COMING TO AMERICA

AN INFLUX OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ARE CHOOSING BROWARD AS THE IDEAL STUDY ABROAD DESTINATION

WRITER CLARISSA BUCH
Broward College student Yanelle Cruz isn’t an average college student. In May 2014, she decided to start a new life and move to downtown Fort Lauderdale from her home in Tegucigalpa, Honduras to attend college.

“I had visited the United States before but only for a very short amount of time,” she said. “I’ve read that this city is very versatile and you can find pretty much whatever you’re looking for, which is why I decided to attend school here.”

Cruz and 553 other Broward College students are known as International Students who are attending college through a student visa. An influx of international students from around the globe find themselves calling this their home away from home each year, and the numbers are rapidly increasing.

Broward College associate vice president of International Education David Moore has seen a significant increase in international student enrollment in the last two years. He projects that fall 2015 will have the most international students enrolled in the college’s history.

“We have a lot of students that have international roots predominantly in Latin America and Central America,” Moore said. “We are very fortunate that we attract these students to study with us.”

With international student enrollment continuing to increase, Broward College appointed an international students outreach coordinator and increased their overall staff to ensure international students remain happy and comfortable while studying in Fort Lauderdale. “Appointing the coordinator was probably the single best thing
we did,” Moore said. “It keeps our students happy and maintains constant communication with them.”

Broward College offers virtual college fairs for students interested in enrolling from out of the country. Moore believes that because South Florida is a well-known travel destination, Broward is slowly becoming a main hub for international students. “In terms of our international students, we have the most coming from Venezuela,” he said. “We also see a lot of students from Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, and Asia.”

Dr. Alejandra Parra, associate director of International Affairs at Nova Southeastern University (NSU), agrees with Moore. Broward is becoming a hotspot for these students.

“I was actually an international student about 30 years ago from Argentina,” she said. “Now I show students how this area can truly be a home away from home for them too.”

There are 1,114 international students currently enrolled at NSU representing approximately 104 countries. According to Parra, most come from South America, Asia, India, and Saudi Arabia.

“There are literally students from all over the world. It’s really a wonderful environment and gives a feeling of globalization to the university,” she said. Both Moore and Parra focus greatly on programs that assist students before and during their stay.

Parra said, “We help students get used to the culture of the U.S., and while they are here, we constantly support their stay with everything from picking majors and minors to helping them get a driver’s license.”

Cruz explained that assimilating into American culture was both
easy and difficult at times, but Broward College staff helped in making the transition. “Socially it was challenging because I arrived during a summer semester, which means there was not that much activity on campus,” she said. “The staff in the international office has been very welcoming.”

Once international students finish their degrees, Parra explained that students typically return to their home countries or decide to stay in the U.S. permanently. Cruz finishes her associate’s degree at Broward College next spring and hopes to transfer to Florida Atlantic University to pursue a bachelor’s degree in international studies, sociology, and women’s studies. She is considering staying in the U.S. instead of returning to Honduras, but she has not made any final decisions.

“I really want to do something that will benefit my country, whether that means living in the U.S. or actually returning home,” she said. “I want to give back to my country, but I feel like I might be able to do a better job from afar. Either way, I’m just open to [seeing] where life takes me.”

Cruz recently celebrated her one-year anniversary of moving to the states. “A part of me is sad this is happening all so quickly,” she said. “I only have one more year here at BC and they have really treated me like I am at home.”

International Week at Nova Southeastern University