



May 9, 2009

Matt Springate: 'Virtual Trade Mission Trip' trains young leaders

By Matt Springate

Last year five Furman seniors, along with two professors, went to Lima, Peru, to attend the Leadership Week of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). The group was made up of political science majors Abby Elsener, Rachael Parrish and me; and economics majors Emily Hunter and Evelyn McKinney. Dr. Cleve Fraser from the Political Science Department and Dr. Nathan Cook from the Economics Department served as our educators.

APEC is made up of 21 member economies located around the Pacific Rim. Together, these economies make up nearly two-thirds of the world's GDP and almost half of the world's trade. APEC works to facilitate trade liberalization in the region, while also serving as a forum for discussion of issues concerning human security and climate change. In the case of this past session, economic recession was the overwhelming topic of discussion.

Our participation in APEC was facilitated through the Voices of the Future, a program coordinated through the Virtual Trade Mission Foundation. Furman was one of four U.S. schools participating in Voices, along with other students from Asia, Canada and Latin America. This was one of the true joys of the trip.

Before our departure, I had been so excited about the exposure to world leaders and prominent businessmen, but being able to interact with international students was nearly the most rewarding experience of the trip. Throughout the week we learned so much about our diverse cultures and varying outlooks on global politics and economics. Even with different languages and thousands of miles separating our cultures, we each managed to find a way to intermingle, be friends and learn from one another.

With that being said, the exposure to political leaders did not fall short of our expectations. Like fellow student Rachael Parrish, my biggest interest is Chinese politics. We were both extremely eager to see Chinese President Hu Jintao, who, through his speech, exuded a presence that made clear the deference the Chinese people give their leader.

During President George W. Bush's speech, I was also fascinated to see an international audience (that many Americans perceive as being hostile towards the president) giving him applause at several times during his speech. We learned first hand through our discussions with prominent business leaders that President Bush's policies on trade are well received within the APEC community.

Furman University students are the only American university students chosen to participate in the APEC program and we greatly appreciate the hard work and generosity of the Riley Institute, Furman University and our Political Science and Economics Departments that makes this unique and amazing program possible.

Additional Facts

Matt Springate will attend the Patterson School of Diplomacy and International Commerce at the University of Kentucky when he graduates from Furman University. He can be reached at matt.springate@furman.edu.