Excitement is filling the air on the UNK campus this fall with the announcement of enrollment figures. Fall enrollment at the University of Nebraska at Kearney is 6,753, the highest since 1999 and a 101 student, 1.5% increase over last year's totals. This marks the seventh consecutive year of growth in fall enrollment on the UNK campus.

In addition to the increase in total enrollment, UNK has experienced an astounding 45 student, 54% increase in the enrollment of new international students (from 84 new recruits in the fall of 2009 to 129 this fall). There are a total of 501 international students representing 39 countries. The countries with the greatest number of students at UNK are: Japan—146, China—144, Colombia—52, South Korea—32, Nepal—19, and Cote d'Ivoire—18.

The Office of International Education attributes this increase to its improved international application and visa processing procedures, redesigned web site, translation of promotional materials into several languages, and word-of-mouth testimonials from current students to their peers back home about the great opportunities for learning and personal growth they have experienced at UNK.

It is an exciting time to be at UNK for anyone interested in the wonderful world that lies beyond our borders. From the courses offered in our International Studies program to the hundreds of ‘live ambassadors’ from other countries that traverse our campus every day—it has never been easier to reach out and experience the most intimate connection to other parts of the globe. UNK, which was already a leader in attracting international students, has recently established semester abroad programs in China and Peru, creating new opportunities for Nebraska students to compete in our increasingly global economy. In this Newsletter, we are pleased to provide the community with a glimpse of this and other programs that are just a part of UNK’s growing—and ever more vibrant—global dimension.
The International Friendship Program has seen significant growth this fall. Bonnie Payne, Outreach Coordinator for the Office of International Education believes there are two factors contributing to the growth of this program. “Of course, the increase in enrollment of new international students is impacting the growth in the Friendship Program. Additionally, the program is gaining in popularity amongst returning students.”

Payne indicated that when she interviews students who have applied to participate in the program, more and more students say, “My friend told me about the program and I want to be a part of it too.”

Payne connected 29 students with Kearney families during the fall 2009 semester. During the fall 2010 semester, she had 95 students apply to participate in this program. This is in addition to 35 students that are still participating from previous years.

“The challenge is finding enough Kearney families to connect with these students. I am constantly recruiting, everywhere I go! I am passionate about this program because I believe it helps international students become acclimated to life in Kearney more quickly. Students who participate in this program experience fewer effects of culture shock and report that they feel much less homesick when they have a Kearney family to connect with.”

If you have an interest in befriending an international student, contact Bonnie at payneb@unk.edu or 308-865-8939. Log on to the website at www.unk.edu/international to find additional information.

The International Friendship Program has experienced growth of more than 200% compared to the fall semester of 2009.

Friends for Life

Though the commitment to the International Friendship Program is one year, the connection often brings friends together for life. Such is the case with Alvaro Correa and Alexandra Arenas from Colombia.

Alexandra came to Kearney in August of 2009 to participate in the English Language Institute. Her fiancé, Alvaro arrived in January of 2010 to begin ELI courses. Both are employees of the Colombian National Police and are extremely bright, excellent students.

Alexandra and another Colombian student, Clarena Restrepo, were connected with Eric and Molly Trettel and their daughters through the International Friendship Program when they arrived. When Alvaro came in January, he also joined them. The Trettels, a new host family, get together with those students and many others nearly every week, and they have developed a close relationship with them.

Alexandra and Alvaro are to be married in Bogota, Colombia on December 17th of this year. Eric and Molly and their two young daughters will travel to Bogota for the wedding, in which the daughters will be flower girls! In preparation, the Trettel family is learning Spanish, and Alvaro and Alexandra’s family members in Colombia are taking English classes so they all can communicate during the wedding festivities.

This is a beautiful example of the value of this program, not only for students, but for the people that befriend them as well!
I was delighted to join nine other faculty and staff members for a two week educational excursion in Shijiazhuang, China in June, as part of a faculty/staff development trip hosted by Hebei Normal University (HNU). Members of the group were: Matt Mims (Counseling and School Psychology) and his son, Griffin, Vijendra Boken (Geography), Noah Rogoff (Music and Performing Arts), Akbar Javidi (Communications), Judy Spivey (Communications), Sara Ice (Theatre), Jeff Kritzer (Teacher Education), KrisAnn Sullivan (Frank House), Bonnie Payne (International Education) and Kathy Smith (Accounting/Finance).

