

ELP STUDENT NEWS

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Fall 2003

Letter from the Editor

Brian T. Arnold, Editor, *ELP Student News*

Hello and thank you for reading the *ELP Student News*. This is an information letter developed to keep international students studying at Virginia Commonwealth University informed and up-to-date about what is going on in the VCU community.

This newsletter is written primarily by current and former English Language Program students. The students that have written articles in this edition of the *ELP Student News* have done a fantastic job! I'm sure that you will agree after you have read this edition. Please take a moment to congratulate the writers for their contribution to the international community here at VCU!

Because international students are interested in learning more about how other international students have adapted to moving to the United States, *ELP Student News* is always interested in finding international students who would like to tell their story.

If you are an international student and would like to write an article for *ELP Student News*, then contact me at btarnold@vcu.edu. I would be delighted to discuss your ideas and help you get started on an article for the Spring 2004 edition. Thanks and enjoy. Brian

Students in the Community!

More than a Volunteer Experience

by: Ursula Arrieta, Ilker Gul, Sophia Ju, MiSun Jung, Jitka Ptacnikova, ELP students and students in the *Learning English through Service* class

Learning English through Service is a new elective class in the ELP. The purpose of this class is to volunteer in one of the local community organizations and get new experience, as well as improve students' English. Students volunteer for 2-3 hours each week during the session and attend class. The community service connects students to the community, introduces them to new people, and helps them understand American culture and society better. Moreover, students improve their listening, speaking and writing skills.



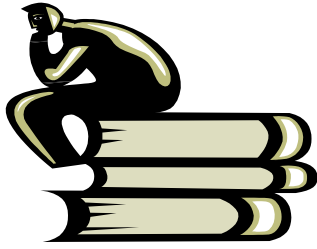
In Fall I 2003, all students volunteered at the William Byrd Community House. The organization has four services: 1) Children's Services: The organization helps parents in child rearing and also prepares children for school. 2) Youth Services: The organization encourages youth to create a positive future and stay off drugs. 3) Family Services: The organization helps low-income families in times of need. 4) Senior Programs: The organization provides free mental and physical health care to senior adults so that they can stay in their own homes.

The William Byrd Community House gave volunteers two orientations. The general orientation for all university volunteers and not just ELP students as well organized. The social worker prepared lots of information about the community house and its programs. In the second orientation, the *Learning English through Service* students were given an orientation just for them. They met the five social workers who work in the youth department. The entire class volunteered to work in the youth after school program. The social workers introduced themselves and explained their jobs and the students each chose a day of the week to volunteer.

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Student's Corner

My Favorite Holiday

by Gabriel Aluong and Encarnita Cedeno

Christmas is a time to rejoice; a time to share and reunite with our families to celebrate and remember the day when Jesus was born. This is our favorite holiday from the whole year. There are many reasons why we love Christmas time, for example: there is no school, the food people make for the festivities is great, and we enjoy the way families unite to celebrate and to prepare the decorations for their homes.

At Christmas time, the nights are so chilly and we can sleep as much as we want because there is no school the next day. We can go to bed at anytime and wake as late as we want. Because there is nothing to do we can spend a lot of time around, something we cannot normally do during classes.

During Christmas people normally make different types of food and families get together to prepare a big meal for the celebration. Often, we have a lot of desserts such as candy, cookies, fruits and drinks; things that normally we do not have during other seasons. We eat a lot during this time of the year and enjoy the holiday a lot.

For the holidays families like to enjoy and celebrate the day when Jesus was born. They make parties where they have music, games and share gifts with each other celebrating this event. They decorate their homes with big trees with lights on it, red candles and different Christmas motives.

The Best Place to eat in Richmond

By: Sara, Carol and Ali

Can you live without eating and drinking? Moving to a new country sometimes requires you to taste different kinds of food. When I moved to Richmond to continue my studies at VCU, I had to try different food that was not what I was used to eating in my country. However, I tried many types of food in different restaurants, and then I thought "Red Lobster" was the best place to eat in Richmond. In this paper I am going to talk about the

reasons why I choose "Red Lobster" as the best place to eat in Richmond.

