Meet Some of Your Fellow Students

From Europe to Asia, the graduate student body has cultures spanning the globe. And this year, another continent is represented on the list—Africa. Cynthia Nagnonhou, from the Republic of Benin, and Cornelius Borkoah Miamen from Liberia, are both International Commerce and Policy students at VU, expecting to graduate next December.

“I came here by chance,” Nagnonhou said. “I came in June to take English courses. After I graduated from Interlink, I applied to Valpo.” Miamen, who has been back and forth between the states and Liberia for the past 20 years due to Civil War in Liberia, decided on Valpo so that he could use his degree when he returns home. “I’m currently involved in a number of things in Liberia and Africa,” Miamen said. “I’m involved in micro-lending and our business is involved with doing contracts with the U.N., helping to employ Liberians into jobs.” But for being the only two African graduate students, it’s easy for isolation to set in.

“Oh of course I can’t compare the U.S. with my country,” Nagnonhou said, adding that the coldest it gets in Benin is 60 degrees. “There’s a lot of differences. Valpo is very quiet city. A good area for studies.” Although it was rough on her at first, Nagnonhou is enjoying her time. “I’ve been able to meet people from all parts of the world.”

One advantage Miamen has taken from his time at VU is the networking opportunities. “The first thing that jumped out to me was diversity in the student body,” he says of VU. “I’ve been able to meet people from all parts of the world.”

At times seclusion does set in, he says, but “you have to turn that around and make it a positive.” One way to do this is to promote VU to more Africans. “We need to get the message out,” Miamen said of VU’s graduate program, adding that he had to really look hard to find it. Miamen would also like to get better exposure for his country while at VU. “The reputation that people seem to have on Africa is not always balanced.”

Graduate Student Tutoring Lab Open!

Need help on a paper? Want assistance on grammar and other issues with someone other than your professor? Then checkout the Graduate Tutoring Lab. From 1 to 4 p.m. every weekday in Kretzmann Hall Room 119, get help on papers and other assignments from your graduate student peers.

“It’s helpful because when (peer tutors) help me to change sentences, it makes sense more to me,” said International Commerce and Policy student Sami Alhaji, who has used the lab two times this semester. Even though he understands what he’s trying to say when he writes his papers, Alhaji says his papers make more sense to him after going to the lab because he’s learning from his mistakes and improving his language.

“I definitely think it’s useful for international students,” said tutor Michael Denotto, an English Studies and Communication student. “They’re expected to be proficient in English. They have to read things then be able to write about it.” Tutor Brody Bluemel, a Chinese Studies student, agrees. “I feel like the tutoring experience has been very productive,” Bluemel said. “There have been a lot of students that come in that genuinely want to improve their English, and I have enjoyed working with them.”

The majority of Bluemel’s time in the lab is spent proofreading papers, discussing grammatical errors and suggesting more fluent and formal ways of expressing thoughts and ideas with students. But the lab isn’t only rewarding for the tutees. “It’s fun talking to International students,” Denotto said. “It’s interesting to get their opinions on things. One student brought in a paper on Ireland today and I’ve been (to Ireland) before … and we got to talking about it.”

Both Bluemel and DeNotto agree that they usually have time to see more students during their shifts. “I think working together with a fellow grad student creates a more relaxed, less intimidating atmosphere,” Bluemel said. “I don’t know if students are more or less receptive to working with me versus their instructor, but I think having both available to them makes it possible for the students to use whichever venue fits their needs personally.”

Important Dates & Reminders

- November 24 to 28: No classes, Thanksgiving Break (University closed November 26 to 28)
- December 12: Last day of Fall classes
- December 13: Reading Day
- December 14: Winter Graduation Luncheon & Commencement
- December 15 to 19: Final Exams
- December 22 to 26: University closed for Winter Break
- January 1 to 2: University closed for New Year’s holiday
- January 5 to 6: Registration Confirmation for all returning students. (Don’t get charged! Here’s how to confirm your classes: www.valpo.edu/registrar/confirm.php)
- January 6: Spring 2009 MBA classes begin
- January 7: Spring 2009 all other graduate classes begin
- January 19: MLK Jr. Observation, no classes

What’s really on the Graduate Studies website???

