

Spring 2015

Spring 2015, Serving Our 1,000+ International Students

Thuy Nguyen

University of New Hampshire - Main Campus

Kate Luksha

University of New Hampshire - Main Campus

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The Newsletter of UNH Global Engagement

Spring 2015

SERVING OUR 1,000+ INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

By Thuy Nguyen and Kate Luksha, OISS, with thanks to the many offices, staff, and students who contributed to this article.

As the population of international students and scholars continues to grow, the integration of campus resources to serve them is becoming more and more vital. [OISS](#), the Office of International Students and Scholars, collaborates with many offices and organizations around campus to cultivate working relationships that will benefit this effort, not just on campus but within the local community. International students and scholars arrive at UNH from about 85 different countries. One can see all the different countries represented by the colorful display of flags in the MUB. There was a time where UNH proudly had flags from A-Z, but our student from Zambia has graduated and gone on to a successful career!

It Starts with Connecting...names, faces, and places

Communication with students and scholars begins before they even reach UNH. OISS advisors are in regular contact with them to ensure all of their immigration documents are in order for them to obtain the appropriate visa(s). Through the various University departments, the [ESL Institute](#), and [Navitas Pathway program](#), students and scholars arrive at UNH with excitement, but also uncertainties and apprehension. They arrive in fall, winter, or summer. Each group is provided a thorough orientation when they arrive. In August, for example, roughly 300 students and scholars attend a week-long orientation designed to ease the students and scholars into life at UNH. OISS invites other departments to participate by providing tours of their facilities or serving as panelists in the many workshops. It's important for students to connect names with faces and places—the many offices and resources available on campus.

Knowing how important a student's first impression of UNH is, OISS, in partnership with many campus offices, works hard to create a welcoming atmosphere. Cristian Ferradas, a PhD Physics student from Lima, Peru, who arrived on campus in fall 2012, says, "Orientation was definitely key for me...I will always remember it because it's the first thing you do when you come. It was an introduction to what I should expect, how do I at least move around this place...so orientation wise, it was very important to me."

Connecting through Food

Jon Plodzick and his dining staff welcome students with a smile and great-tasting nourishment as one of their first discoveries during orientation. Caroline Romao Mendes, a BSMP student from Maceio, Brazil, has made some connections with Holloway Commons dining hall staff. "The lady, Collette, who runs the dining hall, she's so funny, and when she sees me, she always wants to know how I'm doing. One man, he's so kind. When I got here, first he was trying to talk to me and ask me about classes, about life. Everyone there is so nice." Plodzick

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adds: "Dining continues to listen to and ask our international students how we can better serve their needs. From private guided tours of the dining halls, to menu additions like noodle bars and international street food items, we hope to provide comfort foods in an inviting environment to all of the community. Currently, our culinary team is exploring international flavor trends and new cooking methodologies to improve their competencies around preparing dishes that are more than New England favorites."



Caroline Romao Mendes and Collette in Holloway Commons

The ESL Institute, in close partnership with the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences (CEPS), was pleased to welcome its first group of students from the Brazilian Scientific Mobility Program (BSMP) during the Spring 2014 semester. Currently, there are 42 BSMP students currently taking courses through ESL and CEPS. An additional 50 students are expected for Fall 2015.

Connecting through Services

Students also get to explore the **Dimond Library** during orientation. The Reference Department welcomes international students through tours and the support continues once classes start. Reference Librarian Deb Watson and her colleagues, at the request of instructors in the Navitas and ESL programs, conducts classes to help familiarize students with the use of library resources, both electronic and paper. They also emphasize the availability and willingness to assist students with their research and other library needs.

Kathleen Grace-Bishop, Director of Education and Promotion in **Health Services**, orients international students to her vital facilities. Grace-Bishop organizes an instructive session so that "New students can meet some of the staff and learn about the programs and services available, from relaxing massages to quitting smoking." Both OISS and Navitas have helped to facilitate this orientation. "This year, for the Navitas students specifically, Health Services has tried a new approach," Grace-Bishop continues, "creating a social 'meet and greet' opportunity with the staff (including their pet therapy dog, Hamilton) where they served snacks and beverages, gave informal tours of the building, and provided key information about Health Services. The staff took this opportunity to learn about them and their needs as well. In addition, they have pursued staff development to increase their knowledge and skills in working with international students. They often give presentations for Navitas students about Health Services, alcohol and other drug use as part of the Integrated Learning Skills class."

