

Experiencing America through UNC

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They come from faraway lands. Many of them speak another language. They know a different way of doing things. They are the 750 foreign students who have come to UNC to study and find out just what those crazy Americans are all about.

Coming to America

UNC's international student population spans 39 different countries, with the majority coming from Asia and Europe, according to David Austell, foreign student adviser at UNC's International Center.

This includes exchange students as well as full-time undergraduate and graduate students, he said.

"International students at UNC represent the best and the brightest in their countries," said Vicki Pineles, assistant director of undergraduate admissions. Competition is fierce among foreign applicants seeking admission as a full-time undergraduate.

In fact, admissions standards for foreign students are tougher than those for out-of-state students. In addition to an impressive high school transcript and high scores on the SAT, all prospective foreign students must take the TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) and score at least 600 out of a possible 800 points.

Last year, 150 foreign students applied for admission to UNC as undergraduates, and only 35 were accepted. Of these, 21 foreign students entered this year's freshman class.

UNC's foreign student population is made up of 110 undergraduates and 640 graduate students, including exchange students, according to officials at UNC's International Center.

Many foreign students come to UNC through exchange programs, said Judy Tilson, an officer in the Study Abroad office. The Study Abroad office now advises 42 exchange students, she said.

Students come to UNC on a variety of exchange programs and stay for either a semester or a year depending on the program. Conventional programs offer a second- or third-year undergraduate the chance to study in and experience America, Austell said.

Then there are the more unusual programs, such as the romance language department's 25-year-old "TA exchange." This yearlong program gives native speakers, mainly in French and Spanish, the opportunity to come to UNC and teach in the department.

The appeal of Carolina

Foreign students are attracted to UNC for two major reasons, Austell said. "The first reason is the fact that UNC is world-renowned as one of the finest universities in the country," he said. "The second is that, in comparison to other prestigious universities on our level, Chapel Hill is an incredible bargain."

The University attracts many foreign students interested in the highly rated professional schools and science programs, Pineles said. "International students often are interested in the allied health fields, such as physical therapy and pharmacy programs," she said. "And recently we've had Japanese students inquire about the business school."

In addition, UNC's wide array of liberal arts courses often attracts students. "In England, you study literally one subject at the university level," said junior Tom Silk, a Morehead scholar from Radley College, England. "By studying in America, you have the opportunity to receive a much broader education."

The Morehead Foundation includes 30 foreign scholars in its program. Each year, the scholarship is offered to four British and four Canadian students in hopes of enhancing the University community, said Meghan Mazzocchi, communications manager of the Morehead Foundation.

"By bringing in students with diverse backgrounds, we believe they contribute to a more healthy academic environment," said Charles Lovelace, executive director of the Morehead Foundation. "The foreign students who come here are looking for the cultural experience as well as the academic experience."

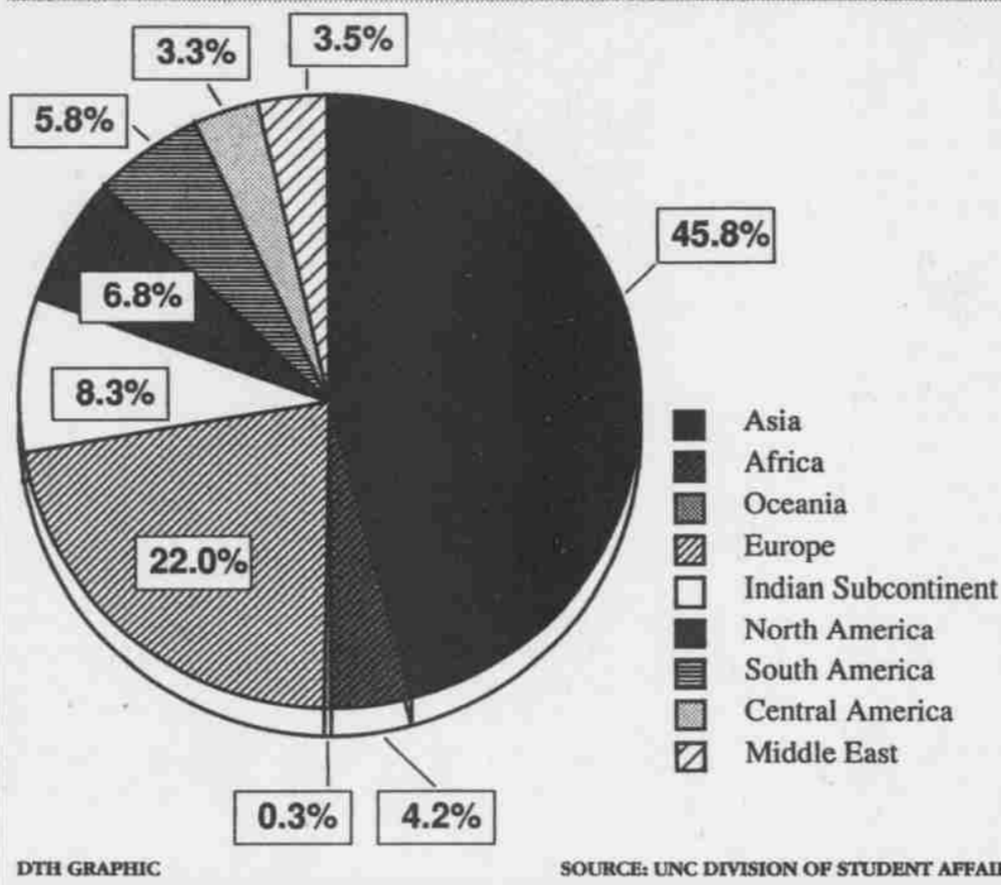
UNC's congenial student body, locale and mild climate are especially appealing to foreign students, Austell said.

