IN THE NEWS

Accomplishments in Academics, Arts, Athletics & Service

University School
NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY

Chinese Program Leads Students to New Immersion Challenges

Ms. Hong Jia
Middle School Teacher - Chinese

University School's Chinese program started in 2007 with 12 students (who are now seniors) and boasts 150 students today with six Middle School classes, seven Upper School classes and three dedicated teachers. Upper School teachers, Ms. Ying Li and Ms. Lin Wang, have even begun to develop programming that offers Lower School students early exposure to Chinese language and culture.

USchool students routinely place in the top three at the annual Chinese Speech and Skit Contest for both individual and group performances. One student who started with the Chinese program in Middle School placed second at the National China Bridge competition and earned a free trip to China to observe the World Wide China Bridge competition. Another received the "2013 Scholar of the Year Award" given by the Florida Foreign Language Association.

Middle School Students Accepted to the Startalk Chinese Immersion Program

This summer, six University School students were accepted to the Startalk Chinese Academy, an immersion program hosted by the University of South Florida. Four of the six were incoming high school freshman selected on the basis of their high-level performance while still in Middle School.

"I definitely felt prepared," said freshman Ben Levine, who was admitted to the program's highest level along with classmate Spencer Chancey. He noted that very quickly, "I found myself watching Sports Center at night but 'hearing' the broadcast in Chinese."

A regular college course requires students to memorize one dialogue per week. Startalk instructors required students to memorize two-to-three dialogues each night, which allowed participants to earn three college credits in two weeks.

Upper School Students Accepted to the Startalk Chinese Immersion Program

In keeping with University School's approach to teaching world language, Startalk participants not only immersed themselves in the language but also conducted themselves in accordance with Chinese culture. Junior Marc Geller fondly recalled that during a traditional 12-course meal, students waited for the eldest teacher to take his or her portion first. They also toasted in Chinese (with non-alcoholic beverages) and vied to "be the most humble" by positioning their cup as the lowest of the raised glasses. Spencer added that he appreciates a "system built upon being modest" and finds the culture to be comparatively more "green" and active than America.

Ben, Spencer and sophomore Rachel Bomser (whose group won the program's "All-State" final performance challenge) credited Middle School teacher Ms. Hong Jia for laying the ground work for their success in Grade 6. Spencer remarked that the opportunity to learn Chinese as early as Grade 6 helped him realize that "the world isn't just concentrated on American ways. We can have the same goals, but other cultures can offer a much different path to get there."

"I think motivation is the most important factor in accelerating students' learning," Jia said. "I provide them with every possible opportunity to expose themselves to the language and culture. Some University School Middle School students participate in Chinese competitions almost every year, and they compete with high school students and college students. As a result, I was very confident that all four attending Startalk would perform prominently."