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Pacific Rim confab brings junior faculty together

Twenty-six junior faculty from some of the most prestigious research universities on the Pacific Rim just concluded a week on campus and in the state of Washington, learning about environmental issues and laying the groundwork for future international collaboration.

This cohort is the second group in the Association of Pacific Rim Universities fellows program. Fellows are picked by the president of their institution. The goal of the program is to foster deeper understanding of the complexities and richness of Pacific Rim societies, while enhancing the scholarly network for teaching and research.

The fellows heard from Martha Choe, director of the Washington State Office of Trade and Economic Development, as well as King County Executive Ron Sims. The fellows made presentations on their areas of interest in research and teaching, and they listened to talks from UW faculty on climate impacts and regional environmental issues. They traveled east of the mountains to the Methow Valley, where they heard a panel discussion on water conflicts in the region.

Then they departed for Thailand, where a similar program has been arranged for them by faculty at Chulalongkorn University.

“Our hope is to build a multinational, multiuniversity collaboration,” says Gretchen Kalonji, Kyocera professor of materials science and engineering and chair of the International Faculty Council. Kalonji wrote the proposal on which the program is based and has been part of the committee that has planned the fellows’ experience in Washington. “We believe this kind of collaboration is the wave of the future, and that a deep immersion for two weeks with younger faculty will help to create a structure for long-term cooperation.”

Kalonji, who has been involved in a joint education project with Tohoku University in Japan (see *University Week*, Dec. 2, 1999), believes that this year’s theme will provide rich opportunities. “We all share water resources and face many of the same issues of coastal management, pollution control and integrated watershed management. It plays out in different ways, of course, depending on the constraints in financial resources and political decision-making. But we believe exchanging information and discussing these issues can result in a comparative advantage for those who participate. We’re also very interested in the different curricular structures at the various universities, and how they deal with environmental issues. We believe there is much that we can learn from one another.”

Evaluation is an important component during the early phase of the fellows program. Based upon last year’s critique, this year’s program allows much more time for interaction and discussion. A postdoctoral anthropology student administered questionnaires and also observed the entire week-long session.

The real test, of course, will be whether the far-flung faculty stay in touch and deepen their involvement with one another. Most are entering the program with collaboration as a goal.

“These are the cream of the crop of young faculty,” Kalonji says. “They are poised to make a difference in their universities and in their disciplines.”

More information about the Association of Pacific Rim Universities is available on the association

Web site: http://www.usc.edu/extrelations/news_service/apruwww/apru.html. Details about this year's fellows program are on the UW Web site: <http://depts.washington.edu/global/apru/fellows/details.html>. ¶

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