

This summer BHC international student Jami Hessell will pack her bags for an internship at the most magical place on earth: Disney World in Orlando, Florida.

Hessell moved to United States from Japan to take English as a Second Language (ESL) classes and pursue her Associate in Arts at Black Hawk College.



Hessell has family ties on her dad's side in the Quad-Cities area. She is living with her grandmother in East Moline. Her sister also attended Black Hawk College.

It was an adjustment for Hessell to move to the Midwest, where she had only visited once as a child. She gets homesick from time to time, missing Japanese food and the ocean.

"I never saw land going forever," she said.

Hessell was born and grew up on the island of Okinawa, surrounded by the Pacific Ocean. She is excited about being able to visit the Atlantic Ocean during her internship.

Her favorite Disney characters are Jasmine and Stitch, but her favorite Disney movie is "Moana." She loves the songs, stories and characters. The tropical setting reminds her of her island hometown.

Getting active at Black Hawk College

While she misses elements of home, Hessell is thankful for the opportunities she has here.

She began taking English as a Second Language (ESL) classes at Black Hawk College two years ago. This semester, she is enrolled in her last ESL class and is taking college credit classes, too.

Hessell volunteers with the ESL Mentor & Mentee Program, and is a mentee.

The program helps international/ESL students adjust to cultural and academic differences by pairing them with a BHC student or employee and holding events.

She credits the program for helping her become more positive and active, and said it has really helped her come out of her shell.

Hessell has worked in the Career Services Center for about a year as a student worker. She has enjoyed learning skills that will help her in the future, and improving her English.

"I used to hesitate talking with clients, but now I really enjoy it," she said.

ESL classes and her experiences prepared her for the college courses she is taking now.

Hessell knew very little English when she arrived, and now speaks fluently in her second language.

Disney opportunities for BHC students

Hessell's internship is through the Disney College Program. Perks include housing, classes, free park admission, and transportation to and from work and shops.

She will work as a custodian during her internship. She is looking forward to walking around the parks, interacting with guests, and taking seminars and classes.

Hessell remembers being amazed at how happy the Disney guests looked when she visited Tokyo Disneyland and DisneySea in Japan.

"Of course I'm a big fan of Disney," she said. "But I really like how Disney makes all the guests happy and makes an unforgettable memory."

Bruce Storey, BHC Director of Educational Services who oversees Career Services, said more than 200 BHC students have participated in the Disney College Program since 2004.

The jobs vary, but each Disney College Program participant learns Disney customer service. They can apply for professional internships, including opportunities at the parks, animation studios, and companies like ESPN, ABC and Marvel.

Storey encourages any interested student to [visit Career Services](#) for application help. He said Black Hawk College applicants have a higher acceptance rate than the national average: 30 to 40% compared to 1 out of 12.

“Jami is going to do a fantastic job,” Storey said. “She is what they look for: someone who is friendly, outgoing, willing to help others, a good team player and will totally fit into the Disney environment.”

Thinking to the future

Moving to the United States opened up a world of opportunities for Hessell.



She will get to decide if she wants to stay in the United States after graduation to pursue job opportunities, or if she will move back to Japan for work.

Her Disney internship is also opening up additional opportunities.

Hessell is interested in exploring careers in marketing and international business. She is intrigued by the possibility of working for Disney after graduation.

“I always wanted to work for Disney because I love how they give dreams to everybody and make people happy,” she said.

This is her chance to see if that is the path she wants to follow. She leaves in June for her internship, and returns in time for the Spring 2020 semester at Black Hawk College.

“I am so excited,” she said. “And I’m not sure what I want to do still, but now I am thinking working for Disney, so I am happy.”

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