

Public Intellectuals Program

From 2005 to 2007, the National Committee held the first round of its Public Intellectuals Program. This multi-year program brings together twenty of the best and brightest of the younger generation of American China scholars and specialists to deepen and broaden their knowledge about China's politics, economics and society, while giving them the skills to use this knowledge to inform policy and public opinion. The first round was so successful that both the Henry Luce Foundation and the Starr Foundation agreed to fund a second round. Over the next two years, the program will include two group meetings in Washington D.C., a meeting in San Francisco, trips to China as a cohort,

participation in National Committee programs or exchanges as scholar-escorts, and a requirement that fellows organize local public education programs.

Twenty Public Intellectuals Program (PIP) fellows were selected at the end of May 2008 from seventy-eight applicants. The first gathering of the fellows was October 2-6, in Washington, D.C. That meeting began with a welcoming dinner that featured thoughtful and inspiring comments by Dr. Ezra Vogel, Henry Ford II Research Professor at Harvard, and Dr. David M. Lampton, director of the China Studies program at Johns Hopkins

University. Dr. Vogel spoke about the history of the China studies field and the commitment that the earlier generations had to filling the role of public intellectuals, and Dr. Lampton offered thoughtful remarks about ethical issues involved in being a public intellectual, particularly in the China field. A fascinating discussion ensued, one that will undoubtedly continue as the group meets together over the course of the next few years.

During the next four days, fellows attended meetings, briefings and meals with staffers on Capitol Hill, commissioners and staff of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission and the Congressional-Executive Commission on China; the Departments of State and Commerce; the USTR; the National Security Council and the National Intelligence Council; and various think tanks.

A full day was focused on the media, with activities designed to encourage fellows to engage with the

2008-2009 PIP Fellows

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PIP fellows and advisory committee members visit the Albert Einstein Memorial at the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C.

public through the media on China issues, and to give them some of the tools necessary to do so effectively. It included sessions on message and delivery; communicating via print, television and radio in both China and America; hands-on media training during which fellows answered

challenging questions before a camera and evaluated their performances; and a dinner discussion panel comprised of Washington, D.C.-based journalists and broadcasters.

One reason for the PIP program is that changes in graduate education and the China field in the last two decades have meant that younger

China specialists tend to be more narrowly focused on specific areas of study, without the same opportunities for cross-fertilization that past generations of China scholars had. The PIP program addresses this by instilling more breadth in younger scholars and facilitating connections among those in different fields, so that, for example, political scientists spend more time with sociologists, or historians interact with legal experts. This is enhanced through presentations by the fellows on their own research throughout the course of the program. Four who presented at the Washington conference were Katherine Kaup on ethnic issues, Amy Hanser on consumerism and product safety, Andrew Erickson on the development of China's navy and Peter Lorentzen on the strategic manipulation of press freedom.

The Washington conference of PIP fellows began the process of creating the strong cohesion among these accomplished individuals that is a hallmark of the program, while providing connections to policy makers and media training that has already been of use to several of them. The first cohort of ten fellows will travel to China together June 19-30, 2009 (the second group will do so in the summer of 2010), and the entire group will meet again in San Francisco for a four-day conference in October 2009. ■

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