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Spreading faith overseas

Professor cites growing need to teach English abroad

AUBREE REICHEL | The Journal Gazette

In 1986, Luke Fetters and his wife committed to a four-year excursion to Macau in southern China to plant a church and teach English.

Instead of returning to the United States after four years, they stayed for 11.

“I went through the United Brothers in Christ Denomination as a missionary at that point,” said Fetters, now a professor at Huntington University. “I really didn’t go because I was equipped to teach English. I went because I was a ministry leader and they wanted to start a ministry work in Macau, so I went in that role and one of the vehicles that we decided to use was an English program and the program ended up defining my life.”

Fetters returned to his alma mater in 1997 to teach in the ministry and missions department. He started the Institute for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages in 2009.

Through the networks he has established with his work in China and in the missions department at the university, a huge part of Fetters’ ministry and missions curriculum is a seven-month internship that can be anywhere in the world.

“Students come, they’re interested in studying missions and preparing to do missions,” he said, “and so during the first couple years they have developed a sense of what they want to do. After a couple years, we sit down with them and we say, ‘Well, what do you want to get out of this?’”

“If the kid says, ‘I want to work with intercity marginalized kids in Central America,’ we look at who they know in their network and who we know in our network that are doing that kind of ministry and we make sure we set them up with an amazing mentor who supervises their work and we introduce them to that.”

The program is called Practical Research and Immersion in Ministry Effectiveness and has been at Huntington for over two decades.

Profile

Name: Luke Fetters

Age: 53

Title and employer: Professor in ministry and missions department and director of the Institute of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages Studies at Huntington University

Time in current position: Professor at Huntington since 1997; TESOL Studies since 2009

Education and professional experience: Bachelor’s in Bible and religion, Huntington University; master’s in practical ministry, Huntington; master’s in intercultural studies from Wheaton; Ph.D. in adult and community education from Ball State

“Our network has expanded, and every year we have sites that we’ve used before saying, ‘Please send us someone,’” Fetters said, “but if we don’t have anybody who’s an exact fit, we end up disappointing them. It’s a good problem to have because we have great sites.”

Each summer, Fetters takes the time to travel and visit his interns. He has two to five interns per semester and has traveled to over 20 countries visiting his students.

Not all his interns end up overseas, though. Fetters enjoys the trips around the U.S. because it allows him to see the different facets of religion in the country.

“Last fall, I went to this huge mega-church in San Francisco who had 10 people just on their children’s ministry staff. I had an intern working in that children’s ministry staff,” he said. “I get to see the state of the church in America to visit my students who are working in all kinds of different churches and all kinds of different settings.”

Fetters is seeing an increasing amount of time and energy being dedicated toward the Institute for TESOL Studies. The institute primarily does work out of China right now because that’s where the networks are.

“That doesn’t mean we’re limited to China,” Fetters said. “That just means that’s our main focus right now. We’ve got a global focus but we have our hands full with all the opportunities in China right now.”

Fetters believes his work in the ministry and missions department and the Institute for TESOL Studies has some overlapping importance.

“With a TESOL certification, you have the opportunity to work and live overseas and get paid for it,” he said, “and then if you have a faith that you’re interested in sharing, you can share it in a very natural way as somebody in a local culture who has what we call a viable role.

“You’re there offering a valuable service, which is English teaching, and you happen to be a person of faith and your faith radiates or communicates who you are just by living in a community.”

Fetters sees increasing importance in the Institute for TESOL Studies and what it promotes both at Huntington and around the world.

“I think that we’re not going to get fewer non-native English speakers in Indiana, we’re going to get more,” he said, “and the world is not going to become less globally connected, the world is going to become more interconnected globally, so I think the role for something like the Institute of TESOL studies is going to continue to expand.

“Just over the last two years, our opportunities are outstripping our capacity, which means that we either have to grow or not continue, so I’m sure our choice is going to be to grow.”

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