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Going Global: Zhilin Li talks hosting international scholars



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As the world becomes more interconnected—and collaboration in global settings has become all too integral in many disciplines--many NC State faculty are hosting international scholars from around the world. Few faculty members are as involved in hosting such scholars as Dr. Zhilin Li in the Mathematics Department at NC State, who has hosted scholars from Spain, Moldova, and especially China.

The Chinese government has created a high demand by initiating scholarships to do research abroad: while Li gets requests to host scholars from around the world, he gets “especially... a lot of inquiries from China because now the Chinese government has Chinese scholarships and many people apply.” In addition, many Chinese institutions require a scholar to have spent at least a year abroad in order to qualify for a full professorship. The result is many bright Chinese scholars are motivated to go abroad and are equipped with the financial backing to do so.

This is true, not just of China, but many countries around the world. While Li has used some of his own grant money to help support visiting scholars, most receive funding from their home institutions or governments. “Each country has some grants,” Li explains, which can be used to fund the scholar’s living expenses and travel—and in fact, NC State requires proof that international scholars will receive at least \$1500 per month.. The [Office of International Services \(OIS\)](#) works with visiting scholars on the visa process and partners with academic departments to support faculty and their visitors in other capacities.

The cost of a visiting scholar to the hosting department is low, as many of the resources provided—office space, e-mail addresses, etc.—are covered under normal operating expenses.

So how do faculty connect to potential visitors? “These days the chances are pretty high that you’ll get an e-mail,” Li says. Going to international workshops and conferences, citing the work of others in published papers, and maintaining a good online presence can lead scholars to reaching out. “Pay attention if students or faculty contact you,” advises Li. “Don’t ignore people.” Being positive, responsive, and accommodating can foster productive, international research relationships.

For faculty interested in getting a small taste of what it's like to host, Li recommends the Global Engagement in Academic Research (GEAR) program, managed by the Office of International Affairs (OIA). "[Students from China] apply for this program, they pay tuition, but they need to find a faculty sponsor," says Dr. Li. The program lasts only a month during the summer, and interested faculty can check out the [GEAR website](#) for details.

Dr. Li also recommends looking into NC State's partner universities, which offer many opportunities to collaborate with and host scholars. NC State has partner universities all across the world, from Sweden and Australia, to Turkey and Chile, to Japan and China: "Now we have Zhejiang University, and in Shanghai they have Jiao Tong University. In Nanjing, they have Nanjing Normal University." The list goes on, and is available through [OIA's website](#).

Hosting a scholar can be a real benefit for faculty because the courtesy of hosting may be returned: Dr. Li has had former visitors host him in countries like Hong Kong and Spain, at universities that paid for his travel and accommodation. The benefits, therefore, extend even after a visiting scholar has returned home: "Once they go back, they will remember you," says Dr. Li. "They will continue your research."

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