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International Panther, Spring 2016

University of Northern Iowa. Culture and Intensive English Program.

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International Panther

Spring 2016
Dear Readers,

During this past semester, in light of the debate about diversity within higher education, the UNI Culture and Intensive English Program (UNI CIEP) had the opportunity to reflect not only on how our program is contributing to this larger institutional goal; but also how we are taking the next step to create opportunities for inclusion and engagement in our campus and community.

Through our work with international students and connections on campus, our hope is to contribute, even in small part, to develop intercultural learning opportunities and exchanges on our campus to foster educational equity and more enriching professional lives for students, faculty and staff. In this newsletter, we showcase some of the academic and extracurricular events are educational platforms for international and domestic students to interact, learn and sometimes create long-lasting friendships. Be sure to read about our alumni spotlight, Mirjana Spasojevic, and her accomplishments as an English as a second language learner.

In the spring semester, the CIEP welcomed a group of students from Kyungpook National University and Korean National University of Education to participate in the CIEP Immersion program with a focus on multicultural education. The UNI CIEP partnered with UNI faculty from the TESOL, Communication Studies, and Education departments to provide lectures on related topics. Don’t miss the note about this English for a specific purpose program to learn about how Korean students came to the conclusion that multicultural education is essential for social justice.

The use of service-learning activities also gets students active in the Cedar Valley community while developing a more in-depth cultural awareness and facilitating intercultural exchange. In this issue, we also included a note about CIEP students’ participation at
CultureFest, an event that is annually organized by the Waterloo Center for the Arts. CIEP students offered special performances, demonstrations, and international food sampling, and they also shared their traditions, religions, native languages, and art.

During this past semester, we had the good fortune of enrolling students from over 12 different countries, and we enjoyed learning from them as they became proficient in English and immersed in the culture. We continue reaching out to our international partners to grow our institutional collaborations. In January, Olivia Randolph, CIEP HR and Administrative Assistant, traveled to Egypt to promote our program at various educational institutions. Similarly, in April, Sally Roos, CIEP Student Services Coordinator, visited Brazil to meet partners and participate in the EducationUSA fair. Also, a UNI delegation had the pleasure to visit our sponsored partner institutions in Washington, DC. In this last trip, we met with representatives of the Panamanian, Mexican, Colombian and Omani embassies, and officials of the AMEDIST and Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission.

Locally, we have also connected with the Iowa Sister States Organization that has international relationships with states from nine different countries, and we have established mutual collaborations to promote international education in Iowa and contribute to increasing cross-culture awareness and inclusion in our community. Read about these initiatives throughout the next pages and stay tuned for information about future outcomes.

The UNI CIEP is committed to international education and English language training. We will continue bridging the cultural and linguistic divides among international students but also among residents with refugee, asylum, and immigration status who are currently living in our community. Without an appreciation for other cultures, languages, history of other nations, and the problems and contributions of other countries, students, in general, will not become successful global citizens and leaders. Hopefully, the discussions about diversity and inclusion in higher education will help to promote more cross-culture learning opportunities for students, faculty and staff and the need for teaching across cultures strengths in our campuses. Without a doubt, we will keep on doing our part and we will strive to work together with our campus community to continue to create more opportunities for all students.

Carolina Coronado-Park,
CIEP Director

UNI & CIEP Delegation connects with Partners & Representatives

Spring has been a busy semester for the CIEP and has included a number of visits to a variety of multicultural organizations from around the world! Carolina, the director of the CIEP, had the opportunity to meet with the Panamanian Embassy, AMIDEAST, Embassy of Mexico, Saudi Arabian Cultural Mission, Embassy of Oman and Embassy of Columbia during her recent trip to Washington, D.C. Topics covered in these meetings included teacher training techniques, study abroad opportunities and partnership opportunities.

