International Orientation: An Amazing Experience

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Imagine being able to meet people from over twenty countries from all around the world at once, this is what International Orientation is all about. This program, also called IO, is one of the pre-orientation programs that Bucknell offers for international students. Its main purpose is to guide and to help international students with their transition not only to college, but also to the United States. The program is organized by International Student Services (ISS).

The International Orientation Assistants (IOAs) and International Orientation Leaders (IOLs) were very excited to meet every single new student. Being part of the IO Staff, we spent an entire week training to prepare ourselves to welcome the new students. We had seen pictures of them and maybe even talked to some electronically, but we were all very excited to actually meet them in person.

After packing, saying goodbye to their families, long airplane trips, delayed shuttles, jet lag, and late night registrations, the new International family arrived on Bucknell’s campus. On Monday, August 13, 2012, International Student Orientation began. For many of the students, it is their first time away from their country, their parents and their home, so the IO Staff has a big responsibility to help them get used to their new “home.” Some of the activities that this amazing program includes are a trip to Knoebels amusement park, a US culture night, a “Party in the U.S.A.”, an afternoon with the BOFers, and, my personal favorite, a river boat cruise along the Susquehanna river.

Every year, Bucknell’s international community keeps growing significantly and I feel we are all like a big family. This year’s group consisted of 45 undergraduates, 14 language teaching assistants, and 12 exchange students. Among the countries represented are: Afghanistan, Brazil, Cameroon, China, Ghana, Indonesia, India, Mexico, Romania, Uganda, United Kingdom, Vietnam, among others.

International Orientation has been the most enjoyable and rewarding experience to date that I’ve had at Bucknell. This is the third year that I have participated in the program, but my second time as staff. I consider being an International Orientation Assistant one of the best things that could have happened to me. I wasn’t only able to learn from each one of the students, but I was also able to share my own personal Bucknell experience with them. Once the program is done, you get the feeling that you’ve helped...they ask you for advice, because they consider you have a kind of expertise in the subject. The best thing is that the program doesn’t end there; International Students Services is always organizing events throughout the year that bring the international community together.

Many Nations, One Bucknell
When students on campus hear about the retreat over fall break called “Common Ground,” they initially don’t know what to expect. “CG is meant to be a positive force for change on Bucknell’s campus, but most people don’t realize that initially,” says Common Ground director, Capri DuBois. Some are intimidated or scared away from applying to the retreat because of its reputation for evoking deep emotional responses from the participants, but the brave of heart apply.

This 5-day long student-initiated, student-led retreat focuses on developing a dialogue around issues pertaining to diversity on campus. Each of the five days focuses on one particular topic, with honest, open discussion and activities as the vehicles for understanding. The first day, “Trust,” is about breaking down walls. The student leaders and facilitators of the program and the participants start to get to know one another.

The second day delves into “Identity, Power, and Race.” Participants are encouraged to explore their personal identities, moving from inside to outside themselves, eventually looking at the social phenomenon of race. The goal is to break down judgmental barriers between people that are linked with race. Following these racially-charged discussions, the third day focuses on sexual orientation. The leaders and facilitators allow the participants to engage in activities that show them the intricacies of sexual identity as well as the oppression of the LGBT community in the world.

On day four, CG’ers discuss “Gender and Gender Identity.” Touching on the gender binary between men and women which privileges men, the goal of the leaders and facilitators is to ultimately get the participants to see gender as a spectrum. Finally, the last day involves an expansion of these concepts to “Global Perspectives.” The participants look outside of Bucknell and American culture at how social issues are handled in other countries.

It’s fairly obvious that CG would be a great way to develop diversity skills for the workplace—it would look great on a resume. It also would appear to make the students involved more cognizant of judgments they make based on physical appearance. But it also creates a healthy, trusting, and honest community of peers.

The retreat is not meant to be a political statement, and it doesn’t dwell on religion. The purpose of the organization is not to preach to participants but instead to allow them to come to their own conclusions on all of these diversity topics. Together, this group of about 60 Bucknellians come to be brave in their social interactions, to step out of themselves and become aware of inequality in American culture. According to the group’s faculty advisor, Laura Yeckley, the goal of CG is ultimately “to expose and educate students on a variety of topics in modern society to help create a more accepting and inclusive campus community.”

