

ICSP: Presenters learn U.S. culture

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centers and other community groups also participate.

They get a chance to meet someone from another culture, giving them personal insight into a society half the globe away.

"It's the people to people, the person to the student," Briggs said. "It's what daily life is like in Taiwan, what's daily life like in Russia. It's what motivates them, what gets them up in the morning.

"The kind of learning that takes place — they're really magic teaching moments. You can't just get that from a book."

The program's Catalog of International Students lists 32 people active in the program, from India to Yugoslavia, Ecuador to Tanzania. These students have been chosen because of their financial need, their ability to give presentations and their academic backgrounds, said program director Heidi Baer-Postigo.

They commit to 80 hours of presentations a year, which averages about three a week, she said. The University gives them partial tuition waivers in return.

That allowed Carlos Maza to come to the University from Mexico City three years ago. Now he sees himself as a cultural ambassador for his country.

That's not always an easy responsibility, he said. He often has to compress everything about Mexico into a one-hour presentation.

"You grow so much," he said. "You realize how much you know about your country, but you realize how much more you have to learn.

"Now, anytime someone asks me to talk about Mexico, I can go for hours."

The students in the program learn how to present their cultures in an upper-division class every year. They learn to use props to draw their audiences in and to compare American culture to their own.

That doesn't always prevent

problems. One Swedish student told a class of eighth-graders that the student thought it was fine to have sex before marriage in Sweden.

"We heard about that one," Briggs said.

But most of the program's history has been written in success, he said. Children and adults learn so much when they put a face and a personality to a culture.

"Once you make contact with another culture, great things happen," he said.

Most of the presenters concentrate on personal aspects of their cultures, such as how Mauritians dance. Appayya said the audiences often ask the presenters what it's like to be young in another culture: how to get from Eugene to their country, what their religion is like or what they eat.

"High school students always ask about dating," she said.

Momoko Ide teaches Japanese dance and paper-folding in her presentations. She tries to let her students experience her culture instead of hearing about it in a lecture.

"The little kids, they are so cute," she said. "They are so interested. They don't even know about Japan, but they are so interested. I'm always kind of excited when I talk to the people."

The program also allows international students to experience and learn about U.S. culture, said Baer-Postigo. Their interactions with students teach them what U.S. students grow up learning and thinking, how they act and what they consider important.

A discussion at the beginning of the year with U.S. high school students covered family life and the independence that children have. The ICSP students were surprised at how much fear the U.S. students had about their futures, Baer-Postigo said.

"It's one thing to grow up in a culture and you think that's just how things are," Baer-Postigo said. "This suddenly just opens



LAURA GOSS / Emerald

The International Cultural Service Program, offered since 1983, is the only such program in the country.

their eyes. I think they learn a lot about U.S. culture."

Beyond cultural enlightenment, the program is allowing international students to pursue their own dreams. Kimeli Ole-Naiyomah is planning to become the Masai tribe's first doctor.

He was raised in Kenya as a member of one of the most traditional African tribes. He became the first member of his clan to attend high school, and one of very few Masai to attend a university.

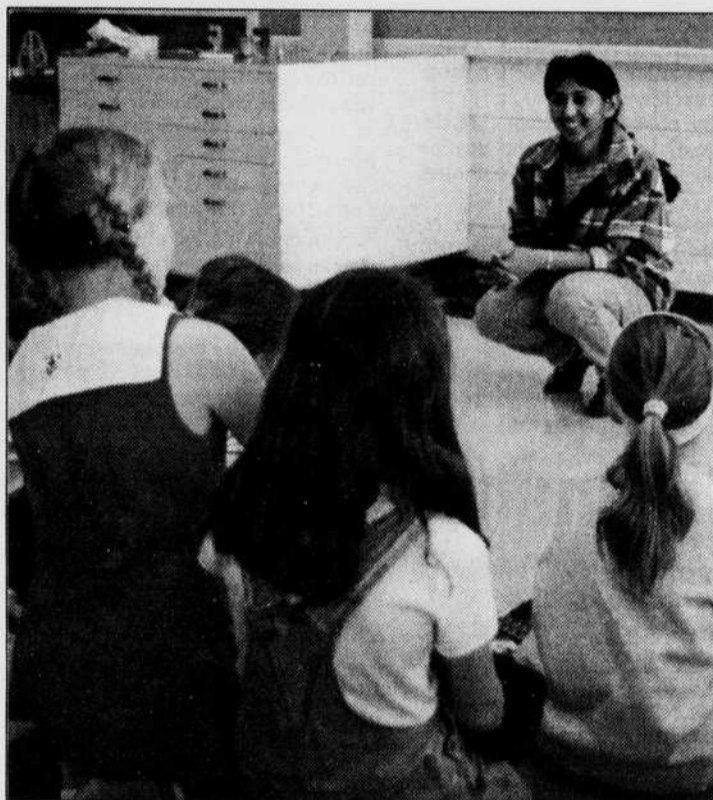
He had wanted to be a doctor since his mother had been carried to a hospital 30 miles away. Ole-Naiyomah, then only 5, had followed and stayed at the hospital while his mother recovered.

He's now a pre-med biology student at the University. He hopes to return to his tribe and build a hospital.

"A little program like ICSP had a very big impact on a little tribe in Africa, an impact so significant to the survival of the tribe," he said. "ICSP has done a great job to my tribe.

"My dream is not my dream alone, but a dream of my tribe. I carry my tribe in my chest, and when I walk, I walk as my tribe.

"If my dream comes true, my people's dream will come true."



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The students in the International Cultural Services Program share their culture and history spending 80 hours a year in community presentations.

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