



News Release

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Education, nursing students experience South Korean culture during IU Kokomo trip

KOKOMO, Ind. — When Serina Perry is a teacher, she will be able to empathize with any student who is new to the country, doesn't speak English, and doesn't understand the culture.

As a nurse, Crystal Jones will be able to treat her patients with sensitivity, understanding their cultural needs, in addition to their medical needs.

Both students experienced what it is like to be in a place where they did not understand the language and culture, as part of Indiana University Kokomo's overseas study programs in South Korea this summer.

Perry, an elementary and special education major from Delphi, wanted to travel after taking a multicultural education class.

"We were challenged to look within ourselves and find our prejudices, and get rid of them, so we have equity for children of all backgrounds in our classrooms," she said. "After traveling to South Korea, I now know, understand, and empathize with children in my classroom who do not understand the language, and who don't understand the culture, because I've had that experience too."

She looks forward to sharing her Korean experience when she student teaches this fall. She bought souvenirs and books to share with the children, and is working on a teaching unit to incorporate some of what she learned. She would also like to establish a pen pal program between children she met during her travels and her students.

“Our children will have to be prepared to interact with people around the world, because of how technology brings us closer together,” she said. “We have to broaden their worldviews.”

The six education students toured cultural and historical sites and visited Sungshin University. A highlight of the trip was a day at Sungshin Elementary, where they enjoyed lunch in classrooms with students and taught an English lesson.

“The teachers and the students were very welcoming and receptive to us,” Perry said. “The children loved practicing their English with us. They were very well-behaved, and were eager to hear about America.”

Associate Dean Shirley Aamidor said students gained insight into what it is like to live with a hostile neighbor during a trip to the demilitarized zone separating South Korea from North Korea.

“At one point, one group of students was standing in North Korea, while the other group was in South Korea,” she said. “Students gained a greater understanding of the challenges South Koreans face on a day to day basis.”

They also visited street markets and ate South Korean food. Perry was surprised to find she liked the food, though she probably would not have tried squid or octopus if offered at home.

“It was unusual, but surprisingly good,” she said, adding that a lot of it was very spicy.

Holly Manns, an elementary education major from Macy, also was surprised that she liked the Korean food, and had hoped to expand her worldview by going to Korea.

“This experience allows me to bring a different culture into my classroom,” she said. “It also prepares me to teach children from different cultures. I have a different perspective now, and I can’t wait to share it.”

She also has the travel bug, she said.

“I’m more open than I was, now that I’ve experienced something other than my small hometown,” she said. “I think it takes getting on the plane that first time to make you want to go again.”

Aamidor, who will spend the fall semester teaching at Sungshin University in South Korea, called the trip a once in a lifetime opportunity for the students.

“We had access to places and people that most tourists never experience,” she said.

While this was the first trip to South Korea for the School of Education, the School of Nursing pioneered the campus' overseas travel programs, with Dean Linda Wallace starting a faculty exchange in 2000. Nearly 30 IU Kokomo students have visited since 2003. Dr. Se-Ung Lee, a South Korean businessman and philanthropist, has supported the program for 13 years with grant funding.

Mary Bourke, assistant dean, led the trip, along with three other faculty members. She taught a graduate level class leading up to the trip, about culturally competent health care practices. In addition to cultural experiences, the six students spent time in hospitals and nursing schools.

Bourke said they experienced what life is like for the people who live in South Korea, rather than being tourists, because of IU Kokomo's partnerships there. Visiting lecturer Sung Ja Whang, who is from South Korea, had her sister and other family members lead their tour of Seoul.

"We had a better insight of the cultural significance because of our guides," Bourke said. "We experienced the real culture, and were immersed in it."

Crystal Jones, a Master of Science in Nursing (M.S.N.) student from Marion, was impressed to witness how South Korean hospitals incorporate both eastern and western health practices.

"They don't act like one is better than the other," she said. "They have respect for both of them, and use eastern medicine for chronic conditions, and western for emergent care."

She was also surprised by how urban and modern the country is.

"I packed like I did when I went to Africa, and felt like I stepped off the plane in Chicago," she said.

Leigh Swartzendruber, an M.S.N. student from Greentown, enjoyed meeting Korean nursing students.

"We are different in ways, but when you meet them, they're just like us, deep down," she said. "We became like family."

Swartzendruber noted that in South Korea, it is common for family members to stay at the hospital with a patient and perform some of the tasks nurses would do in the United States, and they also bring in their own meals. Because of her experience, she would understand why an Asian patient at her hospital might bring family members along.

"I consider my patients' culture now, when I'm taking care of them," she said. "I'm helping teach other nurses to consider that now, because I've had experience being

where I didn't speak the language and didn't know the culture. I'm a better nurse because of this experience."

Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana.

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