When you study politics at Furman, you know you’re going to learn about world leaders. But meet one? Even as a member of a Furman delegation at the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Busan, Korea, last fall, it was beyond the wildest dreams of Cindy Youssef ’07.

While Furman students usually did more listening than talking at the 10-day summit, Korea still offered opportunities for them to put their international acumen to work. “They were taking questions after the president of Mexico addressed a roomful of CEOs,” says Ken Peterson, chair of Furman’s economics department. “Suddenly the master of ceremonies says, ‘Ok, the woman in the back,’ and I hear Nadia Savova—one of our students—ask a really beautiful question, then receive an answer from Vicente Fox himself.”

Mitchell Goldsmith ’07, a political science major, was one of several students who spoke to Christopher Hill, assistant secretary for the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs and head of the U.S. delegation to the six-party non-nuclear-proliferation talks with North Korea. “He was very pragmatic and open about the future of the talks and the major problems they needed to overcome,” Mitchell says. “It was almost as if he could be more frank because it was a roomful of students.”

“Being from Greenville, South Carolina, from Furman, traveling to the other side of the globe to meet business and world leaders and have that access—you don’t get that anywhere else,” she says with a wide-eyed grin. “That’s an experience that will live with me forever.”

The APEC meetings are also a place of pageantry—world leaders dress in the national costume of the host nation—and meeting organizers provide plenty of ways to experience the city and culture. In Busan, for example, the hospitality included tours of local industry and even a $1.5-million fireworks display that drew 600,000 people to the port city’s shores. “We would come out of the hotel and police would join arms and separate the crowd so we could walk down to the beach nearby so we could cover up and stay warm,” says Boris Michev ’07, an economics major from Plovdiv, Bulgaria.

Ask Cindy Youssef what (besides her business card) she got out of her experiences rubbing elbows with world leaders, and she’s almost at a loss for words. Almost.

“Never in a million years could I have imagined that I would be interviewing the foreign minister of Peru, eating lunch in the same room as the president of Peru, hearing a keynote speech by the president of China, and enjoying dinner and an address by the president of Indonesia with the APEC Business Advisory Council (ABAC) CEOs—all in the same day!”

“I feel like my world gets smaller every day as I gain a renewed respect for those from other cultures I’ve encountered. We found out on the way home that Vicente Fox, the president of Mexico, has invited us to breakfast in the morning. Tomorrow will be another eventful day—to say the least!”

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