Monmouth College on Rails
A new approach to off-campus study
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The Itinerary
8-Aug (Sun) Leave Galesburg on 4:38 pm California Zephyr (Class Intro + Halophiles; Forward, Chapts 1, 17-19).
9-Aug (Mon) Aboard the Zephyr (Thermophiles; Chapts 2-8). Arrive in Salt Lake City 11 pm, Stay in HI The Avenues Hostel.
10-Aug (Tue) Rent van from SLC Airport. See Great Salt Lake at Antelope Island SP. Drive to Yellowstone National Park (6 hours). Camp at Yellowstone.
12-Aug (Thurs) See Old Faithful and nearby geysers. Drive to Salt Lake City (6 hours). Catch 11:30 pm California Zephyr.
14-Aug (Sat) Drive to Frog's Leap Winery (1 hour). Tour Frog's Leap Winery in Napa Valley. Drive to Yosemite National Park (5 hours). Camp at Yosemite National Park.
15-Aug (Sun) See Mono Lake. Camp at Yosemite National Park.
16-Aug (Mon) See Yosemite Falls. Drive to San Francisco (4 hours). Camp at Kirby Cv.
17-Aug (Tues) 9:10 am Zephyr to Denver (Acidophiles & Biotechnology; Chapts 20 -22, 27)
18-Aug (Wed) Aboard the Zephyr (Study for final). Arrive in Denver at 7:38 pm. Stay in Hostel of the Rockies.
20-Aug (Fri) Hiking in Rocky Mountain National Park. 7:38 pm Zephyr to Galesburg.
21-Aug (Sat) Comprehensive final exam aboard the Zephyr. Arrive in Galesburg 12:34 pm.

The Plan
While the Monmouth College Biology Department's traditional approach to short off-campus study programs has been to meet with students once a week for half a semester in order to prepare them for a particular trip (i.e. during Spring Break), very little formal instruction has typically taken place during the actual travel portion of the trip. We seek to develop a new model in which train travel is utilized for large portions of a trip, during which time a semester's worth of lecture/discussion is presented on a specific topic. This model not only has the advantages of increased face-time with our students the trip itself, it also provides an opportunity to compare the environmental impact of different forms of travel. This approach has been adopted to take advantage of the fact that Monmouth College is located in a region (the Midwest) which has many forms of transportation available, including trains and rail yards. This will allow our students to compare the environmental impact of different forms of travel and to plan future trips that will minimize their impact on the environment. The course which will be offered on the inaugural trip of Monmouth College on Rails in August, 2010 will be "Environmental Microbiology: the Extremophiles". This course will introduce various harsh environments where microbial life is found and then proceed to visit these environments to acquire soil and water samples which can be returned to campus and analyzed in the conventional microbiology course which will immediately follow that trip during the Fall 2010 semester.

The Cost
While the budget works out at approximately $900/person, Monmouth is able to offer this program to all of our students at a substantially reduced rate of $90/person. This has been made possible through a generous gift from two of our trustees, David Byrnes and Karen Chism, along with their families. Students will be selected based on their completion of the prerequisites for the course, and will be ranked according to their GPAs.

The Future
While the BNSF runs a daily train from Galesburg to Denver and back, the rising costs of rail travel are making it increasingly difficult for students to participate in this type of program. As such, we are exploring other forms of transportation, such as bus travel or even sea travel, as a way to reduce the cost of off-campus study programs.