The University of Maryland (UM) has long recruited students from other countries, and young adults from around the world are a fixture on the College Park campus. But perhaps no other college has devoted more attention on international recruitment and exchange programs—especially with Asian universities—than the College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (AGNR). The college’s programs with universities in China, Taiwan, and India have grown tremendously in the last two years, with benefits not only for faculty, but also for students on both sides of the globe.
2+2 Equals UM Degree

For example, AGNR has become the first college at the University of Maryland to implement a "2+2" transfer program. Following two years of study at a foreign university, participating students transfer to Maryland where they complete their education and earn a bachelor's degree.

While visiting with University of Maryland President Dan Mote in 2004, then-President of China Agricultural University (CAU) Chen inquired if AGNR would be interested in developing a 2+2 program with CAU. They agreed that providing undergraduate students the opportunity to interact with and get to know undergraduates from different cultures would be advantageous for students from both the United States and China and began developing a memorandum of understanding to institute such a program.

CAU in Beijing is the first foreign university to partner with Maryland in this exciting venture. AGNR dean, Dr. Cheng-i Wei, and Dr. Ray Miller, director of the college’s Office of International Programs in Agriculture and Natural Resources (IPAN), met with CAU students on a trip to China, where they presented an overview of UM and AGNR programs. Eighteen students subsequently applied to participate in the 2+2 program in a highly competitive process. Nine—chosen by UM administrators because of their grades and English language scores—arrived in College Park last August.

According to Dean Wei, "The UM chapter of the Chinese Student and Scholar Association (CSSA) has been helpful in assisting the students with locating housing, and giving advice on such subjects as culture shock and when to seek class help. Most U.S. science classes are taught in the inquiry-based model in which students perform hands-on experiments and develop critical reasoning skills." This is a very different style of teaching than in China where most classes are in the stand-up-and-deliver mode.

Based on the success of the 2+2 program so far, AGNR administrators are currently discussing similar
arrangements with Northwest Agriculture and Forestry University (NWAFU) in Yangling, China, and National Taiwan University, that country’s leading agricultural university. Wei hopes that students from NWAFU will enroll at Maryland this year.

And, building on the video conferencing experience developed to deliver continuing education workshops to Russia, Wei and the UM Office of International Programs have secured initial Taiwan government financing to offer graduate courses on the environment and nutritional genomics using this technology. Drs. Bruce James of the Department of Environmental Science and Technology and Wen-Hsing Cheng of the Department of Nutrition and Food Science will lead these courses to be co-taught with colleagues at National Taiwan University beginning in fall 2009.

Vet Med Crosses Borders

AGNR’s opportunities for students from abroad aren’t limited to Chinese. Thanks to the efforts of Dr. Siba Samal, associate dean and professor of the Virginia-Maryland Regional College of Veterinary Medicine (VMRCVM), for example, relationships have been strengthened with Indian veterinary colleges, including Haryana Agricultural University’s Veterinary College and Tamil Nadu Veterinary and Animal Sciences University.

In the past two years, three students from these colleges have completed short-term exchanges with AGNR. While here, they focused on learning about DNA sequencing and animal disease treatments that are not yet common in India. They have been impressed with the quality of medicine and level of technology used in the small animal hospitals that they have visited, saying that even their veterinary college did not have some of the equipment that is fairly routine for most urban U.S. veterinary hospitals.

According to Dr. Bettye Walters, director of the VMRCVM Center for Public and Corporate Veterinary Medicine, who mentors these students, “The cultural awareness these students gain is as important as the increased knowledge in the veterinary field that they acquire. For example, the students spoke of how much they enjoyed trying new foods at various restaurants and how impressed they were that the traffic here was so ‘orderly’ and that we didn’t use our car horns nearly as much as they do in major cities in India.”

Jessica Pizzillo, a fourth-year VMRCVM student who traveled to India in December to learn about animal care in the developing world, says the experience is equally valuable for American students studying abroad. “Traveling to another country gives us an opportunity to see animal diseases like foot and mouth disease that we would never see in the United States and to observe medicine practiced in a way that is very different from what we have ever experienced,” she says.

Adds Miller: “Stepping outside of their own cultures to live and study in a foreign country may influence these students’ education and career choices, launch lifelong pursuits, increase cultural tolerance and understanding, and facilitate lasting friendships.”
EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

The College of Agriculture and Natural Resources (AGNR) is also discussing lending its expertise in developing Cooperative Extension capabilities with China’s Northwest Agriculture and Forestry University (NWAFU). Although Extension exists in China, it is administered by the Ministry of Agriculture, rather than through the university system. Communicating research to farmers has not been done consistently throughout China and provincial governments have not used Extension to help farmers increase agricultural productivity or combat hunger and poverty in China.

Maryland Extension specialists Susan Schoenian and David Martin visited NWAFU in October 2008 to assess the potential for a goat and sheep program and apple production. Susan visited Fuping County in China, where there are more dairy goats than in all of the United States. The demand for goat products is low but Susan sees opportunities for a UM-NWAFU collaboration that could train NWAFU professors and graduate students to work directly with farmers, and teach the farmers how to improve goat farm productivity and farm management.

China is the largest apple producer in the world, and the area near NWAFU is the largest apple juice producer. AGNR might provide advice on apple production systems, program evaluation, treating apple tree diseases, and improving irrigation and pruning techniques.