

Tulane Students Say "Ni hao" to China

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As Americans get their first glimpses of a changing China during the Olympics this summer, many Tulane students already have gotten a first-hand look through university courses based in the rapidly growing country.



On a trip to China this summer, a group of students from the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine gather at Mutiianyu, a section of the Great Wall of China near Beijing. (Photo by Hiral Patel)

The School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, A. B. Freeman School of Business and Newcomb-Tulane College all have China-based classes that allow students to learn much more than just “ni hao” or “hello” in Chinese.

They spend time interacting with and learning from Chinese students and industry leaders.

“It was an amazing and wonderful experience,” says Jeffery Johnson, public health associate dean for graduate admissions and student affairs, who recently returned

from Shanghai.

He accompanied 15 students taking a course on public health in China taught by Lizheng Shi, assistant professor of health systems management.

Johnson adds, "China is a fascinating phenomenon from a public health standpoint because of the rapid industrialization of their country. I think it's a tremendous opportunity" for cultural exchange.

Students in the two-week intensive course studied the country's public health system and ways it is trying to provide services for more than one billion people. China has gained worldwide attention from how it has dealt with the HIV pandemic, the SARS (severe acute respiratory syndrome) epidemic and avian flu.



Lizheng Shi, assistant professor of health systems management, left, and Jinan Liu, a doctoral student in health systems management from China, share a moment in Tiananmen Square. (Photo by Jeffery Johnson)

Shi took students to hospitals, community health clinics and a center for traditional Chinese medicine. Roughly 80 percent of the trip was spent on research and studies.

“It is a very serious program, academically,” Shi says. “It's not like summer camp.”

Shi, who was born in China, says that the enthusiasm and optimism from citizens was palpable as the Olympics approached. The country has the fastest growing economy in the world.

“There is a lot of confidence in how they feel about the country and the future,” Shi says.

That optimism was shared by business school graduate students in Beijing who face “euphoric” job prospects, says clinical professor James Biteman, who led Tulane's second-year masters of business administration class to Beijing this past spring for a week-long program.

Students visited companies and worked on teams alongside MBA students in Beijing to compete for a consulting project in a mock case study.

More than 60 Tulane business students took part in the project, which gave them an opportunity to see how future business leaders in China approach work, Biteman says. This is the second year the business school has brought MBA students to China, and future visits are planned for the global MBA and executive MBA programs.

“How can you study business and not study China?” Biteman says. “China is the emerging economy. If we're not in tune and in touch with China, we're basically not in touch with business.”

Newcomb-Tulane College also will send students to Beijing for the second year through its study abroad program. The program gives students studying Chinese a semester of intensive language training at the Beijing Foreign Studies University. Three students participated in the program last year and the same number is expected to participate this fall, says Mark Beirn, study abroad director.