

University of Bridgeport recruits students from defunct Barrytown College

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Dean Thomas Ward shows a trophy case of student awards to visitors at the College of Public and International Affairs.

Almost the whole student body of Barrytown College spent Friday, May 1, touring the seaside campus of the University of Bridgeport and getting a full spectrum of presentations and the opportunity to dialogue on course offerings, transfer requirements and firsthand insights into life in the city of Bridgeport, Connecticut.

In March, the students were advised that transfer to another school would appear necessary since federal financial aid for students at Barrytown College was denied by the U.S. Department of Education in December 2013, although students had never been informed. Dr. Hugh Spurgin, president of Unification Theological Seminary, promised students that he would get personally involved with helping them to transfer either to the University of Bridgeport or any other college of their choice. Eighteen of the twenty-two students have applied to UB. Dr. Spurgin gave the group a personal tour of the campus and of the neighborhood, including Bridgeport International Academy, a private, college-preparatory high school that he has administered for 18 years.



Professor Peter Van Geldern interviews Andrew Stewart in the film studio in his "Green Room."

"From what I saw, I am ready to go to school there. The student facilities were impressive, and the

atmosphere was very professional and relaxed at the same time,” said Dachul Okamoto, 25, who also observed, “The Mass Communications major seems like a unique program that I feel will fit well in this media-driven society.” Okamoto has produced some short films at Barrytown College and is planning a course of study at the University of Bridgeport that will be media-related, he said.



Dr. Neil Salonen explains to students the ideals that define the culture of the University of Bridgeport.

“I will be transferring to UB, and I am excited to start in Dr. [Thomas] Ward’s IPED [International Political Economy and Diplomacy] program,” said Andrew Stewart, 28. “I really prefer the rural feel that Barrytown has, because I have lived in cities my whole life, but I can live with the return to cities. I also have good housing arrangements worked out, so I am in good shape for the transfer,” he added.

The students began with a guided tour of the UB media arts studio by Professor Peter Van Geldern, who explained: “We are an education community saturated with young people who want to learn. You can study public relations, advertising or news reporting.” Professor Van Geldern pointed out that UB’s high-definition cameras and video equipment are superior to what many TV stations are using.

Dr. Thomas Ward, dean of UB’s College of Public and International Affairs, gave an

overview of the programs offered by the university. “Reverend Moon wanted to see a university that would work with the United Nations,” he told the young Unificationists. “Our College of Public and International Affairs is built around the purpose to prepare people for careers in public service, and it is inspired by the Founder’s vision.” Dr. Ward advised the group that any course that they had completed at any previous accredited college with a grade of “C” or above could transfer to UB. In addition, the students could start with a clean slate, since the credits would transfer but not their grades. However, he said that, when applying to graduate school, previous transcripts would be reviewed but this did give a chance to start anew and affirm their potential.



The Barrytown College students frolic on the beach at the close of a long day of show, tell and shuffle.

Dr. Neil Salonen, president of the University of Bridgeport, spoke to the student visitors over lunch and introduced other faculty, staff and students. “We are not trying to shape what people think here, but we are trying to inspire them to think creatively and critically,” he said. Although a small percentage of the student body is from the Unificationist community, many of them excel in leadership on campus, he explained. “We find that each year the Unification students at UB get elected to student government, and it’s no secret, because often they are the ones willing to do the thankless tasks.”

The faculty members who introduced themselves to students included Professor Robert Riggs, chair of the Religion and Politics department and an expert on the Middle East. Professor Riggs, who is not a Unificationist, said the faculty prides itself on assisting students through mentoring and creating professional experience. “We will do our best to find you internships and professional opportunities,” he said. Professor Riggs also gave high marks for productivity to the Unificationists on campus. “Honestly, many of the best and brightest students at UB have been Unificationists. The talk behind closed doors of faculty includes pleas from some of the professors for more students like the Unificationists.”

At the end of a long day of shuffle and gab, the students took a walk on the beach facing Long Island Sound and weighed the opportunities open to them if they transfer to the University of Bridgeport.