

CLASSIC

A publication for Northwestern College alumni & friends • Winter 2007-08

New Horizon

Romania Semester begins



New Horizon

by Tamara Fynaardt

Students learn about sustainable community development in post-communist Romania

In a November blog entry, Northwestern senior Candi Fender wrote about shopping in Lupeni, Romania: We need more cheese. So I run across the street to Euro Riva.


I wait in line behind women buying eggs, milk, freshly cut meat and candles in preparation for Day of the Dead. Finally it is my turn. I step to the counter, take a deep breath and say, "Jumatare kilograme de brunza, si una cascaval mica," stumbling over the word "brunza."

There are a few giggles behind me.

The clerk weighs the cheese and tells me how much I owe. I hand her a zece lei bill, knowing she probably does not have exact change. I expect to receive a piece of gum or box of matches as change.

But the clerk insists I have the bani she needs. I don't. Thoroughly embarrassed, I point to an orange and ask, "Si una portocala?" She weighs the orange, shrugs, and then hands me the cheeses and the orange.

Sometimes I wish we could get oranges instead of bani at home. Oranges taste better than change anyway.



Romania is a country of contrasts, as evidenced in the Jiu Valley, where bland communist-style apartments and coal smokestacks are surrounded by the untouched beauty of the Transylvanian Alps.



The seven participants in Northwestern's first Romania Semester say the countercultural youth of post-communist Romania inspired them to invest deeply in their communities at home. (From left: Corinna Basinger, Brianne Van Wyk, Candi Fender, Ashlea Combs, Ryan Clay, Lindsay Squires and Andrew Mahoney.)

After the Iron Curtain

In 1989, Romania's Iron Curtain came down, exposing Nicolae Ceaușescu's empire to the world.

Rural villages were nearly empty as peasants had been resettled in urban concrete high-rises. Ceaușescu's people were starving while he exported much of Romania's agricultural and industrial products to pay the country's debt. One in four Romanians was an informant—betraying neighbors, even family.

And Ceaușescu's ban on contraception—an attempt to expand Romania's influence through population growth—had led to rampant HIV/

AIDS and abandonment and institutionalization of children.

"Things are better now," says Dave Nonnemacher, Northwestern's director of experiential learning, who first visited Romania eight years ago. Compelled by something he can only describe as "a wind across my heart," Nonnemacher sought out various individuals who'd traveled to Romania until someone offered to take him along.

During his first trips, he walked through aisles of orphanage cribs. Some held more than one infant. Toddlers were tied to the bars. He recalls one night in an orphanage in Babadag, trying to sleep as children

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 cried and screamed while the workers drank plum brandy.

In 2007, Romania was finally permitted to join the European Union (EU), provided they 1) deal with corruption, and 2) reform their child welfare system. Child welfare is improving, says Nonnemacher. Corruption, however, continues to plague the country.

A November 1, 2007, article in *The Economist* cites a survey by Transparency International, a Berlin-based

watchdog, that rates Romania as the most corrupt country in the EU. Another recent survey by the Research Institute of Romania revealed that approximately half the population believes one becomes successful by stealing or breaking other laws. Only nine percent believe hard work or personal merit have anything to do with personal success.

Civic and moral apathy, corruption, suspicion, predatory ethics and hopelessness. This post-communist legacy is all the youth of Romania have ever known. It also was the classroom environment for the seven students in Northwestern's inaugural study abroad program: the Romania Semester.

Teaching values

In 1990, after seeing a 20/20 special on Romania's warehoused children, Dana Bates' parents sold their house and got on a plane to Bucharest, where they ran an orphanage until their deaths this year.

After a visit to his parents in the late '90s, Bates and his wife, Brandi, both Gordon College graduates and adventure education enthusiasts, hatched a plan to bring an Outward Bound-like adventure program to Romania. Their vision eventually led them to the Jiu Valley, an impoverished coal mining region where the unemployment rate is more than 50 percent.