The CIEP also had the opportunity to meet with the committee chairs from the Iowa sister states of Hebei, Kosovo, Yamanashi and Yucatan. These meetings primarily focused on new partnership opportunities between the UNI CIEP and the Iowa sister states, potentially opening doors for future collaboration between staff and students across programs.
Ask anyone who’s lived abroad and they’ll tell you all about the difficulties of adjusting to a new culture. This is especially difficult for students who are trying to adjust to their new environment while still performing well in their coursework. One particular area that students may have a difficult time adjusting in new cultures is in building new relationships. Regardless of the type of relationship, this is an area where many of us struggle. Now imagine trying to establish relationships in an entirely different culture. Sounds like even more of a challenge, doesn’t it?

Mark Grey and Michele Devlin are professors at UNI who specialize in working with diverse groups. About six years ago, the two of them began working with the CIEP to provide “Culture Talks” to CIEP students. These talks are geared toward providing international students with a better understanding of relationships in the United States and are fittingly held once a year on or around Valentine’s Day.

“Most of them want to know, ‘How do you ask someone out on a date?’” Michele explained, “‘What should you wear?’ ‘What should you give?’” A lot of the information covered revolves around small, seemingly insignificant steps that many of us from the United States never think twice about. Yet, the details are far from universal.

In addition to providing a “How To” of sorts on dating, Michele and Mark supply students with information on other topics such as marriage, divorce, sexual assault, rape and raising children. “We talk about how boys and girls grow up in the United States and how they get to know each other,” Michele outlined. “Topics of sexual assault and things like that all get worked into the training.”

These talks are not so much a presentation as they are a discussion. Mark and Michele provide a lot of time for students to ask questions in order to discuss information that is most relevant to them. Students are encouraged to contact the professors afterward with any additional questions or thoughts that they want to keep more private and confidential.

Michele admitted that early on, she and Mark were nervous about discussing such a touchy subject with a group of students, particularly due to the vast cultural diversity amongst the students. They quickly found, however, that students were captivated by their talks. “Even from the very beginning, the talks went over extremely well,” shared Michele. “People are mesmerized no matter what country or culture they’re in. They always want to know what it’s like to date here and compare it to their home countries and to each other’s home countries.”

The students aren’t the only ones learning about dating cross-culturally. “We learn a lot too, from all of them, because they’re from so many different countries.” The stories shared by the many international students in attendance helps provide both Mark and Michele with a more well-rounded understanding of interpersonal relationships outside of the United States.

Outside of the CIEP, Mark and Michele are active members of UNI and the surrounding community. A big part of their job entails training individuals in a variety of fields across the state how to work effectively in cross-cultural environments. As a professor of global health, Michele has a particular interest in international medical missions and disaster relief work, both of which allow her to apply her knowledge of other cultures to her field. Mark, a professor of applied anthropology, volunteers for the Red Cross as well as a number of state disaster response teams, in addition to teaching full time at the university.

Involvement and leadership form central themes to much of the work done by both Mark and Michele. When asked what he felt was the most meaningful and impactful thing he did, Mark emphasized working with and leading others. In particular, he pointed to his work at UNI in leading students, coupled with his professional development work in the community. “I can’t rank them for you, I think they’re both equally valuable,” Mark explained. The discussions led by Mark and Michele through the CIEP highlight their desire to lead and interact with others. Through their work, they show that all differences can be bridged through communication and understanding.
Meet Rocio Alexandra Calderon Isaza! Rocio is a CIEP student from Colombia who came to the United States to improve her English skills. When Rocio arrived in the United States, her first stop was New York City. She lived with her family in New York for five months. In August 2015, Rocio traveled to Cedar Falls, Iowa, to begin studying in the CIEP.

Rocio had very few English skills when she came to America. She chose to study at the University of Northern Iowa because she had a friend tell her about the program. Rocio stated that people in Colombia regularly talk about the quality of the UNI CIEP program. Growing up, Rocio lived with her mother, father and brother. Her family members all still live in Colombia. She has a nephew named Thomas and is anxiously awaiting the arrival of another nephew. Her family was very happy for her when she told them that she was planning on studying English in the United States. “Not many people in Colombia can study English in another country,” said Rocio. She noted that it is a great opportunity to be able to study in the United States.

