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OU group shares trip to China with campus

By **Jennifer Charney**, *OU Staff Writer*

Why should we care about China? Because more than one person in six in the world lives in China; and as the nation is developing and growing, it's becoming increasingly important.

That was the message from OU China scholar Richard Stamps, professor, **Department of Sociology and Anthropology**, at a celebration of Oakland's Cultural Awareness Week. Stamps' slide show and presentation, sponsored by the **Oakland University Alumni Association**, covered recent tours he has led to China for OU community members. Last week's 2001 China Connection presentation drew 120 OU staff, faculty, alumni, students and community members, many of whom attended the trips.

"As President Bush tries to build coalitions, he can't do it without the Chinese," Stamps said. "Economically, politically, militarily, culturally, there's a lot in China that we can learn from. We need to understand them."

For this reason OU has created many programs with ties to China. One is the Ambassador Leonard Woodcock Legacy, which Stamps chairs. The program promotes understanding between the United States and China in areas such as trade relations, international law, politics and education. It also fosters exchanges of faculty and students between the two nations.

During the presentation Stamps announced a new program to further OU students' understanding of China. The Woodcock Legacy Scholarship Program will support students who are studying Chinese language.

The presentation was appropriate in celebration of Cultural Awareness Week for reason that may be surprising: China's ethnic and religious groups are diverse.

Stamps said religious tolerance is part of China's constitution. The majority of the people in China follow traditional Taoist ways. But the nation's other faiths, from most popular to least popular, are Buddhism, Islam and Christianity.

The audience viewed slides of the 16-day May 2001 China Study Tour, on which Stamps led 16 OU students, staff, alumni and friends. The group visited Beijing, the modern capital; The Great Wall; Ming tombs; Xian, the ancient capital; scenic Guilin; rural Yangshuo; and bustling Shanghai.

In Xian, the group visited the first emperor's burial complex. "In a huge pit full of archeological remains there's a buried army of 6,000 life-size terra-cotta figurines all lined up to protect the emperor and his trip into the next world. It represents the power in the strength better emperor had," he said.

Because 70 percent of the Chinese people still live in the countryside, Stamps took the group to experience that lifestyle. "On one of our side trips, we persuaded the driver to pull over so we could visit a Chinese family."

Stamps presentation was in the context of Oakland University's Creating the Future initiative, when university faculty and staff consulted local government and business leaders to determine OU's direction. One of those directions is that OU should assume a leadership role in preparing all of its constituents for an increasingly international and diverse world.

"There's a widely perceived need to provide both our students and the community more programs and opportunities which increase understanding of diverse cultures," Stamps said. "Students need experiences and educational offerings that reinforce their appreciation so that they may better understand cultures' commonalities and differences. And indeed that's what we've been trying to do at Oakland University."

That effort will continue in future study tours: In 2002, Stamps and the OU Alumni Association will return to China; in 2003, it will visit Tibet; and in 2004, the Silk Road, a group of ancient trade routes that connected China and Europe. For more information, visit www.ChinaStudyTour.com or e-mail Stamps@oakland.edu.

SUMMARY

OU Sociology Professor Richard Stamps presented a slide show covering recent tours he has led to China for OU community members.

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