Another crucial resource students need to be familiar with is the **Counseling Center**. Often times students have to make several types of adjustments all at once: environmentally, academically, socially, and personally. Dr. Xiaoyan Fan, a staff psychologist admits that, "It can be very hard to adjust to a new place, especially a new country. It is important for the students to know that UNH has an office devoted specifically for student mental health, especially in periods of high stress. Counseling Center staff is sensitive and committed to diversity, social justice and the richness of human differences. They understand the unique challenges that international students might face and are dedicated to promoting psychological well-being." Connections with the Counseling

staff starts at orientation with a workshop in Cultural & Social Adjustment and continues throughout the year with weekly International Student and Scholar Circle. As part of student ongoing adjustment support, OISS and the Counseling Center partner to provide a weekly Circle meeting for the students where they have a safe place to unwind from the week, share what's been going on, or even just practice their English. Dr. Fan adds that, "The Counseling Center is a great resource for students. During the past fall semester, 2.6% of students who came to the Counseling Center for support were identified as international students." About 6% of UNH students are international.

Connecting through Campus and Community Engagement

The Department of Housing begins in March to plan for on-campus housing needs, room assignments, and optimal integrative living arrangements for the incoming fall group. The Residential Life staff of hall directors, community assistants, and resident assistants are hired and trained to work with a diverse student population to not only provide a home away from home but also to build a community in which international students can thrive socially and academically. To that end, Residential Life staff strongly encourages students to get involved and participate in floor activities. Assistant Director, Mary Faucher states: "Several international students have shared food and cultural traditions from their home country with students in their halls. Attending these gatherings is a great way to meet people and make friends right where you live." Yue "Bella" Bai, an English Teaching major from Zhengzhou, China, recounts her first experience living in Hetzel Hall, when she first arrived in 2012: "I love [it] there so much, especially my hall director, Gilly. I love her and my RA...they always help me when I need help, especially Gilly. She encouraged me to do a lot of things. She gave me a lot of resources."

Student involvement is key to staying engaged, active, and busy. Clubs, sports, and other campus events provide lots of opportunities to explore campus and the great outdoors. OISS, through our Program and Outreach Coordinator, Zainab Qari, sponsors educational/cultural trips and events. OISS also partners with **Campus Recreation** to provide recreational activities for all students, outdoor enthusiasts or not, to try new things, stay fit and have fun. Campus Rec offers many outdoor activities like hiking, kayaking, rock climbing and skiing. Cristian thinks the trips are "cool, they're (the leaders) very well trained." Cristian has done hikes with Campus Rec groups and fondly recalls his interactions with other students. "The groups are not that big that you get lost, so you can really get to know other students. There's usually a combination of Americans and internationals, so you can get to meet Americans. The environment is very comfortable, very easy to connect with other people. They make it easy, very friendly – even if you've never done it before. Especially for internationals, we're new to these adventures and outdoor experiences here, and they (the leaders) have to be very friendly, and show you the basics. They do a really good job." Cristian hopes to try rock climbing and ice climbing in future trips.



Cristian (second from l.) during OISS sledding trip, winter 2015



Mizuki Hidaka (second from l.) and friends at UNH

Mizuki Hidaka, an [exchange student](#) from Saitama University in Japan, offers her enthusiasm for ice hockey, a favorite American winter sport and UNH passion. "In Japan, we don't go to school games together. I love it. It's so amazing for me. Many students cheer the team by singing, dancing!" For this season, Mizuki has attended more than ten games so far with her American friends, who provide her with explanations, rules, game culture – like the fish throwing tradition. Mizuki admits that this type of audience participation doesn't happen at sporting events in Japan.

hockey game

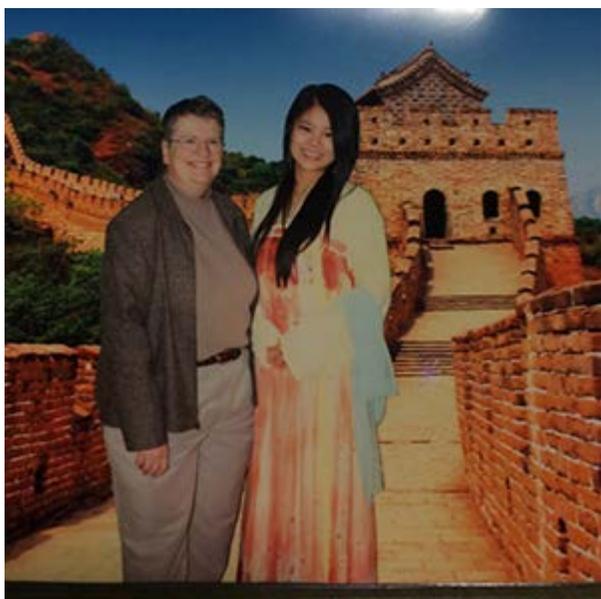
Connecting through Events and Organizations

Once students begin to settle into their new environment, they have the opportunity to learn about the many clubs, organizations and student

support services around campus through U-Day. Programs like Buddies Without Borders, Cultural Connections, International Education Week, Thanksgiving Host Program (to be featured in Fall 2015 issue), and Career & Professional Development workshops are designed to bring students, scholars, faculty, staff, and other community members together.