The main reason Rocio chose to study English was to be able to have better opportunities in the future. Back in Colombia, she works as a lawyer, where she specializes in commercial law. She believes that learning English will provide her with better jobs and hopefully a better income.

According to Rocio, the hardest thing to overcome in the United States is the language barrier. “It was very hard to speak with the immigration officials because they spoke in English,” she said.

When asked about the difference in culture between Colombia and the United States, Rocio said that the cultures are actually very similar. She did point out that the education system is a little different, stating that in the United States students take classes for 12 years. In Colombia, students take classes for 11 years. She also noticed that in the United States, students have the option to learn many different languages, while in Colombia, students study English for one hour a day. Rocio believes that studying abroad has changed her mentality. In Colombia, her parents were always available to support and help her. Now that she is in the United States, she lives alone and has to support herself. That has caused her to become more independent. In her free time, Rocio likes to go to new places and explore new things. She is very happy here in Iowa. When her friends and family back home ask her about her life here in Iowa, she tells them that Iowa is “calm, safe and the people are kind.” Rocio has really enjoyed all of the classes that she has taken in the CIEP. Her listening skills have improved a lot and she hopes to improve those skills even more before returning home.

Once Rocio graduates from the CIEP, she plans to return to Colombia where she will continue to work as a lawyer. In 10 years, Rocio hopes to be living in another country. She also hopes to have a successful career and a family of her own.
The CIEP Multicultural Education program will be making an impact across oceans in Korean communities that are experiencing an influx of immigrants. In January 2016, 16 pre-service teachers from two different universities in South Korea studied English and multicultural education for three weeks as part of a CIEP short-term immersion program.

According to Yejin Jung, the Kyungpook National University International Program Coordinator, immigrants are coming to Korea for work and marriage among other reasons. As a result, South Korea, a nation that values education and pays teachers high salaries, is beginning to think more about the importance of training educators in multicultural competence.

The Multicultural Education Immersion Program started from a previous initiative to provide an immersion program about English and STEM education for students from UNI’s partner institution, Kyungpook National University (KNU). In 2014 and 2015, students came from KNU to the CIEP Immersion Program with partial sponsorship from Global Teachers University, a federal program to educate teachers abroad.

“The best thing, I think, has been providing opportunity to experience different kinds of educational systems,” said Ms. Jung. “That opportunity gave them other opportunities to think about how they should teach. Also they thought about, ‘what is a good education? What is not a good education? What is applicable to Korean society/education?’”

In 2016, the immersion program focus switched to multicultural education and included students from an additional university—Korea National University of Education (KNUE). The group of Korean students attended a special cohort of English courses that focused on the content area of multicultural education three times per week. They also observed university courses in education, visited public school classes in the community and attended lectures on topics of multicultural education from various UNI professors who teach on the topic.

These lectures included a definition of multicultural education, research on nonverbal communication, activities for breaking down barriers and an introduction to the Transformational Approach—a model for teaching that includes helping learners think of themselves as citizens that can influence society.

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“I realized that multicultural education is essential for social justice,” said Sumin Lee, a KNUE student in the program. “I just thought that it is important as the number of the immigrants is increasing in Korea. However, as the purpose of the education is to help students make their lives happy, learning multicultural education is necessary for future teachers because it helps for
international students get rid of social barriers.”

According to Sumin, the current Korean education system does not account for very much diversity in the classroom. The CIEP immersion program has opened her eyes to the need for teachers to consider this.

“I couldn’t understand why some students were not good at studying because I didn’t consider their family backgrounds or social status,” she said about her point of view previously. “However, after taking (the) CIEP class, I realized that there are many different kinds of students in classes like immigrants or the disabled.”

In addition to these academic experiences, program participants also were paired with conversation partners in an Intercultural Communication class and practiced their English with other UNI students in a Human Relations class, which is a required course for all students in the College of Education. Juhee Han, KNUE’s international affairs coordinator, was impressed that students were able to visit the classroom and surprised by U.S. students’ reactions to their Korean classmates. Han hoped that the opportunity would allow the Korean group to enjoy English beyond the test scores they often focus on.

