

Making **International** Students Feel at Home on Your Campus

Coming to a foreign country not knowing anyone and sometimes not even knowing the language can be a frightening prospect.

Moving can be a difficult undertaking for anyone. But packing your belongings, your family, and your culture into a few boxes and shipping them to a new country can be monumental. International students deal with a vast amount of change in a short period of time, emigrating temporarily from their country to another land. Some of them have to learn a new language before they are accepted for study abroad. Some have to adapt to a different type of school system. And still others must become well-versed in the art of layering their clothing to keep warm in the winter! But for each one, the sacrifice is worth the challenge of setting up a new life for themselves because their dream is to realize a scholastic goal.

Benefits of Diversity

Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, has one of the highest international student saturation rates of any higher education institution in the United States. The university has been ranked sixth in the nation for total number of undergraduate international students by the 2003 America's Best Colleges edition of *U.S. News and World Report*. Currently, 816 students are at Andrews on F-1 or J-1 visas or are Legal Permanent Residents (LPR), comprising 27 percent of the total student body. Andrews Academy and Ruth Murdoch Elementary School, both affiliated with the university, have a high concentration of international students, as well. Nearly one-third of the total student body at Andrews Academy comes from abroad, as do 60 of the 318 students at Ruth Murdoch Elementary School.

Camille Butler, a student from Toronto, Canada, decided to come to Andrews specifically because of the diversity. "Toronto is one of the most diverse cities in the world, and Andrews, with all its international students, reminded me the most of home," she said. Margit Waern, a graduate

By Katie Shaw

student from Denmark, also appreciates the diversity on campus. "One of the main reasons I chose Andrews is because there is a wonderful mix of cultures on campus, and being exposed to so many different nationalities is very important to me."

Andrews University's president, Niels-Erik Andreassen, enrolled as an international student (from Denmark) at Andrews in 1963. More than 30 years later, he returned to Andrews as president. "It was really like coming back home again," Andreassen said. "The reason I accepted the position at Andrews was a strong personal commitment to the mission of this institution, particularly its international character and outlook."

Government Regulations

Coming to the United States from another country has become more difficult since September 11, 2001, although Andrews has only seen about a 2 percent decline in its total number of international students, says Najeeb Nakhle, director of International Student Services.

Once an international student is accepted by a college in the U.S., he or she receives an I-20, a document issued by the institution, which the prospective student presents to the American embassy in his or her country in order to receive a visa. In the past, students would receive a visa without difficulty. However, as a result of concern about terrorism, all prospective students must be interviewed by the Consular officer at the American embassy to determine their reason for seeking higher education in the United States. Students must present proof of strong ties to their home country to convince the Consular officer that they plan to return home and will not stay in the U.S. after the visa expires.

Most students come to the United States on F-1 visas, which allow them to work on campus 20 hours per week while school is in session and full-time during school vacations. However, the dependents, spouses, and

children of F-1 students are not allowed to work. F-1 dependents who arrive with F-2 visas are not allowed to study at a university unless they change their visa status to F-1.

Students who are financially sponsored by an organization arrive in the U.S. with J-1 visas. Such students can work 20 hours per week on or off

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Delia Frey and her ESL tutor, Francesca Lippi, focus on Delia's phonics and conversation skills.

campus during the school year and full-time during school vacations. J-1 dependents can study and work full-time on or off campus.

Realizing a Dream

Marcus and Mathilde Frey, with their two daughters, Delia, 8, and Chiara, 3, left their home and jobs in Freiburg, Germany, so Mathilde could pursue her Master of Divinity and ultimately, Doctor of Ministry degree at Andrews University. Mathilde had worked as a pastor in Freiburg for a number of years. Marcus worked for a prominent chemical industry company repairing pumps and served as the company's employee rights advocate. Coming to Andrews without sponsorship was a huge commitment for the Freys, since they plan to stay in the United States for at least five years. Mathilde's F-1 visa al-

lowed her to go to school, but initially, Marcus could not work. He was able to apply for an F-1 visa 90 days after their arrival, and received permission to work in mid-November 2003.

