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UMM students hosted by Jiashan County mayor in China

Summary:

(July 26, 2005)-Twelve University of Minnesota, Morris students have returned from an experience of their lifetime, having participated in a pilot program that was the first of its kind in a region of China.

The program was initiated during the recent exploratory trip to China by UMM Chancellor Sam Schuman during which Jiashan County Mayor George Shen, an alumnus of the Mingda Leadership institute at the China Center at the University of Minnesota, invited UMM to send students to be hosted by Jiashan Senior High School. Over 60 well-qualified UMM students applied, and the 12 were chosen from the competitive pool.

"It is increasingly obvious that today's students, who will live their professional and personal lives in the 21st Century, will need to know much, much more about China," said Schuman.

Students who traveled to China are: Robert Goodfellow, Mound Zachary Clemens, Minneapolis Lauren Johnson Myah Hayle Christa Mims, Bear Lake Daniel Moore, Champlin Savannah Schulze, Ely Ajeng Puspitasari, Jakarta, Indonesia Natalie Kinsky, White Bear Lake Brianna Martin (Eden Prairie High School graduate parents live in Glenwood) Paul Carlson, Plymouth and Michelle Handlin, Burnsville.

UMM students gained valuable insights into Chinese culture as well as into the daily life and local cuisine of the country. Following the students' trip, a UMM delegation then joined with other U campuses for a return trip to China in July to attend the Beijing International Education Expo and explore other innovative partnerships with Chinese universities.

"Because China is the fastest growing economy in the world, and due to the increasing globalization of our own economy, it's vital that UMM students have the opportunity to be exposed to Chinese culture and to develop their insight into the global economy based on first hand experiences," said Jennifer Falzerano, UMM alumna and admissions counselor from Spearfish, S.D., who accompanied the students, and who also serves as coordinator for the Chinese Exchange Program. Dr. Min Zhou, a member of the UMM German faculty from China, also made the trip.

Results of the trip are already being realized. UMM will offer a course in the Mandarin language beginning fall semester 2005. The course is already full. In addition, a group of students from Jiashan High School will attend UMM's Summer Scholars program in July 2006.

The group was welcomed by the local government of Jiashan County. Host families from the school's sophomore and junior students were provided.

"We had the opportunity to teach every sophomore and junior student one English class at the senior high school," said Falzerano. "We also taught English courses and met with students at several middle schools and primary schools, and

were treated to the local kindergarten's performance for International Children's Day on June 2. UMM students also had ample time to interact socially with the students at the high school."

Students visited Shanghai, Hangzhou, the ancient water city of Xitang, as well as several other cultural sites, including museums and temples. In addition, students had the opportunity to visit a local factory producing furniture for several American companies, a bolt factory, and the local economic development commission.

"I was proud of our students as they tactfully interviewed those who ran the factories and the economic development zone about working conditions and the environment," said Falzerano.

While in China, the UMM contingent appeared in local newspapers and TV nearly every day, as well as on the Chinese national media during International Children's Day on June 2 while visiting a kindergarten.

"The response to our group was overwhelmingly positive," said Falzerano, "as was the experience for UMM students. Response to international student recruitment efforts was encouraging.

"We have learned some valuable tools for planning future travel to China and laid a solid foundation for future cooperation," added Falzerano.

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