Culture:
International students bring more culture to campus

Chelsea Yaeger
chelsea.yaeger923@gmail.com

The beginning of a new semester brings new international students, new plans and a new International Week to the University of Louisiana at Lafayette.

International Student Council President Abdul Majeed, junior petroleum engineering student, said he is excited for the semester to come. Majeed is new to the presidency this year. He and other ISC board members are busy planning events for this semester, but a few have already been set.

The first event of the semester will be an international coffee hour — something ISC does every semester. The first coffee hour will be hosted by the Office of International Affairs and the University Program Council in the Student Union Friday, Jan. 15.

Coffee hour is every other Friday and will be hosted by a different international organization each time. Hosts will include international students who are in the Intensive English Program.

Majeed said he is very happy that IEP students are included in hosting the events. “ISC is here for people to see. We (international students) bring you the world on our campus,” Majeed said. “It’s a lot of responsibility for international students. We want to give you the right concept.”

That “concept” is all about education. “(It is to) educate UL students, and future husbands and wives — I love to say that — about the other world,” he said. “Because most of the people over here have only heard about the other countries (besides the U.S.) from the media. The bad stuff. They only show the bad stuff. I have seen it, and it’s like ‘No, we don’t do that.’ Most of it, it’s a bunch of lies.

“The bad and the ugly. I don’t even know where some of it comes from. It’s TV news. Our responsibility over here is to teach them and educate them more and more about cultures and countries,” Majeed continued.

International Week, a week filled with informational sessions, performances, traditional dances, food and attire, will be April 9 through 16. The ISC puts on International Week every spring, but this time, the pageant will include not only Ms. International, but also Mr. International.

According to Majeed, a lot of this semester’s events have yet to be affirmed, but are in the works. There will be an ISC meeting on Jan. 22 in the Student Union to propose ideas for the semester.

He said students are mainly open-minded and friendly. In the past, students involved in Greek life have helped out at ISC events.

“They want to try the new stuff. Most of the time, we have really open minded people (who come to events)... To be far away from your family is already hard, but UL is our second home,” said Majeed. Majeed attributes that feeling of belonging to events that bring students — U.S. and international — together.

“We bring the culture to students so we can understand each other more and more,” he said. “It takes that fear you have that people will judge you away. Once you show them (who you are), they start understanding more and more. That fear you have inside you that people will judge you — because of your background, because of where you came from — it disappears.

“People start coming up to you. ‘Hey, I love your culture stuff, I love your food,’” Majeed continued. “It really makes you feel peaceful and happy. It makes me feel alright. This is a second home for me, you know? Everybody accepted me. I’m not a stranger. This is what UL has shown us since we came over here. I love it. I love UL. I love Lafayette.”

Diversity:
Appreciating Appropriation

Sririkhwan Pamornkul
pirikhwan@gmail.com

Cultural appropriation has received negative connotation in America where social justice advocates view white-skinned folks as unredeemable.

Allow me to loosely define what ‘cultural appropriation’ is. It is a word widely associated with the white Western world adopting a minority’s culture for fashion as a costume or as a form of self-expression.

This is a huge no-no with social justice warriors, who continue to espouse the same rhetoric that a person of the culture must invite an outsider in order for them to participate in a cultural activity and event, or even a traditional garment. Some even argue that language must require the approval of a native speaker for one to learn it.

I often see that these advocates ignore the cross-pollination that naturally occurs within an environment, namely the entire world. The U.S. in particular is not a homogenous society — it’s multicultural — despite the apparent whiteness of the media.

It is true there are some individuals that avoid or restrain from wearing their culture’s traditional or ceremonial garb due to fear of being targeted out of xenophobia (the fear of anything foreign or seen as different e.g. hate crimes), whereas a white person can don a bindi and be fine. But let’s not confuse cultural as being synonymous or equal to race and ethnicity because it extends past these concepts. For example, a sport can have its own culture.

Cultural appropriation is a complicated topic, as there are layers of intersectional values sewn together, like race, and beyond that identity. Culture is an abstract concept that has developed throughout history within ethnicities and geographical regions. It is a family quilt in humanity’s home.

On the surface, cultural appropriation looks like cultural hijacking, but we can’t talk about cultural appropriation without discussing cultural exchange. The lines between the two will always be blurred because it is never neutral. Cultural exchange promotes understanding. Cultural appropriation is not always wrong — it inspires growth and evolution.

I believe the reason why the topic of cultural appropriation is difficult and oftentimes painful in America is because growth is uncomfortable. It is especially in a country whose origins are bound up in theft. The topic of cultural appropriation is a reminder of America’s original sin.

But I believe in exercising empathy. The engagement between cultures allows an individual to fulfill literature’s unshakeable reasoning that entering another’s consciousness expands our own.