UNK Partners with American University of Ras Al Khaimah

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KEARNEY – The University of Nebraska at Kearney has signed a memorandum of understanding with American University of Ras Al Khaimah.

“So many of the subjects students study today have an international dimension. If you’re studying business, you’ve got to know about international imports and exports. If you study the sciences, scientific discoveries are happening all over the world,” said Michael Stopford, assistant vice chancellor for international affairs at UNK.

“Many professions require some international understanding or experience. We want to make sure UNK students have an opportunity to get this international experience,” added Stopford. “One way we do that is by offering study abroad opportunities and by bringing international students to our campus. It gives students the chance to experience different cultures.”

Ras Al Khaimah is one of the seven emirates that make up the United Arab Emirates – Dubai and Abu Dhabi being the most familiar emirates. The partnership provides exchange opportunities to students and faculty at both institutions.

Stopford said students from the university in Ras Al Khaimah will likely study at UNK in the fall of 2016. A group of up to 15 students will potentially study Recreation, Park and Tourism Management because Ras Al Khaimah is becoming an increasingly popular tourist destination.

“In the Middle East there’s been a tremendous interest in American higher education. Governments are interested in giving young citizens a chance to get an American education, often sending students overseas on government scholarships,” Stopford said.

The American University of Ras Al Khaimah offers American-style undergraduate and graduate education in arts and sciences, business and engineering. Students become fluent in English, and instruction is delivered in English.

“This is a time when people are fearful of other cultures. But if you get to know people from other cultures, that can build bridges between cultures,” Stopford said. “Being welcoming improves international and cultural understanding, which is quite necessary today.”

Sr. Vice Chancellor for International and Student Affairs
Dr. Charles Bicak and AURAK President Hassan
From the Assistant Vice Chancellor

This newsletter marks the end of my first year at the helm of International Education at UNK. As I consider the events and activities of this past year, I cannot be more pleased with the year we have had.

With the filling of the Korean/Asian recruitment and support specialist position by Jake Kim, and the Latin American enrollment and recruitment specialist position by Kurt Stoppkotte, we are once again fully staffed. With both positions vacant for more than one year, filling them was essential to revitalizing and expanding our partnerships in these regions.

Both Kim and Stoppkotte have recently returned from recruitment trips. Kim visited a number of partner universities in South Korea that are enthusiastic about sending students to UNK for short-term study abroad opportunities. We will see the first wave of those students arrive on campus in August. Stoppkotte participated in an education fair in Mexico City attended by more than 1,000 students and their parents, and visited several high schools and universities where he made presentations to large groups of students, teachers and guidance counselors.

Another exciting development is the launch of the Summer in Milan short-term study abroad program. This new program not only gives UNK students an additional study abroad destination choice, but it extends beyond UNK, as applications were accepted from Central Community College (CCC) students to participate in Summer in Milan. This is thanks to a wonderful partnership with Rotary District 5630 and their generous support that made it possible to provide scholarships for CCC and UNK students participating in this program. This is a great example of the support UNK receives from the Kearney community.

This year’s Scott D. Morris International Food and Cultural Festival was the first I was able to attend, as I was in Saudi Arabia during the festival last year. The festival is possible due to the generous support of Scott D. Morris and the Morris Printing Group. I was impressed with how nearly 200 students worked together to provide the audience with an unprecedented cultural experience, including traditional foods, entertainment, and games. Though the attendance had declined the past few years, this year’s festival had excellent attendance, thanks to the tireless efforts of the International Student Association board and the University Communications and Marketing office in promoting the event.

Finally, enrollment in January 2016 was up from January of 2015, and we are enjoying the addition of the new Omani students on campus. They are settling in nicely to “The Good Life” of Nebraska.

All in all, it has been a great year, and I look forward to seeing what the next academic year holds.

Enrollment and Latin American Recruitment Specialist

The Office of International Education (OIE) has filled the enrollment and Latin American recruitment specialist position. Mr. Kurt Stoppkotte joined OIE in March.

Raised on a farm outside of Grand Island, Nebraska, Kurt spent his summers working on the farm and developing a wanderlust to discover the world beyond the fields of corn. He didn’t start small—his first trip was to study in Australia for six months. After graduating from high school, he continued to fulfill his passion for adventure and education by studying, working, and traveling throughout Spain and Morocco. Kurt then pursued his formal education, receiving his B.A. in international studies, anthropology, and sociology from Kalamazoo College. He later went on to receive his M.A. in international relations from Florida International University.

