

## Spring Break '08

This course includes a travel program. It is these last six words in the course description of History 30408 that gave 27 Notre Dame students, Professor Kevin Spicer, C.S.C. and Maria Cuccharia (a third year European history graduate student) a unique opportunity to experience the history they had been learning. During Spring Break (February 29 – March 9) the group traveled to Poland (Warsaw, Lublin, Krakow), the Czech Republic (Prague) and Germany (Berlin) to visit sites related to Jewish religion, culture and life and the Holocaust.

Each student integrated the course in to his or her coursework, and many students wrote grant proposals to subsidize their journey. (See below for a list of campus organizations that sponsored the trip.) In one obvious sense a trip of this sort did not make for a fun spring break. The sobering sites continually reminded students of the horrific crimes and suffering endured by Jews and other victims of Nazi persecution in mid-twentieth century Europe. In other sense, of course, the trip made the history of the period real, and cemented the interest of these students in one of the central events of modern history.

*“I can only describe the Travel Program as the trip of a lifetime. Seeing the actual camps and other sites where the holocaust was planned and carried out makes the events tangible in a way all the readings I have done on the subject have never been able to do....The experience was emotionally much different than I expected. Rather than being overwhelmingly intense, the camps were incredibly sobering in a way that was completely mentally draining.” – Pat Graine*

The trip itinerary took the class through former ghettos, to Jewish synagogues and cemeteries, resistance monuments and memorials, Schindler factory, and the concentration and death camps Majdanek, Plaszow and Auschwitz I, II, and III.

*“I kept thinking about the rich Jewish culture that had disappeared from the cities except for tiny preserved microcosms and memorials for the much smaller group of people left. So because this was in my mind for most of the trip, I was glad that we took time to look at old Jewish neighborhoods, the old Warsaw cemetery and old synagogues. I think that as well as mourning the people we murdered and being horrified at what people were capable of, it is also important to Mourn the rich culture that nearly disappeared.” – Beth Neiman*



**Figure 1 Wall Remnants in old Jewish area of Warsaw, Poland**

Financial support for the trip was provided by the Department of History, the Kellogg Institute, Learning Beyond the Classroom and the Office of International Studies. Eight students also received UROP grants and will complete research papers for the course.



**Figure 2 Students take in the Auschwitz latrine**

*“My experiences at Auschwitz were undeniably the most jarring of the entire trip. Before we arrived at the complex, I decided that it would serve as the setting of an assignment for my fiction writing course. Thus, I critically examined Auschwitz and compiled [ages of detailed notes about each nook and cranny of the camp. The barren, gnarled trees shaped like devils’ pitchforks. The piled, rusted, mangled eyeglasses that mirrored the entanglement of their owners’ deteriorating bodies. The mosaic of human bone that decorated the ground next to Crematorium IV. Each of these haunting images has been forever imprinted in my mind since that Tuesday afternoon.” –Jacqueline Emge*



**Figure 3 History 30408 observes a Resistance Monument in Warsaw, Poland**



**Figure 4 A Student views victims shoes in the Majdanek camp in Lublin, Poland**

*“I will never forget the sheer number of shoes and the biting wind at Majdanek or the hair and baby clothes at Auschwitz. Additionally, the visible presence of human remains at Majdanek and Auschwitz-Birkenau was very startling and provided more of an impression that the many statistics we have been seeing could ever create.” –Maureen Rhodes*