GLOBAL CHALLENGES AND EXPANDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WHEELOCK COLLEGE-SINGAPORE

Welcome to the inaugural issue of News From Wheelock College-Singapore, a new forum for information about people, events, and ideas at Wheelock College-Singapore, a program with 20 years of history and experience in Singapore and more than 2,000 alumni in the country who hold diplomas, Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees from Wheelock.

This is a particularly exciting time for early childhood education (ECE) in Singapore with growing public awareness of its importance and an official focus on raising the quality of the sector. As Prime Minister Lee stressed in his National Day Rally speech in August, “We now know how important the early years are for children’s development … [good preschool education] will provide many long-term benefits later on in life.”

However, conversations about ECE are not just local but increasingly international in focus. In part, there is the recognition of the role that good preschool education plays in preparing the learners of the 21st Century knowledge economies who must compete in a global world. Also, systems learn from each other as best practices around the world inform national conversations and reforms.

It is so appropriate then that Wheelock College this year celebrate its 125th anniversary by hosting a major international conference on June 19-22, 2013 in Boston. Wheelock will gather national and international educators, practitioners, researchers, donors, students, and policy leaders to explore pressing issues affecting education, health, and human rights across the globe. For more details and to register, see http://bit.ly/ZhTk2w.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

2 Focus on the Faculty and we sit down with the new Executive Director
3 Milestones Remembering Joan Bergstrom and farewell to the Fedos
4 Wheelock Magazine A taste of the current stories
Dr. Trisha Craig became Executive Director of Wheelock College-Singapore on Oct. 1, 2012. She comes by way of Harvard University, where she served most recently as executive director of the Centre for European Studies. We sat down with her to discuss her plans and ambitions for Wheelock College-Singapore.

You recently took on the role of executive director of Wheelock College Singapore – what attracted you to the position?

Several things. First, this is an institution whose mission ‘to improve the lives of children and families’ is so critical and as someone whose entire career has had an international focus, I found it exhilarating to be associated with a school that is also dedicated to globalizing its education. Singapore also held tremendous appeal: Not just because of its commitment to improving its early childhood sector but because although I’ve spent the last decade with my eye on Europe as the director of the Centre for European Studies at Harvard, prior to that, I had done a lot of work in and on Asia. My husband and I loved the idea of coming back to the region.

You mention that Wheelock College has a 20-year history in Singapore – is that an advantage for you?

Absolutely. For starters, we have a tremendous brand here that started with our first Master’s students. Just as we’re known in the US for our excellence in the field of early childhood education [ECE], that is true in Singapore. It also means we have numerous alumni – over 2,000. Many of them are what I would call rock stars in the field of ECE. But we also need to ensure that we stay at the top of our game and continue to produce the leading graduates in the market.

What are your goals for the program? How do you see it evolving?

There is so much research being done in the field and I would like to engage in more of that here in Singapore, particularly with an eye to producing useful knowledge that can be translated into improving classrooms and the profession, perhaps through faculty and student collaborations. In the coming months, look for new
research publications and discussion papers emerging from us. I mentioned our alumni; we need to do a better job of organizing them and providing ways for them to stay connected as well as to support their continuing professional goals. I also would like to create more opportunities for our students to internationalize their knowledge, through more overseas service learning programmes, for example.

What should students know as they consider a career in early childhood education? What are some of the challenges they face?

This is a great time for the field. Singapore is absolutely committed to raising the standards of the profession and the resources available to the sector. If well-performing countries like Sweden and Finland offer any clues to the future, the educational requirements for the field will increase. When that happens salaries and prestige tend to follow. I am very bullish on the future for ECE in Singapore.

What are some of the advantages that Wheelock has to offer students in Singapore?

I think first and foremost we have our faculty. [See sidebar on p.2 for the visiting faculty] They are amazing – they are fantastic teachers, leaders in their fields and they care deeply about the students. They are the kind of teachers who transform lives – reading the course evaluations, as I’ve recently done, that comes through loud and clear. Our co-teaching model with local and Boston-based faculty means students get both an international and local perspective – very important in today’s global world.

Also, this is a Wheelock degree – there’s no difference between getting it here or in Boston. Finally, and I think this is the first thing the students would point to, part of the Bachelor’s program we’re doing with SIT takes place in Boston. During the on-campus immersion, the students not only take classes but they also discover things about themselves they didn’t know. We help them become the people they are meant to be.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Application portal for the Wheelock BSc degree program offered in conjunction with Singapore Institute of Technology (full time, two years begins June 30) opens on February 1st: http://singaportechnology.edu.sg/about/wheelock-college

Applications are now being accepted for the Wheelock MSc degree program offered in conjunction with SEED institute (part time, 18 months, begins in April). Visit: http://bit.ly/V66lIo for a full description.

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WHEELOCK-SINGAPORE: RECOGNIZING MILESTONES ALONG THE WAY

Singaporeans and educators honored the memory of Dr. Joan Bergstrom, founder of Wheelock’s Center for International Education, Leadership, and Innovation, at the NTUC First Campus Co-operative 35th Anniversary celebration at the Singapore Expo in December.

Dr. Bergstrom was remembered as an outstanding teacher, scholar, author, innovator, and a visionary in the field of early childhood education. Her work continues to touch the lives of countless Wheelock College alumni around the globe and the young children they nurture, mentor, and teach.

Dr. Bergstrom brought Wheelock College to Singapore over 20 years ago and her legacy includes the Master’s program and other degrees started in partnership with RTRC (now SEED Institute) as well as the more recent full-time Bachelor of Science degree in Early Childhood Educational Studies and Leadership Program that is hosted on the campus of Ngee Ann Polytechnic, now offered in conjunction with SIT.

Dr. David A. Fedo served as the latter’s executive for the past five years. He and his wife Dr. Susan Fedo, who was an adjunct faculty member in the program, were well loved by the students. Over the summer, students, alumni and colleagues hosted numerous events to bid them farewell and thank them for their extraordinary work in Singapore. As they settle back into their lives in Boston, we wish them the best in retirement but let them know they are much-missed.
THE LATEST ISSUE OF THE WHEELOCK MAGAZINE HAS ARRIVED…

This issue commemorates the College’s quasquicentennial (125th anniversary.) Hear more about the kick-off festivities of our yearlong celebration. Read about the capital campaign underway to ensure Wheelock’s future. See the plans for the stunning new Centre for Learning and Innovation that will house a state-of-the-art resource centre and a new alumni centre. This new green and utterly sustainable building is destined to be a Boston landmark.

You won’t want to miss the feature on alumna Alice Carroll (’96MS) whose study trip along the Silk Route led to an acclaimed children’s book and global school curriculum based on the true story of an African giraffe that made a sea voyage to China in the 15th Century as a gift for Emperor Yongle of China.

And of course be sure to take a peek at all our alumni are doing to inspire a world of good.

To see a copy of the magazine, simply log onto http://www.wheelock.edu/alumni/wheelock-magazine or better yet, come by the Wheelock office here in Singapore and pick one up. We’re located at Ngee Ann Poly, Block 53, #03-03, 535 Clementi Rd, Singapore 599489 (phone: 6460 7352)

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