FROM THE COORDINATOR
Geoffrey Scheurman

This edition of Coastlines shares highlights from our most recent cohort of COST participants. This group represents the largest cadre of overseas teacher candidates in the history of the program, with 12 UWRF apprentices traveling to 10 countries. They also piloted several new elements in the program, meeting for monthly pre-departure seminars, responding to an “Overseas Check-up,” completing a culminating exercise, and attending a final debriefing meeting and potluck celebration. We pooled travel information, met with COST alums, and conducted anticipatory inquiries into national histories, finances, language, educational systems, and elements of popular culture. In the end, several interesting themes emerged. On the one hand, for example, a number of students reported that our obsession with “things American” was a bit ethnocentric, as people in their host country were more interested in things like “music” than they were in “American music.” On the other hand, news out of Ferguson, Missouri framed much of our candidates’ cross-cultural dialogue, as current events thrust many into the role of American political and cultural experts. Several reported how this focus became a catalyst for exploring issues of race in significantly new ways, including a critical examination of national identity and the American ideal. I hope you enjoy pondering some of these issues yourself as you celebrate the stories from this cadre of future teachers.

COST Coordinator
Teacher Education Department Chair

PILOT GROUP

On February 4, students just returned from their Fall 2014 COST placements convened for a debriefing and potluck celebration, providing a rare opportunity for COST students to connect with others who understood their adventure. All enjoyed food from host countries or made from a recipe of the country. continued page 10
A.J. Sutter in the Bahamas

excerpts from his blog

. . . For the past 7 days I have been on edge wondering if coming down here was a good choice. It was definitely one of my hardest weeks last week trying to adjust but looking forward I am thrilled about the opportunities and adventures that lie ahead.

Even though I spent a few days at my school last week getting acclimated this was my first day teaching in the Bahamas. To say it was intimidating is an understatement. I was teaching 7th grade writing and had all sorts of things prepared for them. I am pleased that my lesson went smoothly. I am still trying to find a groove with these older grades, but all things considered I would call it successful.

I have never had the problem before, but nonetheless, I was worried that my students would not respect me. Thankfully my teacher instincts kicked in and it was easy to establish myself as a teacher in the classroom because the students never had the chance to see me as anything else.

I’m trying to quickly learn management strategies not only for an entirely different culture, but a foreign grade level as well. What the American education system considers strict doesn’t even compare to the strictness of the Bahamas. In 1/3 of my course load the kids are responsive to my style. The others are hit or miss.

The “worst of the worst” classes at LW Young are much “worse” (in terms of behavior) then any group I’ve worked with. The “best of the best” are extremely bright and well behaved and probably some of the best groups I have worked with. The top tiers of the system are given extremely high expectations… even the slightest murmur of talking is addressed as if the world is ending… but the lower tiers are expected to be bad. The system seems to be working but I wonder what the school would look like if the classes were mixed ability levels. It certainly makes planning easier, but at what expense?

I wish I had been set up with a host family. However, I am extremely grateful for my Cooperating Teacher, Mrs. Rolle. She has gone out of her way to make sure I feel comfortable and I am truly grateful for her guidance. She even has outings planned for me to do with the rest of the LA department.

After dinner I had the chance to Skype with my friend Sara, who is doing her student teaching in Mexico. It was great to see her face! Comparing our experiences in two different countries was really cool.

Saturday was a pleasant day. I woke up and got myself ready for a day at the beach. My supervisor invited me to a brunch with some friends so I jumped on the chance to enjoy human interaction outside of school. The apartment we ate at was beautiful, on the upscale side of the island. It overlooked the bay and had its own private beach. After our brunch I walked across the street to Saunders Beach. I had an entire area to myself to relax and sun bathe. My teacher has informed me that locals typically only go to the beach on holidays and very hot summer days.

