

OUR SIDE OF THE STORY



INTERNATIONAL
VOICES at Black Hawk College

OUR SIDE OF THE STORY

INTERNATIONAL VOICES at Black Hawk College

Spring 2013 • English as a Second language Program



www.bhc.edu





My name is **Amina Hasanicevic**. I am 20 years old, happily married, and I have a one-year old daughter. I come from a small southeastern European country, Bosnia and Herzegovina, which has a population of only 4.6 million. Moving to the USA was the biggest change in my life. My

country is among the smallest in the world while the USA is one the biggest. Life in the USA is very different from life in Bosnia, and I am still learning the American way. I have been in this country since November 2010, and I have enjoyed every day of it. My goal at Black Hawk College is to learn English and to start academic classes so one day I can find a good job. I hope I will succeed in my journey.

Bosnians in the QC: A One-Way Trip That Changes a Whole Life

What makes some people move across the globe? What does it take for them to leave the place where they were born? Why do they think it will be better somewhere else? The beginning of this story goes back to the year 1992. The war in southeastern Europe had broken up a country called Yugoslavia into six new



countries. One of the newborn countries, Bosnia, paid a high price to become independent. Many people lost their lives; some fled the country for good. Twenty years later, some Bosnian people have found their new homes far away from Bosnia. In the Quad Cities, there are about fifty Bosnian families who have found new lives and have been living here since the Bosnian war.

Before the war, Bosnia was a part of Yugoslavia, a country with a high standard of living where everybody had a job if they wanted it and where families had all the basic things they needed for a normal life. My father, for example, used to work for the company called FAD, which made brakes for the German

automaker, Volkswagen. He was able to support our family with his job, and we were all happy with what we had. However, for political and



other reasons, the war came and destroyed the country. For three and a half years, Bosnian towns and villages were burning under the fire of

heavy artillery, grenades, and bombs. Armies were fighting in every town and on every street. Sounds of explosions and machine guns could be heard all day. When somebody went outside the house, it was always a question whether they were going to come back or not.

Bosnians in the QC are those immigrants who suffered a lot before coming to the USA and who appreciate a country such as the USA. After living through the war in Bosnia, every Bosnian appreciates the freedom and the democracy in the USA. Simple things, like having a home or a job, mean a lot to Bosnians. Those are the things that once were taken away from them. There were more than fifty families in the QC area, but some moved away to bigger cities, where there are bigger Bosnian communities such as Chicago, St. Louis, or Des Moines.

Most of the Bosnian families living in the QC work in factories. A number of them work in the meat plant at



Tyson Foods. Like many Bosnian refugees, my mother-in-law found a job at this plant. In Bosnia, she was a stay-at-home mother while her husband worked at the local hotel supporting the family. Here in the USA, they both have to work to pay the bills. However, they both said that they are very happy in the USA. They also said that they work hard just like most Americans, but they can buy the food they want, the car they desire, and one day even the house they dream about. All of that is possible in America if a person works hard enough. The opportunity to earn all of this is what they

appreciate. Of course, like many other Bosnians, they would like to have better jobs, but they understand that language is a big barrier for them.



Unfortunately, a lot of older Bosnians don't speak English fluently enough to get a better job. Like my parents-in-law, many other Bosnians have found themselves in the

same situation, working for some factory, paying bills, making a decent living and being happy with what they have.

Many male Bosnians are driving semi-trucks for a living. This has been the latest trend among the Bosnians because they found truck driving to be one of the easier ways to get away from factories and to move up the pay scale. Truck drivers say that they make good money doing this job. It is interesting that once somebody from the Bosnian community finds a better job, he or she tries to teach more Bosnians how to do the same. The same goes for buying houses, cars, or even insurance. For example, if one Bosnian is happy with some insurance agent, the chance is that many Bosnians will go to the same agent for service because of the recommendations. Bosnian women are in an even worse situation than men because they have even bigger problems adapting to the US job markets. Middle-aged and older Bosnian women are usually shy and withdrawn. Therefore, many of them work mainly in factories.

Finally, most of the Bosnian families keep together because they share the same culture and a similar past, but Bosnians are also very open to accepting the new culture. For example, many younger Bosnians talk English among themselves, and their best friends are Americans. Also, many Bosnian families celebrate American holidays. The younger Bosnians, especially, have embraced the new culture in such a short time while older Bosnians struggle with the language and the fast-paced life here in the USA. Children of Bosnian immigrants speak English perfectly, and they are going to schools to get a better



education. They will have a better shot at the American dream in the future than their parents.

In conclusion, Bosnians are happy living in Quad Cities. To have a home to go to after a hard day of work is what makes a Bosnian in the USA happy. Freedom and peace is what seals the deal for them. They are building their future here. They invest in their kids who attend American colleges. The success of their children will also be their own success. Every day, they become more assimilated to the new society. Their children speak perfect English. Their sons-and daughters-in-law are Americans. Bosnians in the QC are true Bosnian-Americans.



Vahida Alicic is my name. I'm from a wonderful European country, Bosnia. I have been in Moline, Illinois since 2000, where I live with my husband and son. Some of my family members live in Moline, but some still live in Bosnia and Germany. I guess "one" is my lucky number. I have one child, brother, sister,

niece, and nephew. I like people and social life. Therefore, I'm a Life Enrichment Aide at the Kahl-Home in Davenport. My goal is to get my ESL certificate, so I can continue my education in the medical field. Being able to speak Bosnian, German, and English makes me feel proud. In my free time, I enjoy shopping, cooking, traveling, and swimming. I also like all kinds of music. I have the best man, a wonderful son, a great family and friends, who give me a lot of love and support. I feel in my heart that I will achieve my goals.

Can We Prevent School Shootings?

The United States of America is known as the country of freedom.

Americans used to be safe anywhere they went. I'm sure that many immigrants decided to come here, solely based on the fact that freedom and safety are offered, unlike in



other existing countries. However, I'm very concerned about what has been happening lately across the United States. I have realized that public





places are not safe anymore. Quite often, I turn on my TV or computer and hear that mentally ill people have killed innocent people.

What's most disturbing is the fact that the shootings take place in churches, shopping malls, sports tournaments, night clubs, movie theaters, Sikh temples, and schools. Do you know how many people were killed in 2012? Do you know how many students were killed at schools in 2012?

The horrific mass murder at Sandy Hook School in Newtown, Connecticut was a wakeup call for many Americans to change their point of view about firearms. According to the *Quad Cities Times*, the mentally ill shooter of Sandy Hook killed his mother first, and then he easily entered the school building and killed twenty first graders and six adults.

What can we do to make our schools safer? The United States is facing a severe problem of gun violence, so law makers must pass stiffer gun control, improve the country's mental health systems, and provide more modern technological security at schools.

First of all, I can't believe that Obama's proposal to back a ban on sales of firearms faces opposition in Congress. However, it is good to know that Congress is still debating this matter. For instance, I have seen on TV that some people in Newtown silently came to the schoolyard and left the weapons that they owned. However, some people don't agree that guns are the problem. They believe that a gun is necessary for protection.

Yet, do armed civilians stop mass shooters? I don't think so. No one person should stop to think if it's safe to send their beloved children to school. I believe that President Obama made the right decision in ordering the international background check. The background check should have been in effect a long time ago.



Secondly, the fact is that many shooters are mentally ill. According to Abramson "We must deal with mental illness first." *Quad Cities Times December 20, 2012*. Therefore, this

country must fix mental health systems. In 2011, according to the U.S. Mental Services Administration, 40 percent of Americans with mental disorders reported not getting medical help at all. Those patients are out in the world without any supervision. President Obama wants to make health insurance affordable to everyone. That means that many mentally ill people will have an opportunity to stay at mental health facilities, so they can get needed help from professionals. Back in 2009, the National Alliance on Mental Illness gave America's mental health system a D rating.

Thirdly, because modern security devices are available at certain places, like banks, airports, hospitals, nursing homes, and government facilities, the government should



provide security cameras at all schools. For example, at the airport, people have to be checked by the security officials.

Another example is that there are security cameras at stores to make sure people don't steal anything. Why don't we have security cameras at all schools? Also, the school board should hire armed police officers during school hours. We know that there is a device that can detect firearms at the entrance door. Why don't we have this at schools? We don't have it because it is expensive, but our children are worth it.

However, I'm sure that having a detector would help and any gunman would think twice before entering a school building. I'm a student at Black Hawk College, and after watching the shooting reports day after day, I have started to feel some fear. I know that anyone can walk in the school building at any time, and no one is there to check that person. One evening the classroom door was wide open, and I saw a messy student walking down the hallway. Negative thoughts crossed my mind. I told myself that if this man pulled out a gun, I would be the first one to go because I sit in the first row next to the door. After a few moments, the student walked away. My fear disappeared. I'm a thirty- six year old student thinking about shootings at school. I wonder



how the little ones feel about this? They see what's happening on TV, but they have to go to school no matter what.

To conclude, lawmakers in the United States of America must proceed with Obama's proposal about stopping or at least decreasing gun violence, especially at schools. We all know that it is a terrible tragedy any time an innocent student is struck down. I don't want to live my life in fear, and our children should be free from fear. American civilians should give great support to the new gun regulations. The new generations should feel safe at school like in the good old days. If I had the power, this would be a gun-free country. However, this will remain my dream. The reality is that America is facing the biggest gun violence controversy, so it will be a long way to get the issue settled. The U.S. citizens should have the right to use guns



for home defense or hunting, but war weapons should never be available to buy or use in our communities. I believe that stiffer gun control will make a difference.



My name is **Abala K. TASSIKE**. I'm 26 years old, and Togo is my native country. I have four siblings. I came to the USA in June 2011. I am a current Black Hawk College student. I enjoy reading articles, listening to country songs, and watching TV.

PROMOTING FREE COLLEGE

The financing of college in the USA has been an issue of debate for quite some time. Education is a necessity, and it shouldn't be something for Wall Street to make a lot of money from. We don't only need to make college affordable; we need to make it available. It would be no mistake to make college tuition free for everyone in the USA. Today, college students' tuition is skyrocketing, and it is becoming worse each year. However, college education nowadays is as important as clean drinking water. Making college tuition free in the

USA will offer myriad opportunities for the population and for the nation.

First of all, today's America is less educated than the America of many years ago. If we make college tuition free, it will make the nationwide human resources grow. Some countries offer free college tuition. For example, in France, the first two children of a family go to college for free, and then the rest of the children have to pay. Why isn't it like that in the USA? Why can't college be free in this country? If college is free in the USA, it means that everyone would have an equal chance to go to college. In America, many upper-middle and high-class families are able to send their children to college. Talking about the lower-middle or the working class, college is something out of the question unless their children get a full scholarship.

Secondly, if we believe in our future, and if we need to go to college to be successful, why is college tuition so expensive? Why do we have to worry about our education fees? In my opinion, by promoting free college, the USA will regain the throne as the most powerful and the smartest nation. In this country, it is terrible that in order to go to college, people have to be deeply in debt and live with those debts for years. Even then, there is no guarantee they will get a decent job when they graduate. Moreover, many people after graduating from high school cannot go to college because of money, so they have to apply for jobs that don't require a college degree. Unfortunately, in today's work market wherever an advertisement is posted for jobs, there are certain criteria. For example, for marketing executives, companies prefer an MBA degree. In addition, a medical degree is required for eye surgeons. Without a college degree, a person is unqualified for such job posts.

Thirdly, it would help the nationwide economic system significantly if everyone were well-educated.

It would also develop a reasonably aggressive economic system.

Having free tuition in college will be a prerequisite for the growing jobs of the new economic system. Many American families are struggling with this



problem right now. A recent petition began circulating on the internet, asking the government to forgive all student loans as a means to jumpstart the economy. Here is the link you can find some information about this petition www.SignOn.Org. The petition estimates that "Approximately 37 million Americans owe more than one trillion dollars in student loans today." In order to prevent the next generation from swimming through an ocean of debt, we need to strongly support that petition by signing it. We need to go farther, not go back.



In summary, fighting the cost of college tuition is a hot topic these days. More and more, people are realizing how high college tuition has gotten, and now they want that to change. Making college tuition free in the USA would be better for everyone no matter what

economic level the family is in. By making college free, everyone will have a chance to get an education without being in unlimited debt. There are kids and adults all over the country that would love to go to college. Should universities turn down people because they can't afford it? Of course, there are numerous scholarships and loans available, but sometimes they don't help to cover many expenses. Education is completed when parents send their children to college, so that they can build their new lives.



I am **Chrystal Pedanou** from Togo West Africa, a small beautiful country between Ghana and Benin. I am from a big family and have two sisters and two brothers. When I received my high school diploma, I wanted to be an accountant, but I didn't have the opportunity to continue my education. I am married with two kids, Jason and Julissa, and my husband studies engineering in Iowa City. I speak three languages: French, English and Ewe, and I have been living in the Quad City since 2005. I am studying English as a Second Language at Black Hawk College. When I came here, my dream was to become a pharmacist, but now I have



changed it, and I want to be a hairdresser. In my free time, I shop, watch African movies and cook, and have fun with my kids.