“I hope that English is a tool for them to make a relationship, but not a goal,” she said. “Our students are used to learning English to be successful.”

According to Jung, the CIEP winter program serves as a gateway for many participants to pursue other study abroad experiences.

“Theyir being friendly (UNI students) is really important to our students because they haven’t been abroad, so their behavior or ideas impacts their opinion about experiences in foreign countries,” said Jung.

In the evenings, when free time was allowed, the Wellness and Recreation Center became a favorite spot for many in the group.

“The campus is really cozy,” reflected coordinator Han. “I could go anywhere in 10-15 minutes. This kind of campus is really good for them to experience.

They can go anytime when they have free time to go to the library, to go to the gym.”

On the weekends, students joined a variety of social and cultural activities as well, including a day with local host families, a trip to a local hockey game and an international potluck with other students in the CIEP program. The potluck was Sumin’s favorite event because it allowed her to socialize and share her culture.

“I could meet many different people, talk each other and eat a lot of international food,” she said. “I felt good when others liked Korean food!”

Overall, this program offered a unique experience for Korean students to learn about multicultural education. After just a few weeks, they were able to participate in many activities and began to build a foundation of skills they will need in their future education careers. The CIEP was honored to host this group of young scholars and the staff look forward to continuing this program for many years.
Most of the towns found in Iowa lack diversity, but here in the Cedar Valley diversity is everywhere. Once a year, every ethnic group gets the opportunity to show off their own unique culture during the CultureFest held in Waterloo. This community-wide event is a desire to embrace each culture through performances, food samplings, artwork and more.

Crystal Buzza from Waterloo Community Schools, explains that “the purpose of CultureFest is to showcase the diversity of our community. In addition, it’s an informational fair where people can learn about different cultures and groups as well as an opportunity for our service providers to get information to new ethnic groups that have moved into our community.”

The CIEP has volunteered nearly every year since 2012 by having students showcase their own culture at the event. Each year, several students from varying places represent their country. In the past, students have created origami and offered ethnic food samples. It is a way for CIEP students to help bring more diversity to the communities within the Cedar Valley.

In addition, it benefits the students to see American culture in a community context instead of just a college campus. This event is very enjoyable for the students, as well as for those learning about a culture they might know a little about or nothing at all.

Buzza mentions, “From a higher education standpoint, having UNI CIEP at the event helps ELL (English Language Learner) students and families know there will still be support at the university level should that be something they need. The other really neat thing is, should an ELL student go to UNI perhaps they would want to help other ELL students at the CIEP. It is a great way for someone to take what they have learned and share it with another student.”

Not only does this event promote diversity, but it also creates unity within the community by having people share their talents with others through service or teaching as Buzza mentioned.

This year, UNI CIEP took six students to represent their country of Saudi Arabia at the CultureFest. They each wore different types of traditional clothing; some wore outfits worn in the home and others wore outfits worn outside in public. The students displayed their jewelry and religious items for onlookers to see. Lastly, they handed out Saudi Arabian dates and coffee. Many people visiting the booth knew very little about the Middle East, which made the booth a unique opportunity to learn more about another culture.

Zaky Almohammedali, a CIEP student who came to the event, explained that his favorite part was informing people about Islam. Getting the opportunity to display some of his religious items like his prayer mat was highly enjoyable for Zaky. He was able to offer people the opportunity to see these elements of his culture first hand instead of simply imagining the culture of Saudi Arabia.

In addition, the students were surprised by the amount of diversity within the Waterloo area. Omar Ibrahim felt as though he “was in New York City.” Overall, this event was a success of uniting the community together as one, regardless of culture.
social & cultural activities

ICE SKATING – FEB. 27
Students spent their Saturday afternoon learning and re-learning how to ice skate at Young Arena in Waterloo. After two hours of skating, almost everyone had gotten the hang of it! This was a unique experience for many CIEP students who may not have the opportunity to participate in winter sports in their home countries.