Today happened to be the consolation bracket championship for basketball. The students were thrilled that I was there to watch them play. I was seated at the table of honor with Mrs. Tonny, the coach of our departments team, and the games were on. The coach for one of the teams did not show up. Who did they call on to coach a team to glory? Me! My team was less than stellar, but we managed to whip ourselves into shape in the second half and come out on top with a buzzer-beating jump shot to win the game and the third place medals! The team was so excited, and I’ll be in the schools photo case for at least the next year.
Andrea Roth in China

excerpts from her blog

When I first found out I was placed in China to teach math I was like you’re kidding right? You expect me to teach Chinese students math?! . . . My supervising teacher, Mr. Merchant, told me what I would be teaching, PreCalculus and AP Calculus AB; I’m pretty sure my jaw hit the floor. I despised calculus through school and I said I would never teach it, now I had no choice!

Mr. Merchant told me that he has implemented a flipped classroom into his courses and it has been very successful so far. I have heard about flipped classroom but hadn’t actually seen it in action. I was getting excited to try a new form of teaching. He has taught me that teaching isn’t straight up lecturing all day every day. He refers to himself as a facilitator rather than a teacher. The students guide how class goes each day. If they are all confused on something we have a class discussion. If a few people are confused on a topic those students get together and work it out. Everyone works so well together; teachers, students, and administration.

The students know they are smarter than me but they aren’t mean about it. This was probably my biggest fear coming to China and teaching math. They are stereotyped as being geniuses in math; they do not disappoint. They work their butts off too. Besides having school for basically 13.5 hours a day, they then either go to the dorms or home and study and do homework until about midnight or 1:00 am. They are back up around 6:00 am to start another day. How do they do it?! Their entire teenage years are spent studying and learning; and the amazing thing is that they are never grumpy or tired. They always have smiles on their faces and are so friendly! These kids are amazing.

I have taken over both PreCalculus classes and have kept with the flipped classroom setup. Mr. Merchant has helped me come out of my shell. We have managed to teach the students the Hokey Pokey and convinced them they need to know it to enter the us! I’m almost positive they think Americans are crazy, but we do the dance once a week and the students are getting really good at it! Of the activities we’ve done, the one I liked the best was called Bungee Barbie. Using their math skills students estimated how many rubber bands they needed to bungee Barbie from the 2nd floor balcony. It was hilarious. The students had a blast.

I’m pretty sure the students are teaching me more than I will ever be able to teach them. They are some of the sweetest, hardest working individuals I know. They don’t know how to be mean, or rude, or not happy! They make it so easy to go to work everyday and are going to make it so much harder to say goodbye to a place I now call home.

I was fortunate to be invited to Yellow Mountain by the Experience China group that is also in Hangzhou this semester.

Yellow Mountain, also called Huangshan, is about 1600 meters above sea level. Our tour guide said once we have seen Yellow Mountain we won’t have/want to go to any other mountain range in the world, I think he’s right! Nothing will ever compare to what we were able to see on top of the mountain.

A famous Chinese artist, Mr. Mou used to do paintings right at Yellow Mountain but has since moved to painting in his home. He had such concentration and precision, it was beautiful.
The students were going to finish their recycling so my teacher sent me out to get garbage bags. I had spent forever trying to track down a janitor when one of my students came running up to me telling me they had found one. I tried to beat her back to the classroom by taking a closer set of stairs than she did, but she flew by me as I got to the top. When I opened the classroom door, all of the students yelled, “Thank you!” It nearly gave me a heart attack.

They presented me with a book of letters/poems they had written for me as well as a Costa Rican soccer jersey. I gave them a surprise of my own. Since our last unit was on poetry, I wrote each of their names in acrostic poems using adjectives that described them. They were very impressed as I used both English and Spanish words. I also wrote a little note on the bag and gave them each a box of nerds. The students were so excited about their poems that they all read them to the class.

Friday was tough. I didn’t full cry, but my eyes were ready to spill more than a handful of times. The kids were so adorable in their performance and they looked so cute all dressed up and out of their normal school uniforms. It was tough to say goodbye to everyone. I have never had so many kisses (on the cheek) from so many strangers (the students parents) but I’ve adapted to the culture here so much that it didn’t even phase me. The parents were telling me how their kids go on and on about talking about me at home and it made me feel so great. I am just not ready to leave.

