

One of the many things I love about working on a college campus is the wonderful diversity that surrounds everyone here. We have employees and students from all walks of life and all manner of experiences. We have sixth graders in our Talent Search Program and senior citizens that join us each week for lunch. We have a great ethnic diversity among the student body, as well as a wealth of varied student experiences. And we have fantastic international students!

While the vast majority of our enrollment is made up of Kansans, we do have students from all over the world at NCCC. Last year we had 245 international students from 27 different countries come to Chanute and Ottawa, Kansas to take classes. This is a wonderful experience for our native students to meet people from different cultures and learn a bit about how they live. The international students, in turn, learn about what I would call the “real America” as most of the country is considered rural, not urban. (OK, to be fair, 58% of Americans live in communities greater than 200,000 people, which is not Chanute or Ottawa. But as far as percentage of the country is concerned, it’s mostly rural.)

Life here is nothing like the TV shows and movies that are so popular overseas. And I hope America is NOTHING like the U.S. Congress right now. But that is how many internationals see the U.S. – Kim Kardashian, Honey Boo-Boo, and bickering representatives and senators. International students have a chance to learn about us first hand, then go home to tell others what we are really like.

With so many colleges and universities in the US, how did they “find” NCCC and why would someone from Switzerland, or South Korea, or Kenya want to come to rural Kansas? The answer is simple – they wanted to experience “real America” too. They wanted a small campus with more of a personal experience. Many come from large cities in their home countries and they want to see life in a more rural setting. Our low cost is a draw as well. We do charge significantly more for international students than we do for state residents as the internationals do not pay taxes and are not supported by state or county help.

But that doesn’t explain how they found NCCC specifically. Some of our students came from referrals from others who have graduated with us from previous years. They go home and tell other prospective students about their experience at Chanute and Ottawa. Personal referral is still the best advertising! Some are recruited to be on our athletic teams, such as soccer players from the United Kingdom, track and field athletes from the Caribbean nations, and basketball players from Australia.

Others go to the local U.S. embassy, or look online for information on colleges and stumbled upon us that way. But a steady stream of these motivated students comes from a wonderful organization – Youth for Understanding (YFU). YFU helps connect international students with its member colleges like NCCC. Students from all over the globe get placed with community colleges and high schools across the United States. It is an exchange student format in that it relies on host families to open their homes to these motivated students.

And that is where I need your help. We are looking for additional host families for some January arrivals and for August of 2014. It is easy to be a host family. You have to have a bed for them

and provide meals – and be ready to learn about another culture as you teach someone about ours.

Here's what one of our host "Moms," Dawn Kuder, had to say about her experience, "Opening our home to international students has taught us so much about their countries and culture. It is also giving us relationships that we will cherish for the rest of our lives." Dawn and Mike have hosted four YFU students over the years and had a great time doing it.

Often our YFU students come back to the US just visit their "American Families" after they graduate. And our host parents have traveled to the student's home country to visit them. Thanks to the information age international students and their American parents stay in touch long after the academic year ends and the student has returned to their home. It's a relationship that can last a lifetime.

If you live in the Chanute area and would like to have the world come to your doorstep please give Sarah Cadwallader a call at (620) 431-2820 ext. 240. Also the Kuder's invite you to call them with questions about their experience. Sarah can put you in touch with them. You can learn more about YFU at <http://www.yfu.org/> . Open your home and your mind to a new culture while teaching someone about what it truly means to be an American.

As always you can send me your thoughts and questions to binbody@neosho.edu.