Despite being swindled out of thousands of dollars

Visit the Romania Semester blog, "Northwestern Adventures in Romania," at www.nwromania.blogspot.com.

by their Romanian partner, the Bates stayed, establishing the New Horizons Foundation (NHF) in 2000. They and other NHF staff run Viata summer adventure camps in the mountains surrounding the Jiu Valley and IMPACT service-learning clubs in a growing number of Romanian schools and churches for teens ages 13 to 18.

Viata offers weeklong experiences with rock climbing, hiking, ropes courses, caving and orienteering to help Romanian young people

understand values foreign to them: self-confidence, trust and teamwork.

The IMPACT clubs reinforce those values through bi-weekly gatherings during which the teens socialize, discuss morals and ethics, and strategize to plan and implement projects that will benefit their communities.

IMPACT club projects have ranged from simply picking up the trash that litters Romanian sidewalks and parks to hosting HIV/AIDS educational forums and raising funds to buy Christmas

gifts for destitute families.

The ultimate goal of Viata and IMPACT is the development of social capital, something Romanian youth are woefully lacking. The NHF website defines social capital as “the moral competencies that build trust and make sustainable development possible.”

Nonnemacher describes it as “Relationships. Civility. The common good. It’s personal integrity and caring relationships that enable society to develop and flourish.”

Nonnemacher was introduced to Bates on one of his trips to Romania and has since taken groups of Northwestern students to

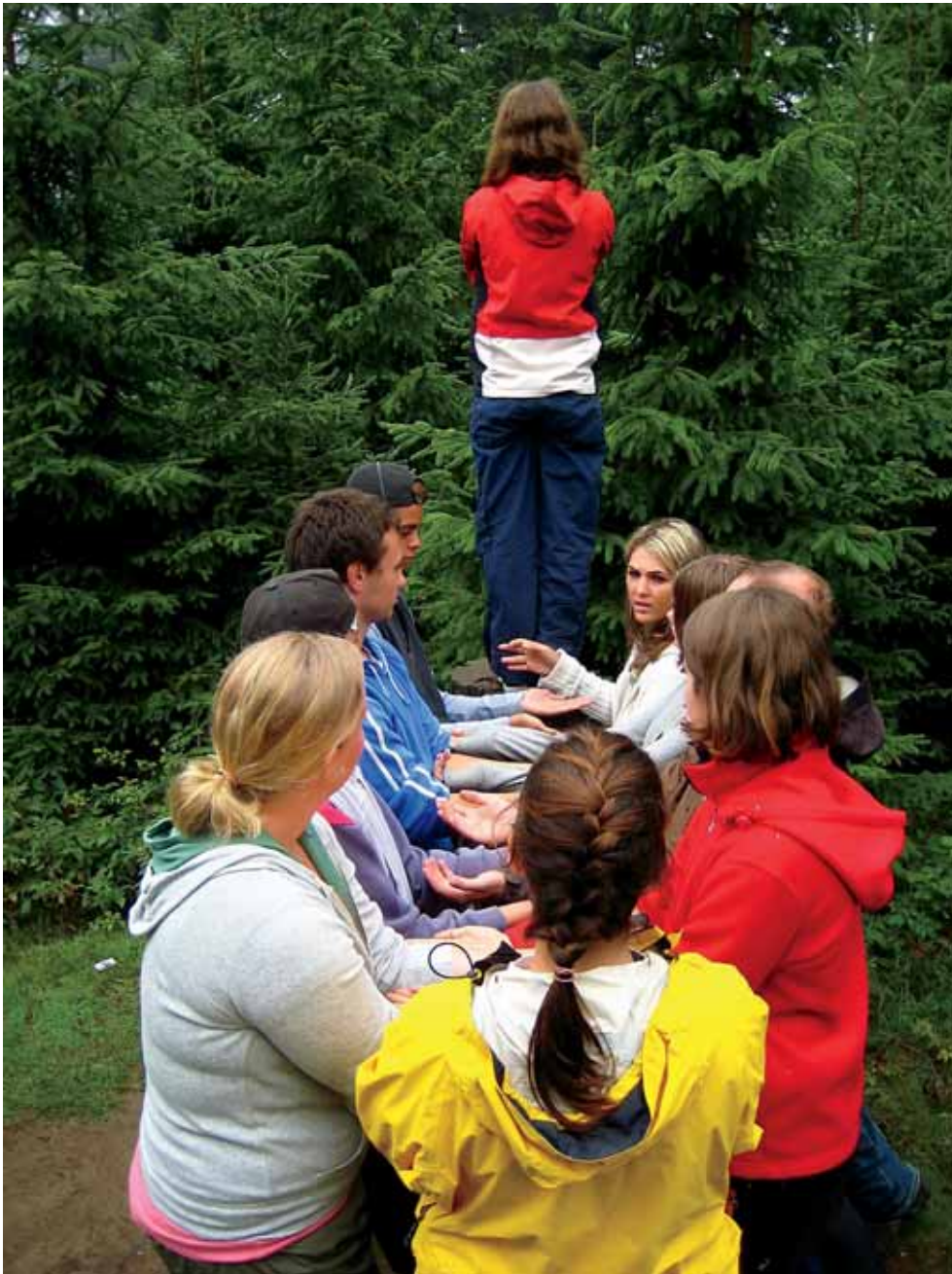
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“Unlike American teens, Romanians have never heard that if they work hard, they can achieve their dreams. Yet so many are learning to take initiative and form a brighter vision for their lives and communities.”
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serve as Viata counselors. The partnership laid the foundation for the semester-long program, for which Bates—a Ph.D. candidate at Oxford Centre for Mission Studies—is the primary professor.

