Creating Hope: Positive Responses to Global Challenges, was the theme of the 2010 James E. Smith Midwest Conference on World Affairs, held March 8-9 on the UNK campus. The annual conference, which began in 1964, featured writers, poets, activists, diplomats, scholars and entrepreneurs representing twenty-three countries. They spoke of initiatives taking place that are making a difference in the lives of individuals, groups and nations.

The conference was opened by newspaper columnist and photojournalist, Mr. Dean Jacobs (www.travel4life.org). In his address, “Wondrous Journey: A World filled with Kindness, Dignity and Respect,” the Nebraska native spoke of his journey away from corporate America that led to a traveling adventure that spanned two years and covered twenty-eight countries. He shared remarkable stories and breathtaking photographs that pay tribute to extraordinary people and places found within the confines of the ordinary.

The evening keynote address, “The American Empire: A Libretto in Eight Movements” was given by Mr. Chris Abani, PEN Freedom-to-Write Award Winning Nigerian Author who, as a teenager, was imprisoned by the Nigerian government for his writing. Abani's delivery combined heartbreak, joy and humor as he expanded on issues that were both personal and political.

There were several interesting panels throughout the two-day event, including such topics as “Latin America and Political Struggle,” “Human Rights and Journalism,” “Environmental Challenges: Climate Change” and “Economics and Sustainable Development.” Additionally, many students were fortunate to have the opportunity to interact more closely with delegates who were guest speakers in a variety of classes.

The conference concluded with a keynote address by Ms. Tamara Banks, a journalist and activist who resides in Denver and combines journalism and her passion for social justice to evoke positive change. Her address, “One Person Can Make a Difference” dealt with her recent trip to Sudan to film a documentary on slavery and the abolitionists who put their lives in danger to help free them. After viewing the documentary (search YouTube “Sudan Stories” to see clips), she opened the floor for questions, which sparked a lively discussion.
Conversation Partners

Conversation Partners is a program that pairs UNK international students participating in the English Language Institute with American students for conversation. It gives the ELI students real-life practice at developing conversational skills in English, beyond the introductory level of the first meeting, so they are more at ease in making friends and participating in classes. The program was started by ELI Instructor, Linda Martin. Martin had heard of similar programs at other universities and felt it would benefit the international students who study at UNK.

Each semester, Linda partners with the University of Nebraska Medical Center College of Nursing to offer Conversation Partners, which is required for first semester nursing students. She also works with the College of Education, offering it to students whose classes have an international requirement. Though each student has an official partner, each partnership is also teamed up with another. Having four people allows for a more natural flow of conversation. They are asked to meet every week for one hour. Each person receives a sheet of suggested topics for discussion and is encouraged to be responsible for the direction of some discussions. Students are also encouraged to use the internet to offer virtual tours of interesting places to visit in their countries.

Program evaluations from ELI students are exceedingly positive. The biggest concern is trying to make themselves understood, but feel that their partners are encouraging and friendly. The students often realize that the conversations get easier with each meeting. Additionally, they discern that American students are also shy when it comes to meeting new people.

American students also benefit from the program. They get the opportunity to learn many new things about other cultures and enjoy meeting people from other countries that they would not have met otherwise.

There were sixty-four partnerships during the Fall and there are sixty-seven this semester. If you are interested in volunteering or would like additional information about the program, please contact Linda Martin at martinl@unk.edu or 308-865-8830.

Class Project Nets Scholarship for Korean Student

Jaekeun Cho, Senior Marketing Major from South Korea had a most pleasant surprise at the end of the Fall Semester of 2009. Cho was enrolled in a Marketing Research class and one of the assignments was a major research project. He and his team members, fellow classmates Nina Batenhorst, Bridget Dishman and Casey Hill, worked with the Buffalo County Economic Development Council on a project entitled, “Economic Impact of Buffalo County Non-Profit Organizations.”

“It took a long time to prepare for this project because we had to analyze all the non-profit organizations located in Buffalo County. The most challenging part of the project was the primary research”, said Cho. “We chose the telephone survey and had to call over one-hundred fifty organizations to collect the data.” Each survey took more than twenty minutes to complete. Jaekeun, who had not previously conducted a survey, indicated that this was an invaluable experience for him.