Love What You Have

People are sometimes discontent with their lives because they think that what they have is not enough for them, but God said that you should love what you have and never complain about it. But why do people complain all the



time? People need to gratefully appreciate what they already have. They need to love it and feel content with it. Please stop complaining so much, and everything that you want, you will get with joy. Loving what you have frees you from some

stressful thoughts and makes you enjoy life without fear. Loving what you have makes you care for the little possessions that you hold. Whether it is material or not, human beings need to keep proper maintenance of what they have and ensure they get the most out of it. According to the singer Asher Roth in his lyrics G.R.I.N.D. (Get Ready It's a New Day), "Happiness isn't about getting what you want all the time. It's about loving what you have." Some Togolese immigrants complain so much about living in the United States, especially those who have left well-paying jobs in Togo to immigrate here. There are several reasons why people must stop complaining about their life in the USA.

To start, many people quit their jobs in Togo to move to the USA because they think life will be better here. The reality is surprisingly painful for some people who leave careers to come to the USA, thinking things will be easier in the land of Uncle Sam. However, I believe we have to assume the consequences of the decisions we make, love what we have and work toward a better future. For example, I know a couple who migrated to the Quad Cities a few years ago. The husband was a well-paid engineer, and the wife was a business owner in Togo. They sold their belongings in Togo when they won the Diversity Visa, thinking it would be easier when they moved here. However, they came to the reality of working at Tyson as meat cutters with the struggles of managing the kids.



They express their discontent about the US, and I happen to encourage them to appreciate what they have and work toward a better future.

I know another couple who came here earlier and went through the same struggles. However, they focused on what they had, appreciated every bit of it, and worked toward a better future for themselves. The husband went back to school, graduated with a master's here



and is now working as a campaign organizer traveling all across this great land. The spouse received her bachelor's here and now owns two small

businesses in the Quad Cities. In their early days in the USA, this couple had to live apart: the husband in Moline and the wife in Chicago. The reason was that the wife could not find a job in the Quad Cities and could not get hired at the meatpacking plant as her husband. My understanding of this latter couple's story is the fact that they never really complained about their situation. They appreciated everything that their hard jobs provided them and learned from that experience that loving what you have does not mean you have to settle on what you can become. This type of love becomes stronger and more important, especially when people realize that this is the only job that provides them their daily meal and money to pay their bills and support their family.

Furthermore, showing love to the children God gives you should be paramount to anything else. That love should be unconditional, unbreakable and eternal. I am astonished to see couples – either the husband or the wife – complain about the fact that they are only having either boys or girls. None of us make a determination on what child God will give us. I have seen a couple get into a fight because the wife had only girls, and the husband really wanted a son. The opposite is also true in other families. I am reminding families that, in today's world, the sex of the child does not matter much. The most important element is the health of the child. As long as there are parents or people to love the children, they will turn out great. God's plan is totally different from our plan. We seem to live in a bubble where we think everything is possible to get. We need to spend more time loving the children we have. Their sex does not

make any difference in their chance of success in life. As long as we love them, care for them, and provide for their basic needs, they will be fine. As Oprah Winfrey frankly put it, "Be thankful for what you have; you'll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don't have, you will never, ever have enough."

Finally, love does not stop at your job, your current situation and your kids and family. Love goes to your possessions. Folks spend money they don't have to buy things they don't need or that they cannot afford. They just copy what other people are doing. They cannot bring themselves to like and appreciate the few possessions that they have. Spending money on expensive furniture or cars that you cannot afford is a betrayal of your values. For

example, I have one friend who loves to buy new things every year because he is jealous of other people's things, and he loves to buy the same things that his friend has. One day, he went to his friend who bought a used car for \$6000. When he saw his friend's car, he went to buy one which was more expensive than his friend's, but now, he always complains that he doesn't have any money to pay his bills. All this happened because he doesn't love what he has; he thought that his friend's car was better than his.



In short, America is a great country where people can find everything, like good opportunities, good education, and a good future, but if you don't know how to live in America, you will lose your values and any chance you might have to succeed. The key to success is to plan and adapt to a new culture. And how do you adapt to a new culture that you don't know anything about? For example, some immigrants have never cut meat, or they have never worked in a factory, but when they move to another country, they do whatever they need to, and they don't have any fear because they know that it is only for a certain time period. Just love what you do or what you have, and you will live with happiness. One proverb in French says, "Après la pluie, c'est le beau temps," which means, "After the rain, comes the sun."



My name is **Ami Eklou**, and I am from Togo, West Africa. I am 18 years old. I have four sisters, and I am the youngest. I have been living in the United States for almost four years. I graduated early from Moline High School. At Black Hawk College, I plan to obtain my pre-medicine degree and then transfer to a medical school and become a pediatrician

several years later. I want to become a pediatrician because I love children, and they usually have a lot of questions to ask. In my free time, I watch movies, read novels and spend time with my family.

The Frustrations of a College Student

Would finding a job after graduation be easy or hard? Many people believe that graduating from college, always guarantees you to find a job, but that is not true. There are more than thousands of people that graduate from college, but are still unemployed. Also, graduation is a moment of happiness for every student, but that happiness ends when they don't find a job. In addition, the lack of jobs is something that is affecting every country. Working is something that is really important to survive in life and to accomplish some of our goals. One of my friends used to say, "Work frees man." Work is a step in life for success. After graduation, there are multitudes of reasons why someone may be without a job. Someone may be unemployed after graduation due to the lack of jobs, the major they chose while being in college and last but not least, having an accent can be a disability when trying to find a job.

To start, the collapse of the economy is one of the reasons college graduates don't find a job. The rate of unemployment is something that continues to climb. It is definitely better than during the time of the Great Depression, but there are still many people who are not working. In the time of



the Great Depression, the unemployment rate was 25%. Now, the unemployment rate is 8%, but the economy is not doing well. Also, the

collapse of the economy causes a lack of jobs for many college graduates. Furthermore in the past, many American students left their family home after graduation to live on their own. These days, college graduates return home to live with their family due to economic problems; some even still have college loans to pay. In addition, college tuition sometimes is very expensive and financial aid is not enough to pay all expenses. Some students may still need loan money to pursue their education. College loans are paid right after graduation. It doesn't matter whether or not the student is working. They have to pay anyway. Also many students feel pain when they find out that they have spent so much time and money and after all, they are still unemployed. A Hebrew proverb says, "Only time heals wounds." In this case, we can't really say time can help; what can really heal those students' pains is a job.

Next, the major a student chooses is one reason he might not find a job. It is true that we all want to do something we like in life. Doing something we don't like maybe frustrating.

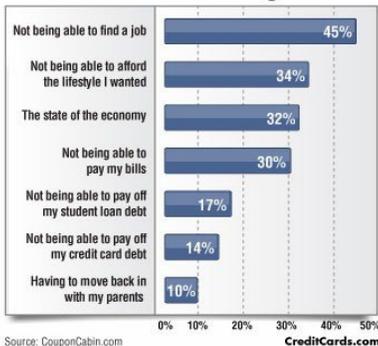
CHOOSING A MAJOR



Unfortunately, life doesn't always work like that because we have to adjust ourselves to the situation we know would be best for us. In addition, college students in their freshman year choose their major. Everyone, of course, chooses what they like. Also, we all know that the lack of jobs is something that is affecting every country, but some fields will definitely need employees in the future. For example, teachers are always needed, especially in middle school. They also retire at a specific age. In addition some students, when choosing classes, don't check their major requirements. They only take classes they feel they are good at. After graduating from college, they end up being unemployed because they haven't taken their major required classes. My cousin Nicole always said, "College is fun." In my opinion, it can be fun, but it is the time to build a future, so being careful is necessary. According to an interview with Ziwei Ren, a student at Black Hawk College, college is an interesting place; she likes all her professors and her main reason to attend college is to transfer to a university and pursue her major.

Furthermore, some students know for a fact they are bad at something, but they want to do it anyway. For example, a student knows for a fact that he is not good at math, but he wants an accounting degree. He takes accounting and gets bad grades or even fails the class. That is

Biggest worries about life after college



obviously not going to help him find a job after graduation because there are people who probably got better grades. If someone with a grade of C and a grade of A applies for the same job, of course the one with grade of A

would get the job. In addition, students should be wise while choosing their classes.

Finally, some college graduates are still unemployed because they have an accent. Having an accent is when someone speaks a language but has a different pronunciation from the native people. Being an immigrant can have disadvantages when looking for a job. Many immigrants work, but they often work at factories. It is very difficult to communicate with people when you have an accent. For example, two people go to an interview for the same job. One candidate has an accent, and the other one doesn't. The manager has problems understanding the one who has an accent. Both have the same degree and also do the interview. Who, between those two, will get the job? In my opinion, the one who doesn't have an accent would get the job. Many have gone to interviews where the manager can't really understand them or even ask for an interpreter. That is really sad because someone may be great for a job position, but he would not get the job because he has an accent. Also, I would personally be frustrated to spend so much to get educated and still end up without a job after my graduation because of my accent. When I was in high school, I had friends that used to have problems understanding me. They asked me almost every time to repeat what I said by saying, "I beg your pardon." Sometimes I just felt like not talking anymore. In addition, after years, the accent disappears and the pronunciation becomes

clearer for the native people. However, it can take a long time for an older person to get a better pronunciation than a young person. A young person is more ready to learn than an old person. The old person already knows a language very well, and the study of the second one may be difficult for them. Also older people always have other problems to think of, so they can't concentrate on practicing pronunciation or making friends.

On the other hand, young people are apt to forget their first language and learn the new one fast. Young people have fewer or no problems, so their minds are open to learn. They have a lot of free time to practice pronunciation, and they are always trying to make new friends. I am personally worried whether or not my accent will disappear one day. I am worried about the disappearance of my accent because I am afraid that many job opportunities will fly by me if I still have it. I am afraid that my accent will stop me from realizing my goals. Also, I am worried that my accent will make me feel less proud of myself.

To conclude finding a job after graduation will not be easy due to three major facts: the economic problems, the major students choose to study, and the accent some students might have. Finding a job after graduating from college is a major problem that every student should worry about. We all need a job if we ever want to live on our own and realize our goals. Many college students work part time to pay some of their college tuition. However, due to the lack of jobs, those part-time jobs are also still very difficult to find. Even though we worry about finding a job after graduation, we should not despair because this is the country of dreams. No matter how bad the economy can be or how bad someone's pronunciation can be if we work hard and pray, we will get what we want. Hoping can never kill anybody, but despair can make someone sad.





My name is **Maria Lourdes Cervantes**, and I am from Guanajuato, Mexico. I am the oldest of five children, and I have four sisters and one brother. I am the mother of two daughters. My oldest is 14 years old, and the little one is 8 years old. I have been living in the U.S. since 1996, so I have lived in Moline, IL for almost seventeen years. I have some

goals to achieve, but the most important one is to finish my ESL classes and start a career in business. One of my dreams is to have my own business, and I hope someday my dream will come true.

Reform of Immigration Law – the Pathway to Citizenship

Every day, more and more people migrate to the U.S. looking for the American Dream, and many of them live in this country illegally. Most of those migrants have been living in this country for many years under the shadows because they are afraid to be arrested and separated from the rest of their family. Unfortunately, in my family there was a separation as well. A wife and two children were separated from a relative. There are millions of undocumented workers that need to be legalized. For this reason, President Obama urges Congress to approve a reform of the immigration laws. A similar immigration policy, called the DREAM Act, has just been approved by President Obama.



This act would allow legalization of young

immigrants who were brought to the U.S. when they were children.

Illegal immigrants do not receive the benefits and provisions given to Americans and legal immigrants through the Constitution, and their rights are violated in many ways. For undocumented people, it is very difficult to find a job. Many businesses are willing to hire cheap labor, but employers pay less money to illegal residents than legal residents; even though they do the same work as any other co-worker, the undocumented do not earn the same wages. In addition, many illegal immigrants suffer discrimination because of their status. Some children at school are even discriminated because their parents are illegal. The

undocumented have to live in the shadows because they are afraid to be deported and separated from their families, and their citizen children have to be given up for adoption at the time their parents are deported. The undocumented cannot get a driver's license. They need to drive as any other resident, but they do not have the right to apply for one. Then in some states, undocumented immigrants cannot rent a place to live because some property owners ask them for a social security number in order to rent their properties. Illegal immigrants have no voice because, unfortunately, they lack the rights to express their ideas.

Therefore, there are many reasons why undocumented people need to be legalized. In his speech in Las Vegas, Nevada on January 29th, 2013, President Obama said, "We need Congress to act - and not just in the DREAM Act, we need Congress to act on a comprehensive approach that



finally deals with the 11 million undocumented immigrants who are in the country right now. We all agree that these men and women should have to earn their way to citizenship. But for comprehensive immigration reform to work, it must be clear from the outset that there is a pathway to citizenship." Also, President Obama said, "It won't be a quick process, but it will be a fair process, and it will lift these individuals out of the shadows and give them a chance to earn their way to a green card and eventually to citizenship, and the principal is we have got to bring our legal immigration system into the 21st century because it no longer reflects the realities of our time. For example, if you are a citizen, you should not have to wait years before your family is able to join you in America. You should not have to wait years."

If the immigration reform proposed by President Obama is approved by Congress, there will not only be many benefits for the undocumented living in this country, but also for the U.S. The first benefit of approving the immigration reform is that there won't be any more separation of families because the deportations will stop. In addition, the immigrants would be free to go anywhere

without fear of being arrested or deported. Also, they can apply for a driver's license and drive



wherever they need freely. Additionally, they will have the same benefits and the same rights as any other resident. Another benefit of legalization is that the immigrants will be permitted to work

legally and get a fair pay for their work. Then with legal status, the undocumented can buy their own house and open a new business. Additionally, the broken economy will improve in this country because the legalized immigrants will pay taxes and spend their money buying what they need. Approving this immigration reform will have more advantages than disadvantages because the contribution of the newly legalized immigrants will increase the collapsed economy.

