Clemson University Signs Pact with China’s Top Civil Engineering Program

Growing numbers of Chinese students have been seeking degrees in the United States, but a deal that Clemson University has inked with China’s top civil engineering program will also send U.S. students in the other direction.

Clemson and Tongji Universities will exchange civil engineering doctoral students as part of an agreement that was signed in summer 2014. Participants will be eligible for a Ph.D. dual degree from both universities.

The agreement marks the first dual Ph.D. program in civil engineering that Tongji has signed with a U.S. university.

Dr. Robert Jones, who is Clemson’s Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost, said that the agreement could serve as a model that strengthens ties between higher education communities in the two countries.

“The agreement enables students from both institutions to achieve dual enrollment and degrees in a seamless fashion,” he said. “Doctoral candidates will be exposed to cultures and work practices from the world’s two largest economies and position them for strength into the future.

“There will be tremendous engagement opportunities for our partners – the state, industry and communities in both countries.”

As many as five doctoral candidates can participate in the Clemson-Tongji partnership at any given time.

Dr. James Martin, Chair of Clemson’s Glenn Department of Civil Engineering, said candidates will remain abroad for about two years.

Doctoral candidates who participate in the exchange will be able to choose whether they want to seek a dual degree.

“As part of a previous memorandum of understanding, candidates can also travel abroad to do a few months of research,” Martin said.

For Clemson’s doctoral students, the agreement will open the door to a university that was ranked No. 1 in civil engineering by China’s Ministry of Education.
Candidates will also be immersed in the culture and language of a rapidly growing nation that has enormous civil engineering needs, ranging from roads, tunnels, and bridges to earthquake-resistant buildings.

“China is the second largest economy in the world and still growing at a fast pace,” said Hsein Juang, the Glenn Professor of Civil Engineering at Clemson. “There will be a lot of opportunities for engineering firms and private consultants to offer their services to the Chinese government and civil engineering industry in the coming decades.

“Having a second Ph.D. degree from Tongji will be a big plus for Clemson students providing engineering and business services in China.”

Doctoral candidates at Tongji will have access to world-class laboratory testing facilities in various fields of civil engineering.

Tongji, which is in Shanghai, has 72,000 students, including 3,903 Ph.D. candidates. Tongji’s College of Civil Engineering has about 500 Ph.D. students.

The agreement will help Clemson recruit some of China’s top Ph.D. students, many of whom will go on to become graduates of the Glenn Department of Civil Engineering, Juang said.

Those who return to China’s universities will help spread Clemson’s name around the nation’s growing higher education community, Juang said.

“That’s how you build Clemson’s international reputation,” he said.

The dual Ph.D. degree program will enable the faculties at both civil engineering programs to collaborate through the participating Ph.D. students. The academic advisors at both universities must approve a plan of study for an individual student.

Part of the draw for students to enroll in the dual degree program is the opportunity to study abroad, receive a second Ph.D. diploma, and increase the value of their education.

The incentive for the faculties at both institutions is to increase the number of Ph.D. graduates and promote high quality research through collaboration.

The Clemson-Tongji agreement lasts until June 2020 with an option to renew.

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