

Regional

Students explore China's culture, industry

Despite its high profile these days, China continues to be an intriguing country for both scholars and students. So it is not surprising to see people from universities across the United States visiting the emergent political and economic giant. This summer a group of students from Southern Illinois University Edwardsville visited several locations in China while studying the Chinese advertising and marketing industries. SIUE professors Tom Lavallee, of the department of foreign languages and literature, and Jason Yu, of the department of mass communications, led the group that included Josh Laurion and Lauren Lowe, both mass communications majors.

"I'm interested in marketing and advertising," said Laurion. "So the idea of international marketing and not just learning inside the confinement of the classroom is what sold me on going to China." For Lowe the motivation was different.

"For me, it was something to take a chance on," she said. "For a while, it was go to school and get it done already, but then Professor Lavallee encouraged me to take the chance and go to China and experience what was beyond the U.S., and it was a great experience." During May and June, the students were hosted by Zhejiang University in Hangzhou, the capital and largest city of Zhejiang Province in Eastern China. And while Laurion said that he was expecting to see a lot of poverty and governmental control over people, he did not.

"I was surprised that I didn't see a lot of that when I was there," he said. "It was very open and developed. My mental image of what I was expecting wasn't accurate at all." Lowe added that she found Hangzhou to be very different from what she has seen on TV of Beijing and Shanghai.

"The people were really welcoming and excited about us being there," she said. And although the level of Chinese language proficiency among the SIUE students varied, they were able to communicate with most people.

"I was surprised by how friendly everyone was," said Laurion. "They would stop us to take pictures. For a lot of us, we realized that people saw us as an opportunity for them to speak English and to show off what they have learned, but when you reply or speak to them in Chinese, they were ecstatic that we came to their country and were willing to learn the language rather than expecting them to speak English. They were patient



Photo by Bill Brinson

The SIUE faculty and students in China. Professor Lavallee is first standing from left, Professor Jason Yu is in the center standing, Josh Laurion is last to right standing and Lauren Lowe is first to left in the first row.

with our mistakes and helped us with our problems." The group also visited Shanghai and there their cultural experience was a little bit different.

"They were more forceful about speaking English," said Lowe. "If you tried speaking in Chinese, they would switch back because they knew it would be quicker and Tom easier to just speak English."

During this program, the nine SIUE students attended weekly classes with Yu and Lavallee, conducted field research on American brands in the Chinese market

such as Apple, KFC and Disney, partnered with Zhejiang University students to regularly practice their Chinese language skills and had an all around "blast" learning how to order food, shop, do their own laundry, use public transportation and enjoy themselves while conquering their culture shock.

"We made friends with shopkeepers quickly, and we would go talk to them and they would teach us words and hand us their babies and then walk away to go find a camera to take a picture," said Laurion.

Aldemaro Romero Jr. College Talk

While the group took in the usual tourist attractions, they also had the opportunity to see what the actual day-to-day life is like. Eating also brought about new experiences for the group.

"There were a lot of interesting items brought to our table," said Laurion. "Jellyfish, tripe, honeycomb, pigs' feet, pigs' snout, odd things that you wouldn't think. Many of the chicken dishes were brought out with the head still on."

Lowe said that she found this kind of trip offers students unique and extremely important opportunities. "It opens our minds to more things than what we grew up with and what we know," she said. "If we are able to see what is beyond the U.S., I think it gives us a better chance to communicate with other cultures, particularly if we go into a field that interacts with other countries, other cultures."

She added that the SIUE students were also a source of curiosity for their Chinese hosts.

"They asked us a ton of things, mostly about clothes or music, just how things work," she said. "College students, for example, that we interacted with don't work, while most college students here hold either a part-time or full-time job while going to school. They get the chance to focus on school." When asked if they would like to go back, their responses were unequivocal.

"I would love to go back to China," Lowe said. "I would definitely go back to Hangzhou, but I would like to go to the rural areas from there and see everything and anything that I haven't seen yet." As for Laurion, he said that he, "would like to go back and reconnect with some of the friends we made, as well as seeing their provinces and where they grew up. They all spoke so highly of their home areas."

Aldemaro Romero Jr. is the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville. His show, "Segue," can be heard every Sunday morning at 9 a.m. on WSIE, 88.7 FM. He can be reached at College_Arts_Sciences@siue.edu.