Representing VIPs in Style

The VIP program is constantly evolving, whether by extending its involvement to additional areas of the Student Development Centre, or by making new connections with community organizations. This year we made another exciting addition to our program when we offered VIPs the chance to purchase a VIP sweatshirt. Early in the fall term, we surveyed our volunteers and they showed plenty of interest in the idea, so we went right to work on designing a fresh, new logo that represented the spirit of the VIP program. We decided on an abstract, two-toned hands design. Not only does this logo tie in nicely to our “helping hands” newsletter name, but it also represents both the diversity and the giving spirit of our volunteers. The sweaters turned out great and thanks to an extremely generous subsidy from the Student Development Centre, they cost the volunteers only five dollars!

- Article by Allie Hobbs
The first annual VIP Information Night was held on February 9th 2006. The theme for the evening was “Volunteer Today for Success Tomorrow” in celebration of the amazing benefits of volunteering.

Allie Hobbs, Reta French and Zi Xuan Huang spoke about their roles as current VIPs while Bianca Schiopu and Zena Al-Saady reflected on their past experiences with the program. Each of the presenters provided the audience with insights into their experience as volunteers and spoke about their journey of personal growth to success.

Sheena Khan, former VIP and SDC employee spoke about her involvement with the program. Ms. Ambi, SDC Information Manager, highlighted the event’s theme and spoke about bridging volunteer experience to a successful career in the future. She gave attendees some insights into the resources available in the SDC library and on the SDC website.

Overall, the event turned out to be a huge success and generated many positive responses from everyone who attended. Here are a few of the responses we received about the evening…

“Hearing the personal stories from VIPs provided me with a great way of learning about other positions in the VIP Program. I heard real life stories about how people enjoyed their position and what responsibilities were involved.”

“I introduced the VIP Program to my friend Victor and he came with me to the Info Night. After the event, he was very excited about becoming a member of the program. It was a great opportunity to listen to other people’s experience and get the chance to meet those amazing people in person.”

“On the whole, I think the Info Night helped bring across the point that volunteering can lead you down many different paths, and that the skills you learn as a volunteer can be transferred to your personal life, your career and your community.”

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Plays were never really my thing; I was always more interested in watching movies filled with car chases and explosions – typical guy stuff. Ironically, in my last year of high school, I became involved with a play production and was also an alto saxophone player for the pit orchestra. I enjoyed being part of the production, but I had never truly realized how exciting it could be to sit in the audience as well.

At first, when I heard that the VIP social in November was a trip to the Grand Theatre to see Annie, I wasn't particularly excited. I lacked the enthusiasm and eagerness that the other 15 VIPs who attended the social displayed.

When the play finally started, I didn’t find myself particularly drawn to it. However, as the play slowly progressed, something captivated me. It might have been the passion of the actors and the commitment and dedication they displayed or maybe it was the beautiful voice of the young girl who played Annie. Perhaps it was the incredible stage set up and decorations or the touching storyline. It might have been a combination of all of these.

Before I knew it, I was eagerly anticipating what songs they were going to perform next and guessing how the plot would unravel. I never realized how much I could enjoy a play. At the end of the night, everyone left the theatre with big smiles on their faces. Watching Annie definitely sparked my new interest in theatre and was an enjoyable experience I will never forget.

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The goal for the VIP program is to provide students with the opportunity to learn and grow through volunteering. Volunteering gives us the chance to meet new people, learn new things, improve our communication skills, and develop the confidence we need to move on into the workplace. This year, we are proud to introduce to you to two international students who volunteered with the VIP program and were willing to share their experiences with us.

Danny Nakahara volunteered as a Website Maintenance & Research Assistant. His duties included providing feedback about the current website and making sure it was updated. Throughout the year, Danny also worked on various special projects and was an integral part of the SDC team.

When we asked how he first became involved with the VIP Program, Danny said “I was having a hard time getting a part time, paid position on campus. I applied at many places, but my job search was unsuccessful. I knew I needed to improve my communication skills and get some solid work experience in order to be successful. VIP looked like a great opportunity for me to learn something new and contribute to the Western community.”

Danny was willing to work hard and learn new things. The VIP program gave Danny an opportunity to strengthen his skills and increase his confidence. When we asked Danny which skills he felt were most beneficial, he said “Through working with the VIP program, I improved my interpersonal skills and learned to work as part of a team. I now have the ability to work proficiently in a detail-oriented environment.”