There can be many reasons why people migrated to the U.S., but the way to end the undocumented people is to create a fair reform of immigration laws. Migrants won't live with fear of being arrested and deported to their original countries if a reform of immigration laws is created and approved by the Congress.



My name is **Subash Bhattarai**. I was born in Bhutan. However my family couldn't live there due to military pressure. I lived in Nepal for 19 years. Along with my mom and dad, I came to the U.S. in 2010. My earlier days in the U.S. were very difficult, but down the road it began to get better. I love to play music, soccer, and volleyball. I enjoy working with numbers and doing meditation.



Parents Should Teach Their Native Language to Their Children

Imagine how you would feel if someone you loved, cared about and given everything to couldn't talk to you over a phone because he needed a translator. What if your own child couldn't understand your language? I think that if immigrants whose first language is other than

English, do not encourage their children to learn their native language, the consequences could be extremely unpleasant in the future. I believe parents have to teach their first language to their children for many significant reasons.

First of all, teaching one's own language to the children will make communication easier. As a bilingual man, I know how much more comfortable I feel expressing my opinion in my mother tongue rather than in



English. I am not the only one who is suffering from this language problem; I have seen this language barrier in various communities everywhere. To be specific, Nepalese children

living in the U.S. whose parents don't have time for babysitting spend many days in day care centers; as a result, they grow up with little use of the Nepali language. Consequently, these children don't learn enough Nepalese. These children hardly understand what their parents are talking about; furthermore, they can't speak with their parents. Hence, teaching them their native language is very important in order for them to communicate well in their families. Next, parents must teach their native languages because if the children desire to visit or continue their education in their home country one day, they won't have to suffer from a language barrier.

क ख ग घ ङ
च छ ज झ ञ
ट ठ ड ढ ण
त थ द ध न
प फ ब भ म
य र ल व स
ष श ह
क्ष त्र ञ

Second, if native languages aren't taught to children, cultural identity can't be maintained. Parents are the first teachers of children; children learn their culture from their parents. If they can read, write and speak the same language that their parents do, then they will learn their native culture better. A child's mind is like a blank piece of paper; he will believe what he has learned and seen very often; therefore, parents should motivate their children to live in a home, filled with the language and images of their native culture. In my opinion, if a child can't communicate in his native language, he can't learn his native culture either. Instead, he/she will learn the culture of the language he is more comfortable with. In other words, how can a child learn about his own culture if he can't understand his own language? Therefore, parents must teach their native languages to the children, so the children

will be able to learn about their religions, beliefs and values.

Thirdly, teaching a native language to the children will promote employment opportunities. Beside English, if a parent focuses on teaching his native language to his child, then the child benefits from bilingualism. Lately, better employment chances in the United States and overseas have been available to those who speak more dialects. For instance, areas like translation, interpretation, customer service, human resources, and sales person are the



various sectors where multilingual employees get more opportunities than others. There is a growing demand for people with foreign language skills across the United States.

Some agencies offer a multiple language hiring bonus package for individuals who have excellent foreign language skills. Hence, children will benefit from the language skills that they have learned from them.

To sum up, if children learn their native languages, they will be able to communicate with the people of their community. Communicating with the people of their culture in the society will help children to learn about their culture and values. On other hand, if parents don't take the initiative to teach their native language, then their language can be forgotten, family relations can be broken, and cultural identity can disappear. Finally, in my opinion, teaching a native language to the children will promote their social interaction, cultural pride, and economic achievement. Hence, I think parents should teach their native language to their children in all circumstances.



I'm **Azogoe Steven Azombako**. I'm from Togo, West



Africa, and my beginning as a legally recognized individual occurred on June 29, 1982. I'm single, and I have four brothers. I've been living in the United States for almost three years with my brother Kossi Azombako, his wife Essi Agbaglo, and their kids Ivana and Gabriella. I've been

studying English at Black Hawk College since Fall 2011. I like listening to music and watching TV.

Foreign Students Should Go Back Home After Graduation

How can foreign students contribute to their home countries and reduce emigration from poor countries? When I was in my country, Togo, I found out that my country needed qualified technicians, doctors, economists, engineers, and teachers. However, it was very difficult to give a good education to our children, and it was impossible to create jobs. Thus, young people left the country looking for a better life. Even though returning home is not easy because of culture shock, foreign students should go back home after graduation to share their experiences with their people and fight against brain-drain.



First, coming home after spending some time abroad is not an easy task; just like moving abroad, coming home can cause culture shock.

"When coming home after a five-year stay in the Middle East, I was really happy at first. Although I loved being there, I really missed home a lot. And then it seemed so great to have all the things back that I have missed for so long. But after a month, things seemed to get worse - I was very miserable, got



depressed and missed the Middle East. The people appeared strange, and even my family and friends, whom I had missed for so long, started to upset me", says German engineer Gerhard

Baumgarten, in his article "Go Back Home." This type of reaction is unfortunately not uncommon. Many students face the same situation when returning home. After a short time being enthusiastic about being home again, they feel increasingly isolated and frustrated with their home environment. What is happening is, in fact, a second culture shock.

The second aspect is that many students come to embody a bit of both their native culture and that of America. As in the example above, the engineer is no longer really "German", but he has become more "Middle Eastern." Thus, coming home is similar to coming to another culture, especially because many people lose their perspectives on their home culture while living abroad. Many people, while being abroad,

will miss their home, which has a tendency to be an idealized home. Once they move back, they are confronted with reality. When people study abroad, they learn a lot; they assimilate to their host culture, and they become accustomed to a different behavior, but their friends and their families at home have not had those experiences. The students may have changed their behaviors quite drastically, whereas the relatives at home have probably not. These students may appear different to their friends and relatives upon returning home, and they may appear strange to each other.

"All my friends were talking about nothing important; they all appeared very square headed to me. None of them really seemed to care for me - we just couldn't communicate at all. After a while, they seemed really a bit suspicious of me.

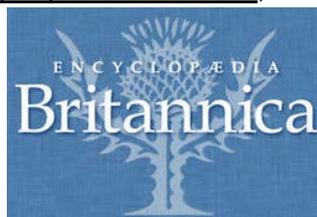


Now, six months later, I have a completely new circle of friends. Many of them have lived abroad or are foreigners. Only very few ones are from before I went to Israel," said Gerhard of his friends.

Unfortunately, not many companies are providing intercultural training for their employees when they return home, although the culture shock can be just as deep and depressing. Many people feel isolated and alienated in their old "home" culture.

Finally, foreign students should go back home to work and build up their home countries, and in this way, they will fight against brain-drain. According to Encyclopedia Britannica,

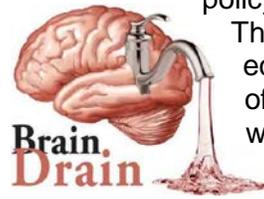
human "brain drain" is the large-scale emigration of a large group of individuals with technical skills or knowledge. When people in rich



countries worry about migration, they tend to think of low-paid workers who compete for jobs as construction workers, dishwashers or farmhands. However, when people in developing countries worry about migration, they are usually concerned about the prospect of their hospitals and universities. These are the kinds of workers that countries like Britain, Canada and Australia try to attract by using immigration policies that give privileges to college graduates. Lots of

studies have found that well-educated people from developing countries are particularly likely to emigrate. According to the Ministry of Education of Cape Verde, two-thirds of highly educated Cape Verdeans, in Africa, live outside the country. A survey of Indian households operated by the Ministry of Home Affairs and carried out in 2004 asked about family members who had moved abroad. It found that nearly 40% of emigrants had more than a high-school education, compared with around 3.3% of all Indians over the age of 25.

This "brain drain" has long bothered policymakers in poor countries.



They fear that it hurts their economies, depriving them of much-needed skilled workers who could have taught at their universities, worked in

their hospitals, or come up with clever new products for their factories to make. However, there are more subtle ways in which the departure of some skilled people may aid poorer countries. Some emigrants would have been jobless had they stayed. Studies have found that unemployment rates among young people with college degrees in countries like Morocco and Tunisia are higher than those among the poorly educated people, perhaps because graduates are more demanding. Migration may lead to a more productive pairing of people's skills and jobs. Some of the benefits of this improved match then flows back to the migrant's home country, most directly via remittances or sending funds.

In conclusion, even though it's not easy to return home after graduation, foreign students should go back because the country that suffers from brain drain eventually loses all of its inner strength due to the scarcity of skilled domestic workers. Indeed, the scarcity of educated and proficient people in the country has a negative impact upon the local industrial development.

Multinational companies avoid coming to such nations due to the lack of capable workers, which also has a detrimental impact on the development of the basic



infrastructure. People in the country suffer due to the unavailability of doctors and engineers. National expenditures increase when buying services from abroad. Basically, brain drain, a curse for developing nations, makes a country hollow from the inside out.



My name is **Essofa Tchiou**. I am from Togo, a country situated in West Africa. I am in my early 30s, and I have four sisters and three brothers who live in Africa. I was a registered nurse in Togo, and I would like to work as a nurse in the USA. I have lived in the USA for three years, and I have lived in two different states.

My hobbies are playing soccer, watching TV and reading books.

Saving Family Values

Family values are on fire. A family is a group of people who lean on each other in times of need and care for each other when they are in need. In fact, families used to live together, do things together, respect and love each other, and plan things together. They were so close to each other that when something happened to one of them, others felt the same pain as the victim. That lifestyle used to make the family a strong, close knit group of individuals ready to give their life for the happiness of each other. In contrast, today, family values are suffering from some specific aspects of today's life in different ways: families are broken apart, family members are no longer strongly linked, and parents no longer have authority over their children; however, these values can still be saved.

Families are experiencing many problems in everyday life. One problem is that families are broken apart, and members fight with each other over things that they shouldn't fight over. For example, people from the same family may fight over pets or cars or over things that don't have any real importance. Another problem is that there are no longer strong links between family members. In fact, family members act like they are strongly against each other as if they are from different



families, or as if they don't even know each other. Parents or children take their own children or parents to court as if they were enemies. Another fact is that children or parents kill their own parents or children for little things or for no real reasons. For instance, recently, one man killed his own mother before going into a school to shoot and kill kids in Connecticut.

Moreover, in the family where there are some family links, there are other problems; some parents don't have enough power to control their adolescent children. Consequently, these adolescents do what they want in front of their parents. For instance, a child can refuse to go to school, or he can smoke in front of his parent. I have a friend whose boy dropped out of school and told his mother that he just doesn't like school, but the mother couldn't do anything. That mother should have taken a strong position as his mother and should have made her son go back to school, but she didn't because she was afraid that her son would leave the house if she tried to establish rules.

Moreover, families are suffering from the bad words they speak to each other. For example, family members curse at one another on a regular basis. In fact, words that didn't use to come out of parents' mouths many years ago are used nowadays by some parents. For example, expressions like *I don't believe you, I don't trust you, I don't forgive you*, etc., are used more and more when speaking to children.



In addition, there are families where parents fight with their children like kids fighting on a playground. I know a man who fell down and broke his arm when he was fighting with his daughter because his daughter was dating a man that he doesn't like.

Also, parents do things that shouldn't be done in front of children. For example, there are some parents who take or talk about drugs in front of their children. All these changes happen because many things have changed in people's lifestyle.

Today's aspects of life affect the family values negatively. Parents are frequently separated from each other. Marriages don't last a long time anymore because not only do people not consider the value of a marriage anymore,

but they also may have gotten married too young.

One consequence is that kids grow up with one parent and hate the other parent because they feel abandoned. Another consequence is that one parent can't teach his kids all aspects of family values. For example, a boy raised by a single mother doesn't have a chance to see how his father lives with his mother at home and to emulate the same behavior. Also, when he grows up, he won't be able to transmit that behavior to his sons; a girl raised by a single parent also doesn't have a chance to see how her parents live together and learn from them.

Another factor is the loss of love which people need to live in harmony. Today, many parents don't show any love to their children anymore, and children feel lost in a jungle. For instance, many fathers refuse their children at birth, and many women abandon their children at birth. One more factor is that women don't feel like their husbands love them because their husbands don't treat them right. For instance, some wives are constantly beaten by their husbands. Also, many husbands cheat on their wives. Men constantly ask themselves if their wives love them. One example is that many wives no longer cook for their husbands or do laundry for them though they live together. Another example is that many wives don't get gifts for their husbands. Also, there is a lack of respect between adults and kids and between wives and husbands. For instance, a lot of children refuse to follow the rules of their parents, and wives opinions are neglected in the families.



The values of a family have declined due to a great deal of difficulties today, but it is still possible to overcome those problems. Three values that lead to the happiness of a family are love, respect and togetherness. One thing a family should consider is love of spouses, children and parents.

The spouses need to love each other. By showing love to each other, they will be in peace, and everything will be good for them. By being loved, a spouse's heart won't beat at all when he or she is coming back home after a long day of work. Also, by showing love to each other, parents teach their children how to love

their future spouses, and their kids will grow up copying them.

Moreover, parents must love their children. Every child needs love, and the parents need to love their kids because when a child feels loved, he or she keeps a good relationship to his or her parents and is 99% certain to transmit that love to his or her children; therefore, parents need to put their effort in their relationship and stay together for the benefits of their children. For instance, parents need to buy little things for their kids or tuck them in at night and read stories to them. They can also bake cookies for their children's school holiday parties.