VISIT TO LANDMARK – FEB. 22
For an off-campus Culture Talk, students visited Landmark, and independent living facility in Waterloo. During a tour, complete with ice cream, coffee and pie, students learned and observed how many Americans take care of their elderly. Students particularly enjoyed the opportunity to see this environment, as several of the residents at this facility meet each session with CIEP students as part of the Retired Seniors Volunteer Program.

INTERNATIONAL FOOD POTLUCK & TALENT SHOW – JAN. 23
CIEP students, including the short-term group from Kansai Gaidai University in Japan, and host families gathered at The Lampost Theatre and Coffeehouse for the annual international potluck! This annual event is always a crowd favorite. After a game of human bingo, everyone enjoyed a variety of Korean, Arabic, Hispanic and Japanese foods.

CULTUREFEST - APRIL 7
CultureFest is one of the largest, most comprehensive festivals of culture in the area! These CIEP students interacted with many members from the community, explaining the significance of various Arabic household items such as jewelry, a prayer mat and incense. Along with that, they wore traditional outfits and brought coffee and dates to share.
Mirjana Spasojevic views every day as a learning experience, and when she was a student in the CIEP, she approached her studies in the same way. Mirjana, who is originally from Bosnia, grew up in a middle class home with her family. Her mother works in the medical field and her father in the financial industry. Mirjana explains her life in Bosnia as a good one and considers her family to live a traditional life. Growing up, her parents set high expectations for her life. With their support and encouragement, Mirjana completed economics school in Bosnia and then went on to work at the university. Along the way she met her husband. Soon after they were married, Mirjana’s husband and his family decided to move to the United States to be with friends and to find new opportunities. In 2005, Mirjana traveled to the United States by herself to join her husband and his family.

Upon her arrival in the United States, Mirjana was unsure of what she would do next. She didn’t know many people in the area and she was not fluent in the English language. She was afraid that people would not know her as she really was and she feared that she would not be able to find employment. Her husband suggested that she learn English to help in receiving additional job offers in the Cedar Valley. That is when she found CIEP!

Mirjana began her studies in CIEP during the fall 2005 semester and she completed the program in the spring 2006 semester. During her studies in CIEP, Mirjana found many difficulties, especially in her speaking courses. To her, English was a “backwards language” so she had to work really hard to make comprehensible sentences. Though it was challenging, Mirjana explains CIEP as an overall great experience. She not only learned English, but she met many new people and learned about a variety of cultures. When asked what she remembers most, Mirjana fondly remembers the classroom interactions with her peers. She remembered always having something good to say about her time in CIEP when she discussed her experiences with her parents and family in Bosnia.

After studying in CIEP, Mirjana started working at a large department store, JC Penny. She loved her work at this company because it allowed her to apply the English language skills she learned in her classes and helped her to continue to improve. She believes her time in CIEP prepared her to communicate with customers and the staff at her workplace. After several years, Mirjana left her job at JC Penny to begin working at Veridan Credit Union. Mirjana still currently works for Veridan in the UNI Maucker Union as a member services representative. She enjoys working on the campus because she gets to see and communicate with the current students of CIEP. She serves as a role model for current CIEP students and is happy to help assist them in anyway that she can. Whenever she meets with current CIEP students, Mirjana is reminded of her own experiences within the CIEP.

In the future, Mirjana hopes to continue her career at Veridan Credit Union. She looks to forward to the opportunities to grow with the company while still residing here in Cedar Falls, the place she now calls home.
Lauren is the academic assessment specialist at CIEP and loves the daily challenges that her position brings. Being flexible and thinking on her feet energizes Lauren as a teacher and as a professional. She spends most of her time working on assessment tasks, such as placement, midterm and final exams, as well as teaching about two hours a day. Specifically, Lauren designs and reviews curriculum, evaluates the readiness of students to progress in the CIEP, and works on special projects as needed.

Lauren has a passion for people and cultures different than her own. Growing up in Cincinnati, Ohio, she knew that she wanted to experience more, but she wasn’t sure what that would look like. She completed her undergraduate degree in international studies at the University of Evansville in Indiana before moving on to get her M.A. in applied linguistics and ESL at Georgia State University. As a student, she worked at the International Students Office at the University of Evansville and later studied abroad at Cambridge. Through these experiences, Lauren found her master’s program and eventually began teaching in Atlanta at a private language school. Prior to working in the CIEP, Lauren also taught English in China.

