Multicultural Week allows international students to get involved, share the university’s diversity

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Students from both inside and outside the U.S. have the opportunity to participate in a week-long University of Louisiana at Lafayette tradition that honors students from more than 70 countries.

Events for Multicultural Week 2018, hosted by the International Student Council, are in full swing, celebrating the diversity in the University of Louisiana at Lafayette student body. Director of the Office of International Affairs Rose Honegger said the festivities, held annually by ISC and the Office of International Affairs, likely started when UL Lafayette first began accepting international students.

“Multicultural Week is an important event for the university because it celebrates the diversity that we have in our student body on campus,” Honegger said. “We have students from over 70 countries and this annual event helped us highlight the various cultures in our student body.”

International Student Council President Clara Chong said the event encourages students “to meet each other.”

“We also really just want to bridge the American students and the international students because I know those two groups, they don’t really mingle,” Chong said.

International students will have the opportunity to test their skills, knowledge of their culture and wit during the Mr. and Mrs. International pageant, a three-part pageant held at 6 p.m., Wednesday, March 21, in the Atchafalaya Ballroom, Chong said. The pageant will also feature a step show from the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity at intermission. The winning prize is typically a bookstore gift card, last year worth $300.

On Thursday, an Immigration Seminar will be held from 1-3 p.m. for graduating international students with information about necessary paperwork, how and when to do it, and programs for working in America post-college.

The culmination of the week is Multicultural Night on Friday evening.

“Everyone comes in their traditional attire so it’s a beautiful night full of color and different traditional costumes,” Honegger said. “Then we have traditional cultural performances, and it ends with a great way to taste food from parts of the world.”

“Food always brings people together, right?” Honegger asked with a laugh.

Chong said Multicultural Week participants can expect dancing, singing, performances from the Indian students and the Bangladeshi students, a Chinese song performance, two performances from South America and a fashion show. The fashion show will feature even more organizations that could not provide performance that will wear their traditional garments, she said.

“Multicultural night is just to give (international students) a space to showcase their organization and their culture,” she said.

Honegger added ISC is excited to host a team at The Big Event on Saturday, March 24, serving as an end to the week’s festivities. Lafayette, she said, has been “very welcoming” to international students.

“I think it’s a great way to end Multicultural Week to allow our international students to work side by side with their American peers in giving back to Lafayette.”

Chong said the week is also great for gaining participation among international students on campus. She said she realizes participation on campus is low among international students, but this is something they can be involved in every year.

As the umbrella organization for all international organizations on campus, the ISC consists of international organization members that spread the word and encourage participation in the week among their members through personal invite rather than mass emails from ISC, according to Chong. She said they found a personal invite was more effective and they currently have eight international organizations participating in the week’s events including the African Student Association, Bangladeshi Student Association, Chinese Students and Scholars Association and invited the Chi Alpha Step Team, Sigma Lambda Gamma Sorority as performers, along with Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity.

“All of you students are going to be entering a global workforce so it’s important you learn about other cultures right now, here, so that you don’t have to fly to Southeast Asia, but just attend Multicultural Night and experience that yourself,” Honegger said.

She said international students love sharing their cultures on campus.

“It’s a great tradition that we want to continue and hopefully make it better and stronger each time,” Honegger said.