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Studying Abroad

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Twenty international students this summer are getting a taste of what it's like to live and study on an American college campus.

They're spending four weeks on campus through the University of Dayton's Business, Engineering, Science and Technology (BEST) campus visit program, receiving an up-close and personal experience of American higher education.

Some of them like it so much they've decided to stay — and that's the idea.

The 20 students — 15 college students and five high school students — are taking classes in engineering innovation and intercultural communication while earning a total of six credit hours, sampling shopping, baseball and other local attractions and sitting down to dinner with University President Daniel J. Curran.

Perhaps the most important experience comes in the classroom, where they encounter differences between American and Chinese higher education.

"American classes place a greater emphasis on discussion and group interaction, whereas those in China are more lecture-oriented. This program gives students a taste of that, along with fun, cultural excursions on weekends," said Jia Jia Wei, one of the coordinators of the program.

The engineering innovation class brings together a number of disciplines — including the humanities — for an experience of working in teams in developing a real-world product or service.

Established in 2010, the program originally concentrated on high school students, but has evolved to focus on college students from China.

According to Jason Reinoehl, executive director of enrollment strategies and operations, the program is highly successful as a pipeline to enrollment. More than half of the 2011 cohort of 40 students decided to enroll and eight of this year's cohort of 20 have also said they will enroll at the University.

"It's a great recruiting tool, it gives them a good sense of the classroom and the close-knit campus community. They also get to experience the city of Dayton and the community and see that it's friendly, very easy to get around and is without the disadvantages of very large metropolitan areas."

While working on projects in the engineering class and writing blog posts in the intercultural communication class, the students form strong bonds with one another while breaking down the language barrier.

"The BEST program has helped me adjust to my new life in America. I've made a lot of friends and the language barrier is slowly breaking down," said Ziyi Yao, an undergraduate finance major who will spend the next four years studying at the University of Dayton.

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