Learn more about the New Horizons Foundation, Viata and IMPACT at www.new-horizons.ro.



Icons are a prominent part of Eastern Orthodoxy, which is the national faith of Romania. While the Romania Semester students could not understand much of the worship services they attended, they were able to experience the gospel through the symbolic images that cover nearly every surface of most Orthodox churches.



The Trust Fall is one of the group activities for teens in the Viata summer adventure camps run by New Horizons Foundation. Simply trusting their friends will catch them does not come naturally to Romanian teens, who are susceptible to post-communist corruption and apathy.

Nonnemacher says the Romania Semester fits with Northwestern's mission: "What we stand for as a Reformed institution is mirrored in the foundational

principles of New Horizons. It's a holistic, transformative vision for community that aims to affect values, relationships, spirituality, the environment, the econo-

my—everything," he says.

Transforming lives

In late August, Fender, Corinna Basinger, Ryan Clay,

Ashlea Combs, Andrew Mahoney, Lindsay Squires and Brianne Van Wyk arrived in the Jiu Valley. They were just in time to participate in one of NHF's last Viata camps of the summer.

The juniors and seniors are from four Midwestern states and studying business, English, music, religion and sociology at Northwestern. During their Romania

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"I watched them work together to try and solve problems facing their town, and I saw them becoming beacons in their communities."

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Semester, they took four classes: Eastern Orthodoxy; Experiential Education; Romanian Language, Culture and History; and Sustainable Development.

In September, Nonnemacher joined the students on a seven-day, team-building backpacking trip in the Retezat Mountains. The students also spent a week in Cluj-Napoca, a large city in central Romania. There they studied with Dr. Gabriel Badescu, associate professor of political science at Babes-Bolyai University, the foremost social capital scholar in Eastern Europe and a board member of NHF.

Early in the semester, the students spent five weeks living with Romanian host

families. After midterm break, they moved into two apartments in Lupeni. In the evenings, they took what they were learning about building and sustaining a civil society to the streets of Romania through interaction with IMPACT club teens.

Combs volunteered with a group that meets at a Pentecostal church on Monday and Friday nights. "As I entered the pink cement building, I was immediately greeted by a dozen teenagers, running up to kiss me hello," she says.

"I was overwhelmed by their passion and spirit in a community that seems utterly apathetic. I watched them work together to try and solve problems facing their town, and I saw them becoming beacons in their communities."

"Climbing out of the Jiu Valley takes more than a hike over the mountains—it

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"The partnership with Northwestern brought community, energy and joy to our efforts again. These students helped us see our work with Romanian young people through new eyes. It is no exaggeration to say this partnership makes the furtherance of the mission and programs of New Horizons sustainable."

