

St. Cloud State students will spend semester in South Africa

4 students have signed up for exchange program

By Michelle Tan

Times staff writer

When Leah Ahles leaves for South Africa on Tuesday, she will be part of the first group of St. Cloud State University students to live, learn and play at a South African university.

Ahles, a senior at St. Cloud State, will be joined by Rebecca Jackson, Jeff Olson and Joyce Roffler.

They will attend the University of Port Elizabeth through St. Cloud State's semester-long exchange program. The group will return Dec. 15.

"This will be my first time overseas," said Ahles, who is majoring in social science. "It's been a long wait, but I'm very excited."

Ahles will take political

science and African studies classes while in Port Elizabeth.

About 7,000 students attend Port Elizabeth. At least 450 of those are international students, said Nico Jooste, director of international programs for Port Elizabeth.

"We're redefining our role in the global society. We want to create a global community on campus," Jooste said.

St. Cloud State and Port Elizabeth officials have worked to form the program for more than two years, said Chunsheng Zhang, assistant vice president for academic affairs and international studies at St. Cloud State.

"This is a full-fledged academic exchange program for our students," Zhang said.

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Africa

There are at least 13 exchange programs in 11 countries offered at St. Cloud State.

Every year, about 250 students choose to go to countries such as China, Japan, Chile, Costa Rica, England, France and Sweden.

"This is our only program in the continent of Africa and we hope to further strengthen it," Zhang said.

In the future, the program will expand to allow students from Port Elizabeth to attend St. Cloud State, and also have faculty from both schools visit each other's campus.

The arrangement between the schools is more than a study abroad program; it's a relationship, Jooste said.

"Our students are our real allies," he said. "We connect you, you connect us."

Port Elizabeth has ties with St. John's University, the College of St. Benedict and the University of Washington in Seattle.

Each student paid about \$5,000 to go to Port Elizabeth.

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Leah Ahles

One of 4 who will travel to South Africa

That includes air fare, a visa, room and board, tuition and an international identity card.

And apart from taking classes at Port Elizabeth, Ahles, Jackson, Olson and Roffler will volunteer and serve at townships in the area. Townships are shanty towns that remain after the era of apartheid in South Africa.

"We're going to dig and find the culture and music," Ahles said. "We're not just going to vacation, but we want to immerse ourselves."