The first reason was that it is a nice place where families or friends could get together. Also the way that they treat the customers are very respectful and modern. Therefore it is very nice and comfortable to eat at.

The second reason is that the food over there is fresh and tasty. They use interesting kinds of spices that make the food more delicious and healthy. Therefore, the kind of food makes the customers happy and satisfied.

In conclusion, in this paper I talked about the reasons why I chose "Red Lobster" as the best place to eat. It is a nice place to spend your time there with your family and friends because of their treatments and services for the customers. Also they offer unique kinds of foods that are tasty, fresh and delicious. That is why I recommend that "Red Lobster" to be the best place to eat in Richmond.

The Best Place to Study at VCU

by Ricardo Valverde and Sin Ty

Environment has a lot of effects on every students' studying. Some students want to have a quiet place to study, and others need to study in a group. We believe that the best places for studying are the Group Study room in the 1st floor of the library, and the Engineering building.

I find that the Group Study room on the 1st floor of the VCU library is the best place for me to learn because it is the quietest place where I can concentrate on my studies. Moreover, I do not have Internet access at my apartment. In Study Group I can access the Internet. Besides that I can use a lot of books in the library. When I am hungry, there is the place where I can buy a coffee or ice cream. In addition, I can spread all of my documents and books on the table and leave them there while I go find a book. When we have a group discussion it is the best place for us. We don't disturb the other students. I really like the library for all those reasons.

I love to study in the Engineering building for many reasons. First, I have access to the most complete computer lab in VCU. Quick computers, CD burners, scanners and excellent printers are there. Also there are empty rooms, where you can study quietly. And if you have a request or a doubt, you have resources and people in the building, people doing the same thing you are who can help you. You don't have people doing other things!! Since the 1st time I went there to study, I discovered that I was able to concentrate better than anywhere else.

That's why we firmly believe that the 1st floor of the library and the Engineering building are great places to study. They are silent and have good resources.

VCU's Counseling Services offers help for International Students

Studying in a foreign country is exciting but can also be a stressful experience. *VCU Counseling Services* provides many types of services to help manage your emotional and mental well-being. The programs will teach you to use strategies and skills that will help you manage your life and reach your academic and personal goals.

When should I consider counseling? When you are feeling overwhelmed or weighted down by life, anxious about school, or struggling in your relationships with other students or friends. If you feel like you have too much stress or that you need a way to better manage your stress, you should consider counseling.

How do I make an appointment? You can call 828-6200 or stop by the office. The *VCU Counseling Services* office is located in the Student Commons in room 225. The counselors will help you schedule an appointment.

VCU Counseling Services is a safe and pleasant place to talk **without worrying about your English skills**. Counselors are trained to be aware of the cultural and language differences that they may meet when working with international students.

Click on the link for more information:

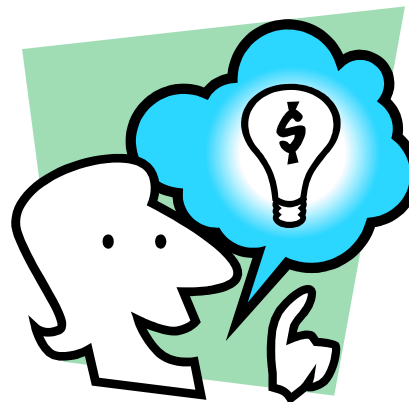
<http://www.students.vcu.edu/counsel/students.html>

Have you been...?

