



# News Release

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## **NMU SENDS STUDENTS TO CUBA**

MARQUETTE, Mich.—Northern Michigan University has launched a historic international partnership in Cuba. Following a lengthy application process, an NMU delegation traveled to the island last week to meet with officials from two Cuban universities. NMU is one of only 16 U.S. institutions granted a license for study abroad programs in the country and the first to extend its presence beyond Havana. Two NMU students who accompanied the group have remained for the semester at the University of Matanzas, east of the nation’s capital.

“Today’s students are the ambassadors of tomorrow and NMU building a relationship with Cuba reflects our interest in getting our students out into the world to serve in this vital role,” said NMU President Les Wong. “The two NMU students who will be studying in Cuba this semester are true pioneers. They are the first Americans that many of the Cuban students have ever met and they are great ambassadors for our university and the nation.”

Michael Wiese-Gomez, a senior Spanish major from Marquette and Natasha Gallagher, a junior history major from Midland, will begin their term at the University of Matanzas on Feb. 15. Both speak advanced-level Spanish, a prerequisite for studying in Cuba. They will live in residence halls, attend classes with Cuban students and take 12-18 credits in a range of topics including Spanish, culture, social sciences and literatures.

Matanzas is called the City of Bridges because of its three rivers. It is also known as the “Athens of Cuba” by virtue of the historical architecture and monuments. The city’s population is about 170,000.

“International opportunities for students and faculty represent a central theme in NMU’s Road Map to 2015,” said Susan Koch, NMU provost and vice president for academic affairs. “With Cuba engaged in a historic social, political and economic transition, the opportunity for NMU faculty and students to be witnesses to and participants in this transition is an extraordinary international opportunity. The signing of a cooperative agreement with the

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University of Matanzas, the first ever such agreement outside of Havana, is the beginning of what we expect to be a mutually beneficial partnership that will be valuable for many NMU faculty and students."

Marcelo Siles, director of International Programs at NMU, said the University of Havana has agreed to sign a similar pact, pending approval by the country's minister of education. Both partnerships will create opportunities for short-term faculty research and possible trips by U.S. Olympic Education Center athletes for training or competition.

Siles said the University of Havana is particularly interested in working with Northern in the sciences and both schools want to glean information about a high-tech learning environment. NMU has a campus-wide notebook computer program and is the only U.S. university to operate its own WiMAX network (4G).

"Cuba is currently connected to the world via satellite, but work has begun on an underwater fiber-optic cable from a port in Venezuela to Cuba," said Siles. "It's scheduled to be completed by June 30. That will improve telephone and Internet services and increase the speed of transmission significantly. All will help improve communication."

The day before the NMU delegation left for Cuba, the Obama administration announced the lifting of some restrictions on academic travel to the country. Koch said the move will ease constraints on programs like NMU's and was a decision welcomed by both U.S. and Cuban educational institutions.

The NMU delegation included Wong and his wife, Phyllis, Koch, Siles, the two students, Board of Trustee Chair Brian Cloyd and Professors Neil Cumberlidge and Amy Orf. In addition to meeting with representatives of the two Cuban universities, the group listened to a presentation by a local doctor on the country's health care system and visited places of interest such as museums, historic landmarks and cultural centers.

Prepared by Kristi Evans. For more information, contact Koch at 906-227-2920.