

## international flavor

# Global Village

By Clif Lusk



International Student Cultural Organization paves way for smooth transition

“Internationalization” is a term TROY aficionados come to know by heart. With the University bucking national trends in attracting international students, creating a global village is a top priority.

While nationwide figures show a decline of 2.4 percent in international enrollments, this fall TROY recruited 320 new students – a 281 percent increase over fall 2004. In all, 629 students from 50 countries are on the Troy Campus.

While getting the students to TROY may present challenges, once they’re here students are faced with all the perplexities of a new university, a new city and, in many cases, a new language and culture.

Dr. Curt Porter, dean of international programs, believes that’s where one student organization stands above the rest – ISCO, short for the International Student Cultural Organization. It’s been bringing together students from America and other nations for 30 years.

Famous for its annual ISCO Festival, the organization meets regularly to promote a cultural and social exchange.

Dr. Scott Nokes, a professor in the English Department, serves as ISCO’s faculty advisor and echoes Porter’s enthusiasm for the organization’s impact on the students who are involved in it.

“ISCO provides international students a way to enter American culture and provides American students a way to sample cultures from around the world,” he said. “American students sometimes think they want to travel abroad but don’t really know where they would like to go. Through ISCO, they can prepare for life in a global culture here at home.”

For the international student, Nokes said ISCO helped alleviate apprehension about being in unfamiliar country.

“International students want to learn more about America but are often intimidated by the foreign language and customs. ISCO brings American and international students closer together,” he said.

Porter said ISCO’s long-term success, however, has its roots in community support – both the campus community and the larger Troy community.

One obvious area in which the broader Troy community is supportive is through ISCO’s cultural festival held each spring. Nokes said the crowd last year was 200-plus.

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The organization has a number of other events as well.

“We have the normal things that other organizations have like a float in the homecoming parade or barbecues,” Nokes said. “And we also have events throughout the year where students present their cultures.”

One such event last year was a Kenyan dance theme party.

“They didn’t present traditional dance to traditional music, but it was done with Kenyan pop music,” he said.

A trip to New Orleans was also a highlight last year, and Nokes said the group is talking about doing everything from bowling to visiting southern historical sites to an Orlando trip this year.

“The students plan and do a variety of activities throughout the year,” he said. “They all enjoy them.”

With such a long organizational history, ISCO has deep roots in the Troy community – a small handful of international students found a way in the beginning to make an impression on the city and its people and has continued to do so each year.

Former ISCO advisors Nolan and Willetta Hatcher credits ISCO’s real growth to Chancellor Jack Hawkins, Jr.

“Dr. Adams and Dr. Hawkins both knew about culture and the impact it could make on education,” he said.

For Hatcher, who had been made ISCO’s advisor as an “additional duty” by Dr. Ed Barnett, the foundations of TROY’s internationalization came when Hawkins was named chancellor.

“There were about 10 students our first summer here,” Willetta Hatcher recalled. “It had grown to about 25 or 30 our first year. It started growing but there was no recruiting. Dr. Hawkins really saw what the cultural mix could do for



**Dr. Nolan Hatcher helped Troy University’s international programs to grow during his tenure.**

learning and for the University.”

She had much of the responsibility for planning the social functions for the group, as well as seeing that international students had a meaningful cultural exchange within the Troy community.

For the Hatchers, ISCO was a way to stay connected with an ever-broadening world. For the students, it was a rare chance at cultural interaction. Among the early activities were outings to the beach and to Blue Springs, cook-outs and having international students hosted by Troy families.

“[The students] wouldn’t live with the families, but they were included in family events and were invited to meals. It made a difference for the students and taught them the American culture up close,” she said.

Over time, those outings turned into responsibilities in other areas of the community, such as visits to local elementary schools and speeches at area civic clubs.

ISCO became international students’ springboard into the community and into America’s culture, and a few students over time became well-known figures about Troy.

“We had twin boys from Malaysia, Peter and Paul Levers. They had been Olympic competitors, although they’d never made the Olympics. They got to be known around town and were involved in a lot of activities,” Willetta said.

It was easy for Nolan Hatcher to get his students involved, after all, he noted, they were bright, well-educated and well-mannered.

“These kids were honor students, from good families and usually had the support of their [home] governments – one was the son of the Arab vice marshal of Pakistan,” he said.

Today, the internationalization effort is in full swing, due largely to Dr. Hawkins’ leadership. His philosophy: university students have to compete in a global market; therefore, they must be globally educated.

“In the past, our international students numbered in the dozens. Now we have more than 600 and seem to be moving rapidly toward 1,000 or more. ISCO is one place they shape and are shaped by Troy University,” Nokes said.

*Lusk is a university relations coordinator.*