Towards the end of the semester, Jaekeun and his team members were notified by the Marketing Department Office Associate, Debra Nourse, that their team was selected to be the Kay Payne Case Competition Winners for the Fall of 2009. They were presented a certificate and scholarship. Cho said, “I did not expect to get this honor, so I was so happy at that time! I still cannot believe this happened. UNK gave me a lot of good things, so I will not forget this place even after I graduate.” He plans to graduate in December.
Chinese University Visits UNK

On March 29-30, UNK welcomed a delegation from an important partner institution in China, Hebei Normal University (HNU).

Located in Shijiazhuang – a city of 5 million, just 2 hours by train from Beijing, HNU will host our new Semester Abroad program in Fall 2010 and a UNK faculty/staff development group this June. HNU has about 30,000 students and its various colleges offer many of the same subjects as UNK.

During their visit, the delegation – which included four members of the HNU College of International Culture Exchange – held a number of productive discussions with UNK Deans, Chairs, faculty members and staff on topics ranging from joint research to the exchange of students and scholars.

UNK Chancellor Douglas Kristensen hosted a special reception for the guests, which honored them for assisting UNK with several important global education projects in the area of study abroad, language learning, cultural exchange, and faculty/staff development. Now retired Director of International Education, Jerry Fox, very graciously led our HNU guests on a trip to view the annual Sandhill Crane migration and a local farm.

HNU delegation members were: Vice President Changhua Wang, Dean Jinguang Zhao, Associate Dean Tongyong Yang, Section Chief Zhenguo Kang.

UNK Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic and Student Affairs, Charles Bicak, and Director of International Education, Dallas Kenny, will visit HNU in June to explore ways to further enhance this growing relationship.

New UNK Semester Abroad Set for Fall 2010

The University of Nebraska at Kearney’s flagship faculty-led Semester Abroad program will depart for Hebei, China at the beginning of the Fall 2010 semester. While in China, students will earn 12-15 credit hours of UNK credit taught by UNK professor, Dr. Kathy Smith – who will lead the program – and professors at Hebei Normal University.

The group will also participate in sixteen days of travel to several World Heritage Sites throughout China, including the Terra Cotta Warrior figures in Xi'an, The Forbidden City, Summer Palace, Great Wall, Olympic Birds Nest, and the Beijing Opera.

Each UNK student will be asked to mentor Chinese students in a local high school as part of their international experience and will have the option of participating in an internship related to their major while in China.

UNK’s new Semester Abroad program in China offers a unique opportunity for students to broaden their intellectual horizons – and career options – as well as to contribute to the cultural enrichment of the University of Nebraska at Kearney Campus when they return.
Did You Know...

♦ UNK international enrollment includes 529 students from 45 countries and represents 8% of the entire student body;
♦ Eighteen percent of our international students participate in the International Friendship Program;
♦ Of the 35 Colombian students attending UNK, 20 are with the Colombian National Police;
♦ There are 79 students enrolled in the English Language Institute this semester;
♦ Sixty-seven English Language Institute students participate in Conversation Partners this semester;
♦ Campus Conversation Tables had over 100 participants five out of the six weeks it met this semester;
♦ Over 3,000 people attended the International Food Festival in March;
♦ Twenty-three countries were represented at the World Affairs Conference in March!

YMCA Families Around the World

Several international students were given the opportunity to share their culture with families at an event held at the Holdrege YMCA called YMCA Families Around the World. The November 14th event included booths from Germany, Sweden, United States, Mexico, Japan, South Korea, China and Russia. The booths featured food and other items that symbolized each country. Guests in attendance were given a “passport” which was stamped at each booth. They made family flags, marked their ancestors’ home countries on a world map and learned words and phrases in a variety of foreign languages.

UNK students represented South Korea, Japan, China and Russia. The students from South Korea displayed fans, masks, toys and chopsticks and challenged guests to picking items up with the chopsticks. Japanese students demonstrated origami, displayed toy models of different kinds of sushi and a Japanese map. Chinese students showed a computer presentation with a map of China and kung fu movies. The student from Russia had a slide presentation with pictures of Russia and a video of a famous Russian folk dance.

