China too big a player for state to ignore
By Dr. Rich Harrill
July 15, 2008 10:34 AM

China, long isolated and doctrinaire, has become a major player in international commerce.

The Communist giant has loosened up at home and brought a capitalist enthusiasm for investment abroad. Meanwhile, it has entered the space race, bolstered its military, successfully sought the Olympic Games and permitted its citizens to travel in increasing numbers.

Ignoring this 21st-century powerhouse, with its more than 1.3 billion people, enormous energy, rising standard of living and growing trade capacity, would be foolish.

Wisely, the state of South Carolina and the University of South Carolina are not.

In October 2005, the S.C. Department of Commerce opened an office in Shanghai to recruit Chinese investment. A recent news release noted that the Chinese government recently recognized the office among three foreign economic-development and investment agencies for their efforts in assisting Chinese companies with investing abroad.

The University of South Carolina has begun exchanges with China that could prove beneficial to the state's economy.

In 2007, some 234 students from Chinese universities attended the University of South Carolina, and, in that same year, 49 students traveled to China. This cross-pollination acquaints our students with Chinese culture and commerce and prepares them for careers in the global economy.

Quietly, the university has created a competitive advantage for the state regarding China. For example, the internationally renowned Moore School of Business features a 24- to 36-month "China Track" for students. This program features a six-month internship, usually in Shanghai or Beijing, with either a Chinese-owned company or a multinational organization.

The university's College of Hospitality, Retail and Sport Management recently conducted landmark research in partnership with the Travel Industry Association (TIA) and the U.S. Department of Commerce on the future of Chinese tourism in the United States. Results indicate that Chinese visitors' fondness for American culture and museums, as well as for beaches and parks, could one day be a boon for South Carolina.

The college also offers students the possibility of studying in Macau, chiefly in the fields of hospitality and tourism, and event and sports management.

As a South Carolinian, I am proud that, through the state's efforts, China-affiliated and China-owned companies employ more than 1,400 individuals in the state and that China was South Carolina's fifth-largest export market in 2007, with more than $623 million in goods sold there. As a faculty member, I am pleased with the opportunities for China-related education and research the university offers its students.

And as an economic developer, I know that international competition for trade, investment and human capital can be fast-paced and fierce.

Just this spring, Georgia Gov. Sonny Perdue and senior officials at Tsinghua University in China announced the creation of a partnership between the University of Georgia and Tsinghua University initiating mutual educational opportunities for UGA and Tsinghua students and faculty members. According to a news release, the signing of the partnership is a significant piece of the governor's economic-development mission in China and enhances the business aspects of the mission.

To compete in this arena -- and, increasingly, states have little choice -- government and academia must form partnerships that will provide and sustain the infrastructure for a knowledge-based economy. South Carolina

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has made an excellent start but cannot afford to rest on its laurels.

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