Growing International Education at Western

OAIE/CBIE Conference

VIPs lent their helping hands at a conference presented by the Ontario Association of International Educators (OAIE) and the Canadian Bureau of International Educators (CBIE) from May 12-15. The theme was “Growing International Education”, reflecting the need to nurture and help international students succeed in school and beyond, as well as encourage Canadian students to become more globally aware by getting involved with different opportunities such as international exchanges and study abroad programs. VIPs got to attend some of the events, including a plenary speech by Jane Roy, a Western graduate who spoke of her work with London’s Food Bank as well as her involvement in the Sudan. Inspired by the conference’s green theme, more than 150 delegates from educational institutions across Ontario received baby spruce trees as a reminder of the importance of a healthy environment for the earth as well as for international students and Canadian students who study abroad.

We would like to extend a special thank you to those VIPs who devoted their time and helping spirit at this important conference. They are: TaeEun Ahn, Julia Berest, Caily Bui, Ryan Cui, Jasmine Dove, Jane-Ching Du, Theresa Henshaw, Wing Ho, Hashim Khan, Vivian Kwon, Vernice Phillips, Maria Ramirez, Jay Ren, Daniela Sorrenti, Yufei Wu, Janny Yiu

TaeEun Ahn, Learning Skills Assistant 07-08, English Conversation Leader Summer 08
Waking up early was hard, but the event was worth it! During the presentation time when directing, guiding or helping people was not necessary, volunteers were allowed to go and listen to some of the presentations. It was a very informative experience for me overall.

Jasmine Dove, EWP Administrative Assistant 07-08
My experience helping with the OAIE/CBIE conference was amazing. I had the opportunity to interact with some of Ontario’s most influential International Educators and as an international student this opened up my eyes to the amount of work and effort the educators put in so as to ensure that the international students at their institutions feel right at home and enjoy their student experience.

Vernice Phillips, International Student Activity Coordinator 07-08
As an international student it was intriguing for me to be able to look at education of international students from the administrative side. I really think that attending the conference gave me a wider perspective. On a personal level several of the sessions were very meaningful for me. Viewing the documentary that featured international students and listening to speakers describe the psychological journey that international students go through was a valuable experience.
Experience Abroad: VIP Reporting from the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing

NAME: Jay Ren
POSITION: International Student Activity Coordinator

Q. What is your job as a volunteer for the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympic Games?
A. I’m part of the Spectator services team for Volleyball Games at Capital Indoor Stadium. What we do is greet spectators at the entrance, help people find their seats, or direct them to the right place or people.

Q. What did you need to do as a volunteer to prepare for the Olympics?
A. First, we need to have a solid knowledge of the Olympic games, Olympic spirit, and the rules of different sports. To achieve this, we needed to attend a one-day long training session and other various training programs for different jobs. And before the games started, we needed to pass a sort of unofficial exam to make sure we were well-equipped with the necessary knowledge.

Second, we needed to take teamwork training. We were divided into small groups according to the type of our job. Since many group members come from different parts of China or even other countries, we also needed to learn how to communicate cross-culturally, which included language lessons. Almost all the volunteers here can speak both Chinese and English, and some of them can also speak Spanish, Japanese or French. Besides, having an understanding of some important customs of different cultures was required for us. Moreover, the organizing committee have made a number of booklets about how to stay motivated and how to maintain our psychological health in order to help us cope with the enormous stress we face everyday.

Q. Do you get to see any of the competitions or any of the athletes?
A. I didn’t have any chance to watch a whole volleyball game since at any time of the game there are many people walking in and out, trying to find their seats, or doing something else. I as a volunteer must keep closely watching people’s behaviour both for the safety and comfort of watching the games.

Q. What are some highlights of your volunteering experience? What have you learned?
A. The world is so diverse; knowing English and Chinese is far from enough. When I try to solve a problem or explain a situation for some foreign spectators from Africa, Russia, France or other small Asian countries, in both Chinese and English, there are many times that they still don’t understand me. This makes me realize that the world is not just comprised of two or three “main stream” cultures; rather, there are so many different cultures and languages, and each of them deserves the same respect and understanding. “One world, One dream” is the slogan of the 29th Beijing Olympics Games. I personally like it very much, because it well reflects the Olympic spirit which preaches fair and peaceful competition, and is beyond race, culture and language. I was thinking maybe this is the real meaning of the Games. Moreover, this game is a great opportunity not only for Chinese to better understand the rest of the world, but also for different countries to better understand each other.

Q. Service Learning in the VIP Program: What VIPs had to say about the program

- I feel more creative, outgoing and no longer fear the thought of putting myself out there and expressing my opinions.
- I think I grew personally through this experience. Both in terms of exposing me to new people and allowing me to gain leadership skills.
- I got to meet new friends and gain a wider perspective of the world. The organization and communication skills will stay with me for my career.
- I’ve made friends who will always be a part of my life.
- It brings satisfaction and further support to the career of my choice.