Outside of work, Lauren loves to travel, watch comedies and knit. Some of her favorite travels were trips to Venice, Italy and Madrid, Spain. She loved the tapas in Spain especially! Lauren also loves the opportunities she has been given to grow within CIEP. “I’ve had great mentors here that have guided me professionally and personally to be more compassionate and understanding.”

As she continues pursuing her passions of language and culture through her work at CIEP, she looks forward to the daily opportunities to be with students in the classroom as well as seeing their development through levels. “I hope to give CIEP assessments that are more comprehensive and organized, but beyond that, I’d love to be able to mentor and encourage other teachers here in the same way that I was supported.”

CIEP visits Alumni, Partners & Prospective students in Brazil

Student services coordinator, Sally Roos, visited Brazil for two weeks in April to meet with partners, recruit prospective students and visit former CIEP program participants. Sally first visited Lavras, where she met with former students and representatives from Gammon Presbyterian Institute, a private school that has been sending students for a special short-term immersion program. During her time in Lavras, she met former participants in the short-term program and had a meeting with future participants and their parents about the program for Fall 2016.

Sally also represented CIEP in EducationUSA fairs in Belo Horizonte, Porto Alegre and Campinas and visited with prospective students about all aspects of the CIEP program and fields of study at the University of Northern Iowa.

Former students Leonardo Trinidad, Angecilia Marques and Adriane Nogueira accompanied her to the fairs and assisted in Portuguese as needed.
As a Culture & Intensive English Program (CIEP) staff member, I was proud to work for a department that does such a thorough job of providing non-native speakers of English with intensive language instruction along with a cultural, social and academic orientation to the United States. The importance and satisfaction in the work done by the staff and students made it easy for me to represent the CIEP on a recent trip to Egypt.

After coordinating with EducationUSA/AMIDEAST Alexandria’s U.S. adviser, Reem Abou Elenain, I was invited to present to interested/prospective individuals on Sunday, Jan. 24, in Alexandria, Egypt. During the presentation, I gave an introduction and overview about studying English in the United States. I talked about the types of institutions that offer English language instruction, what the immigration process can be like, finding scholarships, and how to find and apply for programs. Finally, I also talked about what it is like to study in the CIEP and at the University of Northern Iowa.

I enjoyed my travels in Egypt (I even learned a few Arabic words), which was made even better through the hospitality offered by Reem and by having the opportunity to present to Egyptian students who are interested in CIEP. Shukran!

A fast trip guide through Spain
BY: ALMUDENA NEGREDO, CIEP CURRENT STUDENT

Although there are many marvelous places and beautiful cities that you can visit in Spain, I am going to show you a few places that you should not miss during a trip to Spain!

In the North, you can eat “fabada” (white bean dish with pig ear, blood sausage, chorizo and potatoes), great “tapas” and spectacular seafood like “pulpo a feira” (special octopus dish with paprika, salt and oil). You can also visit the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao and the Sacred Family in Barcelona.

In the South, we have great gastronomy such as “gazpacho” (cold vegetable soup) and “salmorejo” (slightly thicker than gazpacho). Interesting and historic places to visit are the Giralda in Sevilla and the Alhambra in Granada, among others.

On the East Coast, you can enjoy a delicious dish called “paella” (yellow saffron rice with seafood). There are also spectacular paradise islands in Baleares or Canarias such as Lanzarote, a volcanic island, or Formentera. On the other coast, we are bordered by a beautiful country, Portugal, which has great music and culture.

In my city, Madrid, in the middle of Spain, you can enjoy several monuments such as Alcala’s Door, the Retiro Park, or the Cibeles, specially for fans of Real Madrid soccer team, and museums like the Prado or the Queen Sofia.

Do not miss the opportunity to visit a country as diverse, fun and historic as Spain. We will be waiting for you!