Water and Survival: from the Platte to the Nile was the theme of the 2011 James E. Smith Midwest Conference on World Affairs, held March 7-8, on the UNK campus.

Dr. Don Welch, University of Nebraska at Kearney Reynolds Chair of Poetry Emeritus, and Pr. Matthew Shenoda, Coptic Egyptian Poet and Professor at the California Institute of the Arts kicked off the conference with very moving poetry readings on the Platte and Nile rivers.

Another session that was unique was the showing of the documentary film “Flow: for Love of Water,” followed by an informative roundtable discussion. The film deals with the growing privatization of the world’s dwindling fresh water supply and practical solutions to the water crisis.

The keynote address was given by Ms. Maude Barlow, National Chairperson of the Council of Canadians and chair of the board of the Washington-based Food and Water Watch. She is the best-selling author or co-author of 16 books, including the international best seller Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and The Coming Battle for the Right to Water, which was also the title of her keynote address.

The remainder of the conference was rounded out with numerous panels, presentations and roundtable discussions.

Particularly noteworthy was a panel discussion on Latin America, which included information on cooperative efforts between Mexico and the U.S., as well as conservation efforts by the Venezuelan government.

On a more local level, the presentation by the UNL Water for Food Institute shed light on efforts the organization is making to increase water productivity and improve crops and food supply in developing and developed countries around the world.

The closing session did not deal with water. In light of the political struggles in Egypt over the past weeks and months, it seemed pertinent to have Pr. Matthew Shenoda, the Coptic Egyptian poet, and Dr. Dallas Kenny, the Director of International Education at UNK shed light on that crisis. The audience came away from that compelling roundtable discussion with a much greater understanding of the situation in Egypt and its impact on other countries in that region.

Participants came from the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Venezuela, Spain, China, Austria, Italy and Egypt.

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Participants came from the U.S., Canada, Mexico, Venezuela, Spain, China, Austria, Italy and Egypt. During their free time while in Kearney, they had the opportunity to see the Museum of Nebraska Art, as well as the Rowe Sanctuary on the Platte River.
Again this Spring, UNK International Education has seen a significant increase in the number of international students who applied, were accepted, and are now enrolled and in the midst of their studies at UNK. There were 176 applications received, compared to 103 in Spring of 2010, a 70% increase. Seventy-two new students completed the enrollment process, compared to 47 in spring of 2010, which is a 53% increase! And finally, there are a total of 440 international students studying at UNK this semester, compared to 400 in Spring 2010.

Also noteworthy is the number of graduates who participated in the Winter Commencement Ceremony in December. There were 34 international students who marched in that ceremony. A majority of those graduates were Japanese, and also included students from Bahamas, China, Colombia, India, South Korea, and Saudi Arabia.

Finally, the International Friendship Program is still experiencing substantial growth. While there are still two students this semester who are waiting for host families, 58 other students have been befriended by Kearney families this semester. There are a total of 153 students who are friends with 106 Kearney families now, which is nearly one-third of the international student body!

Three UNK students from Japan were notified early in April that they have been awarded grants made available through the Institute of International Education and Freeman Foundation Japan Emergency Assistance Program. This grant program is designed to help students complete their U.S. study programs, in light of the fact that their families were directly impacted by the March 11 earthquake and tsunami, resulting in financial hardship. On behalf of these students, UNK would like to extend our gratitude to IIE and the Freeman Foundation.
Over spring break I was fortunate to take a group of six amazing UNK students to Sarajevo, Bosnia-Hercegovina on a nine day study abroad program connected to the course I am teaching on Gender and War in Modern Europe. Bosnia-Hercegovina was part of the former Yugoslavia from 1918-1992. In the early 1990s when Yugoslavia began to disintegrate, Sarajevo came under siege and became a central site in the bloody civil war between Serbs, Muslims, and Croats that devastated the Balkans and resulted in the worst genocide to take place in Europe since the end of the Second World War. The wars of Yugoslav disintegration were also particularly famous for the mass rapes of women associated with ethnic cleansing campaigns waged especially (although not exclusively) by Bosnian Serbs against Muslims and Croats. For this reason, Bosnia-Hercegovina is an ideal location for analyzing the intersection of gender and war.

