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Visiting scholar shadows city workers

By **Jeff Samoray**, *OU Web Writer*

Ling Wei, visiting scholar in Oakland University's **Political Science Department** and lecturer in English at the **Foreign Affairs College** in Beijing, had a unique opportunity to become exposed to American public administration and learn concepts that she will take back to China after visiting officials and workers from the **City of Auburn Hills**.

The departments and offices Wei visited over eight days include the City Clerk's Office and Assessing, Community Development, Finance, Fire/Rescue, Parks and Recreation, Police, Public Library, Public Services, Senior Services, and Treasurer's Department. OU alumnus and Assistant City Manager Tom Tanghe coordinated Wei's visits.

Wei, whose husband works for the Ministry of Construction in Beijing, said the concepts applied in Auburn Hills could be of great benefit to the Chinese people.

"In general, I was very impressed by the services," Wei said. "The city government is very devoted to serving the public. I was also very impressed by how the city is governed. In the United States, there seems to be more self-government by the citizens. Residents can find ways to participate in managing a city or community."

In each encounter, Wei met with department heads and learned how each department or office operates. In some cases, she was shown various instruments and facilities and visited work and construction sites.

"I think the Public Services Department takes great efforts to educate the people about the city's facilities," Wei said. "For example, I took a tour around the city with the storm water manager. A sign is placed at each (storm water) catch basin asking people not to pollute the water by dumping oil or other materials. In many cities in China, the city and storm water go to the same pipe.

"I also was very impressed by the wetlands. Great Lakes Crossing was built on an existing wetland area, so the city created a new one in exchange. It was man-made, but very natural. The department makes great efforts to serve the community."

Other memorable occurrences came when Wei accompanied the fire/rescue and police departments on runs.

"I was on a patrol with a woman police officer who responded to an incident involving retail fraud," Wei said. "A person stole a \$29 nail clipper but was caught and arrested. The person was a retired man who was very embarrassed and said he had never done something like that before. But the officer showed him a lot of respect and tried hard not to hurt his dignity."

"I also went out with ambulances on various runs. On one emergency call, a woman had been painting her home inside with the windows shut. She appeared to have been overcome by the fumes, and she passed out and fell off the ladder. The firefighters felt she had a concussion. One firefighter kept talking to her while she was in the ambulance on the way to the hospital. They showed that they really cared by trying hard to relieve her pain."

Wei also visited the United Way in Pontiac to learn how nonprofit organizations work.

"At first, I was puzzled and asked myself why people would want to work in the public sector when there is more money to be made in the private sector," Wei said. "But many people in nonprofits love serving the public. This devotion to the community moved me. Americans are individualists, but not exclusively. They are also devoted to helping people as much as they can."

Wei plans to share her insights on the way local American governments and departments are run through newspaper and journal articles when she returns home in August.

"I think there is a big gap in terms of wealth between the United States and China," Wei said. "But there are still many things for us to learn."

The Foreign Affairs College is the only institution associated with the Chinese Foreign Ministry. It is a leading institution in the field of international studies in China. In May 2002, Oakland University formed a global partnership with the college by entering into an agreement to establish an exchange of scholars.

For more information on its facilities, programs and faculty, visit the [Foreign Affairs College](#) Web site.

SUMMARY

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