

GGC's International Students Provide Global Perspective

Editor's Note: This feature prefers to allow students to speak in their own voice as much as possible. The first two pages proceed in interview format. We chose three SLA majors and one student with a major in the School of Science and Technology. Additional coverage follows on page 3. All four play for GGC's soccer teams.



James Forster is a product of an international family with a Gambian father and a Senegalese mother. A political science major, Forster is studying in the USA both to improve his education and pursue his passion for "football" (that is, soccer).

What do you bring to GGC as an international student?

A cultural background that upholds slightly [different] values that people can learn from, a story that some can relate to and push through, and finally, an example of what the world contains outside of the USA.

What challenges do you face studying in the USA?

Starting off in a new country with no knowledge of what to expect and adapting to another culture's values. But even the temperatures vary. Finally, being away from biological family for long periods of time, facing [athletic] injuries, and feeling alone.

What surprised you in coming to the USA?

The difference in temperature when I arrived in October, and it became colder quickly. Another surprise was the fact that people were so worried about security and safety; much more so than people were back home.

What do you wish that people knew about Gambia and Senegal?

I wish people knew how beautiful and magical Senegal and Gambia are, and that they made more effort to visit these countries and have amazing experiences! People



should taste new foods and sample actual good fruit that would blow their minds.

Pernilla Westergren is from Umeå, Sweden. A major in psychology, she wanted to live and play soccer in the USA, and she found the university practice of combining sport and athletics was particularly appealing.



People talk about what a person "takes away" from experiences, but what do you bring to studying here?

I can discuss things from another perspective. For example, I have given some ideas to my soccer coach that were inspired from how we do things in Sweden.

What have been the challenges for you?

Language was definitely a challenge during my first semester here. This was especially true on the soccer field, where it took me a few months to get used to the new terms. The biggest challenge I have faced is being able to balance soccer and school.

What surprised you about the USA?

Lack of environmental awareness, low gas prices, people frightened of getting sued everywhere, and the food menus being the same at almost every restaurant. I thought the food would be really good, but it turns out the options are much better in Sweden. On the positive side, Americans are very kind to strangers.

What do you wish people knew about Sweden?

It is true that our taxes are very high in Sweden, but the positive thing about it is that the money is distributed to the citizens and contributes to things like free healthcare, free education for all, and paid maternity leave. While it hurts to pay taxes in the moment, it is worth it because our system works very well.



GGC School of Liberal Arts News: Students



Riko Yasuzawa arrived at GGC from the Nippon Sport Science University. She hails from Yokohama, Japan. She is majoring in exercise science.

Why did you want to come to GGC to study and play soccer?

This year at a Japanese university I became certified as a Japanese athletic trainer. Since I had only been playing soccer in Japan for two years, my teacher told me that I could play at an American university for two more years. I decided to study in the USA because I wanted to learn more about the body by learning with real athletic trainers, and I also wanted to experience women's soccer here. Also, when I was in high school, my soccer team went on a two-week trip to Minnesota, which made me realize that I wanted to study in the USA.

What has been your biggest challenge?

The language barrier is the biggest challenge.

What were you surprised to discover in the USA?

In Japan, most people travel by train or on foot, but in the USA, there are almost no sidewalks and most people travel by car. Also, I still don't quite understand how much I should pay at restaurants because Japan does not have a tipping system for waiters. What I like about American restaurants is that the calorie count is listed next to the items.

What surprises you about Americans?

American people are always saying "Thank you." They are very [encouraging] insisting, "You played a great game today."

What do you wish that people knew about Japan?



I would like people to know how good the food is, how safe it is, and how beautiful the old buildings such as temples and shrines are. I believe that by promoting Japanese culture and its good qualities myself, I can make everyone aware of the good qualities of Japan.



Ulrike Duyck is from Halle, Belgium, which is just southwest of the capital Brussels. A major in Criminal Justice/Criminology, she is a goalkeeper for the women's soccer team.

What attracted you to studying and playing at GGC?

Although I indeed wanted to come to the USA to study and play soccer, I also wanted a life experience. I think GGC is very diverse and has international students not only from athletics, but also out of athletics. It is wonderful to be able to meet people from around the world.