For example, **Buddies Without Borders (BWB)** is a collaborative organization, where three offices: the **MUB**, **OISS**, and **ESL Institute** work together to promote friendship. BWB pairs international students with American/domestic students in an effort to bridge cultural differences and create friendships through common interests. In this way, American/domestic students are introduced to different cultures and ideas, while sharing some American culture with their international buddy. The hope is that after the semester is over, the buddies will continue to meet, converse and learn from each other. The enthusiasm from the American/domestic students helps drive the integration initiative.

The MUB has partnered with OISS on two other programs. **Cultural Connections** is held every Friday in the Entertainment Center and is an opportunity for international students to present on various topics, including their country's language, art & culture, politics, attractions or cultural practices. The MUB's central location and the delicious appetizers and desserts Director MaryAnne Lustgraaf provides add to the draw of these well-attended events. International Education Week, a week-long celebration, is a campus-wide organizational effort largely supported by MUB staff. Students, faculty and staff members participate in this celebration by showcasing their culture with clothing, food, music, dancing, arts & crafts and various discussions. Katherine Earley, Director of the ESL Institute, cites several ways of engaging her ESL students. Earley explains, "A well-attended IEW event is the Annual Fall Open-Mike event, where students (from the ESL Institute), faculty, staff and community members alongside MUSO students, share original poetry and refreshments."



Mary Anne Lustgraaf, Director of MUB and Bella against Great Wall of China backdrop during International Education Week 2014

Given that the MUB is the "heart" of campus, their events draw students, faculty, staff and community together. Their programs - offered through organizations, clubs, and training programs - fulfill many extra-curricular needs. When Bella wanted to get involved with campus organizations, she met with Nate Hastings, Coordinator of Student Organization Services & Leadership, who helped her figure out how to get involved. "At that time, I could not even finish the application, and Nate helped me. He assigned me a [Leadership] Coach who ended up being MaryAnne, Director of the MUB. She supported me a lot. She was very patient, helpful, and friendly." Bella wanted to improve her skills through the MUB's Leadership Program, and MaryAnne was just the coach for the job. "She always encouraged me to do a lot of things," says Bella. "She trusted me and then gave me more chances to do things. MaryAnne said, 'try this, and this, and this. I believe you can do it.'" Bella recently got hired to work at MUB's Granite Square Station mailroom, where this year alone, 95,000 packages (not including regular mail!) were sent to students' GSS addresses. This is an increase of 21,000 packages compared to last year's. Bella noticed a problematic trend was developing where some international students, due to different naming conventions, either did

not receive their packages, or received the wrong ones. Bella brought the issue to MaryAnne, and together they tackled the problem. Bella attributes her problem-solving skills and better communication skills to her leadership training and mentoring.

Connecting and Re-connecting

The Career Center provides a resource called **Going Global**

OISS does its best to make sure that the students are aware of every opportunity that is available to them, especially for when they are preparing for life after college. Part of this means providing a series of informational workshops on career planning. Many students are unsure of what path to take or what their next step will be. This is where the [University Advising and Career Center \(UACC\)](#) steps in. The series begins with discussing student eligibility to work after graduation, followed by “how-to” workshops on resume writing, networking, job searching and interviewing. Many students are also able to find internship opportunities in their field, getting their foot in the door for future endeavors. By connecting them to the professional world through internships and employment, students can gain experience and make new connections to enhance their learning.

for international students in need of an H1B work visa post-graduation. Going Global allows students to search for employers that already offer sponsorship by city, state or country. Students can also use Going Global to search for employment assistance in other countries if they plan to travel after graduation.

<http://www.unh.edu/uacc/career-guide>

The international population continues to grow every year, thus making the effort for integrated service to this distinctive population more important than ever. This university-wide initiative to foster communication and connection with its international community is vital to the internationals themselves as well as to the UNH community as a whole. As these relationships grow and thrive, the university is continuing to find ways to improve its services and become a more efficient and inclusive team.

It is the hope of OISS that the international students have the most successful and rewarding experience possible while they are here at UNH, in their academic studies, social interactions, and career preparation. It is also the hope that international graduates become the University’s face and voice to the larger world, sharing their experiences and the impact of a UNH education on a global scale. Stories like those of Cristian, Bella, Mizuki, and Caroline present a unique impression of the UNH community and the engagement that make this community inclusive, supportive, competitive and fun.

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223 Hood House • 89 Main Street • Durham, NH 03824
tel: 603-862-2398 • fax: 603-862-0169
study.abroad@unh.edu • international.affairs@unh.edu