

CCAC sociology professor visits Cuba through exchange program

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A Community College of Allegheny County professor traveled to Cuba last month to get an up-close look at some of the country's societal changes.

Jill Oblak, sociology professor at CCAC's Boyce campus in Monroeville, traveled with other professors and high school teachers through the University of Pittsburgh's "A People to People Cultural Exchange." The program is sponsored by the university's Latin American Studies Department and supported by CCAC's professional development program.

Oblak said she took the trip to learn more about Cuban society and culture as well as U.S.-Cuba relations.

She said she was most interested in seeing a society that is undergoing major changes in its social institutions, including its politics, economics, technology, religion and international affairs, and how those changes are affecting the culture.

"Just seeing how those things work in a country as different as Cuba was fascinating," Oblak said in a news release.

The group attended a lecture on U.S.-Cuba relations at the University of Havana

and met with the staff of the Literacy Museum, which traced Cuba's achievements in the Cuban Literacy Campaign of 1961.

The group also took a walking tour of Old Havana and visited the Cuban National Ballet School, the Ernest Hemingway Museum and a tobacco farm and factory.

Oblak described the Cubans she met as welcoming.

"Most people said they love Americans but are unhappy with the American government. As a sociologist, I appreciated being able to see things from other perspectives," she said. "It was interesting to learn about Cuba, but also to reflect on our own culture — there are so many things we take for granted in the U.S."

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