Although their parents spoke some English, Delia and Chiara had not had a lot of exposure to the language. Delia entered the 3rd grade at Ruth Murdoch Elementary School at the beginning of the year. Chiara, still too young for school, learns English from her parents and older sister. Delia's teacher, Stacey Campbell, recalls, "On Delia's first day of school, the only English she knew was 'Good morning, teacher.'" Delia and Mrs. Campbell were able to communicate with the use of a German-English dictionary and the help of a classmate who spoke German. Delia was also enrolled in English as a Second Lan-

guage (ESL) classes with Francesca Lippi, and works one-on-one with her. "Delia has made amazing progress," Mrs. Lippi says. After just three months of school, she has picked up English so quickly that she is now writing complete stories.

When they return to Germany, Mathilde hopes to teach Old Testament at the seminary in Friedensau. She and Marcus feel that their experience at Andrews has been enriched by all of the other international students they have met. "It's very interesting to get to know people from all over," Mathilde says. "Our neighbors are from Rwanda."

Services for International Students

About 1985, because of the large number of international students at Andrews, the university realized the need for a number of special services to assist these students. The International Student Services (ISS) office was created to fulfill this need. The ISS personnel attend yearly state, regional, and national conferences to learn how to help the international students successfully negotiate the maze of regulations affecting their visa status. The ISS office also provides emergency financial help, personal counseling on matters related to student life, and different kinds of scholarships for international students.

In addition, they plan activities throughout the school year not only to help these students feel a part of Andrews, but also to help the student body and faculty members appreciate their international population. Recognizing that the vast majority of students from abroad cannot afford to go home for the Christmas holidays, the ISS office hosts a banquet each year on Christmas Eve. In April, the university hosts International Student Week, which features the International Food Fair, a favorite for both the campus and community; International Chapel; and International Sabbath at Pioneer Memorial church

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(PMC), the campus church.

Neighbor to Neighbor, the local community services agency operated by PMC on the university campus, provides two invaluable programs for needy students. First, Family Emergency Assistance allows students and their families to choose clothes and household items every six months free of charge. Students in non-furnished apartments are also allowed two major furniture items per family. Second, all students are invited to shop at the thrift store, which resells donated items at low cost. "Community Services plays the Good Samaritan

role for students, especially when they first arrive," Nakhle notes.

At the beginning of each semester, the ISS office hosts a mandatory three-day international student orientation that highlights the various services available on campus. During the August 2003 orientation, nearly 70 percent of the students who participated said that they had never experienced winter. However, at least half of those students owned vehicles! The Department of Public Safety at Andrews recognized that offering free winter driving lessons to these students would help keep everyone safer on the roads. Lieutenant Russ Rob-

bins accompanies students in their vehicles and teaches them what to do if the vehicle begins to slide. "This allows the students to get comfortable in a controlled environment," said Kevin Penrod, chief of Public Safety. "This training has definitely helped keep the roads safer, and it has made the students more aware of the potential dangers."

At the international student orientation, each participant receives a folder with general university information including a campus map, the previous year's *Cast* (an informal picture book of all students, faculty, and staff), a calendar for the current school year, and a student handbook with all the university's rules and guidelines. Many campus depart-



Russ Robbins (left), assistant director for Andrews University's Department of Public Safety, teaches international students each year how to drive in winter weather.

ments come to the orientation to present their services. Students are given brochures on procedures pertaining to student labor, registration, and medical services. Other services and materials given to international students include an orientation package that includes local maps and a brochure telling how to obtain emergency medical care. Students at Andrews University are required to have health insurance, either a previous policy under which they are still covered or insurance they can buy after they arrive.

The housing office provides each student with a handbook that outlines



Indonesian students play native instruments for the International Student Sabbath in April 2003.

all the details about living in the campus apartments. Students can view different floor plans, review rental fees, and learn how to use the various appliances. Also included are procedures for the care of floors and carpets, fire safety, the location and use of the laundry facilities, and where and how to dispose of garbage.

Andrews University students who do not pass the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) or who want to polish their language skills can enroll in ESL classes through the Center for Intensive English Programs. The rising need for teachers equipped to assist ESL students prompted Jeannette Bryson, director of the Center for Intensive English Programs, and Rita Seay, vice principal at Ruth Murdoch Elementary School, to devise a new program, with funding from the K16 Collaboration, which trains students from Andrews Academy to tutor elementary students in ESL. Eight high schoolers were selected from 50 who applied. After 11 weeks of preparation, they began working with elementary students during the latter part of 2002. Additionally, the center offers classes for spouses of students and interested community members at the beginning and advanced level, as well as those preparing for the TOEFL test.

