Thoughts of GCC’s International Students

Glendale Community College emphasizes a “strong tradition and commitment to educating students from other countries.” The website adds that “during a typical Academic Year, the College will enroll approximately 550 to 600 International F-1 visa students (each Semester) representing over 50 nationalities.” The International Student Office on the third floor of the Sierra Vista Building is where staff and academic counselors provide help and guidance to current and future GCC international students with class registration, immigration issues, health insurance, off-campus housing and homestay, and workshops. For more information, visit www.glendale.edu/apply/international-students.

Jessica Coompson, 23, is from Banjul, Gambia, which is in West Africa. Coompson is a business administration major. During her two years at GCC, she has accomplished a lot, personally and academically. As an international student it was difficult for Coompson at first to adapt to the different culture, she explained. “I was a loner and didn’t really have any friends, which really made my experience horrible in my first semester.” But, after getting involved with a few clubs on campus, Coompson began to open up, and really found her voice.

Coompson was president, vice president, and treasurer of the Black Student Union/Black Scholars. In addition, Coompson was also treasurer of the International Students Association and a Shadow Day Mentor, which is when high school students come on campus and get mentored by students of the college. She was also a senator of activities in the student government for two semesters, and a vice president of activities in the student government for one semester. “I am the first female African student to hold an executive position in the student government, and the first ever in GCC’s history to put on 19 successful events in one semester,” Coompson proudly said.

Thanks to this experience, Coompson has become a strong, independent young woman because she had the guts to put herself out there, and she is forever grateful for that experience, Coompson remarked. For many international students, she knows Coompson as one of the student workers up at the International Student Office. Coompson’s advice for future international students is not to be shy, and put themselves out there, because being shy will only damper their success in this country. “Never be afraid to speak up,” she said. Coompson will be doing a lot of speaking and defending in the future, because she wants to become a lawyer.

Japanese native from Aichi and international student Moe Maki, 20, is a clinical psychology major. She began studying at GCC in the fall of 2016. “It has been so much fun and it has enriched my life, because of the diversity of people, and the easy access to every field of science,” Maki said. She has met a lot of new friends, whose perspectives and backgrounds are very different from hers.

The way of getting educated is different from her home country, she explained. For instance, the general education requirements such as speech, English, and history have played a significant role in Maki’s life in the United States, because she has cultivated the skills of critical thinking and other elements of human thought. This solid knowledge in multiple fields would not only broaden her horizon in general, but would also help her to become an ideal person, woman, and parent in her future life, Maki enthused. “Embracing and enjoying new found friends will keep you open-minded,” she said with a smile. Maki’s career goals are to become a psychotherapist and help her local community. “You don’t have to win other [over] but yourself. Only hardship and failure will truly teach you how to become more independent, adaptable and skilled. And those victories will be your strength in all the aspects of your life.”

“An F-1 visa is issued to international students who are attending an academic program or English Language Program at a U.S. college or university.”

https://www.internationalstudent.com/immigration/f1-student-visa/
JungWoo Rim is an international student from Seoul, South Korea. He has almost been here for two years. Rim said he values and enjoys his time at GCC. During his first semester here, Rim became good friends with other international students in his ESL-class. They spend time together as often as they can.

As a tradition, they meet up every end of the semester for dinner and to catch up. “They’re my international family,” Rim said with a smile, noting that the group is incredibly diverse. Life here is good, you get to meet a lot of new people, and many of them become friends, Rim continued. “My only tip would be to make friends.”

Ly Lee, 25, from Värnamo, Sweden is a business administration management major, and has almost completed two semesters at GCC.

Being a student in the U.S. has been a lot tougher than she thought it would be, Lee said. “Moving to a different country is already overwhelming, and on top of that you have to think about doing well in school, keeping your budget limitations, since we’re not allowed to work as F-1 visa holders, plus trying to have a life outside of school,” she said.

Lee knows she wants to get a degree, but right now she does not know in what that may be and is exploring her options. One thing Lee feels is important is to “hang in there,” and be social and make friends. “Those are the ones keeping you steady whenever you move to another country. Also, give it time,” she suggested. “It might even take two years until you get the hang of it, so, don’t lose patience.”

Twenty-year-old Max Kwong is a theatre arts major, but will change to film production after he transfer to a university. Originally from Hong Kong, Kwong’s career goals are to make it in the film, music, and fashion industry. He started his education at GCC in the spring of 2017.

One thing that is challenging for an international student is when communicating with native English speakers, because they speak so fast, Kwong mused. He does not feel confident enough with his English, but continuing to work through it. “I had really low self-esteem my first year at GCC,” he confessed.

Kwong mentioned something that other international students might have in common: that it takes longer to study and to understand a textbook, an article, or an assignment in English. But hard work pays off.

Kwong feels more comfortable, and said it is easier to respond when talking with other students. “Don’t be afraid to speak, because people are helpful and understanding here,” he said.

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