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Global Learning

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Q&A: Global learning

Shaik Ismail, staff emeritus, reflects on the value of international education

By Mike Lempner

For many students, an international experience is a key component to their Linfield education. It has, in fact, been a part of Linfield's history since 1976. For the last 19 years, Shaik Ismail has led Linfield's International Programs Office, overseeing the institution's study abroad programs for Linfield students as well as welcoming international students to study at Linfield. As he retired in May 2022, Ismail offered reflections on international education.

Q: Why is international learning important?

I would describe the answer to that question through the lens of our students. What do our students tell us when they're abroad? They write blogs and journals for us, and then when they return, we have re-entry sessions. In reading through the journals, I see some broad themes in terms of why it is important to them.

It makes them more flexible. It makes them more adaptable. They gain confidence, not to mention a proficiency in a second language. They are better at working with teams. These are the qualities that employers look for. While study abroad is important in internationalizing the campus, it also provides these skillsets for our students to negotiate an interdependent world.

Q: What is the biggest challenge you have faced?

The biggest challenge was when we had to shut down our operations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It started in spring 2020, when we had to bring back students from 25 locations and make all the transportation arrangements amid all this horror. Students tell us that one of the reasons they come to Linfield is because of our study abroad offering. Dreams were shattered. It was also really demoralizing for the staff. They're here to send students abroad and to also welcome students here. That's their job. And yet we were robbed of that opportunity, and students were robbed of the opportunity to go abroad.

Q: Do any specific students stand out to you during your time at Linfield?

Many students that we recruit to Linfield have not traveled abroad, and in some cases have not traveled outside of the state,

so it's an important adventure for them. That said, I remember one student who was extremely shy and introverted. He went to Japan for a year and came back very talkative. He not only made eye contact with people, but he started telling jokes and was one hundred percent different than when he left. In fact, we had Japanese visitors on campus the semester after he came back. As we were walking across campus, they spotted him, screamed his name and came running over to give him hugs. Just unbelievable. You see that and you know that you've truly accomplished something special.


Q: What sort of potential future areas of growth in international experiences do you see for Linfield?

I think one area of growth would be to increase the number of 3:2 programs we offer with an international partner like wine studies. Students complete three years at Linfield and two years abroad, earning both a bachelor's and master's degree.

In addition, now that Linfield has master's programs, we also need to provide opportunities for those students to internationalize. This is happening with the Master of Science in business students who complete an international capstone.

Q: If there is one thing you hope to leave as your Linfield legacy, what would it be?

We should be able to work out a plan where any interested student can fulfill the requirements of their major and minor and still study abroad. That would be one thing that I hope my legacy is built on – an opportunity for everyone. Linfield has gone from nine programs to 30 programs, but it still can be expanded further.

 Watch an interview with Ismail at magazine.linfield.edu.