



SUCCESS STORY

Launching China's Environmental Leaders

University partnership helps Chinese legal experts shape environmental regulation



Photo: Vermont Law School

Speakers and participants at a 2008 environmental law workshop in Beijing.

Since its founding, the Vermont Law School Sun Yat-sen University Partnership has provided training to hundreds of lawyers, judges, government officials, legal scholars and students, helping to lay a foundation for China's emerging generation of environmental lawyers and policy makers.

The rapid growth of China's economy has led to severe environmental problems, including a sharp rise in greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming. In recent years the importance of environmental issues has been increasingly acknowledged by the Chinese government and people. In spite of this recognition, however, environmental law remains a field with few experts and low prestige. In order to improve China's environmental governance system it is crucial to develop a strong foundation of environmental law centers and skilled leaders.

Through the U.S. Government, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is helping to change this. Thanks to a grant from USAID, the Vermont Law School (VLS) and Sun Yat-Sen University (SYSU) in Guangzhou, China have formed a partnership to advance environmental law and policy in China. The collaborative program aims to strengthen the ability of the SYSU environmental law center and its scholars to shape Chinese environmental regulation. In addition, the program strives to develop the center's capacity to provide guidance to government agencies on environmental law and policies.

Visiting professors from the U.S. are helping to strengthen the SYSU curriculum. In turn, Chinese students and professors share their unique perspectives through studying and teaching at VLS.

One such scholar is Xin (Mark) Qiu, a Ph.D. student in administrative law at SYSU School of Law in Guangzhou. During a year of study at Vermont Law School, he has been focusing on the comparative analysis of American and Chinese energy and environmental regulation. Mark has taken full advantage of the opportunities collaborating with American and Chinese colleagues to offer conference presentations, including one at a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency workshop and, to publish an article in the widely read *Environmental Law Reporter (ELR)*. The article, written with fellow student Honglin Li, focuses on the reform of China's recently created environmental "super ministry."



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SUCCESS STORY CONTINUED

“By helping to strengthen China’s environmental laws and policies and increasing the Chinese public’s awareness of environmental issues, VLS will open doors for future cooperation between our two countries on global environmental challenges.”

—U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy

Thus the VLS/SYSU Partnership has allowed Mark to begin to develop ideas to aid his country in improving environmental law. This is a remarkable accomplishment for an individual who uses English as a second language and was only able to begin serious exploration of environmental law upon his arrival in the U.S. As a future law professor, Mr. Qiu intends to return to China and apply his newly acquired knowledge and experience to help launch the next generation of environmental law professionals.

Along with cultivation of new talents in the field such as Mark Qiu, the partnership also supports more established professionals. Professor Zhiping Li has been instrumental in building the environmental law program at SYSU. In 2007, Professor Li was awarded a prestigious grant by the Chinese government—one of only two awarded in the environmental field that year. The award recognizes Professor Li’s leadership in the field. Over a three-year period, she will pursue a multi-country study of frameworks for basic environmental law statutes. She will lead the project in collaboration with senior and junior environmental law scholars from universities across China. Their work will support the amendment of China’s own statute, put into law in 1989.

Senator Patrick Leahy supports the Vermont Law School/Sun Yat-sen University partnership saying, it will “open doors for future cooperation...on global environmental challenges.” Since its founding, the program has provided training to hundreds of lawyers, judges, government officials, legal scholars and students, helping to lay a foundation for China’s emerging generation of environmental lawyers and policy makers.