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Out of class lessons

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BLOOMINGTON – Celeste Ayers of Bloomington is in Spain speaking Spanish, and will get high school credit for it.

The 15-year-old is one of 10 students, teachers and parents taking a 10-day trip to Spain, part of "Winterim," a new program at Cornerstone Christian Academy.

Winterim is a two-week semester this month in which high school students take part in non-traditional learning activities both on- and off-campus.

Options include a trip to Chicago to study 20th-century art and architecture, internships and practical courses including auto mechanics and cooking. It is modeled after a pilot project at Wheaton Academy in Chicago, said Beth Sondgeroth, Cornerstone's academic dean.

"The new program will set Cornerstone Christian Academy of McLean County apart from other schools," Sondgeroth said, and help the school with its mission to provide a superior college preparatory education that integrates faith and learning.

And, she said, Winterim helps the school fit more electives into its busy academic schedule.

High school students started school a few days early in August to make Winterim possible. Teachers will have changes, as well: Some will teach different classes while others travel.

"It's exciting to get off school for a month," said Ayers, a sophomore. "I always wanted to go to Europe."

Students' last school day before Christmas break was Dec. 16. They don't return to regular classes until Winterim ends in mid-month.

Ayers, who babysat to help raise the money for her trip, looked forward to seeing the culture, architecture and a Flamenco dance.

"They get to practice Spanish in real life," said Spanish teacher Cathy Jorgensen, a chaperone on the trip.

Students also will learn more about Canada, because students from a Canadian school will travel with them in Spain, where they will learn how to exchange money, take local transportation, and live in a different culture.

The five Cornerstone students on the trip must produce a project for their grade and did some research before the trip. They are keeping a journal and making a scrapbook, and will create a presentation to share with other students. A mentor's evaluation also will be included in Winterim grades.

Travis Wilson, 17, is going to be a movie-maker during Winterim. The junior, who has special interest in communication, will film and edit a promotional video for the school's pre-school.

"I do some sound stuff for the chapel now," said Wilson, who'll spend one week of Winterim as an intern at WGLT radio station on the Illinois State University campus and a week as a filmmaker at his school.

The Christ-centered academy has more than 400 students from pre-school to 11th grade. The school on Ireland Grove Road started about eight years ago with 45 students. The pre-school opened in 1997 and the first graduating class of seniors is set for 2007.