We left Omaha on Saturday, March 19 and arrived in Sarajevo about noon Sunday, March 20. The next day we were honored to be invited to the Bosnian Parliament where we met several members of Parliament. Each day after that we met with different and equally impressive representatives of governmental and non-governmental organizations who informed us about different aspects of the war and its impact on women, children, and the citizens of Bosnia-Hercegovina. By far the most emotionally wrenching day was spent in Srebrenica, the site of the massacre of over 8,000 Muslim men and boys by the Bosnian Serb army on July 11, 1995. Much of what we learned about the challenges facing the government of Bosnia-Hercegovina gave us great cause for concern. Nonetheless, the students found the people of the region to be extremely friendly, kind, and forthcoming. Everywhere we went, the first thing everyone said to us was, “Thank you for coming to hear and learn about us and please thank your government for its help to us!” We were frankly a bit embarrassed by how grateful they all seemed to be. All of this made us want to know more, not only about Bosnia-Hercegovina but about the entire world. If these people think so highly of us, maybe we should try just a bit harder to live up to their expectations and learn more about what is going on beyond our own doorsteps. Funding, however, is also badly needed.

The organization we worked with in Bosnia, “Zenska Infoteka” is a non-party and independent association of citizens gathered around feminist and global principles of non-violence, non-discrimination, women’s and girl’s human rights and human rights in general. Its primary objective is to improve the quality of life of women and girls in Bosnia-Hercegovina. Anyone wishing to donate funds to Zenska Infoteka may contact me at 865-8757 or lillyc@unk.edu.

Finally, I would like to thank the following organizations and local businesses whose generous support ensured the participation of our students: The History Department, The Office of International Education, The International Studies Program, Come and Get it BBQ, Ten Thousand Villages, TCBY Yogurt, Eileen’s Cookies, and Herberger’s.

Dr. Carol Lilly is a Professor in the Department of History & Director of the International Studies Program at UNK.
Reflections on First Chinese Semester Abroad

In the previous edition, you read about nine students that were in the midst of the first semester abroad at Hebei Normal University in Shijiazhuang, China.

They have returned to the U.S., undoubt-edly enjoying reuniting with family and friends. Most certainly, they have indulged in burgers, pizza and chocolate—those foods missing in the Chinese diet!

Alison Davis, one of the students who spent the semester in Shijiazhuang, shared her thoughts on the experience. Alison is a sophomore Elementary Education major from North Platte.

What sparked your interest in the semester abroad in China? Someone came and talked in my class. It seemed like too good of an opportunity to pass up. I’m spontaneous, but I don’t generally make decisions to go half-way across the world at the drop of a hat. For me, I guess it was a quick decision, and it worked out wonderfully!

What emotions did you feel during the weeks prior to your departure? I was a mess! I was trying to learn some Chinese vocabulary, pack everything I could possibly need, all while working and taking summer classes. I was also chowing down on all of my favorite foods before I left and making sure I could stay in contact with people after I left. I was too busy to feel anything, but whenever I had a moment to breathe, I was REALLY nervous!

How did your family feel about you going to China? They (parents Robert & Gaylene, and two sisters) thought I was crazy to go so far, to such a different culture, but they supported my decision because I was excited about it. They also saw what a great opportunity it was.

What were your first impressions of Shijiazhuang? Honestly, I was completely in shock. I had heard of culture shock but had no idea what I was in for until I was actually there. It was so crazy for me to see how different my life was going to be in a big city—I come from a town of 23,000! However, everyone was really welcoming and helped us jump right into our experience.

How long did it take you to feel adjusted to your new setting? I got used to the idea of living in the city within the first week. Some details took weeks. Other things I never felt adjusted to. I learned to accept them as they were.

Did you enjoy the food right away? I am a picky eater, at best, when it comes to meat. I want no fat, no nothing, so to have a chicken head in our soup was pretty surprising to me to say the least! However, I quickly learned which restaurants were my favorite, what I liked there, and how to order it.