Kurt has worked in education in France, Spain, Panama, Florida, Vermont and Nebraska. He worked as a journalist producing documentaries for National Geographic Channel and as a writer and photographer for National Geographic News. He also worked as a diplomat with the U.S. Department of State, serving in Santiago, Chile; Phnom Penh, Cambodia; and Montreal, Canada. Most recently he was World Language department chair at Killington Mountain School, a winter sports academy for competitive athletes in Vermont.

“We feel fortunate to have someone of Kurt’s caliber in this important position within the Office of International Education,” said Assistant Vice Chancellor for International Affairs Michael Stopford. “With his ten plus years living, studying, and working abroad, and extensive experience working with, teaching, and advising students in the U.S. and abroad, he brings with him a wealth of knowledge and expertise that will be most beneficial as he sets out to increase and diversify our population of international students from Latin America and beyond.”
There is a new country represented on campus this semester. Ten degree-seeking international students from Oman arrived in Kearney early in January 2016. Shadha Al Rawahi, Rahma Al Rahbi, and Ahmed Al Kaabi share their impressions and experiences as they near the end of their first semester at UNK.

The three were hit with their first impression of Kearney the moment the flight attendant opened the door of the plane that had just landed. They were immediately greeted by a bitter cold north wind and snow. Having never experienced anything like this, and being used to average temperatures at or above 100°F, Rahma said, “We were tempted to get back on the plane!” However, they’ve now adjusted to winter and even enjoyed playing in the snow during the February 1 blizzard that dumped 18 inches of snow on a large portion of Nebraska and closed the campus for two days.

The weather is just one of the many new experiences they have had. Being new high school graduates, they are away from home for the first time and have sole responsibility for taking care of themselves without being able to rely on their parents who are now so far away. They embrace this as a very important life experience. Kearney’s small size, even smaller Arabic population, different foods, and campus life (especially co-ed residence halls) are new to them as well.

When asked what they like about UNK, the list was long. Most important to them is that UNK is a good, safe, and quiet place to study, and that there are so many campus locations set aside for study, such as in the residence halls. They have also been struck by the kindness of the people here and how professors have helped them feel confident as students and encouraged them to come to their offices for help as needed. They find it challenging taking classes in a second language. However, it is important to have success studying in the U.S. because the degrees are considered more prestigious and people with U.S. degrees tend to have more professional success when they return home.

After they had arrived here and needed assistance as they got settled on campus, they were thankful for the caring and helpful International Education staff, especially International Student Advisor Tracy Falconer and Assistant Vice Chancellor for International Affairs Michael Stopford.

They also appreciated the RAs inviting them to residence hall and campus activities.

One pleasant surprise is that there is so much diversity at UNK. Conversation Tables has been a great opportunity to interact with people from so many different countries and cultures, as have the international student organizations’ festivals and other campus activities.

Sometimes they feel homesick, but are able to video-chat with family daily if they want. Additionally, the International Friendship Program has been an invaluable resource for them. For example, Annabelle and Eldin Wells of Kearney are host family to Rahma and Shadha. Shadha explained, “Annabelle asked us what we miss about home. We answered food, so she prepared a meal of Arabic food. When asked what we wanted to experience and we said being around children, they had their grandchildren come for a visit. When we said we wanted to read books in English, we received several new books from them.”

Students who participate in the Omani government scholarship program are able to determine at which schools they want to study. Shadha, Rahma, and Ahmed said UNK was their first choice, and they are thankful the school and community are everything they were hoping for. They feel very comfortable here.

They love the beauty of Kearney with all the parks, lakes, hike/bike trails, and night skies. They also love the kindness of the people here. Ahmed’s encouragement to high school students in Oman who are making their decisions on where to go to college is, “Come to Kearney! It is beautiful, safe, and welcoming, and the people are kind and wonderful.”
World Leaders Camp

Thanks to grant-funding from the University of Nebraska Foundation, the Office of Study Abroad is able to host an annual World Leaders Camp. The camp is open to 10–12 applicants who are incoming freshmen at UNK.

The goal of the World Leaders Camp is to spark an interest in studying abroad, becoming a global citizen, and increasing global and cultural awareness. Through the camp, students are exposed to a variety of cultures through interactive activities. It is a way for them to experience other cultures right here in the comfort of Nebraska.

