

# Students: China unrest did not ruin trip

By Chris Tipton  
Staff Reporter

Despite recent uprisings, two University of Nebraska-Lincoln students said they didn't feel threatened during their stay in Xian, China.

"I really never felt threatened personally," said Paul Wagener, a UNL senior majoring in architecture. "I did feel concerned to a degree. It was just always in the air."

"I saw demonstrations in Xian. Some days the police were there and other days they would just completely disappear. It was weird."

Wagener and Mike Kros, also a senior architecture major at UNL, were part of a student exchange between the United States and China.

The students left the United States on May 22. They traveled with James Potter, chairman of the Architecture College, and an architecture student from Philadelphia.

The group stayed in Hong Kong for a few days and then traveled to China, where they went to Shanghai, Nanjing and finally to Xian.

Xian is 900 miles southwest of

Beijing, where most of the violence against pro-democracy student demonstrators has occurred.

The trip, which was supposed to last seven weeks, was cut short because of the civil unrest in China. The group left about two weeks ago.

While in China, the group got its information from an underground network of Chinese students who passed information to each other through various methods, Wagener said.

"They used the telephone, driving, bicycling, flyers, fax machines or whatever," he said. "Information would come in and one person would read it over the P.A. system so that more people could hear it."

"One day a leader of the university where we were staying came in and smashed the P.A. and confiscated all of the banners that were on the walls."

Despite such action, Wagener said that the atmosphere was not all that tense.

"People still went shopping for food and took their kids to school," he said. "At night it was noticeably

quieter."

Kros said he was afraid at times because they didn't know exactly what was happening.

"Truthful information from the government is non-existent," he said. "I was angered and saddened by what the government did. The students are doing as much as they can to help the people. They tried to be peaceful about it (the demonstrations) as long as they could. Now they are scared for their lives."

The Nebraskans got most of their information about the demonstrations through what Wagener calls the "Inner China Ring" of students.

Kros said the Americans heard rumors that between 300 to 3,000 people had been killed in Beijing. At first they didn't know what to believe.

"I didn't want to believe it," Kros said. "I hoped that it didn't happen. I was empty inside. When you're there and all those people have died, it feels like part of you goes with it."

"I was horrified," Wagener said. "It was hard for me to believe that someone could go in and mow people

down like that, with tanks and rifles. "The Chinese are a one-child family. Those people are losing their only child forever."

China enforces a one child per family policy to reduce the country's population growth.

Kros said that at night in Xian, truckloads of students went out to block the east and west ends of town to keep the troops out.

The government jammed radio communications from the Voice of

America and British Broadcasting Corporation, Kros said. The bits of the programs that got through were translated to the crowd by students, he said.

Despite the civil unrest, both students said they left with a positive view of China.

"I learned a lot about the Chinese culture and people in general," Kros said. "The Chinese people are just as intelligent and funny as we are. The people are the most friendly and open I've ever met."

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