

NADmag

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Deaf eyes

Identity

Sign

Language

*Fulton
Tontine & Revisited*

*Martha's
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Impact

DEAF HISTORY

Spotlight On...

PEN-International Promoting Worldwide Learning

by Kathleen S. Smith

The face of education for college-age deaf students in several countries abroad is changing at the speed of 21st century technology, thanks to the efforts of a grant program created in the United States called the Postsecondary Education Network International (PEN-International), based at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID), a college of Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) in Rochester, New York. PEN is changing and improving postsecondary education for deaf men and women in China, Japan, the Philippines, Russia, the Czech Republic, and Thailand. And if PEN partners in each country have their way, more institutions and more students will soon follow.

Led by Dr. James J. DeCaro, an experienced educator who served as dean of NTID for 14 years, PEN-International focuses on three goals:

- Professional development and training of faculty
- Creation of high-technology labs in universities worldwide
- Exchanges between faculty and student

Background

Created in 2001, PEN-International has brought its agenda of sound pedagogy, innovative educational technology, and multi-lateral collaboration to eight campuses worldwide. The program aims to improve and expand postsecondary education by sharing technology and expertise gleaned from decades of providing high quality education to deaf students in the United States.

"PEN-International is creating multilateral partnerships to meet the educational needs of collaborating institutions around the world," says T. Alan Hurwitz, vice president for RIT and dean for NTID. When DeCaro and former RIT Vice President for NTID Robert Davila approached The Nippon Foundation of Japan in 2000 about creating PEN-International, the proposal was met not only with enthusiasm but also with a five-year commitment of \$6 million to make it happen.

The Foundation, one of the world's largest, believes that "all people share a common duty of transcending antagonism and overcoming conflict, so that cultures of the world may instead establish consensus and provide assistance to each other."

DeCaro has spent nearly his entire professional career at NTID, the world's first, largest, and most advanced technological

college for deaf and hard of hearing students.

NTID and the collective wisdom of its faculty members have been crucial in helping PEN partners abroad create, develop, and modify their own educational technology and instructional interventions.



World-renowned Japanese deaf porcelain artist, Eiichi Mitsui (right, sitting), teaching deaf students at Ratchasuda College in Thailand.

PEN partners

In Japan, the Tsukuba College of Technology is the lead partner with NTID in the PEN-International enterprise. Tsukuba's Division for Hearing Impaired, part of the larger College, offers programs in design, mechanical engineering, architectural engineering, electronics, and information science to deaf students.

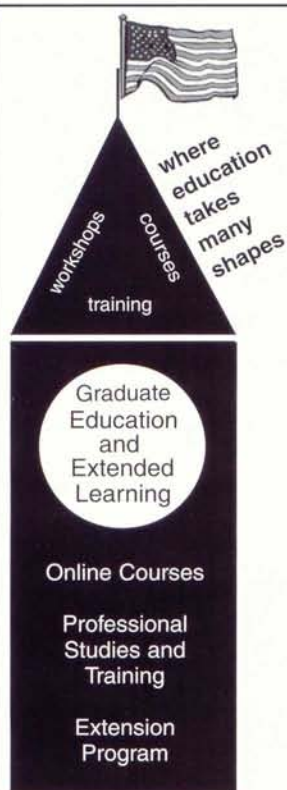
Rounding out the PEN group as partner institutions are Bauman Moscow State Technical University in Russia; Tianjin University of Technology and two other universities in China (Beijing Union University and Changchun University); De La Salle University-College of Saint Benilde in the Philippines; Charles University in Prague, Czech Republic; and Ratchasuda College of Mahidol University in Thailand. Each of these academic institutions has well-established programs for students who are deaf, and most serve at least 100 deaf students annually.

When a PEN partner is chosen, a needs assessment is conducted and plans are developed for appropriate faculty development and high technology to meet those needs. In most cases a multimedia lab, which would be used for classroom instruction, faculty development, and distance learning opportunities, was constructed at the sites.

"We are not in the business of imposing solutions," says DeCaro. "We at PEN believe strongly that our job is to work with partner institutions to meet their needs."



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Training and exchanges

Once faculty members have developed new skills, they are expected to train other colleagues in their respective countries and continue the growth of pedagogical and technological expertise in a positive "ripple effect."

Since many of the teachers at these institutions don't have the benefit of experience from years of teaching deaf students, PEN each year has arranged visits to NTID during which visiting faculty members can observe seasoned NTID professors and determine which strategies can be adapted or adopted for use at their home institutions.

PEN also has sponsored NTID professor Sid McQuay, who served as a PEN-International Visiting Scholar in the Philippines; and world-renowned Kutani porcelain artist Eiichi Mistui of Japan (deaf from birth) who spent three weeks as a PEN-International Artist-in-Residence at Ratchasuda College last year.



PEN Multimedia Lab at Moscow State Technical University in Russia.

Since another PEN goal is to support both virtual and real exchanges between students from participating colleges, Japanese, Filipino, Russian and Chinese delegations have visited the United States, and student groups from NTID have visited Russia and China. In each case, the opportunity to travel created profound learning experiences about cultural similarities and differences for students from the host countries as well as their guests. Forging learning and camaraderie among students perfectly epitomizes the PEN mission.

What's next for PEN?

The 2003 International Technology Symposium co-hosted by PEN and NTID where hundreds of educators from around the world convened for a weeklong conference to learn about and discuss the latest technological innovations used in educating deaf students was so successful that plans already are underway for the next Symposium, which will be held at NTID in June 2005. DeCaro and Clymer also are looking at colleges and universities in the Asia/Pacific Basin to add to the PEN family while monitoring the progress of programs and labs already established.

PEN chief benefactor, The Nippon Foundation, is pleased with the results of its investment. "The progress of PEN-International has far exceeded our expectations," says Foundation Executive Director Reizo Utagawa. ♦

Kathleen S. Smith is a free-lance writer based in Rochester, New York. She frequently writes about issues related to education and deafness.