Words cannot explain how much I am going to miss my kiddos. They were so accepting of me right away and I had so much fun with them. They taught me more than just Spanish, and for that I am forever thankful. I’ve noticed that I talk a lot like them now. For example, when they understand something, they always say, “ah, yes,” and I’ve caught myself doing that frequently. I say things all the time and know that it’s something that came from the kids. I wonder how long it will take for those habits to fade. They’ve spoiled me with end of the year/holiday gifts and I can only hope that I had enough effect on them as to deserve being so spoiled.

As the school year comes to a close, I notice more things that differentiate my school here from the ones in the states. We made crafts with bottle caps from beer and my teacher explained to the students that they were from a bar from beer that people drank. There was also a Christmas tree made out of wine bottles. Anything alcohol related is basically forbidden in the states, but here it’s just a normal part of life. Also, the teachers give students kisses all the time. Not on the lips, but on their heads or cheeks; it is a cultural thing as people often great each other with a kiss on the cheek. Students often bring cake in for their birthday and they light the candles right there in the classroom. I don’t think candles are even allowed in schools back home!

When I first got my placement email saying I would be going to Costa Rica, I was disappointed. I had really wanted Australia. After thinking about it, I realized I am glad I was placed in a Spanish speaking country. Even though I would not technically be leaving the continent, I was going somewhere much different from home and I would improve my Spanish skills. I am so thankful I ended up here instead; I wouldn’t trade these past two months for anything.
I arrived in Ecuador towards the end of October, and by mid-November, I was floundering in a mis-matched classroom environment. Communication was difficult; since my students were 6 and 7 years old, they did not speak much English. I also had a time connecting with my teacher and felt like I did not receive clear expectations of my teaching duties. My cooperating teacher handled the students well, but I was attempting strategy after strategy and always coming up short. It was a trying time; a real learning experience. My principal approached me and suggested moving me to a different grade level. On a sunny, warm Quitenan afternoon in mid-November, I was introduced to my new cooperating teacher in 4th grade.

Everything changed. I no longer felt discouraged or incompetent. I still made mistakes every day, but I learned from them. I had freedom to teach the way I wanted to, more so than I had in the United States. My favorite part of the experience was getting to know the students. I was inspired by how well they worked in groups and by how much they knew. They were learning difficult subject matter for up to 3 hours a day in a foreign language: Math, Science, Social Studies, Reading and Writing, all in foreign English. They amazed me with their hard work and dedication, as well as their excitement for learning and their desire to be social with one another.

I’d found my sweet spot while teaching in fourth grade. However, if I hadn’t had the difficult time I did for the first month of my stay, I would not have learned the following things about myself: 1. I enjoy that older students are independent, and are starting to think more in-depth and abstractly about concepts and questions; 2. I enjoy the challenge of teaching difficult content matter to the higher grade levels as opposed to teaching the younger grades; and finally, 3. I enjoy figuring out ways to differentiate for the students' needs at a higher grade level.

The most important lesson I learned is that life is not just about finding a career in which I will be happy all the time. There certainly will be days as a teacher where I will encounter situations that will make me cry and feel like giving up. However, because of my experience in Ecuador, my confidence is increasing, as is my grace for myself as a teacher. There have been days where I’ve felt like I haven’t served my students to the best of my ability. Days when I know I haven’t been fair to all the students. But, as always, these arduous, spirit-straining, faith-testing days bring about positive change, far more joy, and have the power to strengthen, instead of cripple me. There’s always tomorrow, always a new day. There’s room to grow from my mistakes. There are areas in which I will need to change my thinking, where I will need to be more intentional about my words. The most important thing to remember: all I need to do is my best. Not someone else’s best, not a veteran teacher’s best — my best. If it weren’t for 47 precious 4th graders in a country 3,500 miles away, it may have taken me a lot longer to recognize this beautiful, freeing truth. Thank Ecuador for that.
“Why is this happening to me?” I kept thinking as I spent two days in the hospital with a rare parasite infection. I was scared and felt like I had done everything carefully when it came to safe food and water. Before I knew it, I was on a plane back to the United States after only 6 weeks of teaching. However, my experience in Mexico was life changing all the way up until landing home. Participating in COST was the first time I had ever been given the opportunity to go abroad. After experiencing Mexico, there is no where I would have rather been placed and I HIGHLY recommend it as a choice for anyone considering COST.

