

MANDEL SCHOOL OF APPLIED SOCIAL SCIENCES
CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

INTERNATIONAL STUDY PROGRAM
CHINA - 2009

BACKGROUND

Students who study abroad are able to compare social services, policy, and practice with an intent to understand their own system better and learn about alternative approaches to social problems; Students are also provided an opportunity to experience a culture different from their own as a way to promote personal growth, enhance cultural sensitivity, & expand their world views. (E.W. Lindsey, 2005)

There are numerous statements like the one above from experts in the field of adult learning that support international travel experiences. In 2004, a member of the MSASS faculty, under Dean Grover C. Gilmore, organized a student program to travel to Amsterdam in The Netherlands during the University's spring break. The purpose of this trip was to test the waters for the development of an international study program that would enhance the renowned MSASS graduate social work curriculum. Since then, MSASS has organized 18 trips for academic credit. Some of the more recent trips abroad have included a small number of undergraduate students and alumni. Students receive academic credit for the trip and are required to do pre- and post-trip assignments. They have opportunities to interact with community leaders, social workers, clients, and policymakers in the host country. Most trip planning involves a partner organization or university.

In 2005, Deborah R. Jacobson, Ph.D., began developing the International Studies Program at MSASS and became the program director two years later. Dr. Jacobson is an Assistant Professor at MSASS. Her teaching and research have focused on family system theories, practice evaluation, social work methods, and international studies. In 2007, MSASS received the distinguished "Partners in Advancing Education for International Social Work Award" from the Council on Social Work Education. This prestigious award was in recognition of the quality of curriculum and faculty used in the travel experience for students.

In May 2009, Dr. Jacobson will lead a group to Beijing, Shanghai, Xi'an, and Guangzhou provinces in China to focus on health and human services. This integrated study tour will explore and experience the Chinese culture, history, values and traditions and learn about the unique features of the health and human service systems of China, emphasizing the societal influences on policies, programs, and institutions.

PARTICIPANTS

Most participants are undergraduate or graduate level in various disciplines. Some trips, such as the one to The Netherlands, are open to a few undergraduate students who are studying in a variety of fields and use this experience as an enhancement to their education. Selected trips have recently been opened to MSASS alumni who can receive Continuing Education Units for their participation that

qualify for maintaining a social work license. Many of the students receive some level of financial aid for tuition based on need. Our goal is to provide the very highest quality program at an affordable cost for students and alumni who also have limited income. We currently have 14 participants for the China trip with space for more if funding can be obtained to make the trip affordable to a wider range of students and alumni.

STUDY PROGRAM

The study experience in China will take place at a variety of venues: universities, agencies, and government offices. The students will focus on:

- present-day life, lifestyle and living conditions of people in urban and rural China, including their economic and social problems;
- analysis of how these factors influence the development and functioning of individuals, families, groups or communities;
- analysis of global issues, including globalization as they affect life in various parts of the world and
- analysis of health and social welfare in China.

Some of the learning activities include:

- Pre-departure reading, orientation, seminar and individual consultations
- Meetings with professionals and community members in China
- Seminar and group discussions, led by faculty and practicing professionals
- Discussions with government officials, college faculty, practitioners in the field, students of social work

COST

The price of the China trip is \$3,900 per participant. The fee includes: international airfare, in-country travel, meals, double occupancy accommodations, instructional materials, agency visits, guest lecturers, program fees and most excursions and cultural events. Fees do not include tuition. Funding is needed to subsidize the program in order to make the trip affordable to students. A contribution of \$5,000 would allow us to offer scholarships to students who already carry a significant financial burden for their education costs. Recipients of a subsidy would be selected based on need, with any MSASS students receiving preference. Your generosity will be recognized in several ways. The School's newsletter, MSASS Action, and other news media about the trip will include mention of "scholarships provided by Margaret W. Wong (or Margaret Wong & Associates Co., LPA). You will be invited to a presentation by students following their return from China.

OUTCOMES

At MSASS we have seen remarkable growth in students as a result of their international travel experience. From an educational perspective, we expect that as an outcome students will understand:

- the importance of global learning and of how culture, values & history influence the way societies address social problems, as well as the design of social policies and interventions
- how to integrate theory, observational, and didactic components to gain an intercultural perspective within each country
- the role of social service agencies & nonprofit organizations or nongovernmental organization (NGOs)
- the strengths and weaknesses of social policies and human services within each country and how the social care system is shaped by political & social values
- the impact of the environment, including poverty and inequalities on the lives of minorities, women and children
- and be able to demonstrate sensitivity to cultural differences in interactions with people of cultures & backgrounds that are different from one's own

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