The students enjoyed the opportunity to truly represent Families Around the World.
Year of the Tiger

The Chinese Students and Scholars Association held Chinese Breeze – 2010 Chinese New Year Party on February 6th in the Nebraskan Student Union. The event, enjoyed by nearly 700 people, was coordinated by Wenqi Sun, a student from Shan Dong Province who is attending UNK as part of the 1-2-1 program. Sun, a junior, explains the significance of this being the year of the tiger. “There are twelve zodiac animals. Each year is represented by one of those animals. Last year was the year of the ox and next year will be the year of the rabbit.” Wenqi went on to explain, “Red is the color of luck. Therefore, it is the color used to decorate for the Chinese New Year.”

The event featured Chinese cuisine and booths with astrology and calligraphy. However, the highlight of the evening was the marvelous entertainment. Students in brilliant costumes performed beautiful dances with umbrellas, fans and bamboo stalks, 1930’s style songs, a tea making ceremony, a Tai Chi demonstration and musical performances by students playing traditional Chinese stringed instruments and more common musical instruments. Mayor Stan Clouse brought greetings on behalf of the City of Kearney.

This was a superb event and certainly those in attendance are already anticipating the year of the rabbit!

Sakura Brings Friends Together at UNK

The 7th annual Sakura Festival was held Saturday, March 27, in the UNK Health and Sports Center. When the cherry (Sakura) trees blossom in Japan, families and friends gather for picnics to enjoy the magnificent fragrance and beauty, and to celebrate friendships. The UNK Sakura Festival was launched by the NCN Foundation in 2003 for the purpose of donating Sakura trees to partner schools as a symbol of friendship, peace and understanding between Japan and the United States. This event has grown steadily since its inception. The first Sakura Festival was held in a tent on the lawn of Welch Hall. Having outgrown that site, it moved to and outgrew the Ockinga Conference Room, Fine Arts Choral Room and Nebraskan Ponderosa Room.

This year’s festival featured numerous stage performances such as bands, dance, a Yukata (Japanese clothing) show and calligraphy. Booths included such activities as Fuku-Warai (Japanese masks), wooden chopstick shooting, calligraphy and Ori-Gami. Additionally, there were displays featuring the various regions of Japan. Guests had the opportunity to enjoy delicious Japanese cuisine. The menu included Yaki-Tori, Korokke, Takoyaki, Omu-sushi and green tea.

The theme of this year’s festival was “Interaction”, interaction between different regions of Japan, interaction between old and new Japan and interaction of Japanese and American cultures. Prior to the event, Yusuke Matsui, the President of the Japanese Association of Kearney stated, “The purpose is to know Japanese culture and we want people to come to enjoy Japanese culture. We hope people can learn to get along with each other.”
Nepal Awareness Night Fundraiser

NESAK, the Nepalese Student Association at the University of Nebraska at Kearney held a Nepal Awareness Night event on Friday evening, February 19. The event, which was held in the Nebraskan Student Union, was a fundraiser for the Himanchal Educational Foundation.

The Himanchal Educational Foundation was founded in 2000 by Mahabir Pun, who has earned undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of Nebraska at Kearney. The Foundation supports Himanchal High School in the remote village of Nangi, Nepal, a school that is a prototype for community-based educational development in rural areas. With help from volunteers all across the world, the school supports grades K through 12, including a computer lab with internet connection.

One hundred forty guests at the event enjoyed traditional Nepalese music and dance as well as delicious Nepalese food, while learning about the Himanchal Educational Foundation.

Nearly $2,000 was raised at this event. This brings the total raised this year by NESAK to an impressive $5,000, all of which was contributed to the Himanchal Educational Foundation!

International Food Festival

Delicious food and festive entertainment were featured at the Scott and Cheryl Morris 2010 International Food Festival Sunday, March 7th at the University of Nebraska at Kearney.

UNK students from forty-five countries served their native foods, performed traditional songs and dances and hosted booths with a variety of cultural displays and activities during the festival, which was the kick-off event for the James E. Smith Midwest Conference on World Affairs.

The food festival, planned and coordinated by the UNK International Student Association, is named after Scott and Cheryl Morris of Kearney who provide the resources for food served, as well as publication costs for festival cookbooks. The cookbooks, which give recipes for the foods being served, were distributed at the event.

Among the countries that participated are: Australia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Uganda, Germany, Indonesia, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Canada, China, France, India, Japan, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Turkey, Bahamas, Brazil, Senegal, Spain, Colombia, Mexico, and the Netherlands.

The University of Nebraska Kearney is an affirmative action / equal opportunity institution. Individuals needing accommodation under ADA should contact the ADA coordinator at UNK, 308.865.8655.