Students in intensive English program to go on learning adventure to Grand Canyon

By Feliza Casano : March 1st, 2012

Nineteen UT students will visit the Grand Canyon for spring break thanks to an innovative English language program.

Last fall, students in the Advanced English as a Second Language Reading and Writing class — from left, Jin Ah Lee, Xi Yang, Abdulaziz AlKhudhayri, Kiann Lim, Xu Zhao, Yue Zhao and Hakseong Han — tried freeze-dried macaroni and cheese while camping at Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore in Michigan’s Upper Peninsula.

Through the English Outdoors Program sponsored by the American Language Institute, students from non-native English-speaking populations experience educational trips to different locations in the United States as part of an advanced English class.

“English Outdoors follows principles of experiential education. The American Language Institute is the only intensive English program in the United States that offers an experiential education program,” said Alex Wrege, an English as a second language specialist in the American Language Institute.
During spring break, students in the Advanced Reading and Writing class will take a four-day, 12-mile hiking trip to Havasu Falls in the Grand Canyon. The class spent the past six weeks researching and planning the trip, including the types of equipment they will need as well as their food plan, using an iPad app designed for the course.

“Some students see no real purpose in writing,” Wrege said. “We realized it’s important for students to write about things they find personally interesting or important, so during the trip they’ll be writing journals.”

The students in the program are from a number of nations, including South Korea, China and Saudi Arabia. Of the students attending the trip, two are American while the other 17 are international. Half of the international students came in with no English skills and advanced to the class, while others entered at the advanced level.

Wrege, a former international student from Germany, said seeing the country he was studying in was an important part of his educational experience.

“Projects like these have the promise to deliver higher test scores for students,” Wrege said. “It helps them become better prepared for tests, and it can be a huge contribution to the learning process. The road is really the goal in this type of program. The trip is just the end result of the learning process.”

The UT English Outdoors Program has taken students on two other trips this year: to the Upper Peninsula in Michigan for a hiking trip on the Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore and to the Everglades for a kayaking adventure.

The program will take students on additional trips to parts of the Appalachian Trail in Tennessee in May and to the Rocky Mountain National Park in July.

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