



INTERNATIONAL HOUSE NEWSLETTER

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By Noorin Nazari

A BIGGER PICTURE

An Afghani student reflects on leaving and returning to a nation in flux

On August 30th of this year, I was waiting for the airplane at the dusty crowded Kabul Airport for my flight to the U.S. I was constantly looking at my itinerary, knowing that I had a more than forty-hour flight and six stops had already made me impatient. I was nervous. I was excited. I was hopeful, yet depressed. I was not sure how to feel, but all I was sure about was the fact that I was going to enjoy an opportunity that many could not conceive -- to study in the USA.

As I was traveling, I recalled my happy childhood in peaceful Kabul in the 1980s and early 1990s. Being from the middle class in Kabul, I was lucky enough to enjoy many opportunities that a lot of children at my age were denied due to fighting elsewhere between the former Soviet-backed government and the US-backed Mujahiddens. However, life was not very peaceful in Kabul either. Schools, markets, buses and other public areas in Kabul were the target of the Mujahidden's bombs in an attempt to defile the government; and the arable lands, mosques, and villages were the target of the government's attacks to weaken the resistance movement of the Mujahiddens. Under such a condition, life continued and I grew up. When I look back, it surprises me to realize how impatient the young generation was at acquiring knowledge under severe circumstances of the war. Schools, computer and English language private classes were the main "hobby" that we had at a time when entertainment means were literally non-existent for the majority of the ordinary Afghans. After the Red Army withdrew from Afghanistan, and the former Soviet-backed government collapsed three years later in 1992, we welcomed the victory of the Mujahidden's whom, up to that point, we had trusted as the saviors of the country and preserves of the Afghan's honor from the invasion of the Russians.

Because of the pain that seems intolerable, I have always been hesitant to recall the memories of the Mujahidden leaders' atrocities from 1992-1996; killing, ethnic cleansing, violating the human rights-especially of the women, and imposing fundamentalist views were common practice of the government and its opposition groups. I never expected that there was worse situation waiting for us in 1996; the Taliban.

Today, in the USA, I face a different problem. My identity as an Afghan is associated to those of the Mujahidden and of the Taliban; none of whom represented the Afghan population.

I will be on the airplane traveling from the USA to my homeland after two years. I will have an itinerary in hand, and will not be sure how to feel. I will be glad for my return to my motherland and having an opportunity to serve my people with higher knowledge acquired from Duke University, but I will fear the fact that the same Mujahidden are once again in power, this time not as warlords, but as "legitimate" ministers and deputy ministers.

Will I ever feel safe in my country again?



(Noorin Nazari is a graduate student in the Program in International Development Policy)

INTERNATIONAL ORIENTATION

International House Orientation Peers

During International Orientation, Graduate and Undergraduate IHOPS conducted topical panels, performed skits, gave tours, led small group discussions, assuaged anxious parents . . . Actually, it would be quicker to list the things they didn't do!



My first time coming to Duke and to the United States were probably the most stressful experiences in my life. Because of technical problems at the American Consulate in my hometown of Sofia, Bulgaria, I received my visa one hour before my flight! I had to miss International Orientation, an essential experience (as I learned later) for internationals arriving at Duke. So when the deadline for IHOPs approached, I didn't hesitate to apply. My main reasons for wanting to be an IHOP was to meet new people and to help them with the transition from their previous lives to their new life at Duke. However, what I did not expect was the immense satisfaction of working during orientation. Not only did I meet new excited international freshmen (and their anxious parents), but I was working with a great team of other IHOPs! We came from different parts of the world and during training I had the most diverse cultural experience in my entire life! And on top of that, I hadn't laughed so much in a long time!

Elena Bachvarova, T'08
Undergraduate IHOP

For most, if not all, international students, coming to Duke is a significant leap in one's life. As one of this year's ten graduate IHOPs, I worked as part of the I-House orientation team to help make their transition to Duke a smooth and enjoyable experience. For example, one skit mimicked Americans who greet people in different ways. Another skit addressed typical classroom expectations. Panel discussions provided new international students with the opportunity to raise their own questions, and most wondered about American customs. During small group discussions, the new students were exposed to various resources at Duke. Many new students made friends with IHOPs during campus tours and restaurant hops. Being an international student, I am proud of Duke's International House because the I-house staff members have always been AWESOME in promoting cross-cultural understanding and relationships among the diverse students in our campus community. To first year international students: I would like to say that graduate IHOPs will always be happy to answer your questions. We hope that you are breaking language barriers and enjoying (rather than being overwhelmed by) cultural differences.

Tong Ren
Graduate IHOP



From the Desk of I-House Director, Carlisle Harvard

It's been about three months since most new international students arrived at Duke and faced the challenges of finding their way around campus and making many decisions in order to get settled. During the orientations offered by International House, lots of issues were discussed or dealt with in skits – we laughed a lot and enjoyed ourselves as we learned about health insurance, culture shock, academic honesty and many other tidbits from the IHOPs (International House Orientation Peers).

I've also loved talking with students who are very excited about the new opportunities they are finding at Duke. One student thoroughly enjoys sitting in the dining room and talking with new people each evening. Another student told me about a half credit mountain bike course he's taking that is really fun and gives him some exercise as well!

If you are like most students, you've learned a lot about Duke since that time; you may also have questions or problems now that were not dealt with during the orientations sessions. What's happening with you? I'd love to chat with you. Please drop by when you have time, or even better, email me at charvrd@duke.edu and suggest an appointment time that works for you. I look forward to hearing about your successes and/or questions.

