

EDUCATION

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Local student travels to China with BSU music group

BSU STAFF REPORT

Shortly after commencement in May, Dr. Del Lyren, professor of music at Bemidji State University, set out on a four-week tour with “Voltage,” the university’s five-person student electronic music ensemble.

The tour was unlike any other experienced by the musicians, however, as it involved a trans-Pacific journey to China.

As part of the university’s expanding international efforts, arrangements were made for Voltage to participate in a month-long exchange program with Weifang University in Weifang, China. The students were sent to introduce

electronic music and composition in an environment dominated by traditional instruments such as piano and violin.

Lyren, who supervised the trip for BSU, was joined by:

- Molly Bass, a music major pursuing a teaching certification from Slayton;
- Judah Chezick; a business administration major from International Falls;
- Jessica Lindquist, a music major pursuing a teaching certification from Victoria;
- Josh May, a music and liberal arts major from Maple Grove; and
- Ben Schreiber, a music major pursuing a teaching certification from Bemidji.

■ The group departed Bemidji in early May, arriving in China after a lengthy trip that included a layover in Japan.

Before leaving on the trip, the students participated in a half-semester preparatory course taught by Hongxia Sui, one of two visiting professors in Chinese hosted by Bemidji State during the 2012-13 academic year.

Weifang, located near the center of China’s Shangdong provence, is a city with a population of just over nine million, with 1.5 million residents living in the main metropolitan area.

Voltage arrived in Weifang on a Thursday, and after a three-day adjustment period began taking

classes and rehearsing for its final concert the following Monday.

Lyren and the students began taking classes in Chinese language, and also learned about Chinese culture by studying a variety of subjects including cooking, calligraphy and tai-chi. The group made dumplings and spent hours practicing how to write Chinese pictograms.

The trip culminated with a final concert on campus at Weifang University, attended by students, faculty and the university’s president. Preparations for that concert were intense, and the group spent several hours a day rehearsing.

The music not only helped

the Voltage students settle into a comfort zone of familiar practices and sounds, it also helped them bridge a language and cultural barrier with the Chinese students they worked with for the concert.

Schreiber said that after the concert ended, the group was swarmed by people from the audience asking to have their photo taken with the group or wanting autographs.

“The students thought they were rock stars,” Lyren said.

For the students in Voltage, the Weifang trip provided a lifetime of memories and an unparalleled opportunity to experience life in a new culture.

The group also successfully completed its goal of building the relationship between the universities in Weifang and Bemidji. “This was a good way to solidify the relationship between Weifang and Bemidji State,” Lyren said. “While we were there, we hung out quite a bit with the eight Weifang students who are coming to BSU in August; that was exciting. We’re going to have them and our students who are over there working now over to our house for a big American meal this fall.

“I appreciate the university giving us this opportunity,” he said. “It really was the opportunity of a lifetime for all of us.”

Sen. Franken’s statement on his vote for the student loan deal

SEN. AL FRANKEN STAFF REPORT

U.S. Sen. Al Franken, D-Minn., recently made the following statement after voting to cut the interest rates on federal student loans. The Bipartisan Student Loan Certainty Act, which passed the Senate 81-to-18, would immediately lower rates for all student borrowers and their families taking out loans and would retroactively fix the doubling of rates that happened on July 1.

“Making college more affordable for Minnesota students has been a priority of mine since I joined the Senate. And my main goal throughout this process was to make sure we got students the best deal possible, which is why I supported this compromise,” said Franken. “I voted for this legislation because it will keep rates down for hundreds of thousands of Minnesota students and their families now, and it includes a cap on interest rates. Now, this was a compromise, and like all compromises, there were some things in this bill that I didn’t like. I still believe we need to address college affordability in a comprehensive way, and I intend to keep working on this issue because students shouldn’t be saddled with insurmountable debt when they graduate.”

Franken and Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., introduced an amendment to the bill that would have redirected profits from the

student loan deal to fund the federal Pell Grant Program, but that amendment never got a vote. Another amendment Franken supported that would have improved the deal by lowering the interest rate cap for students, offering them more protection, failed to pass.

Franken has long been a champion of making the cost of college more affordable for students and their families. Last month he introduced with several of his colleagues the Keep Student Loans Affordable Act of 2013. The bill, which failed to meet the 60-vote threshold to break a filibuster, extended and fully paid for an additional year of the 3.4 percent interest rate on subsidized Stafford loans, giving Congress the opportunity to find a long-term and sustainable solution.

In addition, Franken is a cosponsor of the Student Loan Affordability Act — which received majority support but was also filibustered in the Senate by the minority — that would have locked in the 3.4 percent interest rate on new subsidized Stafford loans for two years. He also cosponsored the Bank on Students Loan Fairness Act, introduced by Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., which would allow students to pay the same interest rate on their student loans that banks pay on the money they borrow from the Federal Reserve’s discount window, currently 0.75 percent.

“Before this compromise

was negotiated, I cosponsored two bills that would have kept the interest rate for subsidized Stafford loans at 3.4 percent so Congress could have time to work out an even better long-term solution,” said Franken. “And I was very frustrated that while we got a majority of votes in the Senate, we couldn’t get the 60 votes necessary to break a Republican filibuster.”

He is also the author of the Understanding the True Cost of College Act, which would clarify what financial aid families will receive from a school and create standard terms for the aid offered so that students can accurately compare offers from different schools. Currently, schools do not use standard definitions or names for different types of aid, so students and families often report having difficulty differentiating between grant aid, which does not need to be repaid, and student loans, which do need to be repaid.

Lastly, Franken is the author of the Accelerated Learning Act — which was recently incorporated into the Senate bill to replace the so-called “No Child Left Behind” law — that would help make college affordable by expanding access to accelerated learning models like AP, IB, dual enrollment, and early college high schools for low-income students. This would allow students to get college credit while in high school and earn their college degree more quickly.

EDUCATION BRIEFS

Nicholson receives degree from University of Wisconsin-Madison
Emily Michelle Nicholson, of International Falls, received a master of physician assistant studies, physician assistant, degree at the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s spring commencement ceremonies May 17-19 at the Kohl Center.

Phung selected to University of Minnesota Twin Cities dean’s list
Calvin Phung, of International Falls, was honored for academic success during the 2013 spring semester and named to the dean’s list at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities.

To qualify for the dean’s

list, a student must complete 12 or more letter-graded credits while attaining a 3.66 grade point average.

Phung is a student in the College of Liberal Arts.

Gelo graduates from Grand Valley State University
Raphael Gelo, of Kabetogama, was among those on the graduate list for the winter 2013 semester ending in April at Grand Valley State University, Allendale, Mich.

Gelo received a bachelor of science degree.

Currier named to Riverland Community College dean’s list
John Currier, of International Falls, was named to the 2013 spring semester

dean’s list at Riverland Community College.

To be eligible for the dean’s list students must have completed 12 credits per semester with letter grades and have earned a grade point average of 3.25 to 3.99 on a 4.00 scale.

Kuldanek graduates from UW-Eau Claire
Michael Kuldanek, of International Falls, was among students taking part in commencement exercises May 18 at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire, at Zorn Arena.

Kuldanek received a master of science degree, education and human sciences, communication sciences and disorders.





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