

Developing International Programs for the Needs of Local Socio-economic Development

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Abstract

The purpose of this presentation is to briefly introduce the development of international exchange programs at the Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (GDUFS) and to discuss the issues in the promotion of the exchange programs among Asian universities.

The exchange programs at GDUFS have been aiming at serving the needs of rapid socio-economic development in Guangdong Province, a forerunner of the modernization process in China. Guangdong University of Foreign Studies is one of the prestigious universities of international studies in China and one of the key institutions of higher learning in Guangdong Province. As the name of the university suggests, we attach great importance to the preparation of university graduates who are equipped with the ability to work for and to contribute to international collaboration and competition in the

process of China's integration with the world economy. This means that the students at GDUFS are trained to become specialists in their respective fields on the one hand, and develop in general qualities featuring good command of foreign language(s) and cross-cultural awareness in their performance in international business communication on the other. This clearly indicates the importance of international academic exchange in the undergraduate programs of the university.

Guangdong, a province in the southern part of China, covers an area of 179,766 square kilometers, making up only 1.9% of China's land area. However, its contribution to the national economy has been ranking the top among all the provinces in China, with its GDP (1.604 trillion yuan in 2004) accounting for 11.75% of the total GDP of China (13.65 trillion yuan) in 2004. Its total import/export volume accounts for 1/3 (US\$ 357.13 billion, 33.3% of China's import/export in 2003) of the total volume in China. The simple statistical figures suggest that Guangdong has developed an economy that has been highly integrated with the world economic system. The social development in the area has also been regarded as the pace setter in China's social reform. In such a socio-economic context, higher education plays a very important role in shaping the future development. The Guangdong University of Foreign Studies has the mission to provide the province as well as other parts of Southern China with university graduates who will not only have an international vision and but also the ability to serve the international business sector and the social development in the region.

To serve the needs of socio-economic development in the region, we have attached great importance to, and have actively conducted, academic and cultural exchanges with overseas institutions in addition to the reform of the course structure of the undergraduate programs. Such exchanges and collaborations are on the increase and cover more and more areas. We have so far established links with over 40 universities, academic institutions and cultural organizations in other countries and regions, like those in the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Canada, Australia, Japan, Russia, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Hong Kong and Macao, etc. One of the features of the international exchanges so far is that there are far more collaboration programs between GDUFS and universities in the English speaking countries, such as UK, USA, Canada and Australia. We feel that there is an urgent need to further strengthen and expand our exchange programs with Asian universities as international business cooperation with enterprises from Asian countries has been growing rapidly in the province. In the presentation, the experience of our existing programs will be introduced and some of the key issues such as mutual recognition of students' academic credits and the facilitation of financial arrangements will be addressed. It is hoped that the Forum will play a further role in promoting academic exchanges among Asian universities.

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