

Teachers travel far for unique Claremont experience



COURIER photo/Steven Felschundneff
History teacher Jennifer Gomez shows visiting Ukrainian teacher Kateryna Astakhova her lesson plan last week at Claremont High School. Ms. Astakhova is one of 22 educators from 12 countries participating in a teacher development program sponsored by Claremont Graduate University.

Twenty-two educators from throughout the world are getting a taste of American education and culture over the next month in Claremont.

Claremont Graduate University's Teaching Excellence and Achievement (TEA) program has implemented a 6-week program to provide professional development for the teachers, allow them to work with teachers and students from Claremont High School and El Roble Intermediate School and take part in cultural and social activities.

"We've done a number of different efforts [leading up to this] but this is the first time we've done something like this," said DeLacy Ganley, co-director of CGU's Teacher Education Program. "Two years ago, we took 12 students to Vietnam for a month. And now through our partnerships with universities abroad, we are able to bring some of the world to Claremont."

Colombia, El Salvador, Ghana, India, Kazakhstan, Morocco, Poland, Romania, Russia, Rwanda,



COURIER photo/Jonathan Gibby
ABOVE: Diana Melian of Romania, far right, speaks to Piyatida Namwijit and Suparat Kham-on of Thailand before a lunch held to celebrate the arrival of the Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program students in September at Claremont Graduate University. The students will be taking professional development classes for the next 6 weeks at CGU.



LEFT: Visiting Ukrainian teacher Yuliia Nikul asks CHS students, Lexii Parks and Brandon Ziska, about their project. Ms. Nikul teaches English and is the principal's assistant in the Ukarine.


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Ukraine and Thailand are the 12 countries represented within the group of 22 educators. The Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs funded the grant to allow CGU to be one of 4 universities in the nation to host the teachers.

English-language teacher Anna Shilyaeva (Russia) wanted to take part in the program due to the significant population of Americans within Russian schools. She also believes the exchange of ideas and training will allow her to be a more effective teacher in her home country.

"I want to experience new people and new ideas," Ms. Shilyaeva said, "Claremont Graduate University is a good university, not only to learn about Americans but to also learn about other cultures and other parts of the world. Lots of Americans come to our schools [in Russia] and it's important to know how to deal with them. It's easier if we know how they live."

Many of the teachers are looking forward to the technology portion of professional development. Geography teacher Pratima Menon of India said her school could benefit from more technology.

"I'm looking forward to learning how to use technology in the classroom," she said. "I think I can better attract my students to class with technology."

Several of the teachers started visiting high school



COURIER photo/Jonathan Gibby
Piyatida Namwijit and Suparat Kham-on of Thailand are perplexed after their introduction to salsa during a lunch held at Claremont Graduate University the last week of September.

and junior high classrooms in Claremont last week. Yuliia Nikul, an English-language teacher and assistant principal in the Ukraine, has been interacting with students in CHS teacher Kim Watkins' junior English course.

"I think the school [CHS] is really huge. It has different buildings where in the Ukraine we just have one school building," Ms. Nikul said. "Here the students talk about lots of things, they're engaged and they ask a lot of questions. It's very interesting."

Student engagement is an aspect Diana Melian of

Romania finds unique to American education. Ms. Melian is currently observing one of CHS teacher Molly Arboleta's social science classes.

"The methods are different and much more engaging [in America]," she explained. "The students are allowed to do more in the classroom and everything is much more informal. I really like the methods."

Ms. Watkins views the visits as a learning experience for CHS teachers as well.

"It's interesting to compare different cultures and philosophies of education and I look forward to learning more about the Ukraine," she said. "It's important to foster more international awareness so that we're not always in this little Claremont bubble. You learn that there's more than one way of doing things."

Apart from the professional development, the educators have experienced Southern California culture through visits to the L.A. County Fair, Venice Beach and hiking trips. The teachers have participated in activities with their designated host families as well.

CHS students such as Hannah Pruitt believe seeing the educators in person allows them to have a face-to-face encounter with another culture.

"I think it's awesome," the CHS junior said. "It's nice to learn about how teachers are from somewhere else. It's just nice to learn about other countries by being able to interact with people from other countries."

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