Embracing Diversity

By: Maria Barquero
VIP Program Assistant

This summer VIP Volunteers joined International Students and friends to attend SUNFEST, the annual cultural diversity festival at Victoria Park. Just as the festival promotes diversity, VIP Volunteers had a unique opportunity to meet and interact with international students from Western. As we toured the park, we listened to a variety of musical groups, checked out the vendor tents, and enjoyed new tastes from Africa, Latin America, India and the Caribbean, just to name a few. This was a great opportunity to learn more about each others cultures and experience new ones.
Thanks

On behalf of the VIP Program and Volunteers, past and present, we would like to thank all our VIP Supervisors. They are not only valuable members of the SDS team; they are also leaders and mentors to the many VIP Volunteers and students that cross their paths throughout the year. Their helpful spirit is fully appreciated. As effective leaders they will continue to empower and inspire future VIP Volunteers.

This past June, VIP supervisors attended a VIP Supervisors Meeting. The meeting gave us an opportunity to share and celebrate the accomplishments of the 2006-2007 academic year with our VIP Supervisors. This was an opportunity to learn from each other, as well as give feedback. The meeting was a success, as the sharing of ideas is essential for the growth of the VIP Program. We look forward to working together closely with the VIP Supervisors in the coming year and to providing the best volunteering experience at SDS.

Here’s what some of our VIPs said about their experiences......

“...The people I worked with were great. My supervisor is a great mentor.”

“It has been great having my supervisor ready to answer my questions.”

“The experience has been good because I have spent time with great people like my supervisor. He is very understandable, and flexible with the schedule.”

“My supervisor really helped and continues to help me understand the best ways to assist students academically.”

“My supervisor provides great support and advice.”

“My supervisor has been supportive and has provided guidance while I have carried out my duties.”

Supervisor Spotlight:

VIP Position: SDS Office Assistant

Main Responsibilities: Sorting, filing, creating folders and updating resources.

q.: What kind of environment do you try to create for your VIP?

I try to make them feel like part of the SDS team. I really enjoy getting to know my Assistants and encourage them to let me know how school is going so that I can work with them to rearrange their work schedule so that it is less hectic for them during stressful times.

q.: What do you like most about being a VIP supervisor?

Working with current students closely allows me to see into their world and what it is like to be a student today. I have been out of full time school now for almost 15 years and it is nice to be able to stay in touch. There is also the reward of being able to help a student learn what it is like to work in a professional and confidential office. Also when my Assistant is applying for a job, it is quite an honour to be asked to be their reference. I enjoy giving a reference for a job well done!

Helping Hands Summer 2007
Having trouble finding information on First Nation Services? They are now known as Indigenous Services. This new name has been applied as it is inclusive of the commonly accepted terms of Aboriginal, First Nations, Metis, and Inuit people of Canada. It is also an accepted global definition as set out by the United Nations.

**Unique Services Provided by Indigenous Services**

~ A Learning Resource Centre that is located in Room 204 in the University Community Center. Here you will find a Computer Lab and Resource Library. The library presently offers over 1200 textbooks and resource materials that cover different areas of concern and interest in respect to First Nation issues.

~ The First Nations Students’ Association that assists with raising awareness of First Nation Post-Secondary Issues.

~ A Visiting Elders Program that provides the opportunity for Elders/Traditional Counsellors to offer spiritual and cultural support, and serves to enhance cultural sensitivity within the University community.

~ A summer outreach program called Camp Giiwhisaah for Indigenous youth aged 11-16 in Southwestern Ontario which provides hands-on opportunities to learn more about the Life Sciences. The camp is run by Native People and encourages the process of sharing indigenous knowledge. It bridges cultural barriers to make science and technology more accessible and exposes youth to Indigenous ideas that will help them foster a positive Indigenous identity.

“What is important to know is that by embracing Indigenous, Western will join with leading national and international Indigenous Academic perspectives, gain creditability on a global scale, and open world wide connections, collaborations, and funding opportunities.”
- Vivian Peters, Indigenous Coordinator and Counsellor

**VIP Profile:**

**Yu Li** 1st year Medical Student - Schulich School of Medicine and Dentistry

Yu Li was a part of the VIP Program for two summers. During his time with us he was an English Conversation Circle Leader. This fall he will be attending Western’s Medical School.

**How did the VIP experience help you?**

“The experience gave me an opportunity to explore the facets of leadership. It exposed me to people from different backgrounds, which improved my ability to relate to diverse situations. It presented the challenge of communicating clearly and effectively. This demands creative ideas that go beyond the dialogue we engage in day to day.”

**Do you have any words of wisdom for future VIPs?**

“Do what you enjoy, be courageous to try new things, if you follow your heart, the dots will connect when you look back. Your experiences may seem scattered, but they all serve a higher purpose. Continue to volunteer through life. It keeps you grounded. Helps you relate to peoples lives and hardships.”
Introducing this year’s VIP Student Coordinators

Megan

Welcome VIPs! I hope everyone is having a fun and safe summer. My name is Megan Cook and I am entering my fourth year of my history degree. This is my first year with the VIP program. I am very excited for the upcoming year. I think that it will be a year to remember (in a good way!). I am thrilled to work with the other Student Coordinators Madhu and Sameera. My goal is for the three of us to make this experience as special for all of you as it will be for us. I am really looking forward to this year since volunteering is such a rewarding experience. Western has a very diverse student body and so does the VIP program. I encourage all of you to get involved as it will make the most of your experience, and it will help you meet all the wonderful VIP members.

I leave you with some inspirational words that have motivated me. “The best things are those you do that make someone else happy giving someone else the chance to smile!” I hope to see everyone back safe and well rested in September!

Take care!
-Megan Cook (History and American Studies, Year 4)

Sameera

My name is Sameera Chaudhary and I am one of three of your VIP Student Coordinators for 2007-2008!

Have no fear,
Expect both work and fun,
In the upcoming year,
To which I welcome everyone.
Stand proud and tall
Never lonely you’ll be
On each other we’ll call,
We are THE VIP
As summer flies by
And September rolls around
There’ll be new things to try
And more friends to be found
On a final note
Be sure to keep
The following quote
That is both true and deep
“Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.”
Muriel Strode

Hope your summer is going great!
-Sameera Chaudhary
(Health Sciences with Biology, Year 4)

Madhu

As the summer comes to an end, I am again excited and stunned at the enthusiasm of the volunteers in the VIP program. Last year the program was a perfect place to meet new students while making a difference. Now as one of your student coordinators, I’ll be here to help everyone get involved and have fun at the same time. Through social activities you’ll be able to meet and greet with fellow volunteers and students.

It is our goal this year to ensure that you enjoy your time spent as a volunteer. We want to make sure that you feel valued and appreciated in your positions. It is only because of all of you that this program is successful and therefore I hope that your experience with the VIP program is both unforgettable and exciting.

For everyone new to the program welcome and everyone returning, its great to have you back. Enjoy the rest of your summer and take care!
-Madhu Gupta (Physiology, Year 4)

Get Involved in Western’s International Community!

SDC’s VIP Program is currently recruiting English Conversation Leaders to help facilitate English Conversation Circles and Group Workshops for the upcoming fall and winter terms. Each year over 50 Leaders participate by helping international students improve their spoken English.

Please visit www.sdc.uwo.ca/int/paths.html?ecp to learn more about this great program!