Agnes Cheung, another international student and VIP volunteer, also had great things to say about the program. Agnes had previously volunteered with SDC and heard about the VIP program through friends. When we asked Agnes about what she expected to gain from volunteering, she said “I wanted to improve my communication skills as well as my computer and marketing skills.”

Agnes volunteered as a Marketing and Promotion Assistant this year and did a great job. She designed posters, worked on promotion for events and worked to improve booths aimed at reaching out to students.

Agnes was very enthusiastic about her experience and told us that this past year, she has learned many valuable skills. In particular, she said “I have learned how to manage my time efficiently and how to set goals to accomplish my work. I have become more creative with my posters and have learned many new techniques. I enhanced my ability to work well in a team and learned to pay more attention to detail when deciding what to do next.”

“VIP looked like a great opportunity for me to learn something new and contribute to the Western community.”
message I want to convey to an audience”

Both Danny and Agnes have had very positive experiences as volunteers with the VIP Program. As international students, they were able to gain Canadian work experience that will help them in the future. Agnes says that because of the support and encouragement she received while working with the VIP Program, she now feels more confident in her abilities and has discovered new things she is good at. Danny has also had success after working as a volunteer and has recently accepted a paid position in accounting.

We are truly inspired by these two success stories and we wish Danny, Agnes and all of our international students and volunteers, the best of luck in everything they do in the future.

On Friday March 31st, a team of VIPs went out one last time to do what they do best- volunteer! For the last Community Day event of the year, VIPs went to play Bingo with the residents of the Mount Hope Centre for Long-Term Care. The team wore their stylish VIP hoodies and ran Bingo games for just over two hours. Everyone enjoyed themselves and the event was a huge success!

“Once again, we had a great time volunteering in the community- We hope to help out again next year.”

- Allie Hobbs

Posters Created by Agnes Cheung, ISS Marketing & Promotion Assistant
Reflecting on A Successful Year with VIP

By Francesca Mancuso
ISS Administrative Assistant/ECP Leader

Over 115 volunteers work in many different areas of the SDC each year and are part of a great team of people who improve student life here at Western. With so many volunteers, it can be a daunting task to plan orientation, coordinate social events, and keep all the VIPs informed. There is no need to worry though, we have been in good hands all year thanks to our (three) VIP Student Coordinators. Recently, we asked them each to reflect on their experiences as part of the VIP program this year.

Allie Hobbs told us about how impressed she has been with the creativity and leadership abilities of all those involved with the program. Allie remembered her experience at VIP info night and had great memories of how the presenters spoke of their passion for volunteering and how it had opened the door to many opportunities for them.

Nicole Fich was also impressed with all of this year’s volunteers and felt that each of them exuded a true helping spirit. Nicole said that she has come to realize that volunteers with the VIP program don’t just volunteer in order to add something to their résumés. She saw that they truly enjoyed helping their peers simply because they want to make a positive impact.

Jay Wong echoed Allie and Nicole’s sentiments and said that he has also learned a lot from his involvement in the program. His biggest accomplishment this year was learning to step out of his comfort zone. Once, public speaking had been one of Jay’s biggest fears, but since joining the VIP team, he now says that he has become more confident and feels more at ease in front of large groups.

This year’s VIP Student Coordinators have contributed their time and talents to the program and have done a great job coordinating events and volunteer opportunities for all the VIPs. We thank them for their hard work and dedication and we are happy to see that they have gained valuable learning experiences this year.

THANK YOU & CONGRATULATIONS!
The VIP Program would like to recognize volunteers who have contributed their time and effort for two years or more. Thank you from SDC!

8 terms
Kaitlin Dupuis

7 terms
Allie Hobbs
Ashwati Raghunath
Martha LeBlanc
Silvia Krulc

6 terms
Bing Han
Cynthia Chu
Ekaterina Stepanova
Ryan McLeod
Reina Hassell

5 terms
Danielle Thibaudeau

4 terms
Alexandra Lacko
Connie Lam
Crispin Chan
Hao Dai
Ingrid Murango
Jennifer Howells
Jennifer Schwass

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 summer and fall 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!

Jodine Rosenberg
Megan Chuchmac
Necia Martins
Phillip Vuong
Rebecca Lee
Reta French
Tristalyn Russell
Xiangning Fan
Youky Zhuang
Zi Xuan Huang

VIP Recognition Night!

Please join us for a special recognition of our VIP volunteers and staff on the evening of March 30th as we recognize our VIPs for all of their hard work during the year.

Date: March 30, 2006
Time: 6:30 PM
Location: Mearns Recreational Resource Library Room 117 U-HE3
RSVP by Monday March 27, 2006 at main@ecp.uwo.ca