



No home for the holidays not a worry for UIS students

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Madhu Shetty normally doesn't cook for 50.

But when her boss at the University of Illinois at Springfield's Diversity Center — Jeannie Capranica — told her she was planning for the international and other students remaining on campus over winter break, she knew she could help.

"I was like, wow, I could do this dish and help her out," said Madhu, a graduate student who moved from India to study information systems.

The entree she helped provide was chicken Manchurian, a popular Asian dish that she kicked up a notch with a twist.

On Tuesday, about 50 students representing a handful of cultures gathered at the Butler Housing Commons together, listen to music and try a few new foods. In addition to Madhu, graduate student SreeNitya Gudapati, acting assistant director of the Diversity Center, made a big batch of macaroni and cheese for students who couldn't go home.

The event was called a "holiday party" for a reason.

"Many of them do not observe the Christian religion," Capranica said of the students who attended. "Since most of them are celebrating a holiday party."

She said international students made up a little more than 4 percent of the school's total population of 4,711 students. One-quarter of those students had indicated they'd be staying on or around campus during winter break. The arrangements between semesters, the school does try to ensure each student is well taken care of and provide for four weeks classes aren't in session.

Neha Patel, a graduate student from Chicago whose parents are originally from India, said many of the students who were doing so because of work obligations.

"For a lot of the graduate students, we have internships through the university and have to work 20 hours a week for a month, so we have to stay," she said. "Those internships help pay for tuition."

Sneha Mudumba, a graduate student studying computer sciences, said her internship allows her to take two weeks off in Phoenix beginning this week. Though she is Hindu, her uncle, who has lived in the U.S. for 15 years, insisted she celebrate Christmas.

Sneha said the holiday party was a thoughtful outreach for students who cannot connect with family during the holidays.

"I think it's great because all of us are away from our families and home," she said. "It's very nice."

Most international students at UIS take the opportunity to travel during winter break, either to visit with friend country or to see sites they haven't yet visited, Capranica said.

Prithvi Datla, president of the Indian Student Organization and a graduate student from India, said he hopes least go skiing in Wisconsin.

Most of UIS' international students are either married, graduate students or old enough to live in on-campus breaks. The few undergraduates who live in the residence halls have the option to contact the school's housing but no student inquired about that option this time, according to Marque Hauptert, the assistant director of housing.

Some students also find host families to stay with for the four-week break, Hauptert said, while others travel home.

For students who do remain on campus, the Diversity Center offers programming in addition to Tuesday's holiday. Hauptert invited a batch of students to her home for dinner, and the school has made some campus vans available for transportation. Capranica also said they may organize outings to go ice skating, bowling or other activities "to just enjoy the break."

Are you interested in hosting students?

The University of Illinois at Springfield's Diversity Center is always looking for local families and alumni to serve as host families. Host families can help provide all types of students — international, out-of-state or even local students — with a home for the weekends, holidays or breaks.

For more information, call 206-6333.

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