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Thai judge comes to Chicago to learn ADR, earn a degree

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When Judge Thanarak Naowarat returns to Thailand in mid-May, he plans to inform his colleagues about how alternative dispute resolution works in the U.S.

Naowarat, presiding judge of the Central Intellectual Property and International Trade Court in Bangkok, has been in Chicago since December 2010.

Naowarat is participating in the JAMS Foundation's Weinstein International Fellowship, which involves ADR professionals coming from other countries to the U.S. to study mediation and arbitration. The court in Bangkok, comprising about 20 judges, is now developing ADR processes and procedures.

"I have the responsibility to go back to my court to start workshops and disseminate the knowledge and experience I've learned from this country to my colleagues," said Naowarat, who is known as Pete.

Naowarat observed three mediation sessions conducted by William E. Hartgering, a neutral with JAMS Inc. in Chicago.

"What I have learned here ... is going to be useful to me," Naowarat said.

But Naowarat said there's more to know about the laws and ADR systems in the U.S.

"I will have to learn more about it and try to develop the system in our own country," Naowarat said.

While here, Naowarat said he also has worked on an independent research project.



Thanarak
Naowarat



William E.
Hartgering

As part of the fellowship program, Naowarat also enrolled in LL.M. classes at Chicago-Kent College of Law, including mediation and international trade law.

Law is taught differently here compared to Thailand, Naowarat said.

"Here I have to try and participate more" in class, Naowarat said. "It is a good way to study law."

Naowarat expects to receive his LL.M. degree in International and Comparative Law from Chicago-Kent next month.

Edward C. Harris, Chicago-Kent's assistant dean for International LL.M. Programs, met Naowarat last summer. At that time, the judge was a student in an introduction to the American legal system class Harris taught at the Judicial Training Institute in Bangkok.

Harris also provided advice to Naowarat about classes to take at Chicago-Kent.

Harris called Naowarat an astute listener. "He's a diligent student and very focused on bringing new legal concepts to the law of Thailand," Harris said.

"We're sure that his additional knowledge will have a positive effect on the Thai judiciary and the law of Thailand," Harris said.

While here in Chicago, Naowarat said he tried various foods and experienced cold weather.

"I had never seen snow before," said Naowarat, who endured his first blizzard here in early February.

The Weinstein International Fellowship program began in 2008 and this year's class comprises 13 members, a JAMS official said.

Earlier this year, Hartgering went to Thailand as part of a joint educational program between Chicago-Kent and Thammasat University. He taught a three-week class of six students called "Negotiation, Mediation and International ADR," Hartgering said.

"The students were really enthusiastic about this," Hartgering said.

"We have more experience with ADR than any other country in the world," Hartgering said.

Giving foreigners the tools to resolve disputes provides real value, Hartgering said.

"It isn't just theory, I saw it," Hartgering said.