1. Why did you choose that program?

I chose the Tianjin Program, because I had talked with past participants and was impressed by the language they had learned in only 3 months let alone the praises they had for the program in general. I also wanted to be studying in a city in China that was not too rampid with tourists.

2. What did your program consist of you doing?

Each weekday morning, I was in a 2-hour discussion section comprised of 5-6 people followed by a 2-hour lecture in which there were 20 people. I also had a Chinese tutor working with me for an hour every day Monday-Friday. Beyond the classroom, the program included a trip to Beijing to see Chinese opera and eat duck, and a weekly Chinese table that provided lunch and native speakers with whom we could practice the language.

3. What was it like working directly with this culture? Are you still in touch with people?

As I had expected, my idea of what Chinese culture was before going to China was very primitive and had many gaps. I did not realize this until I was thrown into the culture and in direct contact with it. The friendships that formed with Chinese natives gave me a window into how things are run at home, a Chinese university student’s perspective on higher education, how the Chinese perceive other countries, and more. I still keep in touch with some of them and plan to visit them again next year.

4. What has this experience meant for you now looking back?

This experience has given me an understanding about China and its people and its language that allows me to immediately connect with most Eastern Asian International students on campus. It has also given me a more educated perspective on the world. I can now read the news or about the history of China with a better grasp on the context of the stories.

5. Personally, what kind of affect has this experience had on you?

This experienced has opened up my options for life after college, and I have decided to return to Tianjin, continue to study the language, and to teach English for several years. I highly doubt these would be my plans had I never gone on the summer program.
6. **A particularly memorable moment?**

I think the most memorable moment for me was climbing the Great Wall of China. It has been such an icon all my life all the way from history classes to Disney movies. To actually be standing on the Great Wall, looking out at it wrap around the land, was truly an out-of-body experience and as magnificent as it was cracked up to be.

7. **What would you say to someone considering studying abroad?**

I would say that the Tianjin Summer Program is a great program for learning Chinese, no matter what level you are starting at. The opportunities to learn the language, about the culture, and to travel to other parts of China are rich and abundant. It’s amazing how much you experience considering the short amount of time spent in the country. If there’s anyway you can go, go!

Karen is a senior German Education major at UW-Madison. She participated on the Freiburg, Germany program all year 2005-2006 and on the Tianjin, China program summer 2008. She was the recipient of the Freeman Asia Scholarship for her time in China.