

I N C R E A S I N G   A C C E S S

## Who in the world comes to JMU?

Academic rigor and a friendly campus define the Madison Experience for international students

BY JANET SMITH ('81)

**M**ore than just the appeal of studying abroad in the United States, it's JMU's distinction as a welcoming institution of higher learning that makes it home to more than 500 international students representing 72 nations. Senior Arushi Sachan, who was accepted for enrollment by four U.S. schools, recalls asking her college search adviser as her decision deadline was looming, "Which is the friendliest school?" The immediate answer: "James Madison University."

Sachan, a native of the United Arab Emirates who has also lived in India and traveled to 13 other countries, is glad she asked the question. "I feel so at home here," she says. "JMU has opened my personality and given me a place to flourish." And, she says, the university's friendly reputation has been proven true.

One of 531 international students at JMU (396 are undergraduates), Sachan represents an important population with divergent backgrounds and rich cultural contributions to offer all of campus. Most JMU international students come from one of five countries—China, Vietnam, the Republic of Korea, India or the United Kingdom.

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In his role as director of International Student Scholar Services in JMU's Center for Global Engagement, Jon Kratz interacts with students to help them adjust to academic and social life at the university. "Our office focuses on helping international students plug in with the campus," he says, for the benefit of all students—international and domestic.

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Through programs such as CGE's Intercultural Dialogues, students share about educational and cultural topics in an open space. "As you hear new stories, you give more depth to your own story and more



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appreciation for others' stories," Kratz says. "In a textbook, you can read it, but it seems distant. But when you hear a student talk about life in China or Vietnam or our country's relationship with Russia from the perspective of a Russian student, it brings it to a different level."

Senior Coralie Norris says much of the sharing of perspectives and backgrounds occurs outside the classroom via involvement with student organizations or answering an individual student's questions about her native country, Haiti. "JMU is definitely a friendly school, and people here want to learn more about the world," says Norris, an economics major and political science minor.

JMU's College of Business has been a big draw for international students through the years, but more and more majors in every college are chosen. Health sciences, engineering, and media arts and design are among the more popular majors, Kratz says.

In addition to academic rigor, JMU offers career flexibility, Kratz says. "Some of our international students want jobs in the U.S. and see a U.S. degree as advantageous for that goal," he says. "Culturally, they have been in the country for four years and are better adjusted to what the expectations are in the work world. They have that U.S. degree that is recognized within the U.S. market."

As she prepares for life after JMU, Sachan plans to use her talents as a communicator and the skills she honed in JMU's writing, rhetoric and technical communication major to work as a photojournalist or journalist. She's practicing her writing

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and photography on her blog, arushisachan.com, which focuses on travel and fashion. Both interests were deepened at JMU, where she plunged into academics and outside-the-classroom activities right away, becoming a founding member of both the Indian Student Organization and the Fashion Club. She continues to serve as marketing chairperson and public relations chairperson, respectively.

For senior Ziyu Xu, who came to JMU from China—her first trip outside her native country—JMU's flexibility in combining academic disciplines has been important in preparing for her career. Drawn to JMU for its strong academic reputation, the marketing major soon discovered she could also develop her interests in psychology and the arts. Her program of study has developed to include a minor in studio art and a healthy measure of what she calls "entrepreneurial spirit."

As graduation approaches, Xu looks forward to working for a company, either in the U.S. or abroad, to build her skills and reputation with an eye toward establishing her own business. "I love adventures," she says. "The world is full of possibilities in my eyes, and I want to explore more. JMU has helped me see there are no limitations."

Norris' post-graduation plans are to do "significant work" in the economic development realm in Washington, D.C., before returning to Haiti to apply her economic development experience to benefit her country. From there, who knows? "But there will probably be more travel," Norris says, "because I want to discover more about the rest of the world." 