- Alumni Connect: www.valpo.edu/grad/alumni/index.php, learn about Graduate Alumni, where they are now and how to contact them!
- Example Course Descriptions: www.valpo.edu/grad/programs/ coursedesc.php, read course descriptions of past and current course offerings!
- Forms: www.valpo.edu/grad/forms.php, access petitions and forms for Candidacy, Graduation, Adding or Dropping a Class, Petition for Credit Overload, and more!
- Resources: www.valpo.edu/grad/resources/index.php, learn about the services and offices devoted to helping graduate students succeed at Valpo!
How do your fellow students celebrate their holidays?

Christmas and New Year’s are celebrations ingrained in the American tradition. But, as many VU graduate students explain, these holidays aren’t solely ingrained in America. “We celebrate American [Christmas and New Year], but we also celebrate our own New Year ... in April,” said Sirawan Muangmingusuk, an English Studies and Communication student from Thailand. “We give gifts, have colors and lights and decorate with lights.” During the Thai New Year, Muangmingusuk said people typically go to temple and hand out food.

About 2,000 miles north of Thailand, in China, Christmas, New Year’s and even Thanksgiving is celebrated. There are lots of decorations, music and Christmas trees in China, said Jin Zhang, a Chinese ESC student. Discounts and shopping even exist in China around the holidays, Zhang added. But Christmas in China is primarily a commercial celebration. “We don’t celebrate the Christian side of it,” said Lulu Li, a Chinese ESC student. Li recalls celebrating Santa and having a Secret Santa with her classmates and teachers.

In the Ukraine, where International Commerce and Policy student Ilona Aleksenko is from, both Christmas and New Year are celebrated. “Our Christmas in Ukraine is celebrated on Jan. 7,” Aleksenko said. This is the date of Christmas as it falls on the Eastern Orthodox calendar. Like Americans, Ukrainians have a Christmas tree, presents and Santa.

But it’s on New Year’s when people receive presents. “Christmas is just a family holiday and many people go to church,” Aleksenko said. “New Year’s can be a get-together with both friends and family and usually is a big party.” One aspect Aleksenko appreciates of the American celebration of Christmas are decorated houses. “It’s hard to decorate when you live in an apartment building,” she said.

Decorated houses is one thing, but what about painted houses? In Liberia, where ICP student Cornelius Borkoah Miamen is from, houses are painted instead of decorated. “It’s the one time a year when most people will paint their houses,” Miamen said. With the absence of Christmas trees and Santa, it’s mainly the religious side of Christmas that Liberians celebrate. Gifts are exchanged, usually clothes, Miamen said, and most people dress up in their new clothes and travel to the city to celebrate the holiday with family, food and festivities.

But not all International students celebrate the American holidays. Saleh Ali M. Aljumaah, a Saudi Arabian ESC student, says his Muslim culture only partakes in two celebrations a year—Eid Alfitar, the celebration of finishing Ramadan and Eid Aladha, the festival of the sacrifice in Islam. “My country’s traditions can do whatever they want indoors,” Aljumaah said.

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New Program: MS in Digital Media

In the summer of 2009, another program will be added to VU’s list of graduate majors. The program, Digital Media, was approved by the Graduate Council earlier this month. The program is the result of a visit by the president of an Indian higher education institution last May, said Douglas Kocher, the chair of the Communications Department, who helped sketch out the program.

Impressed by VU, the Indian school president thought VU would make a good place for graduates from his school to earn a degree in Digital Media. “We have long taught undergraduate students in the whole range of digital media (digital video, digital audio, desktop publishing and web design),” Kocher said. “Thus, we had both faculty expertise and facilities to be able to handle a graduate program in digital media.”

With this degree, students will be prepared for any organization that uses digital content in any combination. Although the program doesn’t officially begin for several months, Kocher says he’s received numerous inquiries about it already. “We are expecting a small number initially, perhaps five or so,” Kocher said. He expects that number to increase to between 20 and 25 once word gets out.

“Because it includes elective requirements in the department, many, if not all, of our faculty could see some of these students in their classes,” Kocher said. “We also see the program as attractive to regional and national prospects seeking an intense, applied program in digital media.”

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