We were welcomed to Shijiazhuang on June 10, 2010 with an opening ceremony, followed by a formal luncheon with the Vice President of HNU. Our group had tremendous opportunities to tour several important historical sites in Shijiazhuang and surrounding areas, such as the one-thousand year-old Cyprus Temple and the fascinating Zhaozhou stone bridge that was built in 500 AD. Furthermore, we enjoyed amazing meals and numerous cultural events. However, the highlight of our time spent in Shijiazhuang was most certainly the opportunity to interact with the faculty, staff and students at HNU and surrounding high schools.

On three occasions, we spent our mornings at large high schools. We attended English classes where we worked with the students to complete their writing assignment for the day. In art class, we learned the art and history of paper cutting, creating a variety of beautiful butterflies. Mine, unfortunately, became a ‘tentacle-less’ variety! Finally, we enjoyed the wonderful talent of a large number of music and dance students. We heard everything from a piano solo, to traditional Chinese string ensembles, an oboe solo and even a rock band. Following the show, the student who performed a dance depicting a peacock taught us a dance. It was during this time we discovered we had a candidate for “Dancing with the Stars” in midst! The students were thrilled to have the chance to communicate with Americans and were anxious to learn about UNK.

The University of Nebraska at Kearney welcomed a delegation from HNU in March of 2010. During their visit, the two institutions held a number of productive discussions that opened the door for this trip, as well as the UNK Semester Abroad that is currently under way at HNU.

Another wonderful interaction was the night we spent with our teaching counterparts from HNU. The members of our group who were interested in art and design particularly enjoyed seeing those departments. Kathy Smith and I joined UNK Study Abroad Coordinator, Ann Marie Park, who met up with us in Shijiazhuang, as she made final arrangements for the Semester Abroad group that would be departing for HNU in mid-August.

Following our eleven days in Shijiazhuang, we spent two quick days sight-seeing in Beijing. We were able to see the Great Wall, Forbidden City, Temple of Heaven, Summer Palace, and Tiananmen Square, in addition to taking a tour of an older, traditional neighborhood (hutong) in rickshaws. Finally, we enjoyed a Peking Opera and Chinese Acrobats. And, we ate Peking Duck at the restaurant that originally created the dish! It was delicious!

UNK and HNU look forward to many more opportunities for educational and cultural exchanges in the coming years. The group that went on the trip this year is grateful for the opportunity and is excited for those who will have this opportunity in future years. This excursion proved that memorable experiences are often created by taking risks and putting yourself into unusual situations. Faculty and students are encouraged to seek out international experiences so that you can make memories of your own.
New Semester Abroad Announced

The University of Nebraska at Kearney is pleased to announce the addition of a new semester abroad program. The Office of International Education, in partnership with the Department of Modern Languages, will be offering a semester abroad, based at the Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas in Lima, Peru, every spring semester beginning in 2012.

Dr. Dallas Kenny, Director of International Education, after recently returning from a trip to Lima where he finalized arrangements for this program said, “Our aim is to develop this Spanish language-centered Hispano-Andean learning program in a way that is relevant to the education needs of UNK students, faculty, and staff who are interested in this linguistically, culturally, and academically important area.”

More than 15,000 students study at the Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas’, which opened in 1994. Since its establishment, UPC has been recognized for its innovation and academic excellence. With the population nearing 9 million, Lima is the fifth largest city in Latin America.

China Semester Abroad

Nine UNK students are in the midst of a busy semester as they participate in the newest Semester Abroad program offered by UNK in partnership with Hebei Normal University in Shijiazhuang, China. The students, accompanied by faculty leader Kathy Smith, UNK Professor of Accounting and Finance, arrived in China in mid-August and have enjoyed many adventures in the city and throughout the region in the short time that they have been there. Two of the students were asked to share their experiences thus far.

Emily Wemhoff, Creston, Nebraska

I didn’t have any specific reasons why I chose to participate in the UNK Semester Abroad program to China. I’m the kind of person who loves to travel and thought it would be a great opportunity to see the other side of the world. Although, I have quickly come to realize that studying in China is more than just crossing it off my list of places I have traveled to.

Honestly, China was never at the top of my list of places to visit, but I took the challenge and have learned that sometimes the places with my least expectations turn out to be the most life changing. Life is supposed to be an adventure and I am definitely having my adventure everyday while studying at Hebei Normal University in Shijiazhuang, China. I have seen some of the most breathtaking views from the top of one of China’s tallest mountains. I have tasted traditional Chinese foods. I have also met some of the most gracious people who immediately made me feel worthwhile.

Of course, there are challenges. Being surrounded everyday by a different culture and way of life gets scary at times, but it’s completely normal to begin missing the comfort of life back at home. I miss being able to communicate clearly and I miss knowing exactly what I am eating, but all those factors are part of the unforgettable experience. Like my fellow UNK classmate, who is also currently studying in China, once said to me, “What is life without challenges?”