Kids who grow up with no real parents around usually have a lack of love, and it stays in their mind for a long time, possibly even forever. For example, when I asked Alex, a married man, whether his parents showed any love towards him when he was a kid and what place does his father or his mother have in his life, he said, "My father bailed out on me early in life, and my mom shouldn't be allowed to be a mom."



To the same question, Holly, a married woman and mother of five said, "My parents mean very little to me in my life; my father has never been around, and my mother never wanted me."

In addition, children need to love parents. Any parent likes to be loved by his or her children. For example, children can buy gifts for their parents not only on Christmas Day or New Year Day only but also on other days. They can also write little poems for their parents or draw some love pictures for them. When a parent knows his or her children love him or her, he or she puts his or her effort to the improvement of his family life. For example, parents can spend anything they have to make their children happy when the children show any interest in what they do for them. For example, my friend's father bought a car for him on his last birthday.

Talking about how far he would go for the happiness of his child, Lee, a parent of one, mentioned that his daughter loves him so much, and he added, "For her, I would go to the end of the earth and back."

Another family value is the respect of spouses, parents and children. The spouses need to be respectful to each other. The man

needs to consider the point of view of the woman in the family and the woman needs to consider the point of view of the man. This will cool down any eventual tension that can appear in everyday interactions between men and women. Respecting one's opinion is the key to the family being healthy because when somebody feels respected, he or she always wants to bring something new to the family for the entire good of the family. Also, parents need respect from their children because this makes them feel powerful. When a child shows respect to his parents, these parents love him more and are ready to do anything to help him make the right choices in life. If the parents don't help the child to figure out how to do this, the result is that that kid won't make positive life decisions, and this will have bad effects on the whole family. In addition, the value of a family comes from the respect of children. A child whose parents respect him or her is likely to be more successful than the child whose parents don't respect him or her.

The other family value is the togetherness that should surround the family. Parents have to be together to make their family stronger. When parents are separate, it could cause serious repercussions for the kids who grow up in this situation and could lead to some social integration problems for them down the road. For example, a friend of mine hates women a lot because his mother left his father when he was five, and he lived with his father who always talked negatively about his mother because he couldn't have her anymore. Also, family members, need to work together to make their family a stronger family. When a family member



needs help, others should come to help him and be a part of his support. For instance, when somebody needs financial or material help to reach a goal, family members need to give him money or buy him the material goods.

In conclusion, family links are broken down, and family values are destroyed due to the family members' carelessness, loveless and trustless behavior. Although these are big family issues, there are many ways to keep families alive, and this requires everybody's attention. I believe that if family members don't stop tearing

each other apart, this world will be a real battlefield one day.



My name is **Sandra Espiritu**, and I am from Mexico. My family consists of my mother, two brothers, four sisters and me. I have been living in the United States with my family for fourteen years. I enjoy living in the United States because it is the country of opportunities for everybody. I work at Adolph's Restaurant and study at Black Hawk College in Moline. My dream is to become a CNA, so I can care for the elderly in an institution. I hope to speak English fluently because that will help me fulfill my dream and goals. My hobbies are shopping, reading and spending time with my family.



Mexican Food in the United States

When I was living in Mexico, my family and I used to eat at the beach, and we ate fresh seafood, which was served with rice and spicy sauces. My mom likes shrimp, and she always asked for shrimp in garlic sauce, and my siblings love "pescado a la diablo", devil fish. These dishes are served with the traditional Corona beer. Before I moved to United States, I thought I would miss the traditional Mexican food a lot. But when I arrived in the United States, I was very surprised to find that Mexican food seemed to be very popular here. However, I soon noticed that there are differences between authentic Mexican food and Mexican food in the United States.



When Americans refer to Mexican food, they are usually talking about Tex-Mex. Tex-Mex is a combination of the words Texan and Mexican and refers to an adaptation of Mexican dishes to Texan food. The Tex-Mex cuisine originated with Tejanos (Texanos of Mexican descent) as a mix of native Mexican and Spanish food. Now, it has become popular all across the United States. However, Tex-Mex food is different from traditional

Mexican food in terms of the types of dishes, the ingredients, and the spiciness of the food.

First of all, the best known types of dishes in authentic Mexican food are enchiladas, tamales, and tacos. These dishes are prepared and served differently in the United States. Other types of dishes include beef, chicken,



fish and turkey. These dishes are accompanied with beans, rice and traditional tortillas. Also, street food such as sopes, tlacoyos,

tacos, soups and tortas are very popular in Mexico.

Many dishes in Mexico are defined by their sauces. For instance, adobados, a spicy pork or beef dish, pipian in moles, which includes entomatados (a spicy tomato sauce), and a hominy soup called pozole are all defined by the sauce made with green, red, and chili peppers. In contrast, in Tex-Mex cuisine, the main dishes are chimichangas, quesadillas, burritos, and nachos, and they use mole sauce, tomatillo sauce and grilled meat, but these dishes are not common in Mexico.



Second, authentic Mexican food has a variety of ingredients, often including fresh cilantro and avocado. In Mexican cuisine, chefs prepare their dishes with onion and garlic. Other native ingredients are avocados, tomatoes, squash, cocoa and vanilla, and some edible flowers like huauzontle and papaloquelite, as well as various fruits as pineapple, sapote, pears, mangoes and cherimoya. People prepare authentic Mexican food with traditional ingredients; as a result, it is a pleasure to eat this delicious food.

A difference in the ingredients of Tex-Mex food is that Americans add sauces of all kinds and large quantities of cheese, either shredded or melted, to nearly every dish.



Therefore, Americans delight in eating food with sweet sauces, and they prefer Tex-Mex over the traditional cuisine.

Finally, the Mexican food is prepared with a lot of spiciness. It is more common in the Mexican cuisine. Mexicans like to eat spicy food, and it is an important part of our cuisine. If a food is not spicy, we say it is not good because we are used to eating spicy food, and we don't like sweet food because we can't taste the spiciness. For example, I like cooking salpicon, which is roast beef with eggs. This is a delicious dish because it is a spicy dish, and my family loves to savor the salpicon. In contrast, Americans prefer their Tex-Mex food with traditional sweet sauces, and they don't like spicy food. However,



I know some Americans who are married to Mexican people, and they like spicy food, so some Americans have gotten used to eating spicy authentic Mexican food.

To conclude, the differences between authentic Mexican food and Tex-Mex food in the United States are the types of dishes, the ingredients and the spiciness of the food. Authentic Mexican food and Tex-Mex food use different flavoring and cooking techniques, so this makes the difference of the dishes. There is a huge difference in authentic Mexican food and Tex-Mex food, but they both are delicious.



I'm **Adoukoe Gisele Tounou**, and I'm from Togo, a



small country between Ghana and Benin in West Africa. I came to the USA because I want a better life and improve my English accent. I'm a mother of two funny boys, whose names are Bryan and Edem. I have five siblings: three wonderful sisters and two magnificent brothers.

I speak five languages: French, Ewe, Mina, English and a little Cotocoli. Watching movies, reading articles in the newspaper, listening to music and dancing are my hobbies. I also enjoy talking to my family and playing with my children in my free time. My first dream was to become a nurse, but when I took a CNA class in 2011, I felt depressed, when I saw patients, so I have not decided on my major yet, but I think I will be a pharmacist or get an accounting degree. I would like to thank my brother Georges and his wife

Georgette, who were my advisors and financial support until I came to the USA.

Togolese Immigrants: Between Two Worlds

When people immigrate to the USA in order to have a better life, they try to hold on to their old culture, but little by little, the new culture starts to influence them, and they begin to change.

I'm from Togo, a country which is located in West Africa. When I first came to the USA, it was very difficult for me to practice the new culture, but after two years, I began to change. I have been living in the USA for many years, and I have noticed that some cultural aspects such as language, clothes and food have been changing for me and for the people from my country that live here.



First of all, there are more than fifty traditional languages spoken in Togo, and French is our official language. Of course, we do learn some English in Togo, but we always focus on French. When we came to the US and began a new life, speaking English created challenges everywhere. For example, some Togolese have applied for certain jobs, but during the interview, they lost them because they couldn't explain themselves. Due to these challenges, the majority of Togolese immigrants has started going back to school. Most of us start with the ESL program at Black Hawk College in the QC because we want to improve our English. For example, one of my cousins, Justin, wanted to become a doctor, but he had problems speaking English. However, he was always focused on what he wanted, and in 2006, he started working with international students at Black Hawk



College and sometimes at Western Illinois University and the University of Iowa to practice his English; however, it took time for him to finish his education because he had only learned French when he was in Togo. Now, he has become a doctor and enjoys working at the hospital.

Togolese people do not want their children to focus only on English, so we mix our traditional languages, French and English, when

we speak to them at home or anywhere else. This helps them to become familiar with two, three, or even more languages. As a result, we all feel proud of adding English to our languages, and that has helped some of us find a better job in the United States.

In addition, language is not the only aspect that changes for Togolese immigrants, but also the clothes change. As we adjust to the new culture, we dress like Americans most of the time, but we wear our traditional clothes made with coarse fabrics on holidays, at church, at home and sometimes at funerals. Why do we like to dress like American people most of the time? First, in Togo, we have nice warm weather all year, but in the USA, sometimes it is cold, sometimes it is hot, and the climate changes every three months, and our traditional clothes are not appropriate for the weather in the US. Second,



as seen in advertisements, magazines and on TV shows, many young people like to wear new stylish items. For example, many young Togolese wear baggy pants, shoes, T-shirts, hats and hairstyles associated with the hip-hop culture. Third, most young people become friends with American people, and they often copy their dress style. As for me, I used to wear our traditional clothes when I used to live in Togo, but since I came there, I wear our traditional clothes only sometimes and American clothes most of the time because I always wear American clothes to work because of the company's dress code and because I feel more comfortable that way. Besides that, we still often wear our traditional clothes. For example, we celebrated the independence of Togo in the Q.C. During this event, we all dressed in our traditional clothes and had posters that represent our country.

Fortunately, people from Togo know how to cook very well. We like to eat homemade food cooked with fresh vegetables. In the



USA, most of the time, when people from different countries come to our parties, they appreciate our cooking very much. However, preparing our traditional dishes takes one or two

hours on a daily basis. As I see now, because of time, some people from my country enjoy American food because it is easier and quicker to prepare.

Furthermore, most of our children like to eat American food all the time and often dislike our traditional food. Why do our children prefer American food? They like to eat American food because it contains more sugar and more calories, for example, fast food and snack food. My neighbor's daughter Sonia, for example, always eats American food. She is ten years old, but she looks like she is fifteen years old because she is overweight. To avoid weight gain and health problems, Togolese parents talk to their children during meal times and tell them our traditional food is healthier, contains fewer calories, more vitamins, and more fresh vegetables, and they won't become fat, but they will be very strong from eating the traditional food. Most of the time, we want them to be in the kitchen to watch and learn how we cook.



In conclusion, since I came to the USA, I have noticed that all immigrants want to hold on to their own culture, but little by little, the US culture influences us. Togolese people are mixing some aspects of both cultures, such as language, clothes, and diet. Even though we enjoy having some aspects of American culture present in ours, we are also still strongly willing to keep some of our own traditions. It is amazing for Togolese immigrants that as we travel to a new country, we learn new things and add to our traditions and culture.



My name is **Adama Hawa Bah**. I am from Guinea. I am married and have four children. I speak five languages: French, Foulani, Malinke, Soussou, and English. Before moving to the United States, I worked at the Central Bank of the Republic of Guinea (CBRG) as an administrative assistant for four years. I also worked as an administrative assistant at the Ministry of Transportation in Conakry, Guinea for eleven years. I have been living in the United States since 2004. I am currently attending the English as a



Second Language (ESL) Program at Black Hawk College. I look forward to completing the ESL Program and taking academic classes. My hobbies include: going out with friends and family, listening to country music, and watching Lifetime movies.

Baby Shower

It is always good news to have a newborn in a family, whether it is in the United States or in other countries around the world. However, babies are welcomed differently depending on the society. The ceremony is based on culture and beliefs; it also depends on the country where the couple lives. Indeed, a baby shower in the United States is quite different from a baby shower in my country, Guinea.



First of all, in the United States, people usually have their baby showers before the baby is born. Women typically celebrate this special occasion. Nowadays, men are getting more involved. A couple invites the guests to the baby shower by sending personalized invitations to friends and family. A place is decorated for the party, and the couple also organizes games. Guests can win prizes at the baby shower. The couple receives many gifts for the baby, such as a crib, a high chair, a baby swing, a car seat, a stroller, etc...

The parents-to-be also receive clothes and toys from the guests. Some couples ask the guests to bring diaper packs. The couple cuts the cake, and people eat and drink. A baby shower can be a polite gathering of friends and family to celebrate the upcoming birth of a new baby. Truly, baby showers in the United States are fun.



On the other hand, in my country, Guinea, the baby shower organization starts a week before the baby is born. There are a lot of roles to be played by the father of the baby. The father buys clothes, a bed, a mattress, and toys for the baby. On the day the baby is born, it is the father's responsibility to inform the mother's side of the family about the newborn. In our

culture, the week the baby is born, the mother and the baby are not supposed to go outside the house. The mother is not supposed to cook, and she is not supposed to do laundry either. The couple's friends and family come over to welcome the newborn. The father's responsibility is to invite family and friends by going to their homes or by sending them post cards for the baby shower. He also invites traditional singers.

