I joined the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) fall trip to Asia to recruit students, make contacts and promote our school in a booming market. Relatively new in my job as coordinator of international student affairs, I truly believe I learned more in my three weeks on the AACC trip than I could in five years behind my desk.

I learned firsthand about the cultures of Thailand, Honk Kong, Korea and Vietnam. I met hundreds of prospective students and made key in-country contacts for recruiting and exchanges. I met the embassy officials in each city, who gave us invaluable information about how to approach the student markets and what consulates look for when granting student visas. I met principals and teachers from high schools across Asia and now have a better understanding of the education systems in those countries and the needs of our students from Asia. Especially, I learned the importance of leaving my preconceptions behind to look at people and places with open eyes.

Depending on the city, we had 21 to 27 college representatives from all parts of America, all ages and races. While technically competing for students, the group developed an affinity essential to promote the 2+2 concept. The experienced recruiters gave me tips on how to maximize time while on the road and recruiting trip and how to do my job back home more effectively.

One of the most enlightening moments happened when we watched as the consular officers in one embassy interviewed potential visa recipients. Watching them showed me the process our students must go through to get an F-1 visa and how difficult it is for them. Conversely, I saw how challenging it is for the consular officers to make their determinations in just a few seconds.

Talking to the many students and parents at the fairs gave me better insight into what the students expect from a U.S. education and what the parents’ hopes (and fears) are for their children.

Paula Ross Derrick  
Coordinator, International Student Affairs  
Gadsden State Community College (Alabama)

I have just returned from the 2006 American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Recruiting Trip to Asia. As a member of the advisory committee that Judy Irwin has assembled, I was very interested in participating in this tour to witness firsthand how it served the needs of the participants. I am pleased to inform you that I was favorably impressed with the entire tour. I have participated in several AACC tours over the past few years, and I think this one was the best yet.

I was particularly interested in having AACC go to Vietnam, and I was not disappointed in that visit. I predict that our partnership with the Vietnam Association of Community Colleges will bear fruit and bring rewards for years to come. This was an exciting time to be there and see the dynamic changes occurring in this country.

All of these experiences are invaluable, but the bottom line for all the colleges on the tour, as you know, is how many students will apply and be admitted. Speaking for myself, I am happy to report that I came back to my campus with two completed applications from Vietnam in hand. I am also confident that I’ll be getting more applications from Korea and perhaps from a few of the other stops on the tour.

While I was away from my office the Arizona Republic published a front-page story about how some Maricopa Community College officials have abused the international travel privilege. In response, the chancellor of the Maricopa Community Colleges suspended all foreign travel until further notice. People on my campus have asked me if I will be allowed to travel again with AACC. I am convinced that if AACC continues to offer recruiting trips that are well-planned and cost-effective, I will have no problem justifying my participation. If recruitment of international students is the goal of a community college, then there is no better way to boost recruitment efforts than to participate in one of these tours. This goes for beginners as well as seasoned recruiters.

Ken Bus,  
Director, International Education Program  
Glendale Community College (Arizona)

I was just writing to let you know how much I enjoyed your article on remediation costs (CCT, Sept. 12). As someone who teaches ENG 900, it is heartbreaking for me to see students who enter college lacking the skills necessary to succeed at higher-level learning.

Many of my students last spring didn’t just have mechanical deficiencies in English, they had no understanding of form, tone or, in some cases, what a complete sentence should look like. In the age of instant messaging (IM), I had students who turned in papers containing IM slang. I received e-mails without punctuation and capitalization, and seemingly no regard for the audience. An assignment of a 150-word essay brought some students to anger and others to near tears. For many it was the first time they had been given a writing assignment of that length.

Many think that remedial classes are for the “dumb kids” but my class was a cross-section of our student body. I had returning students, older students, minority students, artistically gifted students and even a valedictorian, all of whom couldn’t understand why they had to take my class. Many of these students needed individual, extensive tutoring and mentoring, based on foundational skills. They needed a lot of opportunities to fail around with language and their ideas. And they needed a teacher who believed that every one of them was capable of passing. I wish that all of them had.

Until we return to teaching fundamental concepts of grammar, punctuation, style and format in an environment that motivates our students, I fear we will continue to see students landing in remedial studies courses when they should be working toward their general studies requirements.

Mary Lohnes,  
Adjunct Instructor, Languages and Literature  
College of Southern Maryland