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The Nippon Foundation Provides Continued Support for PEN-International

by Kathleen S. Smith



Sharing Knowledge Dr. James DeCaro, director of PEN-International, standing at left, gives a presentation for deaf students at Zhongzhou University in China. Translating the presentation into Chinese Sign Language for audience members is Yang Guo Wei, standing at center, who studied at RIT/NTID from 1999 to 2001.

The Postsecondary Education Network-International (PEN-International) is only five years old, but growing by leaps and bounds. The grant program's recent award of \$1.25 million from its sponsor, The Nippon Foundation of Japan, will send the program into its fifth year well positioned to make a significant impact on postsecondary education for deaf students in China, the Czech Republic, Japan, the Philippines, Russia and Thailand.

PEN's goal is to bring 21st century educational technology and sound educational practices to students, primarily in developing countries and mostly in the Pacific Basin. PEN currently works with eight colleges and universities worldwide, each of which

has a significant deaf student population. Dr. James DeCaro, PEN-International director, and Program Coordinator E. William Clymer recently visited Hong Kong and Korea to explore additional partnerships.

The Nippon Foundation, which has awarded PEN-International nearly \$6 million to date, is so pleased with the group's efforts thus far that Foundation Executive Director Shuichi Ohno asked the organization to submit a second five-year plan before the end of this academic year.

That's good news to DeCaro and Clymer, who together oversee PEN-International's efforts. The team recently added Dr. Denise Kavin, a deaf woman, who will handle operations in the Philippines as well as lead a summer

2006 institute in England that will focus on leadership and self-advocacy skill development for students from partner institutions.

"I am so pleased to be a part of a team where I can work as a member of a worldwide network that is making a significant difference in the post-secondary education of deaf men and women," Kavin says.

Another five years will mean the chance to offer additional programs and workshops on topics such as teaching English as a second language; leadership development for deaf student leaders from partner institutions; and teaching math, English and sign language to faculty members at partner colleges and universities. PEN-International uses selected NTID faculty members to offer most of its training.

"Involving NTID faculty members in these efforts is a winning proposition for everyone involved," says RIT Vice President and Dean for NTID Dr. T. Alan Hurwitz. "Our faculty benefit from the professional development opportunities that such workshops provide, and partners benefit from the opportunity to learn from some of our most respected and experienced educators."

Indeed, sharing the knowledge gained at NTID in the past 35 years is part of PEN-International's ultimate goal: to move each country from being an "importer" of its services to becoming "self-sufficient" and finally, to "exporter" status.

"Our colleagues in China, Russia, the Philippines and Japan are demonstrating this exceedingly well," says DeCaro. "Russia and China both have added three universities to their networks, and every partner is now exporting what they have learned within their home country."

"We are immensely satisfied with the work that members of the worldwide PEN-International team have achieved," said Ohno. "This is a very worthwhile project."