

Grant spurs groundbreaking aviation research

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KALAMAZOO--A Western Michigan University faculty member is poised to make a significant and original contribution to global aviation research with the help of a WMU Support for Faculty Scholars Award.

The award will allow Lori Brown, a faculty specialist I-lecturer in WMU's Department of Aviation Sciences, to collaborate with the University of Flight in Sichuan Province, China. The project will evaluate "The Efficacy of Flight Attendant/Pilot Communication and Training Requirements in China" and be the first study of its kind.

Brown, who joined WMU's aviation sciences department in 2001, is focusing her research on investigating the interface between flight deck and cabin crews during onboard emergencies and the communication barriers that can impede the flow of information between cockpit and cabin environments.

Previous research has pointed out areas of concern related to aviation in China.

Due to the country's pilot shortage, airlines employ many expatriate pilots from the United States and United Kingdom, which can lead to gaps that impede communication between pilots and flight attendants.

Prior studies have found that 69 percent of crewmembers globally rank their airlines' level of communication to be below average. But 75 percent of respondents from China indicate that there have been times when they were hesitant to report a problem to the flight deck due to lack of understanding, or fear of being reprimanded by pilots.

The majority of aviation jobs and growth for the next 20 years is predicted to take place in China, so Brown says prudence dictates that American academic institutions collaborate with Chinese universities to share best practices in training and understand cultural differences that can affect the safety of U.S.-Chinese and Chinese-Chinese crewmembers.

"Furthermore, the majority of pilots in China come from the military ranks," Brown notes, "therefore we find a first officer or flight attendant may be hesitant to speak up to the captain if a problem arises, which may affect the safety of the flight."

The results garnered from Brown's project are expected to generate recommended improvements and curriculum enhancements that will serve as a crucial beginning for American and Chinese aviation institutions to establish a mutually beneficial collaboration that will advance global aviation research.

Brown teaches several of WMU's aviation courses and also promotes aviation locally by teaching community education classes. She holds an Airline Transport Rating, European Joint Aviation Authorities certification, and several other important ratings and certifications.

Her more than 20 years in the aviation industry includes experience on the B727, B737, B757, B767, B747, DC-10, A300 and several turboprop aircraft with Continental Airlines, Northwest Airlink, Flight Safety International and American Eagle Airlines. It also includes training international pilots as well as pilots from the FAA, FBI, CIA, NOAA, Walmart and the government of Mexico.

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