

PSH PEOPLE

Diversity

But how strongly are the various peoples of the world represented here?

Of the college's 3416 students, 190, about 5 1/2 percent, are minorities--American Indians, Alaskan Americans, African-Americans, Asians, and Hispanics, said Dorothy Guy, registrar.

Twenty-seven students are classified as international. Twelve undergraduate and 15 graduate students hold passports from another country. These people, for the most part, will return to their own countries after graduation.

However, about 100 other students were born in other countries but now hold U.S. citizenship.

An unknown number of foreign students enrolled at the college have applied for permanent residence in the

United States, Swetz said.

"As far as the university is concerned, they are considered residents of the U.S., but they bring experiences from their own countries to Penn State," Swetz said.

Swetz said one of her missions is for everyone at Penn State Harrisburg to take advantage of the opportunities available from a diverse institution.

Americans can take advantage of the informal associations by inviting "the new kid on the block" to participate in activities. Swetz said, many international students have difficulties with transportation, finding activities to participate in on weekends, and interpreting American colloquialisms.

"International students may find their

way here and get assimilated, but the missing link is to actually interact with American students," Swetz said. Both sides need to associate with each other and gain from the experience.

"The bottom line is to make people think twice about people that may be new to the American college scene," Swetz said. These students may be shy, unfamiliar with American traditions, and have language barriers.

PSH has no formal recruiting program for foreign students. "We do not go out and solicit, mostly because of budgetary and time constraints," Swetz said.

Essentially, the university responds to requests, Swetz said. Many foreign students learn about Penn State Harrisburg from libraries or associations

that act as information centers for students who want to travel to other countries.

Swetz said, the college is trying to foster diversity awareness through several programs. Seminars on diversity are required during orientation. And the program "Lunch with an International Flavor," brings together foreign students who talk about their countries and provide samples of their national cuisine with an audience of American students.

In response to--and in support of--the diversity issue, the *Capital Times* presents a collection of profiles that includes international and non-traditional students--only a sample of the diversity at Penn State Harrisburg.

Kyoko Imata-- Japan

Pat Byers
Capital Times Staff

She came to America from Japan to gain both a masters degree and a better understanding of American culture and its people. "In Japan they misunderstand American people," claims Kyoko Imata. "They only believe what they see on TV, hear on the radio, or read in the newspapers."

This 29-year-old PSH American Studies graduate student smiles as she explains that she is as interested in the American lifestyle as she is in her studies.

Imata comes from a family that encourages her travel and studies abroad. Her mother is a widowed homemaker whose travels to Guam made her familiar with American culture. Imata's lone sister is a Tokyo college student who aspires to follow her sisters' footsteps and study in a foreign land.

Imata chose PSH because of its "cheap tuition and good range of courses" and said she is happy with her decision. She credits her roommate and her professors with teaching her the laws of campus survival and an ability to enjoy her studies at the same time.

Her course curriculum gives her the background she needs to take her own ideas of America back to Japan. She is especially interested in American individualism. She sees both a positive and negative side to this freedom of expression in America. Imata giggled when she spoke of students calling professors by their first name and playfully imitates how students sit on and prop their legs up on their desks. This would not be tolerated in Japan, she said, chewing gum.

"In Japan, the professor lectures and the students sit quietly and take notes," she said. She described good professor-student communications at PSH and states. "Here students enjoy classes and professors listen to students' ideas." A student caught chewing gum in class in Japan would be scolded bitterly.

She would like to pass on some American mannerisms to her students and eventually her own children.

Words such as "Thanks" and "Thank-you" mean a lot to her. She would also like to teach her children to speak freely and publicly.

Communication was a problem when she arrived in the states.

"My girlfriend and I had just landed at the L.A. International Airport when we discovered that we had to transfer to San Francisco and didn't know you had to transfer from one wing of the airport to the other wing," she remembers.

"So I asked questions, but I didn't understand what answers were given to me," she said and added "the man (she spoke to) talked so fast, he thought I was deaf and started to shout louder to me. I have confidence in speaking English but in the airport I couldn't make myself understand."

"In Japan, the professor lectures and the students sit quietly and take notes," she said. "Here students enjoy classes and professors listen to students' ideas."

Imata enjoys Japanese TV yet doesn't quite understand American sitcoms. "I cannot understand why they laugh," she said of the sitcoms' canned laughter. She likes any type of American movie on television and excitedly claims that she was impressed with the American actors and actresses as portrayed on T.V. "American actors and actresses are so beautiful," she said. But she laughs at her discovery that not all Americans are perfect. "Some are fat and ugly," she said.

She said she misses her mother, Japanese TV, and Japanese food, in that order. She has adjusted to the typical American day simply because it mirrors a typical day in Japan. Japanese men go to work very early and eat dinner and drink at the bar with their bosses and

clients. They arrive home late and spend little time with their families. She says that many Japanese men die of heart disease because of fatigue and stress, not of diet and cholesterol as in America.

She said that although Japanese children and teens like McDonalds and Kentucky Fried Chicken food in Japan, an everyday, ordinary meal is far more nutritious in the Japanese household.

She said the Japanese eat less than do many people in the United States, and remembers seeing people at a recent visit to Ponderosa go back to the salad bar for two and three helpings and two and three cups of ice cream.

She said dessert in the United States is too sweet and that Japanese "guys" caught eating sweets in public are considered "sissies." Sweets are for women in Japan.

Imata lives in Middletown. She calls it rural America. "Tokyo is very, very fast. Japanese people walk fast and run in the city. From childhood we are taught to hurry up and eat, hurry up and study, hurry up and go to work. In this country they never run."

Above all else, Kyoko seems to enjoy her PSH experience. We part with a hearty handshake, a polite bow, and a sincere "Thank-you."

Miriam Leakemariam-- Ethiopia

Victoria Phillips
Capital Times Contributor

Friendly and relaxed in jeans and white sweatshirt, Miriam Leakemariam of Asmara, Ethiopia, said she has always been familiar with American culture. In Asmara, she attended an American school.

Twenty-two-years old, Leakemariam has lived in Harrisburg since her senior

year in high school when she attended Susquehanna Senior High. After high school, she attended Harrisburg Area Community College, and is now a student at Penn State Harrisburg.

Yet some aspects of American life continue to surprise and amuse her.

"I think it's funny how many holidays Americans celebrate," Leakemariam said. "Bosses' Week" and "Secretaries' Week" are unheard of in Ethiopia. And it seems sad to Leakemariam that a Mother's Day is needed to "remind" people to love and respect their mothers. "Every day is Mother's Day for us," she said. Ethiopian mothers get flowers regularly.

Leakemariam is a mathematics major who plans to teach in her home land when she completes her graduate degree.

Leakemariam is looking forward to a trip home in January to visit her mother and father, a successful businessman.

"I think it's funny how many holidays Americans celebrate."

When asked about the desert and starving children images often portrayed by the American media, Leakemariam had one response, "Wrong." She didn't minimize the arid farmland and food shortages that plague many Ethiopians, but she made it clear that poverty is not as widespread as the media lead people to believe. She described lush landscapes covered with trees and thick, green foliage in southern Ethiopia. Skyscrapers and luxurious hotels with swimming pools rise above sprawling cityscapes, she said.

When Leakemariam does return to Asmara, she will miss some things about America, especially the freedom to "get up and go out" at any time. In Ethiopia, a curfew prohibits citizens from leaving their homes from midnight until 5 a.m. She said this policy aims to prevent crimes. And, she said, "I'll miss your big selection of laundry detergents," and laughed.