"People are so friendly here," said Anthony Catanzariti, an exchange student from Griffith, Australia. "On practically my first day here, I was invited by several people to go home with them over breaks."

Junior David Wood, a Morehead scholar from Surrey, England, said one of his main reasons for coming to school in the states was to play golf. "The climatic conditions were much more conducive for playing," he said. Wood is a member of the men's varsity golf team.

Foreign Students at UNC

Percent by region, 1988



DTH GRAPHIC

SOURCE: UNC DIVISION OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

foreign students, normal student problems are amplified by the distance."

UNC's well-developed campus life is a definite advantage, said Christian Rohringer, an exchange student from Vienna, Austria.

"There are so many student organizations and clubs here, and it seems like everybody belongs to at least one," he said. "I believe this creates a fun atmosphere and establishes the University as a community unto itself."

The vast array of facilities at the University is another positive aspect of the campus life. "It is incredible the way you have tennis courts, swimming pools and the biggest libraries I've ever seen — all within walking distance of your dorm," said Harry Marples, an exchange student from Buenos Aires, Argentina.

But the self-contained atmosphere also could be a disadvantage, Rohringer said. "In a closed community like UNC, it is very easy to become totally wrapped up in the University and lose touch with the surrounding world."

Those crazy Americans

Often many of the things UNC students take for granted are exciting new concepts for foreign students. "The meal card is the best invention in the world," Catanzariti said. "How else can you eat as much as you want without paying for it?"

Carolina Sanchez-Palencia, an exchange student from Seville, Spain, said she noticed that UNC students seem to consume large quantities of microwaveable and fast food.

Catanzariti agreed. "People here eat so much pizza and hamburgers. I think I've had more in the three months I've been here than in my entire life." The wide variety of food to choose from can sometimes be overwhelming. "Supermarkets here are so different," Marples said. "In Argentina, when you go to buy cereal, there are three types of cereal to choose from. In America, there are hundreds of different kinds, brands and sizes."

The entertainment opportunities appealed to Marples. "There are so many movie theaters in Chapel Hill," he said. "The only problem is they are so expensive." Many foreign students said they enjoyed UNC stu-

dents' enthusiasm for their school. "There is so much college spirit here," Garcia said. "I love all the hoopla of the American football games — the cheering, the electronic scoreboards and the pom-pom girls."

Another striking difference is the concept of the college town. "The college town and the way it completely caters to the students is like nothing I've ever seen before," he said.

Because Garcia's university is in the middle of Paris, the night life is much different. "When the bars are closing here, things are just starting in Paris," he said. "Usually we go out dancing at about midnight and stay out until about six the next morning."

Students' attitudes toward drinking also are different in Europe. "In Seville, less people drink to get drunk, like they do here," Sanchez-Palencia said. "This is probably due to the fact that there is no drinking age in Spain and such a heavily enforced one here."

