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Going Global

Eric F. Spina
University of Dayton, efspina@udayton.edu

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Going Global : University of Dayton, Ohio

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Friday November 10, 2017

Going Global

By Eric F. Spina

As I strolled through the Roesch Library exhibit showcasing the spectacular Grand Canal of China, my mind jumped ahead to my trip next week to China — a land filled with natural beauty, ancient landmarks, and a growing bond with our campus.

The Grand Canal is so long — an incredible 1,104 miles — that the River Stewards this summer flew from one end to the other to soak it all in.

Like our students, I want to immerse myself in the culture and grandeur on my first trip to China. I want to leave with a greater appreciation for the homeland of the 440 Chinese students currently studying on our campus. They courageously traveled outside their comfort zone to be part of UD's diverse community, and now I get a chance to engage the people and places in their national community.

My itinerary for the week is full, but I already know a highlight will be strolling down Pingjiang Road in ancient Suzhou with UD students who are spending their fall semester studying at the University of Dayton China Institute.

I want to see China through their eyes and hear their stories of taking in the Shanghai skyline at twilight, walking along the Great Wall, admiring the ancient art of silk-making, and visiting multinational companies that make up the ultramodern Suzhou Industrial Park.

It's hard to imagine the scale and impact of Suzhou Industrial Park, a joint venture between China and Singapore that has risen out of rice fields and farmland in less than 25 years. Just 75 miles from the world's busiest port in Shanghai, it's home to a third of the world's Fortune 500 companies — and our very own China Institute.

This stand-alone center that's slightly larger than Miriam Hall is a classroom for experiential learning, similar to—but a world different than—the simple farmhouse in Salyersville, Kentucky, that's home to UD students every summer in the heart of Appalachia.

When I give a speech next week at Fujian Normal University on the occasion of its 110th anniversary, I'll talk about how UD students' lives have been transformed forever by living and studying in China. The world's best universities must prepare students to be global citizens, to be successful in a world where traditional boundaries — such as those between countries and those between disciplines — are blurred.

But while such diverse experiences foster innovation and creativity, it's more than that. To be fully human, we must embrace multiple perspectives and look at the world through the eyes of people who are different from us to grow in our own knowledge, empathy — and humanity.

That's one of life's greatest lessons — one we teach in classrooms, residence halls — and in an ancient land 12 time zones away.