IU Introduces China to Western Education and Business Training

Instructors and students at the IU's School of Education are paving the way for American business and education relationships with China in preparation for the 21st century. Three high-level officials from the Beijing University of Aeronautics and Astronautics (BUAA) arrived in Bloomington September 15 for a week of study and introduction to American education and business training methods at the School of Education. The visit is the second in as many months for Chinese education and corporate training managers, the result of nearly five years of ice-breaking efforts by Donald Warren, dean of the School, since he came to IU in 1990. In that year, Warren initiated contacts with officials of the Aviation Industries of China (AVIC), which controls the country's aviation engineering and design efforts, and preparation and training of its support personnel. BUAA is a science, technical, and engineering school that reports to AVIC.

The first group, which came last summer, was composed of some 30 bank officials who were primarily training managers at banks, each of which has an internal training department and school. They attended month-long workshops in IU's world-class Instructional Systems Technology (IST) department. According to Thomas Schwen, chair of IST, representatives from the People's Bank of China contacted the department because of its renowned expertise in workforce training technology. The officials were particularly interested in studying American models of training employees within an organization. "With 3 million employees and control of five universities, the banking system in China is the largest training operation in the world, and that's what we are good at," he said. He further pointed out that China is doing more with distance education than any other country in the world, faced with a critical shortage in meeting the educational needs of the 1.2 billion population.

The second group of three were all senior administrators from BUAA, eager to compare ideas about the directions that China's higher education system must take as the country moves toward a free market system. According to Warren, until the late 1980s the Chinese government essentially funded higher education, and graduates were almost guaranteed jobs. Today, Chinese higher education is moving toward a tuition-based system, and there are no job guarantees. Warren noted that university faculty in China earn about $50 per month—less than they could make in a factory.

"The Chinese became very interested in American higher education policies and administration as they effect students," said Warren. "And they look to us for answers. How do we know students will be successful? How do we know they can do the job they will be expected to perform? How do you assess programs? Accreditation became an issue," Warren said. Although official U.S. relations with China are still strained, Warren believes that in the long run, the country will meet Western standards of democracy. "It is inevitable that China will open to more interaction with the outside, not just the U.S. It's an economic dynamic." Adds Warren, "There's a new effort underway to identify young leadership, an effort to find people who are trustworthy and can take leadership into the 21st century. And this delegation desperately wants collaboration with us."

Erik Novak, IU News Bureau

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