ITJ School was extremely welcoming and excited to have me. Many teachers were from all over the world. I was nervous because I didn’t speak Spanish and I had never taught first grade before. Immediately the students opened a place in their hearts to me and we began to learn and discover together. We had to work hard because of the language barrier but what I learned from my time with them was invaluable. Student teaching was very similar to the United States. I taught and planned lessons in English and gradually took over each subject as well as morning meeting and duties. The school was always trying to find ways to involve students and parents through after school activities, sports, events, and speakers.

I lived in a beautiful closed community in Zapopan, a suburb of Guadalajara, with a young married couple who enriched my journey 100%. Because of them, Río (another student teacher at ITJ) and I were able to enjoy many fun activities such as baseball games, after dark graveyard tours, masked wrestling, and explore multiple cities that were near us. My host Lisset, who worked as Human Resources for ITJ, was a blessing when I became ill and made sure I got the care I needed.

I know I’ve made friends for life! I’ve become more patient, independent, confident, and compassionate because of my journey at ITJ. I learned about a magnificent new culture and deepened myself as an educator. I will never really know how I got sick but I will never let it change my outlook on the awesome experience I had.

The best advice I can give for COST students is that the unexpected can happen at any time and anywhere but having a positive attitude and keeping yourself open will affect the outcome of your experience. Mexico will always hold a special place in my heart and I can’t wait to visit again!
On my walk home from the tram station, someone yelled out their window at me in Dutch, something about American... do I really stick out that much?

Now that I’ve mastered the art of biking in the city, I’m thankful that I don’t know Dutch. When people aren’t paying attention and cross the bike path in front of me I can’t say the things that I’d like to and cause road rage. Instead, I simply manage a sassy “hallo!” like the natives. The new goal is to look as elegant as Audrey Hepburn while I’m out of breath and sweating profusely.

Today I met some students. They were the first years (12 years old). After I introduced myself, I said they could ask me questions if they wanted. Two classes asked how old I am. In the second class they started guessing things like 16, 18, and 20. I didn’t respond until a student said 72. “Yes, I am 72.” And that was the end of question time in that class. Some of the other questions were:

1. Do all Americans like donuts? What about cops?
2. Is there a Starbucks on every corner?
3. How many McDonald’s are there?
4. What is Target?
5. Do people say ain’t?

This is going to be an adventure.

My name can be tricky. I’ve gotten Ms. Obstacle, as well as Ms. Stop – Over. I give them credit for trying? Then there’s the ones who think they’re clever and have found me on social media. They tried to call me Brittany... once.

Before I got here, most people I spoke with said European students are so much more disciplined and respectful. Let me tell you, they are European but they are still kids. They like to talk and goof around. Sometimes they forget their homework or just don’t do it. No matter what country they’re from, 10–14 year olds are consistent.

Today, one of my students here in the Netherlands asked, “Is there racism in America?” I wanted so badly to tell them that my home is a place where equality reigns. Some day, I hope the answer to that question will be a definite “No” but today it was not.

Today, one of the girls in class hit her friend in the face with a workbook and yelled, “facebook!” I almost died I was laughing so hard. How am I supposed to teach these adolescents when I’m at the same level of maturity!? 
Today one of my students came up to me and said “your hair looks really different, did you go to the hair dresser?” To which I had to laugh and explain that since it’s been raining I wear a hood while biking so my hair doesn’t look like such a mess when I get to school like usual. Seriously though, these girls have long flowing locks of perfect hair, bike to school in the rain, and their hair is still perfection. If I even step onto my bike my hair looks like I went through a hurricane. It has felt like I’ve been biking through a hurricane the last few days. The wind is just crazy, I don’t understand how the Dutch do it. I feel like I can barely pedal through the wind and people are passing me on their bikes left and right.

