Commentary

Fulbright offers faculty exchange with Russia

By Joe May

Increasingly, we live and work in a global society. Throughout the world, educational leaders want to learn more about the U.S. community college model. It is recognized that this model has propelled economic growth in the U.S. while ensuring that students have the knowledge, skills and abilities to be successfully employed in a wide variety of fields.

During my recent trip to Moscow, I discussed with Russian educational leaders the community college model as a possible way of dealing with the skills gap that exists in many sectors of the Russian economy. I learned that there is a great deal of interest among administrators and faculty at Russian universities about the role and mission of community colleges.

I was part of a large community college leaders invited to Moscow under the sponsorship of the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Other team members included Judith Irwin, director of international programs and services at the American Association of Community Colleges, Chris Picard, vice president for academic affairs at College of DuPage (Illinois) and Pauline Graveline, associate provost at the State University of New York at Canton. Muriel Joffe, assistant director for Europe, East and North, at the Council for International Exchange of Scholars (CIES), accompanied the group.

CIES administers the Fulbright Scholar Program on behalf of the U.S. Embassy in Russia, which tracked the athletes and their performances on the U.S. baseball team secure a bronze. During the seventh, she won five National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) National Scholar Athlete awards, and made it to the semi-finals of the 50-meter freestyle.

Silver medalist Kerrian Stewart (center) joins her teammates after the women’s 100-meter.

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(BCCC), received gold in the women’s 200-meters, while fellow BCCC grad Leean Sands lanced the bronze for the Bahamas in the men’s triple jump, also setting a new national record.

American Hyleas Fountain, a standout at BCCC where she won five National Junior College Athletic Association titles, made her Olympic debut by earning the silver in the grueling heptathlon, which includes seven events—200-meters, 800-meters, 100-meters hurdles, high jump, shot put, long jump and javelin throw.

Tabarie Henry, another BCCC grad, set a national record for the Virgin Islands in the men’s 400-meters, but he did not qualify for the finals.

Crystal Bustos, who plays third base for Palm Beach Community College (Florida), was a silver medalist for the baseball team at Palm Beach. She helped the U.S. baseball team secure a bronze. During the seventh, she won five National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) National Scholar Athlete awards, and made it to the semi-finals of the 50-meter freestyle.

Other athletes almost made it to the finals in their respective sports. Swimmer Gideon Louw, who recently graduated from Indian River State College (IRSC) in Florida, represented South Africa and made it to the semi-finals of the 50-meter freestyle. His teammate at IRSC, Gordon Touw, Njie Tjouw swam for Suriname, and although he finished third in his heat, he didn’t qualify for the semi-finals on the times of swimmers in other heats (which included eight-time Beijing gold medalist Michael Phelps).

Eleven athletes from ECC participated in track and field sports, representing Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana and Grenada. The BCCC had nine current and former athletes participating in track and field, representing the U.S., Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, the Virgin Islands, Barbados and the Bahamas.

Aside from BCCC, two-year colleges in Kansas were well represented, with participants from Pratt Community College, Garden City Community College, Colby Community College and Hutchinson Community College. Other two-year colleges with current and former students participating in the games included Paradise Valley Community College (Arizona), Pima Community College (Arizona), St. Louis Community College (Missouri), State University of New York-Cobleskill, Tallahassee Community College (Florida), Southwestern Illinois Community College, North Idaho College, College of Southern Idaho, South Plains College (Texas), Rend Lake College (Illinois) and Lower Columbia College (Washington).

The athletes participated in sports ranging from wrestling and rowing to basketball and volleyball, with most participating in track and field.

Seven of Venezuela’s women’s softball team members came from Southeastern Community College (Iowa). It also included a player from Gulf Coast Community College (Florida) and Pensacola Junior College (PJC) in Florida. Beside the athletes, their colleges and colleagues enjoyed the rush of the competition. Brenda Pena, coach of the softball team at PJC, and her players gathered at a local restaurant to watch the squad’s third baseman Geraldine Puertas play for Venezuela.

“IT was such a proud moment,” Pena said. “I was proud for her and proud for PJC to have one of our athletes on the international stage playing against the best players in the world.”

Pena added, “It is a great feeling to know you are helping people not only in your own backyard but from around the world.”

Venezuela’s starting pitcher Johana Gomez, a student at Southeastern Community College (Iowa), throws a pitch against Japan in a softball game. Terry Tiffee, of Pratt Community College (Kansas), celebrates with teammates of the U.S. baseball team after a four-inning home run against the Netherlands. The U.S. eventually took bronze in the event.