

THE BUFFALO NEWS

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Welcoming the Dalai Lama

Visit is a learning opportunity, and a boost for University at Buffalo

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The Dalai Lama offers a greeting earlier this month on his arrival at a meeting in Canada near the start of his North American tour.

Buffalo's hosting of the 14th Dalai Lama this week is an honor for the city and a major coup for the University at Buffalo, one that boosts its national image while providing a stellar learning opportunity for its students and its community. It would be advantage enough if UB simply had landed a speaker of this magnitude for this year's Distinguished Speaker Series - but the Dalai Lama is spending three days at the university, making this visit by the world's best-known Buddhist the university's largest event of the year.

The Dalai Lama's visit also casts this entire region in a positive light, and draws attention to UB's Asian studies program. It is no coincidence that this world leader chose a university with nearly 4,000 international students, which last year ranked it as No. 11 among major American universities in that category. There are 10 university students from the exiled Dalai Lama's native Tibet.

UB has worked hard to establish not only a globally diverse student body but a presence abroad. Much of that effort has centered on China, where "UB" is now a recognized academic brand name. China took over Tibet in 1950, forcing the Dalai Lama to flee. He has been running the government in exile from Dharamsala, India. The 1989 Nobel Peace Prize winner has sought greater cultural and religious autonomy for Tibet, a view the government does not appreciate; while here, he has requested a private audience with the 500 UB students from China.

As the president of UB's Tibetan Student Association said, the school hosts a number of international students who will go back home and be leaders one day. If the Dalai Lama is able to bridge any gap of understanding, and do so with young, open minds, then he will have achieved so much more than any official state visit.

With programs and students abroad, UB is participating on a world as well as national stage. That participation is underscored by this visit. Notably, profit from ticket sales will support scholarships for Tibetan and Asian studies students. The agreement stipulates that the university can not make a monetary profit from the Dalai Lama's visit - but it can and will profit educationally.

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