The seventh day after the baby's birth is the baby shower. Friends, family, and neighbors come over with gifts, such as clothes for the baby. The mother's side of the family brings gifts



for the couple and their baby; they also bring food. During the ceremony, food and drinks are provided. There

is traditional music playing, and people are dancing.

In conclusion, baby showers are different in the United States compared to Guinea. The ceremony is based on culture. It also depends on the country where the couple lives. These baby showers are not only fun, but they are also a way to help the new parents get a jump start on everything they need to bring the baby home. Our cultures may not be the same, but baby showers in both cultures involve family, friends, food, and showering the mother and baby with gifts. They are also a way to bless the newborn.



My name is **Idee Nkongoro**, and I'm originally from Burundi, but I was born in Congo (DRC) and grew up in Tanzania. I am living with both of my parents, two younger brothers and two younger sisters. I have been living in the U.S. with my family for five years. I'm multilingual, so I work for Quatro Language Services as an interpreter in the Quad Cities. I graduated from Rock Island High School in 2012. Right now, I am studying at Black Hawk College in Moline, IL. I want to have an accounting degree in the next few years. In my free time, I like to play soccer, go shopping and spend time with my friends and family.



Leaving Friends and Family Behind in Africa

I was twelve years old when I came to the U.S. with my family. The reason why we came to the U.S. was civil war. In 1972, there was a civil war between the Tutsi and Hutu tribes in Burundi. During the war, my parents moved to the Congo, and that is where I was born. In 1996, another war started in Congo, and we moved to Tanzania. We lived in Tanzania for ten years, and I made a lot of good friends there. I also had many family members with me in Tanzania.



Finally, we decided to move to the U.S. because there was still no peace in Burundi. The day we had to get on the plane was a really sad day for me because all my friends and family came to say bye to me, and some of them were crying because we were leaving them. There are a lot of things that can happen when you leave the people you love the most behind in the country you used to live in. The most common things that happen when you leave your family or friends behind are you miss them; they are going to need your help and sometimes you start forgetting about them.

First of all, when you move to a different country, you will miss your family and friends that you leave behind. The family and friends you are leaving behind are also going to miss you, and they often think that you don't care about them anymore since you are going to live in a better place. For example, when I moved from Africa to America, my family and friends used to say that I was going to have everything I needed and that I was not going to think about them anymore. Since then, when I try to tell my family members that I miss them, some of them don't really think I'm telling the truth. They always just say, "You are just trying to make us happy." I often think about my friends and family and all the good times we had together. Even though I miss my family and friends, it's kind hard to go back and visit them because it will take a lot of money and time.

Second of all, the family and friends you leave behind are going to need your help a lot. When your family or friends know that you moved to the U.S. or any other country, they are going to ask you to send them some money.

Your family is going to be asking you to help them with a lot of things. It is sad that when you help them with what they need for the first time, they are going to ask for your help all the time. For example, I have an uncle whom I was able to help when I first came here, but now I'm unable to help him, and he won't accept the reasons for me not being able to help him now. Your friends may also do the same thing. In fact, when your family and friends see that you don't help them anymore, they may even stop talking to you, and that is how you start losing your relationship with your family and friends that you left in your home country.



Finally, when some of your family and friends stop talking to you, you start forgetting some of them because you think they don't like you anymore. Sometimes, you may also be so busy with your life that you start forgetting

about them. There are a lot of ways you can start forgetting some of your family members and friends. Some of your family or friends may make you mad and you just stop talking to them. Personally, I don't talk to any of my friends in Tanzania because when I came to the U.S., I was only twelve years old, so it was difficult for me to keep track of my friends' phone numbers, so now I cannot call them to talk to them. Since I don't have a way to connect with them, I'm sure they are going to forget about me because I don't talk to them anymore, and they don't talk to me, so that makes me really sad.



In conclusion, there are three things that often happen when you leave your family and friends behind in your home country. You are going to miss them, they are going to need your

help, and you are going to start forgetting about them. I believe that leaving family members and friends in your home country is a really difficult situation because you don't get to go visit them anytime you want, and they don't get to come visit you anytime they want. I have made up a goal that when I am finished with my education, I am going to save up some money so that I can go visit my friends and family. Family and friends

are a very important part of our life, so we should try to make an effort to stay in contact with them, no matter where they are.



My name is **Prophete Saint Fleur**. I am from Haiti,



the first independent Black republic in the world. I have been happily married for one year, but we don't have any child in our family yet. Since I moved to the U.S. one and a half years ago, I have lived only in Moline. I completed a bachelor's degree in management when I was in Haiti,

and I plan to do a second bachelor's in either supply chain management or marketing in the U.S. Watching TV and enjoying soccer games are my favorite hobbies.

A Lifestyle that I Miss

Poverty, political instability, and natural disaster are certainly the things that pop up in anyone's head when thinking about Haiti. This image of Haiti is often shaped by the

international media, the international organizations, and of course the Haitian rulers themselves. If I



conducted a survey and asked the question, "Who has ever heard about Haiti in a positive way?" Without surprise, the number of my positive answers would be equal to zero. However, the Haiti that I know is very different from the one portrayed by the media. In fact, I wouldn't trade the Haitian lifestyle for that of anywhere in the world.

I grew up in the northern part of Haiti in a city named Saint-Marc. My family was Christian-Baptist of the middle class. Since I was an infant, one thing always caught my attention: the harmony existing between my family members and the neighbors. When I was growing up, each time a family in my close neighborhood cooked, the family had to send a part of the meal to the neighbor that they were closest with. Food sharing between neighbors was customary at that time and is still common today. I remember always having food on the table even when my family did not cook for the day.

Different from the concept of family in the U.S., in Haiti we have extended family. It is hard

for me to talk about “my parents” because I had more than one father and mother, not to talk about the countless aunts, uncles



and cousins. Although I was not related by blood to any of my neighbors or friends, they were aunts, uncles, or cousins so and so. This lifestyle was enjoyable, peaceful and respectful. It was only when I grew up that I realized that I was not related by blood to any of these people. Nevertheless, they had the right to discipline me anywhere if I misbehaved, and they could do so any way they found appropriate.

I remember when I was twelve years old; without my parents’ permission, I went to see my favorite soccer team, Tempete of Saint-



Marc, rehearse at the city’s main soccer field, Levelt Park of Saint-Marc. After the game, my friends and I planned to play some soccer before going back home. It was a Saturday morning, and I didn’t

have any homework or house chores to do. So as planned, we played some soccer and headed home around 10 a.m. On our way, we suddenly heard a man’s voice behind us saying, “Well, well, well look who is walking in the streets of Saint-Marc dirty.” It was Uncle Gerald, a strict neighbor that any child would fear. We explained to him where we were and what we were doing, but no explanation seemed good enough for him. He accompanied each of us to our respective family and asked that we be punished because it was better for us to cry now than our parents to cry during a lifetime. My parents were so

shocked to hear that I dared go out without their approval and to see me dirty in dust. I was commanded to shower and change my clothes immediately. Then, as punishment, I had to sweep and mop the floor, clean the carpets in the bedrooms, dust every piece of furniture in the house. Worst of all, I had to spend two hours on my knees while reviewing my lessons. At the end of the day, my friends and I gathered at my backyard, away from any sight to complain about each of our punishments. After all, that’s all we could do.



That event still remains in my mind as if it happened yesterday. But when I look back, I realized how the respect for others, the obligation to be well-behaved everywhere and every time have shaped my existence.

Now that I am living away from my country, I still believe that life in Haiti can’t be compared to anywhere around the world. I find it amazing to see people in the streets laughing, discussing, and taking care of their business without any concern.

Even though I have a good life in the U.S., I miss the possibility that I had to just walk to the beach where I used to spend a whole day in the warm water and under the beautiful sun. I also miss the Haitian traditional food that my mother used to cook for me. The U.S. has given me the opportunity to travel around the world, and I am grateful for that. But there’s nothing that I can compare to the Haitian lifestyle. That’s why each time I go back to visit Haiti, I feel like I am visiting heaven. I meet true happiness; that is why I plan to spend my retirement days in my home country, Haiti.



My name is **Akouvi Esse**. I was born in Togo, West



Africa. I have been in United States for five years. I first came here as international student, but now I have my permanent resident card because I’m married to Edward Goyito-Mensah. My parents have seven children; however, I’m the sixth one and all my brothers and sisters are back home. I have only my cousins in USA. In

addition, I have two beautiful kids, who are Prince and Michelle. Right now, I’m a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), but my wish is to be registered nurse (RN). I love handball and music and I watch TV in my free times.

Abuse of Leadership in Togo

Revolutions won’t occur if leaders behave well. However, many African presidents come to power by force and abuse power, which leads to changes, corruption and injustice. For this

reason, we have the abuse of the leadership in Togo.

First of all, everything changed when President Gnassingbe Eyadema came to power. As soon as he settled in, he didn't want to leave. He changed the constitution of the country so that he could stay in power forever. Indeed, he dictated laws and brought new rules to the country. Gnassingbe Eyadema reigned for 38 years. After he died, his son took over. He has



brought terror through the country. The army is by his side. People of the country are terrorized. We have no freedom of speech. We are obliged to agree with everything

the president is doing in order to stay alive. In addition, people are arrested and sent to prison for protesting against the President. Some of them are burned alive. The president is against any idea that can bring us democracy. Everywhere in the country, we see soldiers walking in the street, disrupting any movement against the government. These actions have made people angry, so they revolted against the president. Some of them left their country behind to take refuge in neighboring countries. Sometimes the president sent spies to those countries to kill his opponents.

Secondly, besides these changes in government, there is also corruption in Togo because the leaders are corrupt. They steal the wealth



of the country. Most of the time, the government consists of the president's relatives. They decide on the future of the country. They live in luxury, and the rest of the people live in poverty. The General of the Army, the bosses of the big companies in the country are their friends. It is hard to find jobs unless one is close to the government. Sometimes, to find a job in our country, you need to bribe the person who is recruiting. Moreover, these leaders don't have pay checks. They think of the country as if it is their property. Therefore, everything in the country belongs to them. When the developing countries help our country financially, the money goes into their pockets. For example, if money is

given to build roads or hospitals, they use the money to build mansions for themselves. In addition, these leaders rob the country and use the money to buy beautiful houses abroad. They send their children to study in the USA or in Europe. These children live more comfortably than people who live in the USA and Europe because they have a lot of money. Plus, when foreign people come to construct companies in Togo, they don't directly pay the employees. The government receives the salaries, and they give those employees less pay. In every part of



the county, there is corruption. Even the lawyers and the judges are corrupt. They don't try a case like in democratic countries. The president and minister's children are not arrested even if they do commit crimes. In school, they give money to the teachers so that they could send them to the superior classes.

Finally, the worst part about the situation in Togo is not only the changes and corruption, but also the injustices. In hospitals, the doctors and nurses treat rich people better than poor people. For example, when I was a child, I was sick, and I went to the hospital. In pediatrics, all patients got treated on the same bed without changing the sheets. However, when a rich child arrived, the doctor ordered the nurses to change the bed. They brought a new bed with a remote control. When they were done with her, they changed the bed back for the "regular" children. In addition, in some places in Togo, you can't get a job quickly unless you are from the North because the president of the country is from the North. The Northerners took over the jobs and left the people of the South with nothing. The help Togo received from other countries was sent to the North. Everything was about the North, but the capital of Togo is in the South. These injustices push people to go on strike every day.



In conclusion, there is a lot of abuse of leadership in Togo. The leaders treat the country as if it is their property.

They do whatever they want. Nobody has the

right to be against or disagree with the government. The leaders forget that when they wrong their neighbors, they are making enemies. These enemies become their opponents and this situation can engender civil war.



My name is **Ines Djondo**, and I am from Togo, a small country in West Africa between Ghana and Benin. I have been living in the United States with my family for two and half years. I have three siblings, two sisters and one brother. I graduated from Moline High School in 2012, and right after that, I decided to further my education at Black Hawk College. I speak three languages: Mina, French and English. My dream is to get my doctorate degree in medicine and become a pharmacist. My hobbies are listening to music, watching TV and spending time with my family.



Guen Society New Year Celebration: Epe Ekpe

The country is so dynamic and crowded; the road becomes busy. People come from different parts of the world; some arrive by cars, and some by planes. Tourists are impatient for the celebration; Togolese are excited to meet with other family members. Then comes the real date of the traditional New Year, Epe Ekpe; Epe means “Year,” and Ekpe means “Stone.” This ceremony coincides with another event called Yeke Yeke, Harvest of Maize. The celebration has two steps: the public manifestation and the family festival.

By virtue of the importance of this celebration, people dress pleasantly. Men wear trousers with a cloth tied around their belly and a lot of traditional jewelry. Women wear nice dresses, a little bit fancier than usual. Women dress with layered clothing adding tattoos, wearing a piece of cloth tied over their dress and a lot of traditional jewelry also. This traditional jewelry is made of natural materials, and usually, they wear multiple colors of jewelry; however,



they go shoeless. According to Ms. Adoukoe Tounou, people arrive in the stadium of Glidji in Aneho City in small groups and sing the traditional song “Abe, Abeba.” Usually, the traditional priest will say “Abe,” and the crowd will reply “Abeba;” that motivates and helps them to accomplish the ceremony. Among those people are ambassadors of Europe and America, and the stadium is overcrowded with lots of people.

