

InterVU

with XIU CRAVENS,

Assistant Dean for International Affairs at Peabody College

In the fall, *Vanderbilt International* asked Xiu Cravens, Peabody College's new Assistant Dean for International Affairs, a few questions about her role and international collaborations at Peabody.

VI: Can you tell our readers a little bit about yourself and where you grew up?

Xiu: I came from a family that values diversity and cross-cultural learning. My father is a linguist who taught Chinese to foreign university students. I was a linguist and literature major at Peking University, and when I left China in 1989, I thought the door between the two worlds of mine was forever closed. I am so glad that I was wrong. I benefited from excellent education programs in both China and the United States. I received my Ph.D. from Peabody College and have had some of the best mentors along the way to help me prepare for my future roles. Today, no matter what we do, it is more important than ever for us to be in dialogue globally. I feel incredibly fortunate to be a part of this dialogue.

VI: What is your main goal as the Assistant Dean for International Affairs at Peabody?

Xiu: We would like to build a platform on which knowledge in teaching, learning, and educational leadership are shared and advanced in a global context.

Specifically, I have three objectives. First, to establish and solidify research collaborations with core partnering international institutions. It is important that we build relationships that will lead to substantive academic work that are of mutual interest to both institutions and will lead to improved educational outcomes. Second, to facilitate, establish, and coordinate research interests and actions among entities or individuals within the Vanderbilt and Peabody community. There are many great projects happening as we speak and such great energies can be even more powerful when they are connected and leveraged. And third, to identify and seek suitable resources to support the internationalization efforts and to ensure that partnerships and projects are sustainable.

VI: What is your favorite part of the job?

Xiu: So much of how education takes place is contextual and deeply impacted by history, culture, and the political landscape. There are many conceptual and empirical challenges to sharing



ideas and models validly and reliably. It is no surprise that while collaborative research and teaching practices are well established in many other disciplines, very few have taken root in the field of education. We are all looking for the best common language.

My favorite part of the job is being a “linguist” that builds meaningful collaborations in the field of education: to facilitate dialogues, to deepen the understanding of communications, and to identify themes that emerge worthy of substantive actions. I am proud to take part in Peabody’s endeavor to be a future leader in this area.

VI: How is Peabody impacting the world’s education systems?

Xiu: Peabody College currently has active collaborations with university partners in countries such as China, Australia, Vietnam, Japan, Korea, Singapore, Russia, and Georgia. Dean Camilla Benbow and Assistant Provost for International Affairs Joel Harrington recently led a Peabody delegation to three major Chinese universities (Beijing Normal University, Fudan University, and Hong Kong Institute of Education) to discuss long-term collaborative oppor-

tunities in education administration, teaching and learning, and special education. We hope to establish sustainable exchanges at multiple levels: faculty research, student learning, and professional development for practitioners.

Our faculty members are engaging in many international research projects and collaborations, such as education leadership development, assessment and evaluation (the United Kingdom, China, Hong Kong), higher education policy and management (former Soviet Republics), mathematics teaching and learning (Australia), and child mental health (Vietnam).

VI: In your eyes, why is working in partnership with others important to Vanderbilt?

Xiu: Engaging with our peers internationally is no longer just an option or simply enriching. It is an essential element of how we conduct academic work. We have a responsibility to help our students get informed and be prepared to work in a multicultural world and to seek solutions to global problems. And as faculty, we must model this way of thinking ourselves. As the second-ranked College of Education in the U.S., Peabody is uniquely positioned to make a contribution on this front.

VI: How do students play an integral role in internationalization?

Xiu: Our outreach to international students focuses on academic integration. For example, we now have an International Education Brown Bag Lunch series where every other week a speaker will present research or information on an education topic with international perspectives. This has been a great venue for faculty, international students, and U.S. students interested in international issues to meet and discuss relevant issues.

VI: And finally, one last question. Where is your favorite place to travel?

Xiu: I love touring the preserved historical towns of China. Recently, I visited a small town at the outskirts of Shanghai. Only an hour away from one of the most metropolitan cities in the world, and we saw this beautiful and peaceful village of small river alleys and stone bridges. It is wonderful to see the new and old coexist so well together.

At the request of Chancellor Nicholas Zeppos and Provost Richard McCarty, and encouraged by the VU Chinese Scholars and Student Association, the Vanderbilt International Office worked closely with schools and departments over the past several months to explore viable options to participate in the reconstruction of areas impacted by the May 2008 earthquake in Sichuan, China. The quake killed at least 69,000 people and injured approximately 370,000, the deadliest quake since the Tangshan earthquake in 1976, according to Chinese sources.

In December eight faculty and staff members from Vanderbilt attended the U.S.-China Academic Conference on Public Health to discuss long-term relief efforts for the province's largest city, Du Jiang Yan. The visit builds on a decade-long partnership between the Shanghai Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the Vanderbilt Institute for Medicine and Public Health.

"The visit to this earthquake-stricken city by a team of VU experts from multiple disciplines was an important first step for us to explore the possibility of being a part of a very unique kind of collective effort," said Xiu Cravens, Assistant Dean for International Affairs at Peabody College and the university's China liaison, who led the trip. The delegation offered expert advice and gave presentations on various topics—including chronic illness management for public health, mental health, and hospital quality management—to 150 national, provincial, and local officials. While in China, members also visited local sites, such as villages that were destroyed in the earthquakes, temporary residential areas for displaced citizens, and health clinics in the region.

"Future collaborations among Shanghai CDC, Vanderbilt University, and the city of Du Jiang Yan on these areas, if we can make it happen, may serve as a model of international collaboration that brings together teaching and research, municipal services, and government support to build a newer and better public health system that will benefit the lives of those most in need for many years to come," said Cravens.

Delegation members, in addition to Cravens, included: Catherine Fuchs, Division Chief of Child Psychiatry; Bahr Weiss, Co-Director, Center for Psychotherapy Research and Policy at the Institute for Public Policy Studies; Carol Etherington, Assistant Professor at the Institute for Global Health; Robert Dittus, Director of the Institute for Medicine and Public Health; Wei Zheng, Director of the Vanderbilt Epidemiology Center; Howard Fuchs, Associate Professor of Medicine; and Stephen Guillot, Director of the National Center for Emergency Preparedness in the School of Nursing.