What have been the challenges?

English is not my first language but I don't really think that is a major challenge. Going to classes and the soccer field are okay. However, transportation is a challenge. For example, going to an off-campus store is a little more challenging because I do not have a car.

What things most surprised you about the USA?

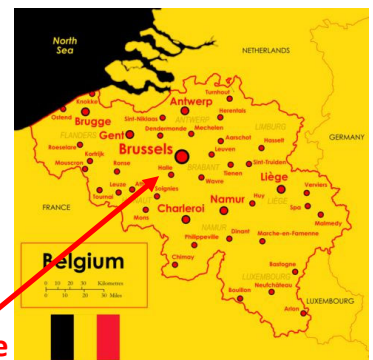
Most of the things here are so much bigger. For example, the supermarkets. The first time I went to Walmart I was astonished because it was so huge. It is a whole experience to be here and to be able to meet new people.

What do you wish people knew about Belgium?

Belgium is not that big of a country, but we have three official languages: Dutch, French, and German.

Sometimes we learn new things about our home country by living somewhere else. What have you learned about Belgium by studying in the USA?

I already knew Belgium was not that large of a country. After coming to the USA, which is a big country, I saw that Belgium was indeed not big. However, Belgium is still worth visiting despite its small size.



International Students Provide New Perspectives And Face Unique Challenges

Numbers released by Cheryl Park, Associate Director of International Student Services, show GGC hosting 176 degree-seeking international students in Fall 2023. In some ways it is a tribute to GGC's campus diversity that these students do not stick out for any particular reason. However, this fact also means that their contributions and challenges can be overlooked.

An international student is defined as a person who meets one of these three criteria: 1) currently lives outside the USA and requires an F-1 or a J-1 visa to study in the USA; 2) lives in the USA on an F-1 visa but is not a U.S. Citizen or a Lawful Permanent Resident; or 3) currently in the USA on another non-immigrant visa classification which permits part-time or full-time study. Permanent residents, refugees and asylees would not be considered international students at GGC.

Professors in the SLA recognize that international students enhance the intellectual and cultural campus climate in myriad ways. The SLA currently hosts 31 international students working towards a bachelor's degree.

Dr. Jenna Andrews-Swann, Associate Professor of Anthropology, observed, "When they feel welcome to share their perspectives, everyone, instructors included, can benefit from exposure to ideas, anecdotes, and practices that reflect something from the unique experiences of international students."

Professor of Religious Studies Dr. Michael Stoltzfus, agreed, noting how they enhance academics, "They bring a global perspective that expands everyone's horizons, promotes intercultural competency, and contributes a plurality of language skills that enhance the reading and analysis of sacred texts."



It is not just professors who appreciate international students. "They have a different way of seeing the world, a more mature outlook on life at times, and a

Incoming international student class of 2023

broadening of the perspectives of all my players," observed women's soccer coach, Dr. Michael Giuliano. "Their work ethic tends to be high."

One challenge of the international student experience relates to language. Even those who learned English at an early age do not necessarily understand American expressions. Many learned English with British idioms. British speakers power their cars with petrol, but Americans call it gas. "Mad," has a wider range of connotations for those from British English-speaking backgrounds. Americans say "Cheers" over drinks. In the other parts of the world it means "Thanks."

These might seem like cute semantic differences but underneath them are issues that those coming to GGC must negotiate. "Not only do these students face things like linguistic, dietary, local transit, housing, and even banking challenges, but they also face the bureaucratic things like visa paperwork and the college websites they must learn to use," explained Andrews-Swann.

Park said that her office is available to help, but she recognized, "it takes a lot of initiative, bravery and resilience on the student's part to accomplish what they need to do." She estimated that it can take international students up to two years to fully acclimate. Not all international students have an athletic team to help.

Students may have relatives in the USA already. These families might support but they can also interfere. International students may feel trapped between the new culture and their "home" culture. If a student has family living in the USA, then their relatives might have expectations of their newly arrived student relation. For example, women students might be expected to take care of their extended family's children, sometimes even at the expense of their own studies.

When asked how to help international students, Coach Giuliano advised, "As with all our students, ask questions. Assume nothing." *By Richard Rawls*