

International influencer

Hong Rost helps give campus a global flavor

Hong Rost knows what it's like moving to a foreign country as an apprehensive college student. She was one of them — from central China — in the early '90s. Now, she's helping to bring others from nearly 50 countries to the Coulee Region and helping American students get overseas.

As assistant director in the International Education Office, Rost works with campus colleges and departments to start and expand international programming. Much has changed since she began in the International Education Office as a graduate student intern in the early '90s.

The number of students studying abroad has increased to more than 500. The university now has 30 exchange partners, up from half a dozen. And the number of international students on campus has expanded to the 400 expected this fall.

In a more global world, expansion is necessary, explains Rost. "We try to bring the world to La Crosse," she says. "This gives our students an opportunity to learn about different cultures they may eventually experience in their careers. It's not a luxury anymore, it's become more of a necessity."

Rost's firsthand experience with international exchanges is appreciated by campus colleagues. Amelia Dittman, assistant to the dean in the College of Business Administration, credits Rost for helping her college with new initiatives.

"On Asian recruiting trips, not only is her Chinese language ability and knowledge a priceless asset, but so is her willingness to go much beyond the extra mile in meeting with prospective students and their families," notes Dittman. "She will meet them at midnight if that's the only time available. She is very proud of UW-L and our programs and is tireless in

her efforts to attract international students."

Rost is proud to be part of a team effort by International Education Office staff who picks up students at the airport. They help students when they become sick. And since 9-11, they make sure proper paperwork is filed so students don't find their stays shorter than expected.

"I understand the difficulty they run into and what they are going through living in a new country," explains Rost. "That's why we're here, to help them adjust to the U.S."

Rost says the job of welcoming students to the U.S. is made easier by the area's welcome mat. The La Crosse Friends of International Students group includes hundreds of area residents willing to help students adjust to a new country. At holidays, many open their homes for the students to discover American traditions firsthand.

"These offers have been extremely popular with our international students," notes Rost. "The community and campus are really so

welcoming to international students."

Rost has impacted hundreds of students worldwide — and she has hand-written and e-mail thank yous to prove it. But she gets much from them as well. "I love students," Rost says. "They enrich my life every day."

The office's team atmosphere provides groundwork for happy international students and an ever-growing program. Rost credits office colleagues for receiving the Academic Staff Excellence Award from peers campuswide. "There's no way to achieve this goal by myself," she notes. "My office provided the teamwork."



The Hong Rost file

- **Assistant director of the Office of International Education since 1995.**
- **Campus service: has obtained more than \$300,000 in grants for international students; member of various Academic Staff Council committees.**
- **Community service: La Crosse Luoyang Sister City Association; International Committee of the City of La Crosse; foreign language services for area businesses.**
- **Holds a master of science in education, college student personnel, from UW-L in 1994. Also, a graduate certificate from Luoyang Institute of Technology and a bachelor of arts from Henan Normal University.**