Carlisle Harvard

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

NC International Leadership Conference

The first North Carolina International Leadership Conference was held October 1-2 at Guilford College in Greensboro. The purpose of the conference was to bring together both undergraduate and graduate, international students, returning study-abroad and serve-abroad students, and students specializing in the field of international and global relations. The major goals of the conference were to introduce leadership principles, the value of community service, and networking benefits. More than 70 students, faculty, and staff from colleges and universities across North Carolina attended. Four students from Duke, Paige Reuter, Esther Cho, Jason Loughnane, and Elizabeth Hensen were in attendance, while two additional students,

“I am very thankful to the organizers for putting together this conference this year. I feel like there is a lot of potential to grow and expand in the future. It was just really encouraging to see fellow students interested in working for the international community. The workshops were most enjoyable and beneficial to me personally for they informed us of real, practical ways we could engage in hands-on service for the international community.”

--Esther Cho, Duke Undergraduate

Lissett Babian and Sally Ong, were among the many student presenters at the conference. Paige Reuter, a Duke undergraduate said, “It was a great way to meet other people across the state with the same interests. It also provided practical career advice, as well as sessions to help us understand what it takes to be a leader and learn and discover our individual leadership styles. The best part of the conference was the opening teamwork project because we had to work as a team with people we’d just met. It was challenging, but so much fun.”

For more information about next year’s conference please contact Lisa Giragosian at img@duke.edu or 919-681-3922.

Common Ground

While many students were heading out of Durham or catching up on some sleep over Fall Break, a handful decided to use the time-off to escape to nature and demystify the concept of diversity. The Center for Race Relations held its annual diversity and community-building retreat, or “Common Ground,” over the four-day weekend. Nearly 70 participants and facilitators convened. The retreat’s main purpose is to challenge perceptions of identity like race, gender, and sexuality and give students a safe opportunity to express ideas about these issues.

“The retreat creates a strong atmosphere of trust so that students can openly voice their opinions, experiences, reservations, stereotypes, and questions,” remarked Aakansha Gulati, a 3rd year undergraduate student from India. Students participated in discussions, workshops and activities that not only focused on building tolerance toward different individuals, but also worked toward an understanding of how notions of race, gender, sexuality and culture are created and manifested in different communities.

One sobering activity had members of a particular ethnic group leave the room and list stereotypes they felt were commonly attributed to them. The rest of the participants were asked to break down the PC barrier and also list stereotypes for the group that had left the room.

“It was surprising to see that each time the list of stereotypes written up by people who belonged to the group and those who did not belong to the group, matched up exactly,” said Gulati. “It was, in fact, upsetting to think that each race/ethnicity is completely aware of even the ugly, dirty and completely outrageous stereotypes that people have created for them over the years.” For more information on Common Ground visit <http://www.duke.edu/web/racerelations/commonground/> or contact Caroline Whistler at caroline.whistler@duke.edu

SEE! The World Serve Educate and Engage



“SEE! The World” is an initiative started by two Duke undergraduate students, Lissett Babian and Sally Ong. SEE stands for Serve, Educate, and Engage Yourself! “SEE! The World” is a learning community that helps students engage in service-learning while studying abroad. It also enables students to connect the international service-learning experience with a local one.

Currently its pilot program has 17 participants studying abroad in Spain, Italy, Scotland, China, South Africa, India, Peru, and Ecuador. Through its three-stage program, “SEE! the World” prepares students for international service-learning, connects them and their peers abroad through online reflection, and provides an academic opportunity for students that will connect students’ service experiences to social justice issues.

In addition to their study abroad course work, they are engaging in their international host community through tutoring English, mentoring and assisting children with special needs, working in public health, and volunteering for non-profits that address domestic abuse issues and immigration issues. Through on-line reflection they are placing their service experiences within the context of what is happening in their host community and around the world while also learning from their peers’ unique service-learning experiences abroad.

SEE is funded by scholarship with a civic mission and MTVU/Youth Venture. For more information check out their website at: <http://www.duke.edu/web/seetheworld/> or contact Lissett Babaian at atlmb24@duke.edu or Sally Ong at so27@duke.edu.

We want your feedback!

We are piloting our first e-newsletter. Please help us in this effort. Do you read the newsletter? What do you like/dislike? What types of articles or news would you like to see featured? Please provide us with your feedback by sending an email to Alicia at alicia.wallace@duke.edu or Patrick at patrick.morris@duke.edu. We look forward to hearing from you!

International Council: International Advocacy at Duke

International Council (IC) is a student advocacy group that researches, evaluates, and addresses the needs of international undergraduates at Duke University. Major past achievements include offering financial aid for international applicants and credit transfers from non-American examinations. This year, IC currently has five new initiatives:

Ambassador’s Program:

To have international students promote Duke in their hometown high schools during holidays.

Buddies Program:

Pair accepted international applicants with current undergraduates that are from the same hometown/country. By contacting through email, we hope that our buddies can bring out the true side of Duke and help ease the college decision process of these prospective students.

Winter Housing

Find solutions for international students who can’t afford to return home during the winter break.

International Career Opportunities:

By working with the Career Center and the Alumni Office, we want to offer Duke students more opportunities in working outside of the U.S.A.

Passport (Duke’s International Magazine)

Duke’s first internationally themed magazine to further promote on-campus cultural exchange and to provide a creative outlet for interested individuals

For more information about International Council contact Alex Shum, as82@duke.edu, or visit the IC website: <http://www.duke.edu/web/intlassoc/>