On Wednesday it poured on my way to school and I was so disappointed. I’d gotten the opportunity to join a group of students and teachers from the Czech Republic who were staying at the school for a week. A couple teachers from my school and a few students took everyone to the town of Dordrecht, the oldest town in South Holland. It was a beautiful old city on the river. One of the things that caught my eye on top of all the homes on the canals was at the new townhall. There is a small plaque on the side of the building with the Jewish star which says in Dutch, “you must tell your children.” It was a note from the town to make sure to keep telling your kids about the Holocaust and remember its effects, it was a simple but meaningful message. I’ve mentioned to a few people here just how mind blowing it is to realize that everything I’ve always read about happened right here and you can still see the effects of the war, and truly realize that the war really wasn’t that long ago.

Friday I had my last day of school. For the breakfast party all the students in my cooperating teacher’s tutor class made something and brought it to share. I ate sooo much and really have no idea what I was eating. They all wanted me to try the different things they had made. It was a great way to end my time at the Willem.
from her blog

Math was great to teach, because it’s the same in any language. Spelling, on the other hand was a little bit more challenging. My pronunciations of some of the words were hard for them to understand (bought, for example). They found it amusing because I said words the way I usually say them, but if they didn’t understand I tried to say the words in a South African accent — entertaining for all of us.

Before hiking up the Knysna heads, my host dad and I went to the Leisure Isle Festival. It was low key and reminded me of the summer town festivals in Minnesota and Wisconsin. What I found most interesting was the tea and cake tent. It was the most popular area of the festival, and after I had a piece of cake I knew why!

From the lagoon all the way up the winding road that led to the top of the heads, are different viewpoints along the way. I could see endlessly in every direction. My host dad paired these fantastic views with stories about his adventures in the hills and caves when he was growing up.

The Vocal Ensemble Gala, put on by the Music Department, showcased music performed by the staff and various individual students, as well as the Vocal Ensemble group. Regardless of the length or quality of the different performances, the students in the audience hooted and hollered and applauded like every performance was the best they had ever seen. That sense of camaraderie at Oakhill is something that I hope to bring to wherever I end up.

The Grade 5’s are learning about tessellations in Maths, a perfect topic for hands-on activities. I showed them different examples of tessellations by M.C. Escher, and taught them how to create their own. This was a reminder of just how critical directions are when teaching students. With a few hiccups along the way, they were able to produce some really interesting examples on their own.

On our tour of an Ostrich Farm the students were able to pet the ostriches and a select few were able to ride them. Everyone had a blast watching the looks of pure panic on students’ faces as they rode around on the back of those crazy birds.

Speaking of crazy birds, this kid (Holly), ran her first half marathon (in South Africa). It was quite the experience, especially when I had to dodge an escaped ostrich with about 5 kilometers left!
**American Identity**
- Obama, pop music-
- Miley Cyrus, Katy Perry,
- fast-paced

**Host Country Identity**
- Soccer, rainforest, relaxation
- and laid back, developing

**Anticipated and Realized**

What “identity” did you feel you bore as an American and what “identity” did you come to associate with your school or host country?

**American Identity**
- Loud, Rich, Rude
- Friendly, Helpful,
- Professional
- Perceived as ignorant of European history.

**Host Country Identity**
- Community, Resources,
- High standards
- Everyone is very trendy with what they wear, they all try to be Hipsters
- Not politically correct and often border on racist
- Tend to be very laidback, and work as little as possible. Sometimes they can be really lazy.

**What “identity” did you feel you bore as an American and what “identity” did you come to associate with your school or host country?**

**Marcia Scheurman and Dr. Scheurman**

**Maryn Feyerheisen, Ecuador and Gretchen Larson, Costa Rica**

**(l to r)Kallie Knudtson, Ireland, Gretchen Larson, Costa Rica, Brittany Oberstadt, the Netherlands, Sarah Fuller, Mexico, Andrea Roth, China and Allix Bell, the Netherlands**

**Dr. Scheurman explaining about his “emporer’s” jacket, a gift from China.**

**Holly’s, South Africa, farewell**

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