Currently, there are three past camp participants who are studying abroad. Since this initiative was implemented, the number of UNK students studying abroad has increased by nearly 79%. Ashley, who participated in the World Leaders Camp in 2014 and is currently studying abroad in the Netherlands, said, “The World Leaders Camp is one of my favorite college experiences thus far because it helped me to develop friendships and a greater appreciation for different cultures. The activities for the week were so perfectly planned that it felt as though we were traveling to different countries each day. I would definitely apply for the World Leaders Camp again, if I could!”

The camp consists of a full week of intercultural discussions and activities with UNK international student volunteers. Additionally, participants explore global cultures within the state of Nebraska through professional intercultural seminars and activities led by UNK faculty members, and field trips to international communities.

One field trip includes travel to Wilber, Nebraska, the Czech capital of the USA. There, students learn to make kolaches, play accordion, and polka dance, in addition to touring the Czech Museum and enjoying an authentic Czech dinner. They also spend time in Omaha exploring Latino culture by visiting the first Latino art and history museum in the Midwest, El Museo Latio, learning salsa dance and enjoying an authentic Mexican meal.

The 2016 camp will include a very unique dynamic. The participants of the World Leaders Camp will be joined by four international winners of the Global Leaders Scholarship Program. Read the article below for more information on this exciting program.

Global Leaders Scholarship Program

Through another University of Nebraska Foundation grant, the Office of International Education is able to offer the Global Leaders Scholarship Program, scheduled to take place this July. The goal of this global initiative is bridging cultures and sparking a curiosity about the University of Nebraska at Kearney amongst high school students in Brazil, China, Mexico, and the United Arab Emirates. Students who will be completing their junior year of high school in these countries are invited to complete the application and include an essay and a video introduction. One student from each country will be selected.

The four participants of the Global Leaders Scholarship Program will receive an all-expense-paid trip to UNK for the two-week program, including airfare, on-campus meals and lodging, field trips, intercultural seminars led by UNK faculty, and a wide variety of international activities.

The first week consists of intensive coursework with the English Language Institute, giving them the chance to meet other international students, receive intensive English study, experience the American classroom, and build confidence in their language ability.

The second week will give them the opportunity to join the domestic students participating in the World Leaders Camp (see above article for more information on the camp). This week of integrated cultural activities will give the scholars the chance to practice their English language skills by sharing in intercultural discussions and activities as well as exploring global cultures within the state of Nebraska.

In addition to the tremendous value of having these visitors on campus, UNK will gain from the promotion of the Scholarship Program. Thousands of high school students from the four countries will have their interest sparked as they learn of UNK and this program from the information distributed in their schools.
Nearly 2,000 people took the opportunity to enjoy one of Central Nebraska’s largest cultural events, the annual Scott D. Morris International Food and Cultural Festival, held Sunday, March 6, in the UNK Health and Sports Center. Sponsored by the International Student Association (ISA), the first festival was held off campus nearly four decades ago in 1977. Soon thereafter it was moved to campus and outgrew several locations before moving to the Health and Sports Center, the only venue on campus large enough to house the event.

Planning and organizing the festival begins during the fall semester. The first order of business for the ISA board is a campaign to introduce the festival and its mission to the international student body and generate enthusiasm about the opportunity to serve as ambassadors from their home countries by sharing their cultures with the large audience. This year, the board recruited and led nearly 200 volunteers, including international and domestic students as well as a handful of community members.

The food, prepared by the international students, featured twenty dishes representing eleven countries and included:

- **Colombia**—Empañadas and Plantains
- **Liberia**—Meat Peppersoup and Cassava with Plantains
- **China**—Eggs with Tomatoes and Cabbage Wrap with Pork
- **Mexico**—Flautas and Mosaic Gelatin
- **Finland**—Rye Pie and Sima-Lemon Mead Beverage
- **Saudi Arabia**—Kabsa and Macaroni Bechamel
- **South Korea**—Spicy Pork and Sugared Ramen Cookies
- **Japan**—Teriyaki Chicken and Daigaku Imo
- **India**—Curry Chicken with Rice
- **Brazil**—Brigadeiro
- **Vietnam**—Barbecued Pork and Pâté Sandwich

There were nine country-specific traditional performances including individual or group dance, Karate, a percussion ensemble, and singing from Vietnam, South Korea, Nepal, China, Japan, and Mexico. The grand finale was “We Are One,” a fusion of traditional music and dance from five countries, including Nigeria, Nepal, South Korea, Japan, and Finland.