According to my father, who was born and raised in Aneho, the public celebration happens on Thursday. However, three months before that, when someone dies, people do not play drums during the personal funeral; they can only go to church and do the funeral after. After that, three weeks before this event, the great priests begin their preparations. This part is called “Trace of Direction.” During the public festival,



people walk to a jungle. When approaching the jungle, one man, usually an old person, will go alone to the forest, cover his face to pick a

stone and hold it with two hands. Immediately, the public wants to know the color of the stone. Everyone turns his or her eyes in the direction of the great priest. Then the great priest shows the stone to the four directions: north, south, east and west. After the crowd has seen the stone, the representative of the priest tells the divine message of the stone. Then after that comes Yeke Yeke, Harvest of Maize. According to the history, Epe Ekpe originated from Ghana, a country west of Togo; therefore, they come to Togo every year, and the great priest shows them the stone. This is a reminder for the Guen where they are originally from. Afterwards, the Ghanaians take one stone with them.



Also, according to my father, there are different kinds of stones, and each color has a different meaning and gives predictions of the coming year. These are the different stones: – black means death, accident, war, disaster and famine – red means health, wealth of old people – blue means too much rain that could lead to flooding, good agricultural

production and animals – white means a good year, a year of prosperity

Depending on what color the stone is that year, it is followed by a particular message, which is the prediction for the coming year. According to my father, if the year will be dangerous due to the color of the stone taken, the great priests do some traditional ceremony to reduce the effect, like praying to the traditional God, calling our ancestors and asking for their protection for the coming year. Then after the population knows the color and the message of the stone, they go back to their houses and continue the celebration.

When continuing the celebration in their homes, family members come with their sacrifice to thank the traditional God for his protection during the last year and then ask for more protection for the new year. Every sacrifice depends on the person's status. For example, if you are rich, your sacrifice will be different from those who are poor; however, rich people and

poor people can buy the same thing to thank the traditional God, but the difference is that the rich give more than the poor ones. During the festival, people play music, sing, dance, eat and drink.



To conclude, Epe Ekpe is a traditional New Year celebration for the Guen people, those who came from Aneho into the southern part of Togo, West Africa. This celebration has two steps: a public manifestation and a family manifestation. It is has an important meaning for the Guens. For this reason, they gather together in Aneho every September to celebrate it. It is another opportunity for people to see each other because some people can only meet during this festival.



My name is **Simon Maria Nsue Mokuy**. I am a political exile in the U.S.A. Rock Island in the Quad Cities is the only place I have lived since I came to the U.S.A. on November 30, 2006. I was born in Equatorial Guinea, Africa. I speak Spanish, French, and English. Before coming to America, I was working as



manager at a pharmacy. I was also the owner of Business Express, and representing our political party, FRRAGE in Equatorial Guinea. Between July – December 2002, we were planning to have a meeting in Paris, France with all political leaders of the Equatorial Guinea's opposition to find the ways we could end the anarchy in Equatorial Guinea. However, on January 28, 2003, I was kidnapped by secret service of the dictator, Mr. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo. Consequently, the International Community put pressure on the regime to release me. Finally, I was released on March 15, 2003. Therefore, I fled to Libreville, Gabon on March 22, 2003, where I made the request for political asylum to the U.S.A. Now, I am here to learn more about politics. I want to become a political scientist. Indeed, at that point, I will go back to my country to finish what I started in 1983. That means the end of the anarchy of Mr. Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo and family and open a new page of the history of Equatorial Guinea.

FREEDOM IS NOT FREE

A quote from Jean Paul says: "If you choose yourself, you choose all mankind." Yes, life is about freedom, and freedom is about life. Imagine life without freedom, and freedom without life; whatever the circumstances, they are inseparable. Freedom is the right of a person to make his own choices and to carry them out. The words freedom and liberty mean the same thing. For a person to have complete freedom, there must be no restrictions on how he thinks, speaks and acts without being controlled by anyone else. From a legal point of view, a person is free if society imposes no unjust, unnecessary, or unreasonable limits on him. Society must also protect his rights, which are his basic liberties, power, and privileges.



A free society tries to distribute freedom equally among all its people. Most legal freedom can be divided into three main groups. Political freedoms, social freedoms, and economic freedoms. Indeed, all those freedoms come to insure and confirm the first one as the fundamental right in our society in a civilized world. These are our rights from our first day on earth until our last day. Whoever replaces these rights for ideology exposes the society to danger with unpredictable consequences.

To illustrate, the absence of freedom around the world has tragic consequences.

Again and again, history has shown us the negative effects of intolerance in our society



The French Revolution
1789

from generation to generation. It is sure that humans can be patient with intolerance and injustice for a period of time, but there have been times that people could no longer endure the dictates of dictators; the intolerance of extremism, or watch the injustice and corruption around them. For example, there is the case of Spartacus when

he fought against Rome's anarchy in 71 B.C. There is the case of thirteen Colonies in America, which refused to pay more taxes and started the revolution that drove them to independence in 1776. There is the case of the French Revolution in 1789, which ended the monarchy. By the way, other countries also followed the experience. In addition, there were Germany, Austria, Italy, Hungary, Russia, and others. Indeed, the results were revolutions caused by intolerance and injustice.

In the same negative way, recently history re-hunts us with the Arab Spring. The Middle East and Africa are in turmoil because for a very long time, those areas have experienced the same level of injustice and intolerance which Europe and thirteen Colonies suffered.

Reflection and debates have always been the tools that we use to fix anything that is wrong. As the chaos in Middle East and Africa show, we need to fix the world. That is the reason I chose to write about freedom: start a debate of how we can improve freedom, and democracy everywhere and reduce or end the bloody fights for freedom. By using new methods, we can act with common sense to make freedom the wall that would protect us against potential dangers from the collateral damage of those conflicts. That is what this article is about. It is an invitation to the world to work together and to make the Earth a better place to live everywhere: from North to South, and from East to West. For instance, in order to stop violent fights for freedom, we must identify the causes, and fix them; indeed we all know



that violence is caused by intolerance, and injustice. This is a point, often overlooked. That is why I am asking the USA to play its role of leadership to make the world safer. Here are some ideas that I believe could help:

- A. The U.S. and the United Nations should encourage more dialogues between rivalries. That will slow down anger in some regions.
- B. The U.S. must sell democracy around the world. This means the U.S. should condition, create or use the aids it has already had to help the world, and use them to promote democracy and freedom in the world.
- C. The U.S. Congress should create a commission to supervise elections around the world, work with presidents who were elected democratically, and help them on the way of progress. However, refuse any contact with presidents who won elections with 96%.
- D. The U.S. should deny visas to dictators and their families and block them from the world bank and other monetary institutions.
- E. The U.S. should work with the European Union to make heavy sanctions against presidents who plunder their own countries, and condemn populations in misery.
- F. The United Nations should also have the courage to tell the truth to dictators. Presidents who torture and kill their own people should not represent them in the United Nations.

Finally, I am in the U.S. seeking help, not only for my country Equatorial Guinea, but also for Africa in general. I want to help Africa get freedom and democracy; indeed, I want to help the world fight terrorism. Of course, winning the battle of democracy is winning peace; freedom is life, and life is freedom. Both go together. There will not be peace in the world when some states and people struggle for freedom.



MANOS UNIDAS POR LA DEMOCRACIA

However, the world will be in peace when everyone enjoys freedom. As Mr. Jean Paul used to say: "If you choose yourself, you choose all mankind." That is true in every aspect in our society, even more true about freedom because what is good for us, is good for everybody else.



I am *Ziwei*, and I am 19 years old. I just came from China in August of last year. At first, I was not comfortable staying here, but now I feel much better. My family is in China, and I am living with my aunty now. I was a high school student when I was in China. I want to study accounting and get a master's degree in it. I will study hard to make my dream come true. I deeply hope everyone can make his or her dream come true!



Typical High School Life in China

I graduated from high school almost six months ago. From the first day I stepped into the building, I found that high school was a new world which was filled with newfangled things waiting for me to explore. High school showed me a kind of brand-new life which was totally different from that of my junior high school. Most importantly, in China, high schools are totally different from American schools. When I was in high school, I felt extremely tired every day, and sometimes I didn't even want to study because of the high school students' life which consisted of difficult academics, tense times and unwritten rules.

First of all, when I went to high school, the first thing I faced was that I needed to adapt to the high pressure which was caused by the difficulty of academics. In my country, if you are a high school student, it means that you have to spend almost all your time on your studies.

Although the universities are the same as in the U.S., because of the large population, only the excellent students



can go to a good university and make their dream come true. In addition, all the things about our daily life are well-arranged by our parents. We don't need to worry about food and clothes, etc. Our parents will do anything they

can do for us; all the parents hope their children can just focus on their studies and get good grades. Moreover, you will have eleven classes each day you are at school. We have Chinese, math, English, physics, biology, chemistry, history, geography, Marxism and some art class. Every class lasts fifty minutes, and we need to follow the teacher all the time. After studying in class, we will have ten minutes to have a break.



For example, I would always rest on my desk, and sometimes I liked to talk with my friends. At the same time, you both have matins

and vespers, during which you need to arrange the time by yourself to recite the text and do your homework. Can you image that one class has more than 70 students? I can. In my class, I was seated with more than 70 students, so I needed to pay 120% attention on my school work, and then maybe I could be a top student because everybody was working hard.

Second, high school caused a lot of tension for me. When I was a high school student, I needed to arrange my time precisely during the day because time was money for me. I had matins at 6:30 am and vespers at 9:00 pm. You can see that I spent almost all day at my school except when I had lunch at noon and dinner in the evening. Many students always complained about the time. For instance, one of my good friends,



named Yuzi, always said, "I don't want to live! Ziwei, kill me, kill me." Obviously, I didn't have time to myself, or time to do other relaxing things, but I did have a break on weekends. Sadly, I also had a large bundle of homework to do. For example, I needed to write some essays for Chinese class; I had to do a huge number of math problems; I also had to do English writing and reading, etc. In my country, we just have three years of high school, and the third year is the most difficult time. When I was in my third year of high school, I forced myself to wake up at 5:00 am, and I finished my studies at 12:00 pm at night. Why did I want to spend almost all my time on studying? It's just because I wanted to be a top

student in my class and get great grades to go to university.

Third, unwritten rules are an interesting part of my high school. We have some unwritten rules on dressing. First of all, we needed to wear uniforms on Monday because we would raise the national flag each Monday; other times, you



needed to wear simple clothes. Our high school uniforms always have two colors like white and green, white and black, red and black, or white and blue. At

the same time, the uniform was really just like ordinary sports clothes. Seriously, girls couldn't wear short skirts, and boys couldn't be dressed like a street dancer or gangster. When it comes to hair, girls couldn't have long hair, and boys couldn't be bareheaded. Next, you couldn't be late, and if you were late, you needed to stand outside until the class was over. If the teacher was in a nice mood, she would let you come into the classroom. Especially, if you were a lovely and good student, the teacher would be nice to you. In fact, in my school, everyone knew the other students' grades and who was the best student in the class, so we would all try our best to "run to the front." After all, most people loved the student who was smart and could get good grades. I always tried my best to go ahead because I wanted to make my mom happy.



To conclude, my high school life differed so much in terms of the academics, time and rules. The academics were difficult; the time was tense, and the rules were tough. I always felt like I would give up, but I was really eager to be a useful person in my society, so I thought it was worth it for me to use one hundred percent of my energy to make my dream come true. When you read my essay, it may amaze you if you grew up in another country. I hope that in the future my country gives more students an opportunity to attend the university and allows more time to also do things they really like and enjoy.



My name is **Sunday Paw**. I am a Karen and am originally from Burma (Myanmar), a country which is located in South East Asia. I was born in a Thai refugee camp. My family fled Burma and moved to Thai refugee camps before I was born because of the civil war in my country. I have three brothers and no sister. I spent my life in a Thai refugee camp from when I was born until I was seventeen years old. Life in a refugee camp wasn't easy; it was just a safe place for refugee people to live, but there were no opportunities for refugee people. Fortunately, refugees had an opportunity to move to the U.S. or other countries, so in Aug 17, 2008 my family left the refugee camp and moved to the U.S. I enjoy living in the U.S. because there are a lot of opportunities for everybody. I graduated from Rock Island High School in 2012, and now I am studying at BHC. My hope for the future is to become a registered nurse because I like working with sick people.



My Karen People Become Refugees

Ever since my country gained independence in 1948 from Great Britain, it has never been at peace. In 1949 the Karen ethnic group, to which I belong, started asking for our own land from the central Burmese government. However, the central government refused to give it to us. Once the demand was refused, the Karen people started an armed revolution. The fighting first broke out in the cities and lasted for many years, and later it began to spread to rural areas where most of the Karen people reside. Because of this, my Karen people have become refugees. The three reasons why we have become refugees are there are no opportunities, there is civil war, and there is human right abuse in Burma.



First of all, my Karen people have become refugees because there are no opportunities in Burma. We have our Karen leaders, but they have no opportunity to lead us, and also we have our own land, but the Burmese government took our land. We were treated cruelly and violently, and also less than human. Moreover, since Burma is a Buddhist country, the Burmese government wanted all the Karen

people to become Buddhists, but the Karen people didn't convert because most of us are Christian. Therefore, the Burmese government started killing the Karen people. They didn't



have mercy or care if a person was a woman or a child. Once they started killing the Karen people, the Karen people fought back. The Karen families had to start hiding because if

the Burmese government saw them, they killed them.