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requires a transformation of the mind," says Squires.

"Unlike American teens, Romanians have never heard that if they work hard, they can achieve their dreams. Yet so many are learning to take initiative and form a brighter vision for their lives and communities."

Dr. Doug Carlson, history professor and associate dean for off-campus programs, visited the students in October. He and colleagues encourage Northwestern students studying abroad to adopt a posture of learning—

of receiving knowledge rather than giving it.

"There can be a strong sense among our students that we have what the world needs, whether that be the gospel, democracy or material things," he says. But these students approached their host country and their new Romanian friends with humble, avid curiosity and a desire to serve.

The students say their semester in Romania enlarged their worldview. Their exposure to the wounds of communism

taught them about the shared values that underlie a civil society, the responsibility of the individual in the face of corporate apathy, and the role of faith in sustainable community development.

More important, perhaps, than what the Northwestern students learned was the effect of their presence and enthusiasm among those committed to remaining in the Jiu Valley. "This place is very lonely after eight years," says Bates. "At times we have wondered if we can survive this valley."

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Although there are still some jobs for coal miners, the unemployment rate in Romania's Jiu Valley is 50 percent. Since being allowed to join the European Union, Romanians are free to work throughout Europe. The resulting exodus of workers is affecting family and civic life.

Beyond the horizon

Carlson hopes 12 to 15 of the approximately 60 Northwestern students who study abroad each year will enroll in the Romania Semester. In addition, he and sociology professor Dr. Scott Monsma are working to launch Oman Semester, where students will learn Arabic and study Islam and interfaith dialogue.

Now that the Romania Semester is enabling Northwestern students to learn from the country that captured Nonnemacher's heart, he says the next step is

to bring someone from the Jiu Valley to Northwestern.

That someone could be Robi, an 18-year-old son of a miner who has been a leader in his IMPACT club. Robi

has served as a tour guide and language tutor for the Northwestern students this semester.

He is respectful, responsible, honest and trustworthy.

He's committed to fighting corruption and serving the common good. He speaks English and wants to earn an American college education. Nonnemacher and Bates

hope if Robi studies at Northwestern, he will take what he learns about reconciliation and redemption and live it at home, in Romania.

Popquiz answer key (Questions on page 12)

1. Deus est Lux (Latin for "God is light")
2. a (John Kaericher taught art at Northwestern for 42 years, from 1963 to 2005. Current English professor Barb Turnwall will tie his record this spring, since she joined Northwestern's faculty in 1966 and is still teaching.)
3. a
4. d (The Rev. James Zwemer, principal of Northwestern Classical Academy, presented plans for its construction to the Board of Trustees in 1892.)
5. Noah's Ark
6. e
7. a
8. c
9. 1882, 1928, 1960
10. 1-d; 2-e; 3-b; 4-c; 5-j; 6-i; 7-f; 8-a; 9-g; 10-h
11. c
12. The Rev. Dr. Jacob Heemstra (23 years) and Dr. Frederick Wezeman (3 years, 4 months)
13. b
14. Theora England Willcox, a member of Northwestern's theatre faculty
15. d
16. football, 1973
17. c (football, 1973 and 1983; men's basketball, 2001 and 2003; women's basketball, 2001; Jacob Koczman, indoor 600 meters and outdoor 400 meters, 2001)
18. 1-b; 2-d; 3-a; 4-c; 5-f; 6-e
19. Heemstra and West have both served initially as women's dorms and are now men's dorms.
20. a
21. d (It depends on how you count them. We tallied every window opening as one, regardless of how many panes or sections it contained, and didn't count windows in and around doors, except for the arched window above the north entrance.)
22. Virgil Muilenburg, professor emeritus of biology. The melody is the Dutch national anthem.
23. c
24. Piet Koene, in 2004, and Jeff Barker, in 2006
25. a (The woman for whom Fern Smith Hall was named married the father of the former Northwestern president for whom the RSC was named.)

How did you rate?

21-25:

Archive Addict

OK, you're way too familiar with the contents of Northwestern's archives. You really should get out more.

