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### **GWU School of Divinity Students Take Cultural Immersion Trip Across Asia**

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# GWU School of Divinity Students Take Cultural Immersion Trip Across Asia

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Office of University  
Communications

November 5, 2014

## *Intercultural Studies Course Trains Students to be Global Citizens*

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – Gardner-Webb University

intercultural studies students travelled on a two-week mission trip across Asia for a cultural immersion experience this summer, visiting the countries of Singapore, Indonesia, Philippines, South Korea, and Malaysia. The trip was offered to students at a reduced rate as part of the School of Divinity's Intercultural Studies (ICS) Practicum Mission Immersion class.

Dr. Tereso (Terry) Casiño, professor of Missiology and Intercultural Studies in the School of Divinity at Gardner-Webb, shared the story of their multi-nation trek, emphasizing that the unique experiences could not be reproduced in a classroom environment. "There's no substitute for our students being there," Casiño said. "Nothing replaces getting acquainted with locals in their own countries. That was one of the goals I had—basically exposing students to the realities outside of North America. They realized that the Lord is doing something we haven't heard before."

The primary goal of cultural immersion is to experience and understand the culture of the region among its people. Three overarching goals were set for the students during the

Asia trip: exposure to different worldviews, languages, and religious traditions; immersion into non-gospel dominated countries; experience with different movements in ministry and missions practice. The main way of accomplishing these goals was through observation and participation—talking to locals and relating to them as best as possible.

Taken at the DMZ, North-South Korea Border

Casiño shared the story of how his heart for missiology developed while serving among the Cordilleran tribes in the Philippines. "It allowed me to understand how systematic theology can be understood and expressed in the context of culture," he said. "Sometimes theology can be abstract, but it helps me understand how I should consider cultural forms and meanings within cultures, not just my meaning as a theologian." He expressed a two-fold approach to missiology: communicating the content of biblical truth and appropriating that content within the culture.

The group experienced first hand what it's like to live in a country where Christianity is a minority religion, among other realities such as widespread poverty and diaspora, the dispersion of millions of people from their homeland. "Most of our students came to the same conclusion—the struggles in Asia are the same struggles we have here," Casiño shared. "The difference is sometimes we can become complacent here in not seeing them as opportunities for the gospel."

Christian education major, Denise Hopper, reflected on the kind of people they encountered on the trip, such as their time with two missionary women in Indonesia who taught in a hostile environment.

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Discipleship game with Rev. Joshua Tham in Malaysia

"Boiling it down to one word that impressed me the most: joy—genuine joy—the kind of joy that can only come from living in Christ. To have that joy when you're living under threat of life, and to be able to meet them, share a meal with them, and to walk alongside them—it made it real. You can read about it, but there's nothing like meeting with them where they minister." She spoke of a church of nannies in Singapore who worked tirelessly for small gains within an environment with extremely limited freedom. "You would never know their conditions by the way they worship," she said.

Hopper was also impressed by the youth of South Korea. "The Christianity was a natural part of who they were. It wasn't compartmentalized at all, and it wasn't something overt," she shared. "It was a natural way of being. We could use that kind of holistic approach here in the West."

Ninety percent of the mission immersion class is hands-on, experiential learning on the field, led primarily by the students and guided by the professor. Casiño expects next year's summer class to travel to the Asia Pacific region.

"The students have a stronger sense of what it means to make a difference in a globalizing world," Casiño said. "This is what Gardner-Webb is all about—training our students to be global citizens."

*Located in Boiling Springs, N.C., Gardner-Webb University blends a liberal arts core curriculum with more than 55 major and minor professional programs of study, a comprehensive academic experience that flows from our Christian commitment to intellectual freedom, service and leadership.*