*From VIP Program Evaluations 2007-2008

Helping Hands Summer 2008
Q. What was your experience like being a VIP as a Learning Skills Assistant?
A. It was a challenging but very useful and rewarding experience. The main challenge of this job is that it requires a variety of skills—from communication and academic skills to the ability to think “on the spot” and be creative. I had an opportunity to acquire new skills and apply my experience as a Teaching Assistant in a new professional setting. My supervisor Counsellor Maaike was a source of inspiration for me. I learned a lot by observing her at work. As a recent immigrant, I cherished this chance to gain more Canadian work experience.

Q. What kind of services do you offer students?
A. We offer a counseling service to help students develop learning skills to succeed academically. Our service includes individual consultations, presentations on a variety of learning skills, drop-in help center and bi-weekly e-mailouts with study tips. We also have a collection of self-help books (including preparation guides for LSAT, GRE, etc.) which students can use in SDC, Room 210, UCC.

Q. How many staff members and volunteers do you have?
A. We have five Counsellors and seven VIP Assistants available to help students over the academic year.

Q. What kind of students use the services provided by Learning Skills Services and what kind of challenges are they dealing with?
A. Students from all programs and levels of study use our services. Among them are students who experience academic difficulties and those who succeed in their courses but would like to learn more about effective study strategies.

Q. In what ways do you feel Learning Skills Services makes a difference?
A. We understand that each person is unique. When students come for a consultation we approach each case individually, seeking the optimum strategy in accordance with the student’s interests, abilities and study goals. Many of our students experience a significant improvement in their grades. We often see students who enter university straight from high school, a foreign institution or after several years of working. We help them ease the transition to the new learning environment. I would also like to emphasize that some of the strategies that we teach (for instance, time-management skills and organization) have application outside the classroom. So, we always encourage students to think strategically about their years at Western.

Q. What kind of opportunities do you have for students interested in volunteering?
A. We invite qualified volunteers to serve as Learning Skills Assistants in our drop-in Help Center. The volunteers counsel students on such academic issues as time management, reading strategies, effective lecture notes, etc. We provide individual supervision and five training sessions throughout the year to help VIPs develop counseling skills.

Q. Is there anything new that you are doing for the upcoming academic year?
A. This year we are going to expand our Certificate program by inviting more prize donors for the draw. Students who attend four presentations in the fall term will have a chance to win attractive prizes. We also hope to attract more international students to our services. For their convenience, Friday will be a special day in our Help Center but they are welcome to drop by at any time.

Q. What would you like the general student population to know about Learning Skills Services?
A. Students often postpone using our services until they start experiencing academic difficulties. My advice would be to make use of Learning Skills Services early in their program to prevent potential academic problems or improve their existing study skills.
Welcome VIPs!

My name is Sameera Chaudhary and I am one of your student coordinators for the upcoming 2008-09 year. I hope you’re having a blast this summer and enjoying the summer heat. Have no worries, the fun isn’t anywhere near ending. This upcoming year, there’s a lot to look forward to: great events, new friends and the opportunity to make a difference. The best thing about the VIP program is that it brings together so many great leaders making the program better year by year. Therefore it’s inevitable that together we will make this year rock!

Have a great summer,
Sameera

Welcome all the returning and new VIPs! I’m Rui (Jessica) Gong, a fourth-year student in BMOS for the upcoming academic year. This is my first year in VIP program. I feel very excited that I can become one of the three student coordinators and will have rewarding experiences with all of you excellent volunteers. We, student coordinators, will make all of our efforts to plan really interesting, creative activities.

I hope all of you can get involved because here, in our awesome VIP group, we ensure that you will make many friends, take part in lots of very exciting and valuable activities and events, and have a ton of fun and amazing experiences! We also expect to learn and to get any great ideas from each of you.

I’m really looking forward to meeting you all! Again, welcome back to Western and welcome to VIP program! Enjoy the rest of your summer holiday and see you in September!

Rui

Dear Friends,

I am glad and delighted to welcome all of our new and returning colleagues of the V.I.P. program!! V.I.P. has experienced the success of its volunteers since 1983 and with the same enthusiasm and energy we move on to celebrate the 25th anniversary of V.I.P.

Sameera, Rui and I work together to provide you with the best volunteer experience while serving our Western community. We not only appreciate your contribution but also recognize and value your contribution. Use this opportunity to learn new skills, make new friends and share your experience, because ‘Volunteers’ truly leave their legacy behind.

I look forward to meeting all of you in fall 2008, until then enjoy the rest of your summer and take care! If you have questions or suggestions, feel free to contact me at hthakka@uwo.ca.

- Harsh Thakkar (BMOS, Year 2)

Happy 25th Anniversary VIP!

On Wednesday, November 5, 2008, from 4:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m., we will be celebrating the Volunteers In Progress Program’s 25th Anniversary in Conron Hall. What started in 1983 as a small summer project called Student Employment Experience Development (SEED) by a group of Western students has grown into a large and successful volunteer program. Over the years, VIP has offered amazing opportunities to countless volunteers and has been able to provide an increasing quality of support to the student community at Western. Thanks to volunteers like yourself, we will continue to succeed and grow.

Please join us in honour of the VIP Program for an evening of celebration and entertainment at the VIP Open House. There will be speeches and performances by current and past VIPs and a slideshow of the memories from the past 25 years. Complimentary hors d’oeuvres, beverages, and cake will be served. There will also be door prizes. You don’t want to miss this amazing event!