14-20:

Raider Rooter

You're one of those who had a hard time deciding whether to name your son "Bub" or "Seine," aren't you?

6-13:

Alumni Apprentice

Apparently you spent a little too much time at Debo's during your Northwestern years.

1-5:

Northwestern Novice

Are you sure you didn't graduate from Dordt?

Send your Classic thoughts to classic@nwciowa.edu

Glimpses of Change in Romania

by Lindsay Squires '09

Diesel trucks growl by on the utility road behind my host family's apartment, sending loud puffs of air from their brakes. The windowpanes rattle. Sometimes, motley packs of dogs come trotting through the muddy alley immediately outside my window, stopping to investigate the more promising pieces of trash. At other times, ragged workers plod by with shovels thrown over their shoulders or pushing a rickety wheelbarrow.

During the daytime, I push the blue curtain aside to reveal the dingy mining ruins that stretch along the utility road. Beyond, autumnal mountains contrast starkly with the features of the mine. Some of the mines are still in operation, but many are not. Near the center of Lupeni, a massive smokestack towers 250 meters above the city, the specter of a collapsing enterprise or the brooding mother of the cement apartments below.

A few weeks ago, I was reading in the little sun room on the south side of the apartment. Sunshine filtered in through the lace drapes, and occasional voices joined the steady drone of hip-hop music somewhere down the street.

"So, what does Europe mean in the Eastern European imagination? ... It is something distant, something to be attained, to be deserved. It is



Lindsay Squires, right, poses with Ema and Alexandra near a ropes course at New Horizon Foundation's Viata Camp.

also something expensive and fine: good clothes, the certain look and smell of its people. Europe is plentitude: food, cars, light, everything—a kind of festival of colours, diversity, opulence, beauty. It offers choice: from shampoo to political parties ... Europe is the opposite of what we have, and what we want to get rid of—it is the absence of communism, of fear and deprivation."

I lowered my copy of *Café Europa* and shifted my gaze out the window, pondering Slavenka Drakulic's evocative writing. Here I was, a Westerner, trying to comprehend what Eastern Europe is to those who have lived through communism. I have never really thought of myself as a Westerner, but living here has proved to me that I am. The contrast between my world and theirs is too stark for me to be anything else.

Yet I have found a place in their world. "Welcome home!" my host mom, Erika,

had said with open arms as my pale face emerged through the doorway after a backpacking trip. She had heard of my food poisoning and had been waiting for me to come home. A few weeks earlier, I had not known this family. After entering their lives, however, I knew God not only had brought me here *for* them but also had given me a place *with* them.

One of my favorite places in Erika's apartment was her little blue kitchen. Erika had apologized for the roughly painted walls, but I didn't care. She and I would sit on the low white stools and talk for hours after dinner. That is how I heard her story. As I learned of her childhood, her family, and how she has changed her life in recent years, I saw brokenness coexisting with strength.

That is the paradox of the Jiu Valley, one of the statistically saddest regions of the world and the most corrupt place in Romania. Beauty and ruins coexist; hope competes with despair.

All this lends even more profundity to the vision of New Horizons Foundation (NHF). Erika and all those involved with NHF understand that rebuilding Romania means transforming its youth. God has given these people hearts of steel and hearts of love. Their challenge cannot be fully appreciated by a Western mind because breaking the societal mold formed under communism takes a

rare courage, perseverance and faith.

I have been blessed to meet some of the young people here. I have loved them and let them love me. I have laughed with them and let them laugh at my broken Romanian. I wonder if the small investment I have made in them is anything compared to how they have inspired me.

I cannot imagine growing up in the Jiu Valley as they are. Many forces are against them, yet they are learning to stand in the face of everything that says they can't—and to change the very value system of their society.

When I think of Romania in the future, I will see the faces of people like Ema, Alexandra and the NHF staff who have worked with them. These students and adults are what give me hope for the future of Romania. Like new growth emerging through the ruins of the past, God is raising lights in the darkness.

A junior writing and rhetoric major from Fairfield, Neb., Lindsay Squires is one of seven students who participated in the inaugural year of Northwestern's Romania Semester program this fall.