- feeling homesick
- experiencing culture shock
- feeling like others don't like you
- wanting to clarify American customs
- worrying that your English is not good enough
- worrying about being a failure or disappointment to your parents
- feeling upset over the break-up of a romantic relationship
- feeling conflict regarding your own needs versus those of their parents
- having difficulties getting up and going to classes because of feelings of depression

Students volunteered in the youth after school programs one day each week for 2-3 hours. Students went on different days Monday through Friday. Some students went with a partner while some went alone. They participated in a variety of activities. For example, students talked with kids, played board games, and played basketball. They also helped with educational activities. They assisted the teens in computer projects and helped them with their homework. One student had the opportunity to hear the former governor of the state of Maine give a talk to the teens. Due to the hurricane, students only volunteered three or four times each, but in most terms, students will volunteer for six weeks.

In addition to volunteering, students meet for class each week and write about their experiences. In class, students discuss their volunteering and exchange ideas about their volunteer experience. Additionally, students participate in role plays. For example, they pretend to be teens or their parents. This kind of activity helps them imagine what teens are thinking. Homework includes journal writing and filling out forms to document their volunteer experience. As a final project, students attend coffee hour and sit at a table where they answer questions about their experience.



Do you have any ideas for the next *ELP Student News*? What do you want to know more about in Richmond?

E-mail your ideas to Brian: btarnold@vcu.edu

DATES TO REMEMBER

ELP SESSION INFORMATION

Sessions	Placement Test Dates	Class Start – End Dates
Winter 2004	January 12, 2004	January 20 – March 5, 2004
Spring 2004	March 16, 2004	March 22 – May 4, 2004
Summer 2004	June 14, 2004	June 21 – July 30, 2004
Fall I 2004	August 18, 2004	August 30 – October 14, 2004
Fall II 2004	October 20, 2004	October 25 – December 10, 2004

Where are we going and what will we do?

TRIPS & EXCURSIONS

Winter and Spring 2004

Each term, international students are invited to attend trips. The Student Services Office has scheduled the following trips for 2004. Check your VCU e-mail account for more information about dates and costs.

February – Ski trip to Wintergreen, VA.

March – New York city

April – Jamestown/Williamsburg trip

A New Life in Another Country: Adapting to Living in the U.S.A.

Written by: Andrea, I-Wen, and Yin-Chun

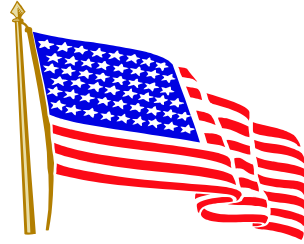
When we came to the U.S.A., we try to find out how to settle down here. We discover many differences between our country and America. Indeed, these differences exist in every parts of American's daily lives, such as custom, food, and relationships among people. However, for us, the most difficult thing to adapt here is the relationships among people; that is, we have a hard time on how to get along with people. And the following statements are our discussions about adapting to living in the U.S.A.

To begin with, we think it is not easy to progress deep conversation with Americans. For instance, we may have a lot of small talk on every corner, but it is usually general greetings. What always happen to us is just talk about weather or food with American people. At the development beginning of relationship among us, it's a usual phenomenon. However, we would like to make our friendship go more steps. At this time, we meet difficulties because they would still not go our conversation deep into their life. For example, they not often talk about family or work to us. Whether it's part of culture difference or not, it makes us, live in a foreign country, feel so sad and discouraged. We realize most Americans are really friendly, but we hope to build up relationships with Americans from strangers to acquaintances, then intimate friends, and gradually have touched conversations.

What's more, we feel Americans are easy to turn down anything they do not like. To illustrate, Americans talk directly, but sometimes it hurts foreigners. We can understand there is nothing wrong about that because this means Americans are very honest. However, what we think about is that in Asia or Germany, we used to consider others a lot. We will regard how people will feel before rejecting them.

To sum up, in fact, everything is good and easy for us to adapt the U.S.A. Only relationships among people are extremely difficult to work as what we expect. First, we have a hard time on making friends with Americans. Although they are really friendly, it's not easy to make close friends with them. It takes much more time to build up friendships with Americans than with Asian or Germans. Furthermore, Americans are easy to turn others down. For these reasons above, we consider relationship among Americans is the hardest part for us to adapt in the U.S.A.

