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Welcoming students from abroad

After a year-long hiatus, international students returned to the Linfield community this fall

By Ben O'Loughlin '22

They came from all over the world – Egypt, France, Germany, Japan, North Macedonia and the Netherlands. But, for the first time since spring 2020, they came.

This fall, 11 students studied from abroad at Linfield University. They were the first group to arrive since students departed in spring 2020, and they did not waste time finding their place at Linfield.

Nada Elekiaby, a pre-physical therapy major from Egypt, waited two years to step foot on the McMinnville campus. Her scholarship through World Learning's Global Undergraduate Exchange Program was delayed because of the pandemic. However, once she arrived in August 2021, Elekiaby quickly became involved in activities outside of the classroom.

"I'm trying to take advantage of everything," Elekiaby said. "I really like the clubs here. I'm a fan of psychology, so I joined the Pre-Psych Club and Circle K. I enjoy volunteering."

Alexandre Collard came from Epernay, France, to major in wine studies and learn more about Oregon's unique wine region. He was able to find his community at Linfield in the athletic department.

"I really appreciate the importance of athletics in a student-athlete's life here at Linfield," Collard said. "I met a lot of great people thanks to tennis and golf. Every person is very committed. I love it!"

From joining athletic teams to rushing fraternities and sororities and participating in campus clubs, being an active part of the campus community is something the International Programs Office (IPO) encourages.

"One thing the exchange students are looking for is connecting with Americans. They want to make friends," said Deborah Herlocker, assistant director of international programs. "Here at Linfield, it is much easier to make that connection thanks to our size, the welcoming culture and the variety of student activities."

For Nenad Stojchevski, the transition from the Republic of North Macedonia to Oregon was as smooth as could be. Even as the first student to study at Linfield from Macedonia, the computer science major felt a sense of belonging from the get-go.

"I've been volunteering at Sue Buel Elementary here in McMinnville with a fourth-grade class, which has been super fun,"

Stojchevski said. "I really like to exercise, so I've gotten to know a lot of the athletes around campus. At the beginning of the year, I got involved with the calisthenics club. I've just been trying to attend as many campus events and opportunities as possible."

The Institute of International Education (IIE) annual Open Doors report detailed a 15% decrease in the number of international students studying at colleges and universities in the United States during the 2020-21 academic year. It was the first time since 2014-15 that fewer than one million international students were studying in the country. However, initial numbers from the 2021-22 academic year have shown a return to numbers closer to the historic norm. The same was true at Linfield.

It's a trend that IPO – and the Linfield community – was happy to see.

"In the years directly prior to COVID-19, Linfield would often host around 20-30 short-term exchange students a year, which would include students coming for one semester and a few for a year," Herlocker said.

In 2020-21, Linfield had only one short-term, non-degree seeking student, so welcoming 11 this fall made an immediate impact on the campus community.

Linfield shares the culture of its international students in various ways. This fall, Elekiaby hosted an Egyptian Tea Hour, where she introduced Egyptian food, tea and music to the others. In prior years, IPO hosted regular presentations from interested international students, as well as some study-abroad returnees, to talk about other cultures.

"We connect with different clubs and help with their on-campus programming – specifically Chinese Club, French Club and Japanese Club," Herlocker said. "We've also moved more to social media, where we've been posting facts and information about the different countries and cultures from where our international students come. This way, even if the students aren't comfortable being the 'explainers' of their country and culture, we are able to provide insight and awareness for Linfield."

"The more we can increase the international perspective on campus, the more it allows the students here on campus to learn more about the world."



BACK ON CAMPUS: Nada Elekiaby, a pre-physical therapy student from Egypt, is one of 11 international students who studied at Linfield in fall 2021.