Secondly, my Karen people have become refugees because there is civil war in Burma. Many Karen families including my parents, fled to a nearby jungle area in hopes of going back to our village in a few months. However, as war continued and fighting between the Burmese government and the Karen rebel soldiers dragged on, the few months they hoped to stay in the jungle turned out to be many years until the Karen people and my parents finally moved to refugee camps in Thailand in 1987. Once in Thailand, my parents still dreamed about going home in a few years when the war ended and fighting stopped.



Some of the Karen people didn't want to live in a refugee camp because it wasn't their homeland. After they heard that the civil war was over, some of them went back to Burma to live peacefully. However, everything they hoped for turned out to be the opposite. Moreover, the civil war didn't even end, it still continues.

Finally, as war continued, so did the human rights abuse and poverty. Ordinary people could not make their living peacefully. Like many other families in my village, my

parents could not survive in our village anymore and fled in 1986. The Karen people continued to flee and made their way to refugee camps in Thailand. In 1991, I was born in my parent's first refugee camp



in Thailand. Although, I never experienced war nor witnessed it, I know what's happening in

Burma. I can understand why many Karen people, including my parents, fled my country and moved to Thailand.

In conclusion, though I had not been born yet when my parents first left our village and moved to another place to escape war. I do understand how and why I became a refugee. It was not my fault, but a result of no opportunities, civil war, and human rights abuse in my country. This is how I became a refugee, and how I ended up in Thailand even before I was born.



My name is **Joel Jacob Viyegbe**; I was born in Abomey, Benin, a peaceful country in West Africa where I grew up with my brothers and sisters. I am married and have three children, Maeva, Aurel and Bryan. Before graduating in industrial maintenance from the University of Calavi, Benin, I received my high school diploma in mathematics applied to mechanics from a vocational high school. Upon graduation, I taught physics in public middle and high school for three years before being hired by Chevron Corporation. During my ten-year career with Chevron, I held different positions from aviation operator to maintenance supervisor to assistant superintendent at Cotonou airport. I have lived in the USA for two years. My hope is to have well-educated children, and my goal is to continue working in aviation or with any oil company in the USA.



Market Day in Abomey

Abomey, a former colony of France, was a powerful kingdom in West Africa during the 17th century. Like everywhere in the world, the villagers go shopping on market day. The market day is not a special date in the year; however, it is a day in the week that comes every five days.



Because of its importance in the life of the population in Abomey, the market day is a business day chosen by the king's charlatan. It is a day of great preparation and animation in the village.

According to the story that I heard from my parents, the place and the first market day was chosen by the king of the village after he

consulted his charlatan. For instance, the place where the market livens up in my village was chosen by King Guezo. This place is not near the king's palace; however, the place must be a



safe place, which allows the king's security services, information services to have all information in the real time and the population to make their exchanges.

Besides, the first day of the market was chosen by the king's charlatan who consults the Fa (oracle) and makes scarifies and traditional ceremonies before the place opens. For example, I heard that the first market day in my village was Wednesday, and the place was called "Hundjolo." The market Hundjolo was indicated by the charlatan, Guedegbe, who did all traditional rituals for the inauguration of the market. Actually, the choice of the market place and day are the responsibility of the administration.

Secondly, because of the importance of market day in the life of my village, people prepare for this day seriously. For example, in my village, the day before the market day, the sellers arrange the items, which they want to sell. For example, because the fields are so far from the home and the market, the farmers come back home, and they tie the products of the harvest such as corn, beans, fresh tomatoes, peppers and yam, and other things that they want to trade behind their bicycles. For instance, my uncle, a

palm oil seller, fills bottles with palm oil, packs the bottles in boxes, and ties them behind his bicycle. Moreover, I remember that each day before the



market, after I came from school, I helped my aunt who sold snacks on the market to sort out her belongings. Therefore, everybody hurries to have his or her item arranged, so they are not late for the market the next day. The day before the market day is not only a busy day for the sellers, but it is also a busy day for people who want to buy supplies. In my village, people review the products that they need in order to live for the next five days. For example, it is the day before the market day that my father gives the cooking money to my mother to supply our

needs for the next five days when she goes shopping. Usually, she buys maize, beans, rice, tomatoes, palm oil, peppers, and cassava powder.

Thirdly, market day is one of busiest days for everybody in my village. For instance, early in the morning on the road, women walk with their goods on their heads heading to the market place; men bike with their goods tied behind their bicycles towards the market. At the entrance of the market, vehicles of every shape and any size align in the big parking lot. They bring diverse articles and any kind of food from



all the corners of the village and the nearby parts of the village. Porters and young people pulling carts transport the goods towards the diverse

points of sale, and with difficulty, they clear themselves a passage between the crowds of sellers and buyers.

In the old time, to avoid that the enemies infiltrated the village, the security services had multiple check points around the market. Today, the police department increases the controls and patrols. In the market where there are no stores, the sellers install their goods under the hangar in rows. There are rows of tomatoes, rows of peppers, rows of corn, beans, etc. For example, my aunt sold loincloth that people use to make shirts and pants in her row. Also, some people who did not have a place in the market put their goods on plates on top of their heads and rode around the market to sell. More importantly, there is a hard competition between the sellers in the same row; each seller struggles to sell more than his neighbor. For instance, two sellers of tomatoes yell at the same buyer to buy, and people can hear from the sellers: "Honey! I have a product that is good quality with a low price; come here! I could decrease the price a little bit for you; if you buy one, you get one free." In the row of the cassava powder, important goods that students use as a snack after they come back home from school, people can taste it to see if the product is the quality that they want before they pay. It is a hubbub of a multitude of sounds and colors.

Somewhere in the market, people even fight against the pick pockets to get back their wallet. In another place, it is the seller who

help each student understand and give them more explanation about the topic.

Finally, some students have to stay at school during lunch because they don't have enough time to go home for lunch. They only have one hour for lunch break, but since lunch is not offered at school, they have to go back to their house to eat lunch there. For that reason, those who come from far away don't go home to eat lunch. As a consequence, some of these children struggle when it is lunch time. During the afternoon classes, the children who did not eat lunch will often be sleeping because they have no energy. While some children went to eat their lunch, those who are from far away stayed at school until it closed. And then they go home in the afternoon, and some children will still not have had anything to eat.



In conclusion, we need the necessary equipment to build many schools in my country. I would like to ask people to support the idea to build schools in my country because we desperately need more schools. I think the government should add more schools in my country because children need to be educated because they are the ones who are the future of Burundi.



My name is **Regine Uwimana**. I am originally from Rwanda, which is a small landlocked country located in Central Africa. I have been living in the U.S. for almost three years, and I am married. I am currently taking ESL classes at Black Hawk College in order to improve my English. I am interested in nursing. I speak five languages: Kirundi, Swahili, Nyanja, English, French and my native language Kinyarwanda. I currently reside in Rock Island, Illinois, and I work at Rock Island Academy as a paraprofessional. My hobbies are reading, watching TV, educational movies, listening to music, and traveling.



Learning about Traditional Marriage Ceremonies in Rwanda

Do you celebrate any traditional events?



Have you attended a traditional marriage? Many cultures have different views toward traditional marriage. In Rwandan culture, traditional marriage is very important. It is rare to hear of a girl

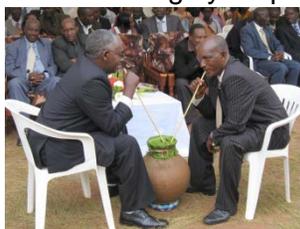
who walks into a man's house before her parents receive a dowry. Also, a Rwandan says, "A man and woman who are living together without having had a traditional wedding feel isolated. They are too ashamed to spend time with each other's families, and when they have children, they cannot take them to see their grandparents." Usually, there is no need for paper evidence of marriage in Rwanda because the whole community is witness to the traditional marriage. A typical Rwandan



traditional marriage involves members of the two sides of the families and the community itself. Many people value their traditional

marriage, but others don't. Rwandans value their traditional ceremonies. In the Rwandan traditional marriages, there are several main ceremonies such as the traditional engagement, the introduction ceremony and the dowry.

First of all, in Rwanda, after a young man has been dating a girl for two years or more, he proposes. When the girl has agreed to the proposal, the young man goes to tell his parents. The young man's parents arrange for the traditional engagement, or "Gufata irembo." This is when a highly respected person representing



the groom's interests in marrying their daughter meets with the prospective family. The family of the groom-to-be gets ready and decides on a day to visit

the bride-to-be's family. "Gufata irembo" does not require spending much money, but does require respect and discipline. The groom-to-be's family brings a local beer called "urwagwa",

a hoe and a company beer with soft drinks to the bride-to-be's family. When the groom-to-be's family gets to the bride-to-be's house, the spokesman chosen mentions the reasons why they have visited. He will mention the name of the bride that the groom is interested in. Representatives from the groom-to-be's family negotiate with the bride-to-be's family for the dowry.



Indeed, when the family of the bride-to-be agrees about the dowry, they will set the date for a formal introduction ceremony, or "gusaba no gukwa,"

which is to bring gifts and a dowry called "inkwano" of appreciation to the bride-to-be's family. The introduction ceremony, or "gusaba no gukwa," is a traditional event given by the family of the groom. Moreover, the introduction ceremony is where the bride's side deduces if the groom and his family are able to protect and take care of the bride. This event takes place at the bride's house, and even though the groom-to-be's family pays a dowry, it is the bride-to-be's family responsibility for the preparation and cost of guests that attend. If the groom's side wants, his family members can suggest helping out with some of the costs or food.

On the day of the event, the groom's side and the bride's side sit on opposite sides. The groom and his family come to the bride's house and sit with members of the community before the bride comes out. The men who stand as the groom's father and the bride's father start a conversation. The groom's father asks if they accept his son into their family. In Rwanda, the traditional marriage involves negotiation. Sometimes it takes an hour long battle of wits before a request is approved. The groom will sit in a special seat with his groomsmen waiting for the bride. The bride will come out after her family brings several girls of different ages pretending that each one is the bride. This is a test for the groom. The groom refuses to choose any girl because the real bride is not there. The bride's family will claim that those are the only girls in the house, but the



groom's family has to insist. After that, the bride's family will bring out older girls with veils covering the tops of their heads. They will be singing and dancing and carrying different gifts to give the groom and his family. Then, when the groom has chosen his bride, the older girls come with hugs and kisses. They will exchange gifts and the groom takes the bride to a chair.



groom has chosen his bride, the older girls come with hugs and kisses. They will exchange gifts and the groom takes the bride to a chair.

Lastly, traditional marriages in Rwanda have a dowry called "the inkwano." This is typically paid for by the groom or his family to the bride's family in the form of cows or money. The two sides will agree on the number of cows or the amount of money. Also, if the groom's family chooses the cows, the cows must be healthy. The groom's family can give the bride's family any number of cows they agree upon; for the majority, it is only one. For money, they count it using the price of a cow, but some families give money according to how rich they are. Moreover, the dowry is the groom's way of demonstrating his suitability as provider for his wife.

Before the bride's family asks for a dowry, or "inkwano," representatives of the two families serve each other with soft drinks, a traditional beer like a banana beer (urwagwa), a sorghum beer (ikigage), and traditional tobacco.



To conclude, conventional marriage is considered the most basic social institution in Rwanda. Rwandan young people still accept the standard marriage, and they are excited to go



through the age old process. The customary marriage is still strong and rarely falls apart because people from Rwanda still respect their culture. These typical

marriages bring together families because the ceremony involves the parents on all sides, extended families, neighbors, and the whole society. Alexis Rusine, a sociologist, explains. "In Rwanda, nothing can replace a traditional wedding, not even a religious ceremony."



My name is **Maria Salazar**. I was born in Northern Mexico in a town named Zacatecas. I have four sisters and three brothers. I am married and have three children, one son and two daughters. I moved to the Quad Cities in 2007, but before that, I lived in Torrance, California. I study at Black Hawk College, and my dream is to



become a CNA. I like to practice yoga and meditation. What I enjoy most is spending time with my family, especially while watching a soccer game. Soccer is my favorite sport because I've been around it since I was very young. I believe this sport is truly amazing.

Soccer Unites

Soccer has been around for many, many years as it originates from ancient Greece although our modern soccer differs from it. It's a worldwide sport and very controversial. Since the moment I came

into this world, I was introduced to soccer. Soccer has and will continue to make a very big impact on my life. Attending a



professional soccer game is something unforgettable. The stadium will fill up with thousands of fans to cheer their team on throughout the whole game and will go wild if a foul is committed against them. When a goal is made, shouts of victory will invade the stadium as well as disappointed looks and sighs. From experience, I believe this sport allows you to meet new people because if you meet someone that likes the same team as much as you do,



chances are you'll become great friends. It's amazing how a simple soccer game can unite so many people and

how a World Cup can unite countries.

First, the Federation Internationale de Football Association, FIFA, is the official organization that organizes different tournaments for soccer clubs and international soccer teams. Soccer is divided in different

confederations throughout the world determined by the country's region. The FIFA World Cup is the largest international soccer tournament in the world. Since the year 1930, the World Cup is hosted in different countries every four years. During this tournament, countries come together and unite as one. Some dedicated fans might even travel to the country in which the World Cup is hosted and support their team in the stadium. The upcoming World Cup will be in 2014, in Brazil.

