

Foreign Students Adjust to Education System

By Jan Travers

Raise your hand if you are willing to leave the United States for foreign territory to pursue an academic degree? Would you be able to cope with the abrupt changes in your life, like a different language, new foods, strange customs, and no recognizable friendly faces?

For the 16 international students at Penn State, Harrisburg, learning to adapt is taken in stride. Most of them do not even see themselves as doing anything extraordinary.

This is not to say that their stay in America is without problems. As is understandable, communication is a major problem. Not only are they unaccustomed to speaking English daily, but also, as in the typical case of Panos Xynarios, a graduate student from Athens, Greece, it is hard to think and react in English as well. "I decided early in my education that the key to survival was getting into the mainstream, so I joined

student clubs," said Xynarios. This allowed him to make friends, meeting many people and gradually improving his English comprehension.

Hiroimi Yoshida, from Tokyo, Japan, looks at the language problem as a "good exercise in learning about American thinking and behavior."

Each of the international students finds shortcuts to help interpret the language. Huey Juan Chou, from Taiwan, feels fortunate because she is able to understand her professors, but still finds it difficult to ask questions in class. "When I have a question, I write it down in Chinese first to make sure I am really saying what I want," she said. Motoko Sakai, of Kyoto, Japan, finds note taking difficult. "My class notes have both English and Japanese in them. Because Japanese is more concise, it is easier to say a lot more in less space," she said.

Getting used to the education system has also been an adjustment for the international students. "It's hard to get used to the way American students are

encouraged to question their professors. In China, our professors know it all and we are only students. We would never disagree with them," said Chou. Agreeing with this, Sakai added, "The professors here respect the students point of view, even when it is obvious that what they (students) said is wrong."

Xynarios, seeing the American and Greek education system alike in many ways is impressed with the degree of practical knowledge that can be acquired through internships here. "In Greece our education consists of lectures, with the only training coming after graduation when we are actually in the working world," he said.

Another difference between American and foreign educational systems is the admission of part time students to the universities. "When a Japanese housewife goes back to school, it is big news because it seldom happens," said Sakai. "Older students help make the classes more interesting, by offering a more mature viewpoint," she added.

Also, in Japan, there are no semesters. All classes are taught on a one year cycle. "The assignments here can be overwhelming because there is not as much time to do them," remarked Sakai.

How do these guests view the American people as represented on this campus? "The students are very helpful in my daily life," said Chou. "When I came I was totally unprepared about how to dress. The students instructed me on what I would need for the winter, so I was able to have my parents send me heavy clothes," said Chou. She sent home for them because she could save two-thirds the price of clothing by having them sent rather than buying them here, according to Chou.

However, even though they all were pleased by the individual acceptance by the other students, they all perceived a feeling of defensiveness about this country. "Americans do not want to hear that America is not the best country around," said Sakai, "so I try very hard not to criticize." But this attitude is also apparent in other ethnocentric ways. "Americans are willing to learn from us, but if they begin to feel threatened from our knowledge, they just shut us off," charged Xynarios.

Dave Doaty, director of the student support center, which includes international students, probably has more contact with the students than any other campus official. He is on hand to greet them when they arrive at the

airports, as well as being available to them if any problems arise. According to Doaty, he knows of no student who came here and did not finish his studies.

But like any other program, there is always room for some improvement. Besides being a member of a small minority, the international students have to find ways to circumvent obstacles. Many times they turn to each other to discuss the approach. Every international student interviewed expressed a wish that an international room, such as the Black Cultural Arts Center, would be established for them to get together and share their problems and successes. "We could hold an international film festival, include a small library of materials from everyone's country, and offer the public presentations," said Xynarios.

The increased interdependence among nations has changed the world. Adjustments in thinking are needed to face this new interdependent world. The

international students know they need to adjust, which explains their presence here. The Americans don't, unable or unwilling to admit the limitations of a superpower.

By hosting international students on campus, an opportunity is provided to show Americans that a whole new resource of knowledge and ideas is available to them.

Committee Working to Internationalize Campus

By Jan Travers

"Americans are very parochial. They are unaware of other cultures," said Frank Swetz, director of campus international affairs. "We can no longer expect to be professionals in our global society without being knowledgeable about other countries," he added.

It was for this reason that the Committee for International Affairs was charged with the task of "internationalizing the campus." The committee of 10 is finding ways to build

awareness of the big world beyond our door.

The number one committee priority for this year is establishing a host family program where a family in the community would agree to "adopt" an international student. According to Swetz, some students never leave the campus for the whole time they are here. To really get to know what American culture is, the international student must go into people's homes and see how they live. "You can't learn the culture by bumping into Americans at Fox's Market," Swetz quipped.

Clem Gilpin, another member of the committee and advisor to the International Affairs Association, agreed. As an American spending time in Nigeria, he got the opportunity to live with a Nigerian family. "You really get the feeling of the ways of the people. It takes an effort for international students to adjust to our wacko world and how we do things," he said. Developing a bond with an American family helps make this transition easier.

In addition to the host family program, which Swetz hopes will be operational this year, the committee is overseeing other programs, which include: an information exchange with Marion Mugabi University in the Congo, sending books to underdeveloped nations, trying to establish a program with Barbados, investigating teaching positions in Malaysia, hosting visiting professors and assisting in their research, and sponsoring cultural events on campus.

Alumni Role Model Program in Action

By Jan Travers

In an attempt to provide better career information to minority students, the "Alumni Role Model Program" has been established.

This program, set up by the Career Services Office in concurrence with the Black Student Union, will be an ongoing association network between currently enrolled minority students and Capital College alumni who are successful in the business world.

The kick-off of the program was held November 4, and consisted of work-shops, dinner, and a panel discussion.

The approximately 70 in attendance had an opportunity before dinner to hear the alumni talk about their career paths, and how they got to where they are. After dinner, during the panel discussion, the focus shifted to the students and what they must do to prepare for the market.

According to Peg O'Hara, coordinator of career planning and placement, files will be kept on all participating alumni. When a student has a question or problem, they will be able to contact the business person first hand. "By having access to this information of alumni who can relate to this school, we are hoping to build a working information network," said O'Hara.

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Professor Hosts Radio Show

Dr. John Patterson of the American Studies Department, hosts a weekly folk music program Saturday evenings from 8 to 10pm following "A Prairie Home Companion" on WITF 89.5FM, your listener supported radio station. Give Patterson a listen, and you're bound to learn something.

"SMUGGLING BIBLES INTO POLAND"

Friday, Nov. 21

7:00 At The CUB

Terry Bone, a PSU graduate and music teacher will share his experience. Bring a friend.

Volleyball to follow until 11 pm