Seven countries had booths that featured traditional decorative pieces, games, and activities. Adults and children alike enjoyed the opportunity to learn a bit about the culture of the countries represented by interacting with the international students at the booths and participating in the games and activities.

“In Central Nebraska, it can be challenging to experience cultures from around the world,” said ISA Advisor Tracy Falconer. “We don’t have the same opportunities for travel or cultural immersion that others in more metropolitan or coastal areas have. So, the students love to bring the world to Kearney.” Furthermore, the students are grateful to the UNK and Kearney community members for being so welcoming and supportive; this gives them the opportunity to give back to the community out of gratitude.

The food and cultural festival would not be possible without the ongoing generous support of Scott D. Morris and the Morris Printing Group. In addition to funding the purchase of the food ingredients and paper products, they printed the cookbooks, programs, menu, ingredient cards, and posters for the festival, bringing their skills and expertise as a first class printing company.
Winter Break in Mexico

Four English Language Institute (ELI) students from Japan had an unexpected opportunity to travel over the winter break. They spent seven days in Mexico visiting three students they shared classes with last summer. The Mexican students, only in Kearney for three weeks, are from the Universidad de Quintana Roo. Such a strong bond was developed amongst the students in that short amount of time that they wanted to meet again.

Aoi Hoshiko, Hinako Usui, Kunihiro Hara, and Hirokazu Shigetani spent most of their time in Cancun and Chetumal, where America Ancona Nadal, Alejandrina Santos Cano, and Karen Villanueva Puc live and attend school. They enjoyed time on the beaches of the Caribbean coast and indulging in traditional foods and beverages, such as tacos, horchata, and ceviche. Since the Japanese students were in Mexico over the New Year, they had the opportunity to attend a New Year’s celebration, which is one of the most precious memories they have from the trip.

Families in this culture are close-knit, so it was natural that the students would spend time with a number of the Mexican students’ relatives, including parents and siblings, aunts and uncles, and other friends. They were struck by the kindness of everyone they met, who were all supportive and helpful guides as they traveled in a country in which they were unable to speak the language. The trip would not have gone as smoothly without their devoted help.

Hara said of the trip, “From the very beginning, I never thought that I would meet these Mexican girls again in Mexico, though I became friends with them. However, I am happy to make such a good memory with them.” Hoshiki added, “Last summer while we were taking ELI classes, we made friends from very different countries: Brazil, South Korea, Saudi Arabia and Mexico. During class we shared each others’ cultures and that made my world wider. Since we were good friends it was hard to say goodbye the day our Mexican friends had to go. At the same time, we felt we could get together again, and it became true! The trip will be an unforgettable one in our lives for sure. I’m thankful ELI put them in my life.”

UNK Hosts First Italian Short Term Group

UNK will be hosting 22 international students from the Libera Universita de Lingue e Comunicazione (University Institute for Modern Languages), located in Milan, Italy. Students from the Masters in Communication for International Relations (MICRI) program will be spending ten days here in May, following their annual trip to Washington D.C. and New York City.

While at UNK, the students will meet with professionals on campus and in Kearney from the fields of communications, marketing, and political science. Additionally, their schedule will include a tour of the Nebraska State Capital and other excursions as well as interesting cultural events and activities designed to give them a taste of “The Good Life” in the heart of the U.S. Finally, they will meet with our students preparing to depart for their Summer in Milan study abroad trip.

MICRI attracts students who have a flair for communication and interpersonal relationships and an interest in politics, economics, and multicultural processes.

International Alumni, we want to keep in contact with you!

- Please go to unk.edu/international to update your contact information and tell us what has been going on in your life since you left UNK.
- Catch up on news and happenings by reading the UNK Global Newsletters.
- See the campus activity calendar or access the UNK Alumni Association website.
- Join the UNK International Alumni Facebook group to read about happenings on campus and around Kearney.
- If you are interested in being a person prospective students could email about life at UNK, send an email to internationaled@unk.edu.
- Finally, many of our current international students heard about UNK by “word of mouth.” Please share your UNK experience with your friends and relatives so they can receive the same great education you did!