

Students Bring International Flavor to Eastern Campus *By Sarah Coomber*

Eastern Washington University draws a few hundred international students to Cheney each year. The reasons they choose to study here are as diverse as the students themselves.

Some spend a few months improving their English skills and developing an understanding of U.S. culture.

Others come to study a specific subject.

Still others want to explore a family connection.

Studying with classmates from the United States and around the world, these students open doors to new worlds for themselves and their peers.

"I'm going to work hard and make America proud," he said. In July he plans to try for his black belt.

Coming to Eastern felt like a homecoming for Abdulwahid. He was born in Spokane while his father, Anas Ben Ali Al-Abdulwahed, was studying business and marketing at Eastern. Now Al-Abdulwahed is director of the ports and transportation department for the Jeddah Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

"I would like to graduate from Eastern," Abdulwahid said. "It's kind of a family thing."

the 2001-2002 school year, 115 students studied English with ELI.

"That's the thing I like about (English as a Second Language) programs in university. You get to meet people from different countries and get to know the culture," Abdulwahid said, listing off classmates from Japan, Korea, Taiwan, China, Colombia, Brazil and the United Arab Emirates.

But Abdulwahid's goal is clear.

"I came here to practice my English and try the American freedom life," he said. "So I hang out with Americans."

Although Abdulwahid misses his family and friends in Saudi Arabia, he feels at home in the United States. The events of Sept. 11 did not dampen his enthusiasm or cause him to consider a return to Saudi Arabia.

"I always treat people nicely and politely," he said. "So when that happened, people treated me nicely."



Mohammed Abdulwahid, 19
Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Dressed in a white karate uniform, Mohammed Abdulwahid moves his arms and legs in powerful strokes, fending off an invisible attacker.

"I want to use the whole power from my whole body," he explains to a group of students gathered to watch his demonstration. With a great shout, Abdulwahid sends his hand slicing through five planks of wood.

Abdulwahid has a brown belt in the Kyokushinkaikan school of karate, which practices a full-contact version of the martial art. He works out with a club at Washington State University in Pullman and started his own club at Eastern. In June he will be a representative of the United States in the World Cup competition in Portland, Maine.

He and his brother Ibrahim, 18, are studying in Eastern's English Language Institute (ELI), which in 1999 became one of the first three intensive English language programs in the United States to receive national accreditation. In existence for more than 20 years, ELI offers non-academic-credit programs to prepare students with English skills that will enable them to enter more advanced studies and professional arenas.

Many ELI students enroll as regular international students after completing their intensive English studies, and that is Abdulwahid's plan. He hopes to begin undergraduate work this summer in outdoor recreation management, physical therapy or maybe business.

"I like the idea of traveling," he said.

At ELI he studies grammar, reading and writing in classes of 14 to 16 students from all over the world. During

Mio Kawada, 26
Yokohama, Japan

Mio Kawada's goal of studying English and international affairs brought her to Eastern—and put her in a position to witness history.

Kawada arrived at Eastern in July. Between summer session and the start of fall quarter, the former ad agency employee arranged a home-stay with friends of her mother in Jersey City, N.J., near Manhattan.

On the morning of Sept. 11, her host mother woke her up in a panic.

"I couldn't understand actually because her speaking was so fast, but I heard 'terrorism' or that kind of scary word," Kawada recalled. "I didn't say anything. We ran to the television, but the media also got panicked. I tried to figure out what was going on, but I couldn't understand at all."

From her host family's house, Kawada saw smoke and watched one of the World Trade Center towers collapse.

She called her parents in Japan to reassure them that she was all right and, along with the rest of the world, tried to figure out the situation—using a language that was not her own.

"At that time, my hard time started," Kawada recalled. "I had no Japanese friends around there. Even though my host family said I was OK, the media told us everything was getting worse."

She found a television channel that broadcast Japanese news twice a day, but it disappointed her.

"I was upset at the Japanese media



Left: A student in Eastern's English Language Institute, Mohammed Abdulwahid demonstrates his karate skills. Abdulwahid has a brown belt in the Kyokushinkaikan school of karate. Top: Eastern student Mio Kawada was in New Jersey on Sept. 11 and saw one of the World Trade Center towers collapse. Back in Cheney, she is studying international relations. Right: A student in Eastern's master's program in public administration and planning, Lucas Cepero says meeting individuals from different countries dispels stereotypes.

there because they just tried to say the situation was getting worse, worse, worse, because they didn't understand the real situation," she said. "They weren't successful at reporting the news that we wanted to know. Just surface, I think."

On Sept. 24 Kawada returned to Cheney and now lives on campus in a residence hall.

"After I got here again, I felt so safe because I have so many Japanese friends and we can share the information," she said. "At the time I was in Jersey City, I wanted to come back here—not Japan."

Undaunted, Kawada said she hopes that this summer her mother, father and grandmother can visit her and they can go to Manhattan together.

Meanwhile, she is working on a major in international affairs. After she graduates in 2003, she hopes to find work in Japan as a translator for a publishing company.

Lucas Cepero, 25 Colombia/Spain

Lucas Cepero loves telling Americans to go study a second language, because, he said, through language they can learn about the cultures, countries and realities other people experience.

The irony is Cepero used to hate the English language and did not want to study in the United States, whose foreign policy troubled him. This is how he described his earlier attitude: "I'm going to stay in my country my whole life. I don't need English."

But things changed. Cepero, a native of Spain who grew up in Colombia, earned his bachelor's degree in marketing in Colombia and advertising in Spain. He decided it would be useful in his career to incorporate

English into the mix. He wanted to go to Australia, but that country had no embassies nearby where he could fill out the necessary paperwork. The United States did.

He learned of Eastern's ELI program from a Colombian alum and began his studies two years ago.

"I came with 'Hello,' 'What's your name,' 'How old are you,'" he said.

He later entered the pre-Master's of Business Administration Program, which provides language support, and in January began a master's program in public administration and planning. He hopes to graduate from Eastern next year and find work with the United Nations or in some other international capacity that will enable him to "go around the world helping poor people in developing countries."

In addition to his studies, Cepero is a cultural mentor on campus, helping students from Spanish-speaking countries deal with culture shock and other adjustments to the United States. Cepero said the major changes these students face include the move to a small town and a colder

climate, and the experience of a more reserved society.

"Most of them come from a 10-million-person city to Cheney with 10,000 people. It's a shock," Cepero said. "When students, they come in winter, they go down after two weeks. They don't want to stay."

Colombians on campus also bring concerns related to war and violence at home—and the resulting lack of job opportunities. Cepero said many come to him asking how they can stay in the United States longer. Some stay on for master's degrees or take community college courses.

"All of them want to go back but not right now," he said.

Cepero has found the Eastern community is curious about his perspective on world events. Likewise, spending time on Eastern's campus with people from many backgrounds has given Cepero a new outlook.

"I won't say anymore in my life 'Americans,' 'Colombians'—no, 'Spanish'—no, 'Japanese'—no," he said. He explained that now he knows individuals from these countries, so he no longer can generalize one person's behavior or attitude to an entire group of people.

Cepero's experiences at EWU have helped him look beyond policy to see other aspects of the United States.

"Now I'm here, so I'm looking at the world from here," he said.

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