

## JOSEPH HARROFF

During the past academic year I have been teaching English at Shandong University. Shandong University is located in Jinan, the capital city of Shandong province in the east of the Shandong peninsula. Situated just south of the Yellow River, and surrounded by mountains, it was surely a beautiful city before rapid industrialization took place. It is still possible to find some enclaves of natural beauty, and the city as it stands today is not without a certain charm. I taught first-year graduate students conversational English. In one week I taught eight classes of different students. The students came from various departments, including History, Literature, Philosophy, Marxism-Leninism, International Politics, Biology, Engineering, etc. I was especially happy to have some chance to talk philosophy and or politics in class, as these are subjects that I am passionate about. I was given a textbook and some tapes by the head of the English department, but I quickly found out that they weren't all that helpful (being written and edited in China). Moreover, the students displayed a general apathy and/or displeasure to learning English out of such a textbook. So I had the opportunity to plan out each class with a broad freedom. Debates, discussions, play-acting, dictations, readings, etc. were some of the activities that we engaged in during class. Being a pseudo-optional class, there was no in-class test or attendance grade--just a final exam for all English related classes, the students who did show up to class generally had an authentic interest in learning the language. It was clear that most students made a marked improvement after a year of class. In addition to the genuinely rewarding experience of teaching, I was able to make use of the university environment. The first semester I audited an upper-level Chinese course with other foreign students, and by the second semester, because of this class and the fact of being immersed in the Chinese language, I was able to audit some classes in both literature and philosophy. My Chinese, both spoken and reading, improved drastically in the time I was at Shandong University. Many friends, and students, were more than happy to help me in tutoring. Several friends helped me read novels and poetry, which was the most enjoyable, and perhaps most efficient, way of learning. Living on a university campus also afforded me with many other opportunities. I had the chance to attend many lectures, both Chinese and other. I was also able to audit a class on contemporary French philosophy with a visiting professor, who had studied under Michel Foucault and Giles Deleuze. And there were several student groups, like Taijiquan (Shadow Boxing) which I participated in. Also, I was able to attend several student art exhibits and various performances. The opportunities for cross-cultural learning and exchange were great. I plan to teach the following semester there again, and afterwards head to Beijing to participate in the IUP program at Qinghua University. IUP is an intensive Chinese language program run by a consortium of U.S. schools. For anyone graduating or soon to graduate from college I would highly suggest teaching at a university in China (I am not so sure that one would have as good an experience teaching at one of the many private schools now opening up, and in fact have heard other foreign teachers complain about these very schools). It is a great chance to learn about another culture and to deepen knowledge about one's own. About the content The content of these pages do not constitute, nor are they intended to convey, any official VU content. The content, view, opinions and positions expressed on these pages are strictly and exclusively those of the author.

