



News Release

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WESTERN VP TRAVELS WITH DELEGATION TO SOUTH AFRICA

St. Joseph, Mo. —March 23, 2005—Dr. J. David Arnold, vice president for academic and student affairs at Missouri Western State College, said his recent trip to South Africa was such a great experience, that even after an extremely full 12-day itinerary and a 24-hour airplane trip home, if someone had asked him to, he “would have turned around and gotten right back on the plane and gone back.”

Dr. Arnold, who was invited by the American Psychological Society (APS) to travel with a delegation of academic psychologists under the auspices of the People to People Ambassador Program, said the trip, his first to South Africa, was very worthwhile. The group visited five universities in February to discuss academic issues with faculty members and administrators.

He said that the exchange of information was valuable, and he found that the South African universities are facing similar challenges that American universities face, including retention and graduation rates, and higher education funding issues.

One of the benefits of his trip is that he now has at least 30 contacts to begin working with on faculty and student exchange programs between Western and a South African university. “It was great to be able to physically visit the universities to see if they were safe.” Dr. Arnold hopes to develop an exchange program within a year. He noted that when he visited, it was the end of the summer and their academic year was just beginning, so that could prove to be an interesting timing challenge for exchanges.

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The most fascinating aspect of the trip was experiencing South Africa's new democratic society, he said. In the years since the end of Apartheid in 1990 and the first democratic elections in 1994, the country has undergone major changes. "I witnessed the grand social experiment that is South Africa. It was fascinating. South Africa is a great example of peaceful democratic transitional leadership."

Dr. Arnold noted that with the major overhaul of their society, the country is "a land of contrasts, paradoxes and ironies." All institutions now are integrated racially, for example, but neighbors of different races still do not speak to each other. Newspapers may now openly criticize the government, but people seem patient with the new government and willing to give it a chance to work. People are very friendly and welcoming, but the country has a very high crime rate. The largest challenge facing South African society is dealing with the AIDS epidemic.

And even though the vice president was half a world away, he said he felt right at home when they gathered at a faculty member's home one evening for a barbecue. "No matter where you are in world, when it's summer and you have people over, you barbecue."

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Missouri Western State College is a four-year public institution providing a blend of traditional liberal arts and professional degree programs. The college offers student-centered, high quality instruction that focuses on experience-based learning, community service, and state-of-the-art technology. Western is located in St. Joseph, Mo. and is committed to the educational, economic, cultural and social development of the region it serves.