What were the people like that you encountered in the city? They were so kind! Everyone was interested in us since there are not many Western people there. People were more than willing to help us out and very understanding when we mispronounced words.

What were the people like that you encountered in the city? They were exactly like my American friends. My friend Yu Ya loved Friends (sit-com) and the same foods as me. She had a great sense of humor.

What was it like studying with Chinese professors? The only thing that was a bit different was grading. I really had no idea where I stood in the class until I got my final grade! Other than that, they were very supportive and helpful. I loved our Chinese teacher—she was great. Another professor took us under her wing and would invite us over for lunch and even helped me with a project I had for an online course. She was a great friend to all of us.

Did you have the opportunity to travel and see important historical sites? YES!! We saw tons while we were there! We hit up all the spots in Beijing: The Great Wall, Temple of Heaven, Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square, etc. We also saw the Terracotta Soldiers in Xi’an. We went to Baiyang Lakes and saw tons of Lotus flowers. We climbed Mt. Tai. I loved having the opportunity to see so much while we were there.

“it was really a lesson in loving people as they are and learning how to love another culture.”

When your departure was nearing, how had your impressions of Shijiazhuang changed? I was actually in love with it. I was missing home, but at the same time, every time we had a “last,” my roommate and I would feel sad! It was hard to leave somewhere that had, unexpectedly, become home in just four months.

Now that you are back in Kearney, what is your most treasured memory? I don’t think I can pick just one memory. But something I really learned was love. People were so kind, so willing to help us. Our students loved us. Our teachers treated us fairly and kindly. It was really a lesson in loving people as they are and learning how to love another culture—not thinking of it as weird, but just as different, but really great.

What do you say to students when asked why they should participate in the Chinese semester abroad in the first place? Go for it! It was truly the experience of a lifetime. When else are you going to be able to travel China? I know that I won’t be doing it when I’m married with rugrats! It’s a hard decision and it’s scary to decide to go so far and to such a different place, but that is what truly made it worthwhile for me.

Allison Davis, Ashley Sloup, Saray Aguado, Emily Wemhoff
English Conversation and American Culture in Chinese High Schools

UNK International Education is expanding an English Conversation and American Culture teaching program that has been solely a summer program in years past. ELI instructor Lisa Terry, and her Communications Professor husband, Keith, have taught summer language workshops in Latin America and China for several years.

During the fall, we advertised for and hired two people interested in spending the entire spring semester teaching conversation and culture in partner high schools in Shijiazhuang, China. Mind you, a semester is 18 weeks, which is long by American standards, so the two instructors have their work cut out for them planning and executing lessons for a variety of classes of students at different skill levels!

Below is an update on how things are going for the two instructors.

Kyle McConnell, who teaches at Number 17 High School reports:

3/6/2011 It is hard to believe that it has only been one week. The laptop computer the school provided has been working well. I had them switch the operating system so I can use Power Point at school.

I am teaching junior and senior level students. For the first week, I introduced myself and did the “note card trick” I picked up at the UNK workshop. It went very well for a few classes, and was a disaster for one class!

I meet the same students twice per week. My students are more advanced than an equivalent to American high school junior level. There are 45-55 students per class. I also have three sections of English Conversation at Number 17 Middle School, which is an informal language practice and conversation hour. There are 20-25 students who regularly attend. Classes have settled down now that we’ve been together six weeks—they know my expectations and I understand how the “foreign class” fits into the curriculum.

I meet the same students twice per week. We mix fun and more serious topics. Some very successful lesson topics so far have included: the meaning of friendship, cooking American cuisine, popular contemporary music artists, American/European clothing style, U.S. high school differences/contrasts, and American holiday traditions. The best lesson topics introduce things they’ve never heard about before because this immediately engages their interest. My students are more advanced than anticipated, so I haven’t been able to utilize the books and materials that I brought with me much.

I enjoy trying more typical Chinese foods. I like mushrooms a lot and there are many kinds prepared differently: fried with noodles or rice, in dumplings, with special sauces, or made into soup. It has become a favorite healthy food. I take a lunch break most days in the school cafeteria.

