India is the largest and most culturally diverse country on earth. Home to nearly all the world's religions and birthplace of four (Hinduism, Buddhist, Jainism, and Sikhism), in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries the country has also become, though still plagued by poverty and underdevelopment, a major economic power and a key ally of the United States in Asia.

The land of Gandhi, in its modern history the country has also given rise to the first modern anti-colonial independence movement, forging in the process the world's largest and, in many ways, most raucous, complex, and unlikely democracy. This program will introduce students, both in the classroom and through field trips to a number of sites, to the entire sweep of India’s long history, from the rise of civilization c. 3,000 BCE to the present.

In addition to taking classes in the ancient city (and modern IT hub) of Pune, students will visit sites associated with the life of Gandhi and India’s freedom struggle, Hindu temples, Buddhist cave temples, mosques, medieval fortresses, Goa—the capital of the Portuguese Indian Empire, the great metropolis of Mumbai (Bombay), the ruins of the ancient city of Vijayanagar, and the palace of the powerful Maharaja of Mysore.

For the first 2 1/2 weeks of class, we will cover ancient and medieval South Asian cultural, religious, social and political history which students can take for either GenEd or History credit. For the second 2 1/2 weeks of class, students will enroll in a course on either the modern history or politics of the region or a course on its literature.
Dear Students,

I’m writing to you to invite you to participate in JMU’s inaugural Study Abroad Program in India. While the program is designed chiefly for History or English students, the program can be undertaken for GenEd credit as well.

The India—History and Culture program is brand new. I went to India this summer to plan it and, as I say, it will be the first of its kind for JMU. I not only hope that some members of your student association will participate in the program, but that you will make publicizing the program, above all by word of mouth, a priority as well.

The place where we'll be going is Pune in the state of Maharashtra, about 75 miles from the great megalopolis of Mumbai. Pune is a large-ish and rapidly expanding Indian city known chiefly for its educational institutions and IT industry. The college where we'll be studying, Fergusson College, was founded by patriotically minded Indians in 1885 and is one of the most famous and oldest institutions of higher learning in the country. Located in the historic Deccan Gymkhana district of the city, the College has roughly 7,000 students, though it is affiliated with the much larger University of Pune. Many of the faculty of both the college and the university will serve as guest lecturers and affiliates of our program.

Broadly speaking, the program will be a general but intense engagement with a region and a country with as long and complex a history as any on earth. Our itinerary is going to packed, both with afternoon and day-long trips in and around Pune as well as with weekend trips to more distant sites, most notably to Mumbai, to the ancient Buddhist-Hindu-Jain temple complexes of Ajanta and Ellora, and to the medieval hilltop fortress at Raigad. Towards the end of the program we will tour South India more extensively, visiting the site of the Hindu kingdom of Vijayanagar, the great Mulsim Sultanate at Bijapur, and the capital of the Portuguese East Indies (and modern-day resort), Goa, to name a few.

In addition to ruins and museums, we’ll visit (and be visited by) many historians, political activists, and writers who (together with our course readings and discussions) will introduce students to Indians’ struggles against imperialism, caste-ism, patriarchy, religious bigotry, and poverty. Trips to the cinema, theater, and musical performances will also form part of the program’s program itinerary. All in all, it'll be a wonderful (and, experientially speaking, extremely rich) seven weeks of summer. The website for the program is here. You can apply to the program directly from that page.

Though, as I say, the focus of the program will be on history, there are no prerequisites for the program apart from curiosity and a modicum of maturity. Credit in History and/or in English is available through the program. Some GenEd credits that students may substitute in place of History or English credit are as follows: HUM 252, which satisfies Gen Ed Cluster 2, Group 1; ENG 239, which satisfies Cluster 2, Group 3; and/or POSC 200, which satisfies Cluster 4, Group 2.

Many Indians, of course, speak English, albeit most do so in what has now become a distinct dialect which Indians speak with varying degrees of fluency in a variety of accents. But English is the primary language of higher education in India. Consequently, our program will have no formal language component. However, Dr. Leonard will offer a basic introduction to the Devanagari writing system or script on a voluntary basis. Also, for those who are interested private or semi-private lessons with native speakers in basic conversational Hindi-Urdu or basic conversational Marathi, the regional language of Maharashtra, can be arranged.

The cost of the program cannot be stated exactly until we know exactly how many students are going. But, like all JMU study abroad programs, your fees go to cover actual costs. (Unlike commercial travel abroad providers, JMU makes no money off of these programs). If you want a ballpark figure, my best guess right now is that the program fee will be about $4,500 (this is an estimate - the fee covers all books and other course materials, entrance fees at various sites, accommodation, insurance, transportation, bottled water, and most meals). Apart from this you'll need to pay for a round-trip flight to India and JMU tuition, and you'll need some spending money.

Let me know if you have any questions and feel free to forward this email to anyone else you think might be interested.

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