

Students share their cultures

■ The International Cultural Services Program helps pay students' tuitions, with a hefty public speaking requirement

By Diane Huber
for the Emerald

Indonesia's political tensions and splintered government have left it far behind the technological advancements of the developed world. With no access to the Internet, it was pure chance that University student Iova Margoyungan filled out an application that a friend's brother had given her. She mailed it just one month before the deadline without knowing anything about the University.

"It was meant to be," she said.

Four years later, Margoyungan will graduate from the University with a journalism degree. Because of the economic tensions in Indonesia, she would have had to leave the University after her first year were it not for a full scholarship she received through the International Cultural Services Program.

Unlike other scholarships the University offers, the ICSP requires participants to speak to the community about their culture for 80 hours a year. Last Monday, during International Women's Day at Mother Kali's Books, Margoyungan shared what it's like to be a minority woman.

The program's coordinator, Alberto Albuquerque is a graduate student who participated in the program all four years as an undergraduate. He said participants receive a yearly benefit ranging from \$6,000 to full tuition.

Admission into the program is competitive; for the 2001-2002 academic year, only 30 students will

be accepted out of 104 applicants. They are chosen based on their native country, their level of financial need and their public speaking ability. Margoyungan's unique background is just one example of the diversity in a program that includes 28 students from countries all over the world.

Margoyungan described her first presentation as being a bit nerve-racking. She was scheduled to speak to each grade level, from kindergarten through 12th grade, from 6 a.m. to 4 p.m.. She laughed, remembering how worried she was when the junior high kids dozed off during her presentation.

Presenting about a native culture is harder than it sounds. Margoyungan often has to research for certain presentations about Indonesian politics or the economy. She said it's difficult representing the actions and motives of an entire country.

On the other hand, she pointed out that one of the most significant benefits of the program is that she had learned so much about her own culture.

"You don't really think about your culture until you step out of your first-person point of view," she said.

Through the program, Margoyungan has placed herself within the community at-large and also within the campus community. Because she had never traveled outside Indonesia before attending the University, she said the support of the international office and the other participants was very helpful during her transition.

Albuquerque agreed that through the program, he has found a place in the community.

"At first you feel alienated and you see things in a superficial

way," he said. "Someone says, 'hey, you're from Brazil; wow, that's such a beautiful country.' But it never extends beyond that."

He said the ICSP helps many participants extend beyond the day-to-day superficiality by allowing them to connect their culture with that of America.

The most rewarding aspect of the program is broadening children's horizons by introducing them to other cultures, Margoyungan said.

Leo da Silva, a Brazilian participant, said many of the questions are very naïve. "The kids will ask: 'Do you wear shoes in Brazil?'; 'Do you live in the jungle?'; 'Do you have cars?'"

Albuquerque said that the most important aspect of the program is breaking down these stereotypes that are just beginning to form in young people's minds.

"These ideas obviously come from somewhere," he said. The presentations give the kids another perspective to compare with the stereotypes they may have heard, he added.

As Margoyungan pointed out, it's important for people of all ages to realize that "America is not the world."

That's exactly why Connie Hanson, a second-grade teacher at Mt. Vernon Elementary School, invited one of the program's participants to share his culture with her class in January.

"I think my children realize that as they meet people from different countries, the people have more things alike than different," Hanson said. "I hope that the presentations will motivate them to be more tolerant of everyone they meet."

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