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Furman Students Get Valuable Lesson In World Politics At APEC Conference In Chile

GREENVILLE, S.C. - As a senior mathematics-economics major at Furman University, Jordan Teague certainly understands that the United States is a driving force in the world's economy. After all, the U.S. accounts for about 30 percent of the world's Gross Domestic Product.

But her participation in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit last month in Santiago, Chile, gave her a deeper understanding of the profound impact that U.S. policy has on other countries.

A native of Oviedo, Fla., Teague was one of seven Furman students who attended the international conference as part of a Riley Institute program conducted under the auspices of the Virtual Trade Mission (VTM) Foundation. VTM is a privately funded, Washington, D.C.-based organization dedicated to educating students, educators and businesspeople about the emerging global economy.

During the seven-day trip, the Furman "citizen diplomats," accompanied by political science professor Cleve Fraser



The Furman students found the time to visit an ice cream shop in Chile while attending the APEC conference. From left to right (sitting) are Monica Handa, Amer Ahmad, Cindy Youssef, Chris Schoen, Jordan Teague, Dan Ennis, and Mike Overby. The university plans to send student groups to the next two APEC conferences in South Korea and Vietnam, respectively.

and economics professor Ken Peterson, were able to meet international business executives

and trade officials. They also roomed and dined with college and high school students from other member countries.

In addition to Teague, the Furman students making the trip were junior Amer Ahmad of Greenville, junior Dan Ennis of Fallston, Md., sophomore Monica Handa of Greer, senior Mike Overby of Cary, N.C., sophomore Chris Schoen of Greenville, and Cindy Youssef of Greenville.

All the students are political science majors with the exception of Teague. Overby is majoring in political science and Spanish, with a concentration in Latin American studies.

The interaction with other students from around the world was mostly robust and friendly. But it turned tense on occasion when the Furman group was peppered with questions about unpopular U.S. foreign policy.

"We (the group from Furman) all have different views, but we found ourselves circling the wagons a bit," said Amer Ahmad, a junior political science major from Greenville.

Added Teague, "After dialoging with students from various nations of the Asian-Pacific, I began to understand the degree to which U.S. policy affects not only the U.S., but also the functioning of the rest of the world's nations."

Representatives from 21-member countries attended the summit, which generated headlines around the world. President George W. Bush and outgoing Secretary of State Colin Powell addressed APEC audiences. The presidents of China, Japan, Russia and South Korea also made speeches.

APEC countries represent 2.5 billion people with a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of \$19-trillion, or 58 percent of the global total, and accounts for more than 50 percent of world trade. Government corruption, terrorism and international trade policy were popular topics at the conferences as was the development of standardized shipping system that would allow countries track freight and monitor content.

Established in 1993, APEC is a platform for economic cooperation that facilitates

bilateral trade and investment. The organization's signature event is an annual summit hosted late each year by an APEC member nation.

The Furman trip, made possible by a grant from the John I. Smith Foundation, was organized under the auspices of the Riley Institute. Fraser, who coordinated the trip, says the 120 students participating in the VTM program were granted press passes and were granted the same access that journalists had to government officials, trade ministers and business executives.

While some of the Furman students used their time to interview conference attendees and mingle with international students, others toured the area to learn how Chile, once ruled by military dictator Augusto Pinochet, has developed into one of the fastest-growing economies in Latin America.

Don Gordon, director of the Riley Institute, says the university will participate in VTM-coordinated trips to South Korea and Vietnam, which will host APEC summits in 2005 and 2006, respectively.

For more information, contact Furman's Riley Institute at 864-294-3280.

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