American Customs



Like other cultures, The United States has developed its own customs. To make your adjustment easier, it may help to know what people expect with regard to friendship, dress, greetings, invitations, schedules, and meals.

Friendship

People from other cultures often say that Americans seem very friendly when you first meet them. They welcome you and seem willing to help. But being "friendly" in America does not mean the same as "being a friend." It takes time to develop a close friendship. People who seem friendly may or may not get really involved in your life. For this reason, Americans may seem insincere if they do not get very involved. But close friendships can develop. It just takes time and effort.

People are usually interested in talking about current events, politics, hobbies, sports, and religion. They are not as eager to talk about personal matters such as their financial situation or their family problems.

You will find that many Americans are curious about other cultures and want to know what it's like in your country. Americans tend to ask many questions. You do not, of course, have to answer every question that anyone may ask. But in America, people become friends by sharing their experiences with each other. If you are comfortable in doing so, you may show people photographs and maps. You may talk about customs, holidays, and religious festivals.

Dress

Americans do not have a strict dress code for most events. You may wear everyday clothing for most occasions--visits to other people's homes, attending classes or lectures, and going shopping. If you are going to a formal cultural event or dinner, you may choose to "dress up." You are not required to appear in Western-style clothing. It is acceptable to attend events in clothing you've brought with you from home. If you're uncertain about what to wear, ask. Most Americans are willing to help with such questions.

Greetings

In America, it is the custom to shake hands when being introduced to someone new. This is true for both men and women.

When being introduced, you may say something like "I am pleased to meet you" or "It's nice to get acquainted." But you don't have to wait to be introduced. If you'd like to meet someone, simply walk up, extend your hand, and say, "Hello. My name is ____." People will respond by giving you their name, and you may begin talking with them.

You may see some Americans greet each other with hugs or unusual handshakes. If you do not wish to be hugged, simply extend your hand for an ordinary handshake.

As you probably know, space is an important part of nonverbal communication. Pay attention to the amount of space American students keep between themselves as they visit and stroll. It may be somewhat different from what you are accustomed to.

Invitations

It is not unusual for Americans to say "Come and see me sometime" or "I'll see you later." This is a friendly gesture, but it isn't necessarily an invitation. People who want you to visit them in their homes will provide you with a date and time. As you become good friends with people, it may become more appropriate to just "drop by" without having a specific invitation.

If you receive an invitation, it is polite to answer either yes or no. If you say yes, it means that you are agreeing to accept the invitation. You can, however, change your mind; if you decide not to attend after accepting an invitation, it is polite to call and say that you won't be attending. It is generally considered impolite to accept an invitation and then not attend.

Schedules

Americans are very conscious of the clock and tend to view time with great precision. You may hear people say, "Oh, look at the time; I've got to run" or apologize when they are a few minutes late. To many Americans, "time is money."

You will be expected to arrive "on time" to many activities. Most events have a starting time - classes, restaurant reservations, theater shows, appointments with professors. It is expected that you will arrive at the agreed upon time.

Meals

One exception to the "on time" rule in America is dinner invitations. If you're invited to dine at someone's home, it is polite to arrive up to 5 or 10 minutes after the agreed time. It is not polite to arrive early. Arriving very late is considered by many to show a lack of respect. Arriving on time is still the safest course.

If you're invited to someone's home for dinner, it is polite to describe any dietary restrictions you may have ahead of time (such as being a vegetarian or being unable to eat certain foods). It is also polite to refuse alcoholic drinks if you wish. Always ask permission before you smoke.

You do not need to take a gift with you when you dine at someone's home. On very special occasions, however, you can give a small gift to your hosts. It is customary to spend an hour or two talking together after finishing a meal. A few days later, you may wish to send them a short note thanking them for the invitation.

(The information used in this article was adapted from <http://www.k-state.edu/counseling/culture>)