

Purdue Education an International Experience for Many

While walking around Purdue University's campus in West Lafayette, a stranger may liken the experience to that of being in a large city rather than a mid-sized Indiana town.

This is because of the diversity of the student body at Purdue, and according to school officials, it's no accident. The university currently ranks second among American public universities in terms of having the largest international population (nearly 5,500 students) and places fifth overall.

"Recruiting a diversified student body creates a very cosmopolitan world population on campus, and that prepares students for what their working world will likely be like after college," says Mike Brzezinski, director of Purdue's Office of International Students and Scholars.

He says that Purdue initially began its international focus back in the 1960s with its agricultural program. The university, however, has heightened its recruiting efforts abroad in the past two decades, and now the school's largest international student base is from India.

"In the last 16 or 17 years, Purdue has structurally organized itself to be more global (by creating corresponding programs at the school)," he notes, "and we may see even more of that unfold in the next year or so."

Brzezinski points out that international students are attracted to Purdue because of the varied and unique on-campus opportunities.

"Students coming here receive excellent academic quality and there's a lot to do outside of the classroom," he surmises. "We have over 800 student organizations, our foreign students can join our speakers bureau to discuss their experiences, and we match the largest number of students with people in the community so they can build relationships. This is not true at all big schools."

Across the ponds

Not only does Purdue focus on welcoming international students, but the school sends around 1,500 of its American students abroad annually. A majority of those students travel to China, but western European countries like Spain, Italy and the United Kingdom are seeing their share of Boilermakers as well.

(*BizVoice*® first examined the university's international outreach efforts two years ago, in the March-April 2007 issue).

According to Brian Harley, director of Purdue's Programs for Study Abroad, about 20% of those students are performing internships.

"That's important because it's an applied kind of learning," he says. "They get to learn the cultural aspect, but they're also gaining practical experience."

Harley adds, "The knowledge and learning that happens overseas is done to supplement or augment their learning at Purdue, not replace it."

He notes that students from all 10 of Purdue's campuses are sent overseas, and the school doesn't want those who wish to travel to be hindered by costs.

"We're constantly working to make studying abroad more cost-neutral so there isn't added expense compared to what they'd pay to study in Indiana," he offers.

According to a study by the International Educational Exchange of American Colleges, Purdue's main campus sends the 34th most students abroad. Harley explained the school's ranking jumped to 34th from 51st in one year.

A presidential visit

Purdue President France Córdova embarked upon a 10-day trip to India and Hong Kong in November. The trip had several purposes, but featured a theme of maximizing the school's global network.

"The school has recently gone through preparing a strategic plan, and one key aspect of that was promoting globalization at Purdue," explains associate vice president for advancement Robin Bellinger, who organized the trip.

Bellinger adds that Córdova's meeting with officials from Cummins College of Engineering – a women's engineering college in Pune, India – was especially beneficial.

"She had significant discussions in India regarding recruitment efforts (with the school)," Bellinger offers. "Cummins has sent women to Purdue in the past, and we wanted to enhance those efforts."

The two schools recently agreed to expand their partnership, in which Cummins sends undergraduate students to Purdue's West Lafayette campus to pursue master's and doctoral degrees, over the next five years.

To view the March/April 2007 *BizVoice*® story on studying abroad, go to the archives section of www.bizvoicemagazine.com.



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Purdue President France Córdova (center) and Robin Bellinger, the university's associate vice president for advancement, greet a guest at an event in Bombay.

INFORMATION LINK

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