Andrews University provides dormitories for single undergraduate students and apartments for families and single graduate students. One of the

most helpful resources for students in the university apartments is Project P. Wilson Trickett, a retired staff member, began this initiative when he realized that a large majority of international students were not getting enough food to properly feed their families. Distribution takes place every Sunday through Friday at 5:00 p.m. at the university's apartment complexes. After Trickett's death in 2002, Joyce Ward took over. "A lot of foreign students would not have come [to Andrews] without Project P," says Allan Freed, former director of housing for Andrews University. "They counted on that to help them."

International, academic, and support clubs are also invaluable re-

sources for international students and offer a great opportunity for all students to learn about other countries and cultures, as nearly every country and region of the world has a club at the university. Clubs such as the Pre-Med Society, Lambda Pi Eta, and the communication honor society offer students enriched academic experiences. The Seminary Women's Ministries group reaches out to wives of pastors enrolled in the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. Because of the rising number of women enrolled in every seminary program, the Center for Clergy Women was established at the beginning of the 2003-2004 school year to deal specifically with the needs of women in ministry.

The Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary allows spouses of students to enroll in classes at a greatly reduced price. If a student is pursuing a Master of Divinity degree, his or her spouse can enroll as a part-time student and earn an M.A. in one of several different programs. "We have sent an increasing number of couple teams out into the field recently," says John McVay, dean of the seminary.

Academic departments also provide a great deal of support for stu-



Mathilda (center) and Marcus Frey participate in the Multicultural Fair at Ruth Murdoch Elementary School, showcasing their German culture.

dents. “I have come to realize that my department is one of the best in my field,” says Leslie-Ann Williams, a junior from Trinidad and Tobago, of the Speech-Language Pathology and Audiology Department. “It is small, but my three professors are excellent and experienced. They love the discipline and the students. In our department, we are a family. I wouldn’t trade my teachers, or Andrews, for the world.”

Getting a Christian education is very important to the international students at Andrews. Margit Waern noted: “There is so much secular education that would look great on a résumé, but that is not my major goal. I want to experience the Christian community and be a part of it even when I am studying.” Students with families also appreciate the opportunity for their children to attend a Christian school. Adebola Osundina, a master of business administration student from Nigeria, was looking for a balanced education for his children. “I found it here at Ruth Murdoch Elementary School and the Crayon Box daycare center where all the values I teach at home are reinforced in school.”

Adapting to Life in a New Country

Coming to a foreign country not knowing anyone and sometimes not even knowing the language can be a frightening prospect. Many times, the only thing that compels students to come to Andrews is the knowledge that a support group awaits them. International students at Andrews are a very tight-knit group. Marcus and Mathilde Frey had friends from Germany at Andrews; however, they were away when the Freys arrived. A group from Romania stepped in to welcome the family with lots of food and friends. This sense of community is one thing Adebola Osundina especially appreciates: “The community is so warm around here, and people understand you are far from home and do all they can to make it easy.”

Nakhle reported that the number



International students at Andrews University are given the opportunity to share food and culture at the annual International Food Fair.

one struggle international students face is having enough money to pay their school bill and rent. “We get a lot of people asking for scholarships, but we have only so much money,” he says. He works with several departments on campus to find extra funds for especially needy students.

At the new international student orientation, Enid Harris, administrative assistant for the Institute of World Mission, herself originally an international student from South Africa, told the group that coming to America is actually the easy part. “Returning to your country can be harder than leaving it,” Harris said. She recommends attending a re-entry program upon arrival, similar to classes offered to missionaries who have completed their terms.

Impacting the World

The high concentration of international students among the general Andrews population is a great asset, according to the professors, students, and alumni. McVay appreciates the fact that theological students from the North American Division will know what a world church is like after attending the seminary. “They will truly appreciate that in either Kansas

or Kenya, the same gospel is preached, just with a different language,” McVay says. Chris Bokich, a 1999 graduate of Andrews with a bachelor of business administration, notes: “Once in my job at Volkswagen of America where I am constantly traveling and dealing with other cultures, I realized how valuable my Andrews education truly was. I feel comfortable with diverse groups of people. After leaving Andrews, I now feel like the world is literally at my fingertips because I understand and am at ease with a wide variety of people and cultures.”

Enrolling international students can greatly enrich a school’s student body—as well as its bottom line. Any of the programs described above that are used by Andrews University to welcome such students can be adapted to a local situation. This will help make them more comfortable and successful at your institution. ✍



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