Communication gap

Most foreign students said that, as a whole, students at UNC are friendly and have gone out of their way to make them feel at home. "I've met more people here in one month than I do in a whole year at home," Rohringer said.

However, sometimes the fundamental differences are hard to ignore. "Although everyone was really friendly, I realized we didn't have much in common," Silk said. "I had no knowledge of American sports, and sometimes it was just as hard for me to understand others as it was for them to understand me."

According to Garcia, "Many American students, unlike foreign students, are very ignorant of what goes on outside the U.S."

This lack of familiarity can sometimes be funny. Catanzariti, a native Australian, remembered this incident: "Someone once said to me after a pretty long conversation, 'Your English is really good.'"

Other times it can be frustrating. "It was the little things that started to bother me," said sophomore Patrick Emerson, a Morehead scholar from Sussex, England. "Different phrases started to bother me, and comments on my accent got old."

Happy to be here

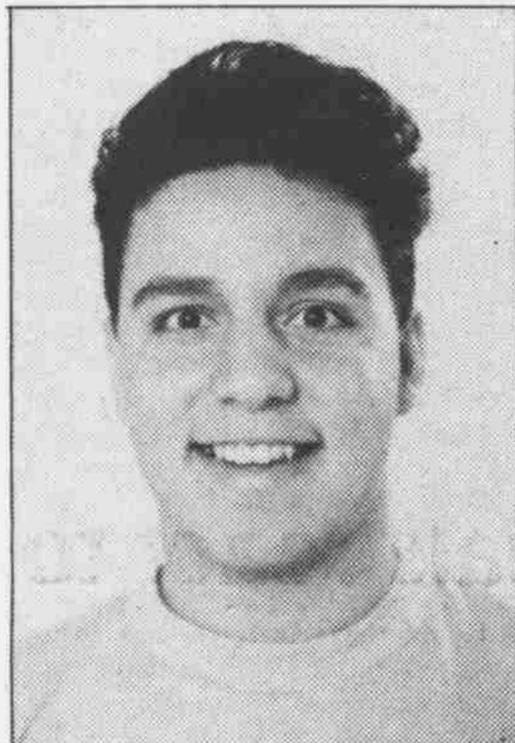
In spite of the differences between the cultures, most foreign students say they are glad to be here. "I know that I will have grown immeasurably by the time I return to Spain in the spring," Sanchez-Palencia said. "After living in a completely different culture with totally foreign perspectives, how can I not change?"

According to Emerson, "I used to live in the states and I loved it then. I found the American attitude more exciting — I think it has a lot to do with the weather."

Freshman Samantha Phillips, a Morehead scholar from Bath, England, said she wanted to do something different when it came to her college education and was glad to have the opportunity to come to the states. "I would quite like to stay," she said. "Maybe working in the states or commuting between here and England."

Most said they would recommend that their friends come over as well. "I hope that more Australians will come to America," Catanzariti said. "They need to be convinced that everyone here is not like Roseanne Barr and the people in those other corny American sitcoms."

They also encourage American students to go abroad, if only to experience another culture and learn a new way of doing things. "It's one of the best things I've ever done," Garcia said.



Anthony Catanzariti

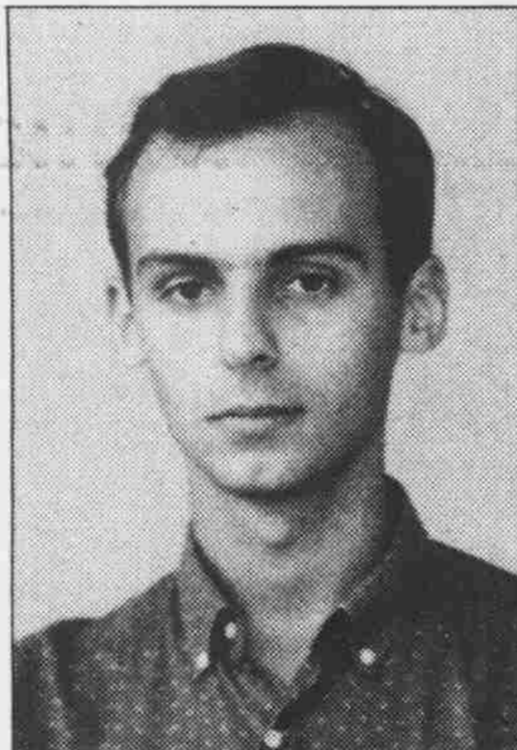
Culture shock

For the foreign student, UNC can be quite different than universities in his or her own country. "Things here are so strange," Catanzariti said. "The toilets flush backwards, you drive on the wrong side of the road and those Pit preachers are just crazy."

