

Exchange program aims to improve Taiwan-US ties

A Taiwan-US student-led exchange program is to be initiated on Friday, with 42 delegates from the two countries gathering for two weeks in Taiwan to study and analyze issues of concern to both countries while visiting diverse regions in the country.

"I want to bring these two countries together in a very personal way," Alice Liao (廖品蘋), a rising junior who majors in international business and marketing at Villanova University, Pennsylvania, said in an interview via Skype yesterday.

A Taiwanese who is about to get US citizenship, Liao, a founder of the Taiwan America Student Conference (TASC), said it is an honor as well as a responsibility for her to give back to the two countries she cares about the most.

"When it comes to international relations and peace, if you have some connections to a country, whether a friend or a family, that country becomes endeared to you. It is real to you," Liao said.

Liao said the idea to start the exchange program came after she participated in last year's Japan America Student Conference (JASC), where she was inspired by their "passion and how much they care" about the two countries.

Established in 1934 by university students concerned about the breakdown of bilateral relations prior to World War II, the prestigious JASC is now the world's longest running student-led exchange program.

Amy Kao (高敏嘉), a senior at National Taiwan University's international business department, said she joined the founding group to organize the TASC because she wanted to break the stereotype that young Taiwanese lack ambition and vision.

The five major themes to be discussed at this year's conference are Taiwan-China-US relations; modern issues in education; diversity, identity and discrimination; government and society; and energy and environmental sustainability.

Former American Institute in Taiwan director William Stanton, Democratic Progressive Party Chairperson Tsai Ing-wen (蔡英文) and Teach for Taiwan founder Anting Liu (劉安婷) are among the speakers at the conference.

During the two-week program, students will participate in roundtable discussions on these issues and tour various places in Taipei, Greater Taichung and Greater Kaohsiung, including Siaolin Village (小林), a mountain village that was devastated by a typhoon in 2009 but which has since seen a rebirth.

"Our mission is to improve US-Taiwan relations by deepening our mutual understanding of each other's cultures, histories, and most importantly, people," the TASC said on the Web site.