



focus

ON SUMMER LEARNING

Stepping out of your comfort zone *Teaching English in another country*

Allison Barron
Special to ChristianWeek

Traveling to another country is the dream of many students, and TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) programs at Bible colleges and universities across Canada offer the perfect opportunity for doing so.

An estimated 700 million people worldwide use English as a first or second language, and the demand for certified teachers is growing around the world. This explains why many colleges and universities, including Alberta Bible College, Briercrest College and Seminary, Steinbach Bible College, Bethany College, Vanguard College, and Providence University College offer TESOL certificates.

Mark Wiebe, a graduate of Providence University College's TESOL program, had always wanted to travel to another country to serve and learn about other cultures.

Wiebe and his wife learned about a program called Radical Journey through their church bulletin, a one-year formational experience in cross-cultural learning through Mennonite Mission Network. Through the mission, they ended up going to China to live and teach English for a year.

"Learning at Providence was helpful," says Wiebe. "I received the base knowledge for knowing how to teach English. The cultural classes were also useful to prepare me for understanding a new place and how to fit in."

Wiebe says there were still a lot of surprises about living in a new country and learning a new culture.

"In China, you don't say 'thank you.' They will respond with 'no thanks,' as no thanks are required. Politeness is just expected. Also, you don't say 'sorry' if you bump into someone on the bus. I would

do that and apologize, and people would look at me funny. You don't say sorry in China, it's just life.

"I think it's good to get to know other people from other cultures because we often have an 'us versus them' mentality."

"They also love making toasts to each other at meal times," Wiebe says. "One time I was making one, but I obviously said something very wrong because everyone went dead quiet and stared. I still don't know what it was I said wrong, but they worked with me to try to figure out what I had meant to say, and were very gracious."

Wiebe loved his time in China and says it was a wonderful experience. Though the reason he went was to teach English, he feels that he was most impacted just by being surrounded by another culture for a year.

"I think it's good to get to know other people from other cultures because we often have an 'us versus

them' mentality," Wiebe says. "Now that I've lived in China for a year and have friends there, I don't think of it as 'them' anymore.

"There are a lot of things embedded in our culture that we don't realize, that we take for granted. Individualism is one of them; it's just the way things are in Canada. But in China, the good of the group is just as important as the individual. It was a different way of living that I appreciated and gave me a broader perspective."

Wiebe says that the opportunity to travel to other countries and teach English was extremely valuable to him. "It's a great way to get to know new people and cultures, and step out of your comfort zone."

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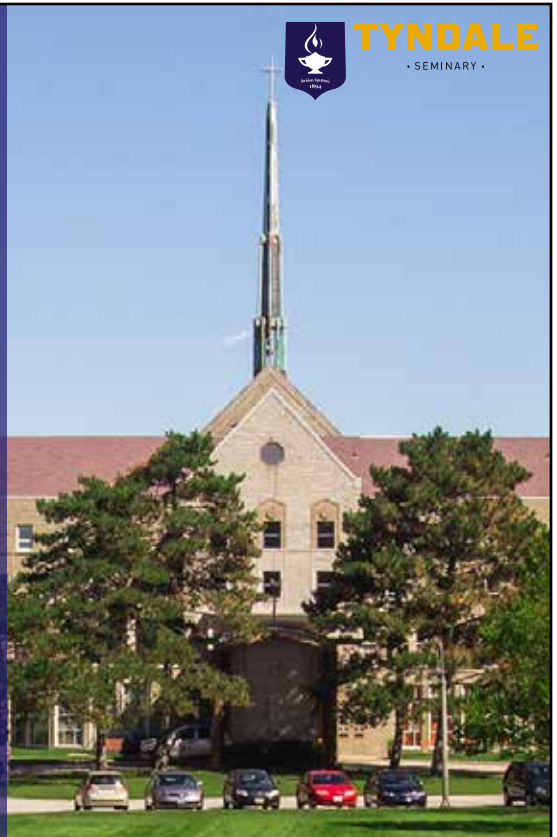
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Summer programs provide path way for a new kind of student

Christian colleges and universities are offering more flexible education options

Allison Barron
Special to ChristianWeek

Christian colleges and universities across Canada are glimpsing a new type of student emerging during the summer months. More flexibility in course offerings is attracting students who can't commit to full-time studies.

"We are seeing a greater interest in online education," says Brian Westnedge, Director of Continuing and Distance Education at Briercrest College and Seminary in Caronport, Saskatchewan. "But this is as much about flexible options for our on-campus, dorm students as it is about attracting a new kind of student."

Through Briercrest's online offerings, Westnedge says they are able to serve students outside the traditional semester schedule.

"Online offerings are only a part of the flexible options at Briercrest," says Westnedge. "Our seminary is built around a flexible modular system, and in the college we offer one-week modular courses at strategic times throughout the year."

A unique opportunity Briercrest offers is Summer Stage, where students and community



Potential students have more options than ever thanks to online courses and summer programs. Photo courtesy of Redeemer University College

members have a few weeks to prepare, rehearse, and perform theatre productions. Students learn quickly how to approach a production in a professional way in a Christian environment, outside the regular school year. This summer they are performing "The Sound of Music" and "H.M.S. Pinafore".

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