Future participant in Common Ground, Alex Liggett, says: “I’m hoping to be exposed to different ideas from my own so I may grow as a person.” He said that he doesn’t know exactly what he is getting himself into, but that he’s heard that it’s “a fantastic experience.” And that’s good enough for him.
Greetings and salutations fellow Bucknellians from Buenos Aires, Argentina! My name is Nigel Henry Robinson and I am a junior at Bucknell University. On campus, I am involved with a number of organizations including Bucknell’s Track and Field team, New Student Orientation, Bucknell Brigade, and Latino Dance Corner. However, as the beginning of my passage suggests, I decided to spend this fall semester studying abroad in Argentina.

My trip with the Bucknell Brigade to Nicaragua during the spring break of my first-year increased my interest in the conditions that numerous Latin American countries are presently in. I was enthralled and perplexed by that experience. It influenced my choosing International Relations as my major. Beyond understanding the nature of life in those areas, I wanted to learn what I could do to better the situation. Therefore, when the opportunity to study abroad presented itself, I jumped on it. Not only is it an experience that International Relations majors should have, but students of all majors should make an effort to go through as well.

In Buenos Aires, Argentina, I am currently enrolled with School for International Learning (SIT) and my program is called SIT Argentina: Regional Integration, Development, and Social Change. SIT’s education emphasizes experiential learning, and therefore provides as much teaching outside the classroom as it does inside. In the morning, we, as a group, switch off between two seminar classes. The first is centered on the topics mentioned in the program’s title (Regional Integration, Development, and Social Change) and has us examining Argentina’s history in relation to its past, present, and future. The second is a Field Study seminar where we are introduced and taught the tools that we will use when we write our independent study project during the last month of the program. This also includes a number of field trips where—in only a month—we have had the chance to visit a former concentration camp, “unafactoria recuperada” (a reoccupied factory), and a “villa” (a shanty town). Along with all of this, we also take a Spanish class every afternoon in order to communicate with the natives.

Despite the academics, there are more than enough opportunities to get to know the country. When I am through with the usual weekday grind, Friday night to Sunday night provides my fellow classmates and me the opportunity to take Buenos Aires by storm. The day provides us with the opportunity to take walks, site-see, and do some learning outside of the classroom. Being that Buenos Aires, along with Argentina, has a rich culture and history, there are always multiple museums, street fairs, and historical sites to explore. It is even possible to attend a protest or two! Cough cough! All in all, the city is just as alive at night as it is in the day. With the barrio of Palermo as the hotspot for natives and foreigners alike, people usually go to the bar for a casual night out or to one of the many “boliches” (clubs) to dance the night away.

Studying abroad provides great networking opportunities. With SIT, I am part of a small cohort of 14 students who after taking classes and going out with them on the weekend, tend to bond a lot. Also, I am fortunate enough to be in a home stay with a lovely woman by the name of Stella. Dubbed as my “hip grandma” (but don’t tell her that), I have had the opportunity to not only learn about her, but about Argentina, through my interactions with her and her family. This has included everything from dancing at “clubs” with her “boyfriend” to our late 9:00pm dinners. Plus, it is hard to not grow close to the person who is cooking your meals! All in all, studying abroad has been a great experience to say the least. With one month gone and another two and a half months to go, I am looking forward to making the most of my time here. Study abroad, like most things in life, is what you make of it. Therefore, it is up to you to go out and make it memorable! To all those back at Bucknell, I wish you the best this semester.
First-Year Spotlight

Name: Leo Chareme Fotsing Fomba
Country: Cameroon  Major: Undeclared
Why Bucknell: Bucknell’s beauty, spirit and strong academic program attracted me.
Your favorite Bucknell experience so far: Intramural Soccer and CLIMBucknell.

Name: Bwalya Andrew Gefason Mwaba
Country: Zambia  Major: Undeclared
How did you find Bucknell: I found Bucknell through a wonderful woman named Lana Bird, who is an admissions officer here, and my wonderful college counselor, Ms. Joan Liu.
Your favorite Bucknell experience so far: My favorite experience so far would have to be Color Games. It was a well organized, fantastic, ruckus!

Name: Tingyi Jin
Country: Changchun, China  Major: Mathematics
Why Bucknell: The academics here are really good. It is a small school, located in a small town. The view here is really beautiful. 53% of the students here go abroad or exchange to other colleges to study. Everything here is perfect for me!
Your favorite Bucknell experience so far: International Orientation! Talking to different people is so much fun!