Education Dean Studies Schools in Several Asian Countries

The educational systems of several Asian countries are likely to undergo massive change in the next few years. That's the assessment of Donald Warren, dean of the School of Education, who recently completed a visit to Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam, Japan, and China. Accompanied by his wife, Beverly Warren, director of the Student Advocates Office, Warren lectured extensively and met with top educational and political leaders, including many IU alumni, throughout the month-long trip.

Upon his return to Bloomington, Warren noted that the issues facing the people vary in each country. In both China and Vietnam, the struggle is to move away from the Russian model of higher education, which features specialized undergraduate universities instead of less expensive and more functional comprehensive institutions.

With China moving towards a market economy, the “hot topics” were administration and governance, evaluation, accreditation, and assessment of students. Chinese universities are struggling with competition for students, reduced government funding, and job markets that no longer guarantee employment to graduates.

In September, Warren will head back to Beijing with a School of Education team to co-host an international conference on education and technology with Beijing University of Aeronautics & Astronautics.

Vietnam enjoys a very high level of adult literacy, yet primary school reform is essential if this literacy level is to be maintained. As for the training of teachers, Vietnam prepares them in two-year programs that badly need to be upgraded, Warren said. The country needs to increase teacher salaries to attract people to the profession and needs to develop incentives to keep them, especially in rural areas.

On his very first visit to Thailand, Warren met with a large group of alumni from the School of Education as well as the schools of Business, HPER, SLIS, and the College of Arts & Sciences. Given Herman B Wells’ long involvement with Thailand, these alumni sought reassurances that IU remain interested in their country, just as they remain committed to sending Thai students to IU.

At a lunch that included Dr. Saisuree Chutikul, an Education alumna who heads the newly created National Commission on Educational Reform, discussion focused on the commission’s mandate, how to balance exacting academic standards with the increasing demand for access to education, and the possibility of some IU faculty serving as consultants to the commission.

Taiwan, meanwhile, is making minor adjustments to its educational system and is interested in educational exchanges with the United States, Warren said.

In Japan, Warren and his wife enjoyed the hospitality of the IU Alumni Club of Japan, headed by its president, retired business executive Hiroshi Watanabe. Discussions ranged over trade issues facing Asian countries, Japan’s relations with its neighbors, and other area tensions among neighbors.

Many Asian alumni have had distinguished careers, and they attributed their success to the start that IU Bloomington gave them.

“We faced this dilemma in the nineteenth century and Japan faced it after the Second World War,” said Warren, a historian of education. “We both decided it was an impossible choice. You had to do both.”

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“There is a clear opportunity for follow-up in all these countries,” Warren said.

He stressed the importance of maintaining close ties with IU’s alumni groups, recognizing their educational and professional achievements and their continued efforts to recruit new students to the university.

— Diane Carmony
School of Education