It took a while to shake away the nerves, but I decided to take the challenge. As a result I have gained a deeper appreciation for the life I have back in America. I also truly appreciate the little things that I usually wouldn’t think twice about. More than anything, I have proven to myself that I am capable of doing amazing things. If studying abroad in China is what it took to truly learn how to believe in myself, I would do it all over again in a heartbeat.
In closing, the following blog that was posted by Ben on September 16, 2010, so aptly reflects the value of Study Abroad programs:

Today marks one month since the beginning of the biggest culture shock I’ve experienced to date. In the past 30 days, I’ve managed to finally leave my comfort zone. That feat, the feeling of uncertainty about the recent decision to trade safety lines for adventure, is what I’d been looking for. It’s indescribable really, but it’s what burns within anyone who yearns to just go. In previous ventures, I’ve only managed to gain that feeling in spurts, never lingering or staying for long. China grabbed hold and even scared me a little. Am I going to make it? How will I get around? Who can I lean on? One has to take the leap into the unknown when that hesitation sets in, with eyes continually forward.

I’ve met people from all walks of life since jumping in. Professionals vacationing to students experiencing. People hailing from Australia, America, Canada, Korea, Greenland, Scotland, Russia, and of course China. I’ve made it a point to leave myself open and approachable in order to meet anyone taking the same leap as me. I’ve also made the conscious decision to try anything that’s new to me, becoming a kind of “Yes Man.”

I don’t want to look forward to the end of this trip, allowing it to pass me by, but I do want to be able to look back on it and know there wasn’t one regret, one missed opportunity, or one reachable peak I neglected to tackle. I left on this adventure with mind at ease and ready to live in the moment. So far, I’ve done so, but it’s just the beginning yet. I’ve got dishes to taste and miles to walk before I can call China complete. But, for now, Cheers China, to the month passed and the future to see.
This semester, forty participants in the English Language Institute are employees of the Colombian National Police. Jerry Fox, retired Director of International Education envisioned a program by which CNP employees would come to UNK to improve their English language skills by participating in the English Language Institute. Through acquaintances he had in Colombia, including now Kearney resident Fernando Segura, Fox made contact with the Colombian National Police.

On his first trip to Bogota to meet with the international liaison with the CNP, Jerry arrived to the airport, but the liaison had forgotten that he was coming! Things went smoothly after that and an agreement was reached, with the first four students arriving on campus in the fall of 2007.

There is a new group that arrives each semester. Most stay for one year. The program is gaining in popularity, as each semester, the group is a little larger. There is interest in expanding this program into branches of the Colombian military. There is one Colombian Navy officer who is participating in ELI this semester.

The CNP employees indicate that there is a great deal of value in their ability to communicate in English. It has been helpful for them in a variety of scenarios, such as working with the U.S. military or in the Embassy, communicating during investigations, working at Colombian ports that are cruise ship destinations, even referencing airplane and helicopter manuals.

According to Fox, because of their ability to communicate in English, past ELI students who are with the CNP have been given the opportunity to go on peace-keeping missions through the U.N., and also act as a liaison between the CNP and U.N. in Washington DC.

UNK is a better place because we have this group of bright young professionals on our campus. It is our hope that they treasure their experience here as much as we treasure having them here, and that when they go back to Colombia, they will encourage more of their colleagues and their own children to study at the University of Nebraska at Kearney!

Colombian students celebrating their achievements at the English Language Institute ceremony in May, 2010

Campus Conversation Table

UNK Campus Conversation Table met six times during the Fall semester. Attendance was excellent, ranging from 146 to a new record, 170!

The ratio of native English speakers to international speakers is improving, with one session having a ratio of 3 internationals to 1 English speaker. The event is also attracting more members of the community. At the final meeting, Mayor Stan Clouse attended and visited each table. Everyone enjoyed having him there!

There are many reasons for the success of this program. UNK and ELI teachers promote the event in their classes and offer extra credit to students who attend. Additional promotions include Antelope Newspaper and weekly email announcements, and word-of-mouth. Visibility, due to the great location, also helps attract the attention of passers-by.

ELI teachers do an excellent job of facilitating each week, which is essential for it to run smoothly. International students assist with preparation and implementation, leading to student ownership, a “party” atmosphere and student recruiting initiatives.

Six sessions are planned again next semester, with a goal of increased numbers of participants and continual improvement in the ratio of native English speakers to international students.