

College Looks to Increase Number of International Students

Learning Different Cultures: Washington Is a Top Destination for Students From Abroad, and Officials at Centralia College Hope to Increase Numbers Locally

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Data released by the Institute of International Education shows Washington as one of the top states in attracting international students, with colleges seeing an 11 percent increase in recent years.

Although the numbers at Centralia College have not increased substantially, International Student Programs is working to bring more out-of-country students to the area.

Director Laju Nankani said the college currently has 40 students from 13 countries. She said at the program's peak, there were 65 students.

Nankani hopes to see the program grow to 100 international students within the next five years, something she believes will be attainable through aggressive marketing and advanced planning.

"They always say if you invest, you have to see what return on investment you get, and it can't just be the tuition dollars. It's so much more," she said.

As a way to educate the community and other students at the college, the program recently took part in the Lyceum lecture series, giving the floor to four international students. As part of International Education Week, the students represented their home countries and shared their experiences at Centralia College.

Nankani said the opportunity helps the students feel comfortable, while it also helps gain support for the students.

"I'm speechless because I think it's a privilege that we host these students on our campus and whatever we can do for them. They give back tenfold to our native speakers, so it's a win-win really for the campus community, for the larger community," she said. "People are amazed. We are a small school and we attracted so many from so many different countries. We just scratched the surface really; the potential is huge."

Many of the students are involved in the college's intensive English program, a tool that is a major draw. Those who presented the lecture Wednesday noted the language barrier as a major problem, and Nankani said the college offers international students with low English proficiency a chance to improve their language skills before moving to a bigger school.

Mantau Tse, an international student from Hong Kong, came to Centralia College at the age of 18. After graduating from high school, he was excited to experience a new culture, but said he was hesitant to speak English at first for fear of being made fun of.

"I didn't feel comfortable speaking until my second year," he said. "But later on I figured out the more I speak, the more confident I feel."

The program offers a variety of opportunities for the international students to practice their English outside of a class setting.

Amanda Mobbs, adviser for the International Student Programs, said the program offers an international club and a program called Conversation Partners. Both encourage students to get together, share cultures and build friendships while practicing the English language.

One community member expressed the importance of encouraging the students to come to Centralia.

"What richness these international students bring to Centralia," Audrey Kimball said. "Coming from another country myself, there is so much to learn about all these other places. I've seen so many people in Centralia who know so little about the world."

The events put on by the International Student Programs aim to bring more awareness to the international students, while providing them for space to grow.

"My job is to help them as much as I can because I think they bring a lot to the community, to Lewis County," Nankani said. "It would be great to have many more countries represented, and already from some of the ads we are placing in certain countries, we are getting the word out."