies don’t have guidelines to focus their efforts.”

Research gathering and analysis will also be a major component in the work of the center. “Our faculty will be able to look closely at the role language plays in the international workplace, and the impact different cultures have on business relationships,” says Connors. She has found that getting businessmen to recognize language and culture as potential pitfalls has not been easy, due to lack of experience in dealing with people of other countries, as well as the ingrained attitude that “business is business is business.” This attitude is not necessarily so in other cultures, she says, comparing the American businessman who wants everything spelled out in detail, to his Asian counterpart who is determined to leave matters more open-ended.

The center is already working on developing a conference with IUPUI’s Center on Philanthropy, which runs an international fund-raising school, and plans to host different workshops on changing business communications practices for potential clients in the Indianapolis area.

“We’re in a wonderful situation here in Indianapolis and central Indiana,” says Connor. “International business is booming here, but there are many problems and situations that companies face that we can help them solve.”

The Center for Intercultural Communication will draw on IUPUI faculty from many disciplines and will coordinate research, teaching, and service activities both on and off the campus. For further information, contact Ulla Connor on E-mail: uconnor@iupui.edu.