Marcos Garcia, an exchange student from Paris, said the parking problem at UNC is the exact opposite from the situation at home. "At my university, there are more parking spaces than cars."

For the British students, the academic system itself proved to be the biggest difference. Wood said he was surprised that class attendance was required since it is not in England. Silk admitted that his first month was confusing because he didn't even know what a perspective course was.

"I think that there is a culture shock," Lovelace said. "There is an adjustment to college anyway, and for



Marcos Garcia



Carolina Sanchez-Palencia

Carolina's Chinatown

Students find academic freedom flourishing beyond bamboo curtain

By MARA LEE

Staff Writer

China — the home of Taoism, t'ai chi, pagodas, gun powder, silk and firecrackers. But China is also the world's most populous country and home to most of the foreign students at UNC.

Almost 200 of the 750 foreign students who attend the University are Chinese, according to Jack Lu, president of the Friends' Association of Chinese Students.

Most students stay for more than a year, Lu said.

Students come to the United States for increased educational opportunities, he said. "I think here we can learn something that we cannot learn in China. For (nearly) 30 years, 1957 to 1981, there was no sociology published in China. It was canceled by the government in the anti-writers movement," said Lu, a sociology graduate student from Beijing.

Xu Bai, a chemistry graduate student from northeastern China, said he "wanted to bring back (his knowledge) to China."

Chinese students often are unaware of what to expect, Lu said. "Before, I had no idea of what a United States university would be or should be."

Caixia Dong, a sociology graduate student from Beijing, also came with no preconceived notions of UNC. "I didn't have any preliminary expectations of any American university. I was almost unprepared to come. Before I came here, I imagined

what kind of life it could be. I had heard what life would be like in an American university in a southern state in a small university town. When I came here, it was like drowning in things I didn't know."

But the differences between school in the United States and China soon became apparent. Academic opportunities are more readily available here than behind the bamboo curtain, Dong said.

"Here students have more choice," Lu said. "They have more chances to use their own creativity."

"Relations between the students and professors are more casual. You can exchange your ideas with your professor, argue with your professor. Your professors have more freedom. In China, they have to teach what others teach."

Students' attitudes differ as well. "Some American students work very hard during the weekday and relax on the weekend. I will finish reading this book all night before the weekend," they say. Break is break," Lu observed.

In China, students set aside time during the weekend to work if needed, he said.

"Students back home are quite serious," Dong added. "Children in primary school and middle school are more influenced by their parents, their relatives. Their parents say, 'Get a good education,' and that affects your whole life."

The cultural differences between China and the United States are many, Chinese students agreed. "Everything is different," said

Qihong He, a chemistry graduate student from Changchua.

Lu gave this example: "I think here time is more valuable than in China. In China, we aren't as tied to a time schedule. In this country, if you want to talk or chat with people, you go to dinner together or a party. No formal occasions are made in China — people just drop in. They knock on your door without advance warning."

Spiritual traditions contrast, too. "A lot of people (in the United States) believe in God, and the Bible influences their lives a lot," He said. "In China, we don't believe it at all."

The students saw the variety of personal and social choices as the best aspects of America, but one problem with American society, according to Bai, is that family ties are not close enough.

On the less serious side, Dong said she does not appreciate American food. "It comes from other places ... and lost its style, its originality," she said. Despite absences as long as five years, Chinese students still feel attached to their homeland and have strong emotions about the recent prodemocracy protests.

Bai, who was president of the association when the student protests began in China, said: "In late April, when I heard of the protests in China, I was very excited. At that time, I saw hope of China."

"After the June massacre, if I ever go back, they will know I knew the truth. They do not allow the people in China to know. I will



DTH/Jodi Anderson

be isolated, not trusted, because I do not trust them." Bai said he was a member of the Communist party until last June, when he became disgusted with its political tactics. "I just denounced communism immediately after the massacre. The party was changing when I was in college. It brought a lot of hope for the country. As a young college student, you are always full of hope. Always, from my youth, I was taught (that the) Communist party was good; capitalism was bad. Later on, we learned that was not true. "After the June massacre, the party lost the small support of the people. I felt dirty to be one of them."