Kyle and Bart took the opportunity to travel to Beijing for sightseeing over a recent weekend. They attended the dawn flag raising at Tiananmen Square, walked through the Forbidden City and saw the Olympic Park. Kyle enjoyed fried scorpions on a stick, but as Bart mentioned above, he stays with the more traditional cuisine!

Bart Bosshamer, who teaches at Number 1 High School reports:

4/10/2011 I may be learning more in Shijiazhuang than I am teaching! But for sure, the experience continues to stay positive. Naturally, there is a feeling of taking a bump backward now and then, but each week brings progress in becoming more acclimated to daily life and teaching. Just like moving anywhere new in the U.S., it takes time to figure out the most efficient way to do things—where to shop or get a haircut, local specialties, etc.

I have six classes of what would be equivalent to American high school junior
Faculty/Staff Development Trip

The University of Nebraska at Kearney, in partnership with Hebei Normal University in China, is once again offering a UNK Faculty/Staff Development Trip to Shijiazhuang, China.

The trip will take place June 8-22, 2011, and will feature:

- Meetings with HNU colleagues in similar areas of expertise
- Field trips to UNK partner high schools in Shijiazhuang
- Social, cultural, and culinary experiences
- Excursions to culturally and historically significant sites in the Hebei Province and Beijing areas

A group of ten UNK faculty and staff members participated in a similar trip in June of 2010. The group toured the site of the brand new HNU university campus, which was in the midst of construction at the time. The new campus brings together all 30,000 students from four separate campuses. The 2011 group will have the opportunity to see the completed campus.

Japanese Students Respond to Tragedy

Japanese students at UNK were profoundly impacted by the tragedies that struck Japan in March. Many are from areas near the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdowns. Some families members were missing for a time; one father is still missing. Many others had friends that perished or suffered substantial loss.

It has been difficult for the students to be so far away and seemingly helpless to assist. In response, the Japanese Student Association at Kearney (JAK) set up donation tables on campus and at WalMart to collect funds for Japanese relief. Additionally, the Chinese Students and Scholars Association, the Nepalese Student Association, Rotary Clubs of Kearney and Rotaract (campus student Rotary Group) assisted with fundraising.

On Sunday, April 17, the JAK organization hosted their annual Sakura Festival. Instead of the usual festivities, the event, entitled “Sakura—Hope for Japan,” gave guests the opportunity to record videos or write notes of encouragement to be forwarded to the people of Japan, fold some of the 1,000 cranes that the students will take home and distribute at the conclusion of the semester, and make monetary donations to the American Red Cross, designated to Japanese Earthquake and Pacific Tsunami Relief.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, JAK passed the donations they received along to the Fort Kearney Chapter of the Red Cross, which will transfer the funds to the Japanese Red Cross. The amount of the donations the students collected was an incredible $10,874.19! The students are overwhelmed by the generosity and concern of the people of the Kearney area.

Out of gratitude to the community, the students prepared entertainment and traditional Japanese cuisine.

Uprising in Egypt

The Offices of the Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, and International Education sponsored a talk entitled “Uprising in Egypt” on February 8. Dr. Dallas Kenny, the Director of International Education at UNK made the presentation.

Dr. Kenny is a Fulbright Scholar who received his doctorate in Near Eastern Studies from the University of Michigan—Ann Arbor. He lived in Egypt for three years while studying Egyptian Arabic dialects and researching southern Egyptian immigrants living in Cairo. While in Egypt, he also served as a translator for the Nobel Prize for Literature laureate, Nagib Mahfouz.

Dr. Kenny shared insights into the current events taking place in Egypt, based on his experiences living in Egyptian society. Additionally, he discussed some of the competing social and political forces at work—in and outside of Egypt—that provided a framework for better understanding of the protests taking place in February. The presentation was supplemented by some excellent maps of Cairo, which helped the audience to have a better understanding of the geographical layout of Cairo and the ramifications of that on the protests taking place.

Following the presentation, he opened the floor for questions. There were many questions posed by the standing-room only audience, made up of UNK faculty, staff, students, and administrators.

The University of Nebraska Kearney is an affirmative action / equal opportunity institution. Individuals needing accommodation under ADA should contact the ADA coordinator at UNK, 308.865.8655.