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The Chronicle

Students retrace Wiesel's steps



By [ALLIE HUTTLER](#)

September 22, 2011

An audience gathered to follow in the footsteps of a prominent Holocaust survivor Wednesday night.

The Center for Documentary Studies held a showing of “In the Footsteps of Elie Wiesel”—a documentary that follows 12 students from Charlotte-Mecklenburg High School in Charlotte, N.C. as they travel to several locations significant in the life of Eli Wiesel, Holocaust survivor and Nobel Peace Prize laureate. The film was followed by a panel discussion among Duke faculty, the film’s directors and some of the students who participated in the trip—including junior Cate Auerbach, who organized the event.

“My experience was very powerful and very impacting in some ways that I expected, but some that I did not,” Auerbach said. “I hoped to learn more about the Holocaust and Elie Wiesel’s personal experience, which I did, but in addition I learned about the importance of sharing that experience with others.... The event is one way in which I’ve been able to share that experience and continue the personal lessons that I learned.”

The award-winning documentary, which premiered in Charlotte last year, was created by the Echo Foundation—a social justice organization founded in 1997 using seed money donated by Wiesel.

“We believe that each person has a responsibility to humanity,” Stephanie Ansaldo, Echo Foundation president and director of the film, said in an interview. “It is our obligation to contribute whatever talents we have to the betterment of the human condition.”

The students began their journey in the summer of 2007, starting in Wiesel’s birthplace of Sighet, Romania. The group then traveled to Krakow, Poland; concentration camps such as Birkenau and Auschwitz; and to France—where Wiesel stayed following his time in the concentration camps.

“We visited Paris to absorb the influence of the French culture and to imagine what it must have been like for a young man from the rural mountains to find himself in this magnificent city filled with culture and life,” Ansaldo said.

The group also traveled to Berlin to assess modern German attempts to make amends to the Jewish people for the Holocaust.

Between footage of the trip, the film included students’ journal entries and interview excerpts, as well as quotes and speech excerpts from Wiesel and biographical facts.

The discussion that followed the documentary featured Abdullah Antepi, the University’s Muslim chaplain; William Donahue, professor of German and Jewish studies; Dean of the Chapel Sam Wells; and Rabbi Jeremy Yoskowitz, assistant director of Jewish life at Duke. They discussed the importance of youth service, the relationship between German and Jewish people today, the connection between faith and responsibility to others and the legacy of the Holocaust.

“The Holocaust does transcend any race, religion and any other boundary you can think of because—in reality—is it is challenging for any human being with a modicum of emotional health to hear about such an event and remain unmoved,” Yoskowitz said.

Some audience members said the program was inspiring.

“It’s really nice to come to an event to get perspective because it’s easy to live in the Duke bubble and forget important lessons,” senior Katy Warren said.

Yoskowitz said he is supportive of these students’ endeavors because projects like this can serve as a model for other peace-making efforts.

“The Echo Foundation and what the students have done is remarkable and commendable and something that is well deserving of the praise it has received,” he said. “[The students] have taken responsibility for their own learning and are creating a more positive future.”