

News Release

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Korean nursing students visit IU Kokomo

KOKOMO, Ind. — Jessie Cunningham knows when she is a nurse, she will have to treat patients who don't share her culture or language.

She's not worried about it, though, because the Indiana University Kokomo School of Nursing is preparing her for the challenge. For the last two weeks, Cunningham and her classmates have experienced Korean culture, hosting seven nursing students from Jesus University, in Jeonju, South Korea.

Meeting people from another country gives Cunningham an insight into that country. It has also made her realize if she has an international patient, she may need to ask him or her questions to meet expectations.

"When you're working in a hospital, you can get patients from anywhere," she said. "You need to know about other cultures to give the best care possible, and you must be respectful of their culture."

IU Kokomo promotes global learning through overseas study, with trips planned this year to South Korea, Italy, Turkey, and Guatemala, among others. Linda Wallace, dean of the School of Nursing, is a leader in this effort, starting a faculty exchange with South Korea in 2000, then expanding to add students in 2003. About 25 IU Kokomo students have traveled there since, with seven more scheduled to go in May.

Hosting the Korean students gives students who may not have the resources to travel a chance to have a cultural experience close to home.

Wallace said these programs enhance the top quality nursing skills the students learn, better equipping them to serve after graduation.

“These experiences create greater cultural understanding for our students and the Korean students,” she said. “You learn not to see people from another country as strangers to be afraid of, but as potential friends. It also helps you as a nurse to think about how you can consider cultural needs in the care you are giving.”

IU Kokomo student Jessica Graber talked to some of the visiting students in her class, and was interested in the differences and similarities between nursing school in Korea and in the United States.

Patti Johnson was surprised by the similarities.

“You get to know the language a little when you talk to them, and you see that we are different, but we are the same,” she said. “They’re nervous about school and want to do well, just like we do.”

The IU Kokomo students also learn from Sung Ja Whang, a retired professor from Jesus University who is now a visiting lecturer on campus. She said their Korean visitors are selected from among the top students, and several have continued their nursing studies in the United States since visiting.

She said all the students involved gain a global perspective, from visiting another country and from hosting international visitors, and she hopes it will inspire them to consider working in another country, perhaps even in missionary work.

“You need to get as much education as you can, so when you are needed somewhere, you can say, ‘Here I am, I can go,’” Whang said.

The visitors have been busy during their two weeks in Kokomo, with clinical experiences at IU North, IU Health Tipton and St. Joseph Hospital, a campus tour, and visiting classes. They’ve also had fun, with an afternoon making ceramics, a trip to the Logansport carousel, cheering for the Cougar men’s basketball team, attending a Valentine-making party, and eating a Thanksgiving-style dinner.

Korean student Su Jie Lee’s favorite part of the trip was the clinical practices at IU Health Tipton Hospital and St. Joseph Hospital. She was surprised by how much student nurses are allowed to do as part of their clinicals.

“The student nurses can use the electronic medical support systems and can enter information for the patients,” she said. “In Korea, we can’t do that. Student nurses here have more responsibility.”

Kyung Min Kim liked being part of the introductory nursing class, and said the classroom atmosphere is friendly between professors and students.

Young Eun Hwang liked touring the IU Kokomo campus.

“It’s very big here, bigger than our university,” she said, adding that Jesus University students either study nursing or social work.

The exchange program is made possible by a grant from Dr. Se-Ung Lee, a South Korean businessman and philanthropist. The original grant, given in the year 2000, was for nursing students. Lee gave scholarship money in 2011 and 2012 for IU Kokomo students and faculty go to South Korea.

Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana.

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