



Pukar Baskota (right) of Nepal visits with Dan Barefoot, a Master of Business Administration student from Dothan. Baskota, who is in his second semester, says that the American English Group (AEG) has helped him adjust to life at Troy University. The AEG not only helps international students with their English skills, but also exposes the students to American culture.

Easing the Transition

American English Group helps international students feel at home

By Sara Godwin

When Pukar Baskota entered the American English Group (AEG) at Troy University in July 2006, he thought he would only be learning the basics of the English language. However, AEG offered much more to him than just the occasional “hello” and “goodbye.” AEG opened a world of opportunity for Baskota.

“When I first came here everything was different. Religion was different, customs, traditions and cultures were all different,” said Baskota, who is originally from Nepal. Like with most international college students, Baskota was a little uneasy about the differences.

David Kent, director of the AEG, said that “each student has his/her own culture shock beginning with the first semester with the AEG program. The AEG is provided to help relieve some of that shock and get the students more involved with campus activities,” he said.

Baskota agreed with Kent saying he believes “every international person should be part of the AEG classes because he or she can learn a lot of things from the teacher, as well as a lot of things about schools of the United States and about the way English is spoken.”

Throughout the program, each student learns English

grammar, as well as listening, reading, speaking and writing skills. Students also study American culture.

Baskota said the person in the AEG that influenced him the most was Ms. Sharon Eller. "She taught me reading and grammar," said Baskota.

Not only is the AEG helpful with adapting new international students to American college classes, it also provides activities that help new students improve their communication skills with their peers.

"Conversation partners come to help an international student interact directly with American language and culture," said Kent. "With American students coming and interacting, an AEG student can ask simple questions and get the answers." This program also helps the students meet new people.

Baskota enjoyed conversation partners, as well as the presentations that were given by classmates on their countries of origin. "It was a good way to communicate with interesting people and learn about their environment, their region, their customs and the people of their country," said Baskota.

Through his experience in the American English Group, Baskota is happy about his decision in choosing Troy University as his American home. "I chose TROY because I think it ranks high. You come to America for a good college education. If you move from place to place [other colleges], it is hard to make friends and very hard to communicate with professors," said Baskota.

Baskota, who is now in his second semester of academics in criminal justice, said every international student should participate in the AEG's different classes and activities. "If you don't participate, you are going to be left behind," said Baskota.

International students on the Troy Campus aren't the only ones benefiting from the program. Troy University recently opened an English Language Center at its Atlanta Site. The center's programs specialize in academic English, targeting students interested in pursuing higher education in the United States. Five nine-week sessions are offered through the center, covering reading and writing skills, listening and speaking skills and structure.

This center features an on-site computer lab and library access, as well as on-site tutors and individual assistance.

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Signs on the Troy University campus in Troy, AL, point students to call the "help desk" for information technology support in both English and Mandarin Chinese. Since the majority of TROY's international students are Chinese, IT professionals made the call to have the signs printed in both languages, a move that (from left to right) Yuging Dong of Nanjing, Yihnan Chen (Ivy) of Suzhou and Ren Zhang of ZhenJiang, all 1-2-1 students, say made them feel more comfortable on campus.

Bilingual signs aid students

Visit the Troy Campus, home to more than 660 international students, and you'll see signs more commonly seen in downtown Beijing or San Francisco's Chinatown. They're written in Mandarin Chinese.

The signs, paired with English-language signs, tout the same message: help for students on the University's computer system.

The signs were the brainchild of Chief Technology Officer Greg Price.

"Fundamentally, the signs were to promote information technology services," he said. "In the process, we have discovered that our international students view the signs as welcoming tools and an appreciation of them being at TROY."

The signs simply direct students with IT-related questions to phone the University's "Help Desk" or visit its Web site for self-help tools, but the decision to

have signs produced in Mandarin Chinese was the result of reviewing actual call logs into the help desk.

"A significant percentage of calls were from the international community, of which the Chinese are the largest representatives," Price said. "Statistically, we have great success with our self-help tools that are located in the IT Web site and we decided to promote the tools to a large segment of the campus population in their native language. We hoped the signs would serve, during the first few days of class, as a transition tool for the students."

Troy University currently has 293 students from the Peoples Republic of China, both traditional exchange students and in the University's Sino-American Dual Degree Program, or 1-2-1, where students begin at a home institution in China, transfer to TROY for two years and then return to their home institution to complete their degrees. When completed, the 1-2-1 students receive both a degree from their home institution and one from Troy University.

Confucius Institute to open at TROY

Troy University will soon be home to a new non-profit center that will expand Chinese language and cultural education, as well as provide business and industry ties to China.

Gov. Bob Riley and Troy University Chancellor Jack Hawkins, Jr., announced the creation of the Confucius Institute, which will officially open in 2008, during an Oct. 11 ceremony in Beijing, China.

The center, which is the first such established in Alabama and the 25th in the United States, will also expand the use of the Governor's Alabama Connecting Classrooms, Educators and Students Statewide (ACCESS) program to Alabama high schools.

"The Confucius Institute is an important step in the continued internationalization of Troy University. It will promote the understanding of Chinese language, history and culture to the students we teach and the communities we serve," said Dr. Hawkins in a joint announcement between Chinese officials and the State of Alabama.

"On behalf of our Board of Trustees, I thank you for placing your confidence in Troy University. The



Troy University Chancellor Jack Hawkins, Jr. (left) with Gov. Bob Riley (back row) and Hebei University of Science and Technology President Tang Shengling sign the formal agreement establishing the Confucius Institute at Troy University Oct. 11 in a ceremony in Beijing, China. The purpose of the Confucius Institute at Troy University is to expand the Chinese language and cultural education, provide business and industry ties to China and expand the use of the Governor's Alabama Connecting Classrooms, Educators and Students Statewide (ACCESS) program to Alabama high schools.

Confucius Institute at TROY will be a source of pride for both of our great nations for generations to come," Dr. Hawkins said.

The Confucius Institute at Troy University will be based on the Troy Campus and operate a satellite office on the University's Montgomery Campus. Additionally, the Office of the Chinese Language Council International (Hanban), the governmental of-

fice that administers the Confucius Institute, has similar institutes in 30 other nations. Hebei Normal University of Science and Technology, which already has ties to TROY, will serve as the University's Confucius Institute host.

Students from the Peoples Republic of China currently attending Troy University account for nearly half of its almost 670 international students.



Macedonia trip – TROY assistant professor of design Sara Dismukes (pictured at far left) and international relations graduate student Sheetal Nangia (far right) recently spent a week at the 25th International Exhibition of Children's Paintings, where they visited students, teachers and other officials in Bitola, Macedonia. The Macedonia trip is one of many projects that the Troy University Department of Art and Design and its collaborator, Halmstad University in Sweden, will take part in as part of a larger effort to use the arts to bridge gaps between cultures.