In addition, the World Cup is not the only



international tournament; there are numerous others in each confederation. The CONCACAF confederation, which includes countries such as the U.S., Mexico,

Honduras, Guatemala, El Salvador, etc., has one main tournament named the Gold Cup. The Gold Cup is hosted every two years and whoever wins is announced as the best team in the confederation and qualifies immediately for the next World Cup. The next cup will be hosted this summer in the U.S. In my family and many other Mexican families, it is custom that when Mexico's international soccer team plays, we have a family reunion or a large cookout while enjoying the game in company of family and friends. Traditional Mexican food cooked for this day are, but not limited to, tacos de carne asada with extra hot sauce, rice, beans, and sometimes even enchiladas. To drink, adults usually drink

beer or tequila and children drink agua de orchata. Agua de orchata is a sugary mix



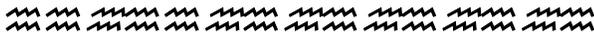
made of ground rice, cinnamon, sugar, and water. It's very tasty! Regardless if the game is just a simple friendly game with no competition/tournaments involved or not, we still have some sort of gathering. When the team plays and the game has an actual meaning like a World Cup game or something along those lines, we unite.

Attending an actual game is very different from watching it on TV. The last international tournament game I attended was part of the

Gold Cup 2011 in Chicago. It was a game between Mexico and Costa Rica. I enjoyed it just as if it was my first time. The stadium was packed. I remember later hearing that there was an attendance of about 60,000 people. It was very exciting, and all I remember was yelling in victory as my team scored. I also remember celebrating with strangers, but at the time, it didn't seem strange. It felt right.



To conclude, soccer is a worldwide sport known by everyone, and it also very controversial. The most crucial base of a team is the fan base. Without it, it wouldn't be a team. The motivation given is beyond recognition. It's amazing how a simple soccer game can unite so many people and how a World Cup can unite countries. The world unites for a ball.



My name is **Tara Rai**. I am from Bhutan, a beautiful Himalayan country between India and China. I was ten when I left my country and spent most of my teenage life in a refugee camp in Nepal. I went to high school in India. My hobbies are dancing and playing music. I live with my two brothers and my mother. We came here to the United States on August, 18, 2009, hoping for a better tomorrow.



My Mother's Role

As the saying goes, "God could not be everywhere, so he created mothers," and this is true with my mother. Ever since I can remember, she has worked hard, not only for our family, but for our society, too. She has given equal importance to her work and family. She is a straightforward type of lady, which must be the reason why people respect her and her work. She mostly used to help women and encourage them to be forward like men are, study and work. Her boldness to fight for women's rights, for our society and for our family in our conservative society makes me feel proud.



In our country, people still think that women are meant only to take care of family and not for work outside the home. Parents think that daughters have to go to their husband's house to take care of their family, so it would be a waste of money to educate daughters; therefore, parents only educate their sons and not their daughters. When we were in Nepal, my mother used to influence women to leave these old thoughts behind. At first, she worked in adult education and used to teach the Nepali language to women. From there, she gradually worked on motivating women and later formed the BRWF (Bhutanese Refugee Women Forum) organization, where my mother and a few of her friends worked to raise women's voices. My mother used to go to every individual hut in camp to see if there is any kind of pressure put on sisters or daughters, like not sending them to school, making them do all



of the work at home, etc. She used to tell people that women and men are equal, so there should not be any kind of discrimination among sons and daughters; there should be equal rights for daughters to live how they want, just like sons.

People in our society have very conservative mindsets. They think that in our society there are higher and lower level people by cast. People of a higher cast used to neglect people of the lower cast during special celebrations, like feasts and festivals. They thought that if people of the lower cast touched anything, then it would be impure. But my mother used to make those people of the lower cast work at those special festivals. She used to say in mass that things being pure or impure by touching is just a misconception; there isn't anything that makes things impure. For example, our neighbor lady was from a lower cast, but she was educated, and my mother told all of the people in our community to elect her as head of our sector (group of huts in the refugee camp) to look after our sector in everything like distributing food, counseling social cases, etc.

So my mother went to every single hut and asked people to vote for her, and they did. She was elected sector head and did a great job, and everybody was glad and thankful for my mother's help.

Not only has my mother helped our society, but she has taken great care of my two brothers and me ever since our dad, who was an alcoholic and gambler, left us when we were small. She didn't think of getting married again because she thought that there would be other children from a new husband, and we would not receive the same care and love. So she brought us up by herself in that difficult situation during the civil war in Bhutan. We had a restaurant at that time, and my mother did all of the cooking, but even then she used to get our school



uniforms ready for us, prepare lunch and help us with our homework. She always fulfilled our desires, no matter how much cost she had to bear. She always encouraged me and my brothers to study. Whenever she had to go out of town for her work, she always used to tell us not to fight with each other and not to go with strangers. She said that because one time our dad tried to take us with him when my mother was out of town, but as soon as she heard the news from our neighbor, she phoned almost all gateways, so my dad couldn't take us.

In conclusion, any woman can become a mother, but being a true caring mother is really difficult. However, my mother managed to help other women and fulfill her motherhood responsibilities at the same time. We still hear from our friends in Nepal saying that they miss our mom so much. They say that they feel like there is no one to protect and help them. Her great work for women, our society and our family makes me proud to be called her daughter.

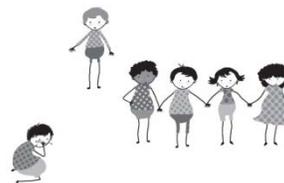


My name is **Amadou Dia**. My native country is Mauritania, but I grew up in Conakry, Guinea in West Africa. I have been living in the Quad Cities since 2001. I am a big fan of soccer and basketball, and if I am not at work or school, I will easily spend time watching the news. Going to the YMCA with my wife and two boys is also one of my habits.



Discrimination in Guinea vs America.

When I was growing up in the 90s in Guinea, West Africa, I did not realize at the time how much discrimination was around me. Back then, I used to think that I was a unique case. I didn't know much about the diverse ethnicity around me. As I would learn later on, with all the technology surrounding me in the 21st century era, discrimination based on ethnicity exists all over. The dictionary defines racism- as an unfair treatment of people or violence against them



because they belong to a different race from your own. Ethnicity or ethnocentricity is based on the idea that one race or one group is more important than any

other. Therefore, people suffer when they become victims of racism.

My first experience with discrimination was when I moved from my village, Pita, to the capital Conakry, where I had to learn a new language because in Guinea, where there are more than fifteen different ethnic groups, each student has to study in his own dialect until he goes to high school. One day on the field, we were playing soccer and a group of kids came to tell me that I wasn't from the city, so I could not play soccer with them but should go back to the village to take care of



farming; another example was at the beach. Two other friends and I who also weren't from the city were trying to swim, and we came across some people who instead of showing us how to swim made fun of us and called us a

name like country boy: "There is no ocean where you are from, so you can't swim."

Meanwhile, from my reading and studying, I understand more about how the country was ethnically divided and how the government has a say in all the division so that the ethnic group that is in power can stay there forever. For example, if the population strikes for more freedom, justice and equal treatment for the citizens; the government replies with tear gas, beating and jailing the protesters.



Furthermore, in Guinea, the gap between the different ethnic groups is becoming larger. The diverse ethnicity is everywhere in Guinea from school to the work place. In the army for example, 80 % of the soldiers are from the same ethnic group.

Moving to America in 2001 was a dream come true for me in many ways: no more discrimination, more freedom and more opportunity. However, during the first year, when I worked at Tyson Food, I was going through almost the same kind of discrimination I went through back in Guinea with two big differences here.



First, here I was being discriminated against by my coworkers who happen to all be from South America. People were calling all of them Mexican not knowing the difference between Mexicans, Nicaraguans, Salvadorians or Panamanians. For all of them, I was the main reason why the line was not running or anything else.

Second, here there is a place where to complain and there is always a follow up, so the discrimination could not go on for a long time.



In one word, racism and ethnicity are part of our society, but being a racist or being ethnocentric is the cancer of any nation. I believe that with better education, understanding, and tolerance between

humankind, we all can live side by side in a harmonious way.

XXXXXXXXXXXX

Hossou Zounffa, in full **Hossou Claude Boniface Zounffa**, is my name. I am a native of Cotonou, Benin, West Africa, I was born June 4, 1983. I grew up in Cotonou, the most developed city in Benin, in a big family. I am the third child of Houna Catherine, my mother, and the twelfth child of Isaie Zounffa, my father. After my high school graduation in Benin in 2005, I attended the University of Abomey Calavi from 2005 to 2010. After presenting my dissertation the following year, I graduated from the same university with a master's degree in economics. I worked in the field of education from October 2009 until March 2012 in Benin, where I taught mathematics and economics before coming to the United States in spring 2012. I speak French, Goun and Fon. I hope to speak English, Spanish and Arabic down the road. I am very interested in research, macroeconomics and the stock market. I have decided on the career of a professional economist; I hope to embrace a career as a speculator. Having lived in the US over the last 40 weeks, I made up my mind to learn new things and to make the world a better place through my hard work, honesty and willingness. I look to the winners of the Nobel Prize of Economics as my role models.



Improving Student Services at Black Hawk College

Student services are a great concern for all students. What do student services look like at learning institutions? I would say that most activities at educational institutions depend heavily on student services; without those, schools cannot survive. It is true that a student's goal, which is to improve his or her life through learning, may be reached when a good policy and good services are in place, which is to say that these services are one of the principal resources by which students may reach success, get a better job after earning a degree,



and participate in the job market, and on and on. In this regard, Black Hawk College offers a variety of useful and interesting services to its students. The essential services include:

- *Recruitment
- *Enrollment Services
- *Financial Aid
- *Orientation
- *Academic Advising
- *Counseling
- *Student life
- *Tutoring
- *Banner Support
- *Community
- * Athletics

This article considers four questions. First, are all the services functioning effectively? Second, which services should students know about? Third, what do they need to do to get help? Fourth, how are the student services aligned with the college's mission statement and core values? In two separate interviews, Dr. Vallandingham, the Vice President of Student Services and Mr. Ty Perkins, the Student Retention Coordinator, responded to my questions.



Black Hawk College offer a large number of student services. Are all the services functioning effectively?

"The services are functioning, but we continue to improve them all for our students. For instance, Black Hawk College has created its Facebook page; it did not exist five years ago," said Dr. Vallandingham

Which services should students know about? What do they need to do to get help?

"All services are functioning." He went on, "We do good job on advising and



counseling. If a student needs help, the student should stop at the First Stop Center. I am sure that he or she will be satisfied. We even help students who have family issues. For instance, if a student has a problem with his girlfriend, we can help him deal with his problem, and this is the student's life," declared Dr. Vallandingham.

According to Mr. Perkins, "Students should be aware of all services that are available to them in Student Services such as advising, career services, tutoring, disability services, student life, counseling, TRIO, Perkins Career Program, financial aid and enrollment services to name a



few. These services are vital to our campus and significantly contribute to student success." He went on, "A student can visit our First Stop Center or contact someone within Student Services for help anytime. We are always available to assist and help direct students to the appropriate support area. Students can always visit the **First Stop Center** during business hours to be connected to someone in Student Services," he mentioned.

How are the student services aligned with the college's mission statement and core values?



"When we talk about resources, Student Services provides an abundant amount of resources to students from advising, financial aid, enrollment services, career counseling, tutoring, disability services, student life, to



counseling to name a few. Now with the new First Stop Center, we bring many of these resources together in one location." He went on, "In Student Services, we discuss our core values quite frequently. These core values are incorporated into everything we do at Black Hawk College. These values are frequently discussed within the department," Mr. Perkins explained.

Every single service offered to students at a school is vital to both learners and educational institutions. When the service is available, it must function effectively. After my interview with



Mr. Perkins, the Student Retention Coordinator, we visited all the offices concerning each service listed above. I saw staff and teachers interacting in the context of improving their student services. Where will you go as a Black Hawk College student if you have any concern or problem? You do not need to worry any longer. You don't need to talk to anybody. Just stop at the First Stop Center. You will be satisfied.



My name is **Koffi Alavo**, and my three other given names are Wisdom, Senami, and Theodule. It's true that I have too many given names. I am married, and I come from Togo, a country in the West Africa region. I came to the United States nearly six months ago now, with the aim of finding new study and work opportunities. My career goal is mainly focused on the



communication field, and I am planning on becoming a speechwriter in politics. I really like discussing and arguing political matters, and I am also an advocate of social justice. My hope and dream is that the African governments will one day free themselves from the domination of the Western countries, who tend to control their politics and their economy, and thus the social life of the population in Africa.

The ESL Program Evolves at Black Hawk College

I was really enthusiastic and eager to learn new academic skills when I started the ESL Program this spring semester because I assumed the curriculum in the US would be different from that of my home country, Togo. Although I knew the ESL program at Black Hawk College surely has many services to offer to international students who would like to further their academic studies at higher levels, I wanted to know more about how it all started, about the program as of today, and about its future perspectives. An interview with the ESL Program Coordinator Anne Bollati, and David Murray, the Dean of Arts and Humanities, helped me find out more.



The English as a Second Language (ESL) Program spans more than two decades at Black Hawk College, providing comprehensive English language training for many international students, who look for advanced studies and better job opportunities. It all started with the developmental classes that were held at Black Hawk College in the beginning, in order to help international students to integrate into the American education system, but these programs proved to be insufficient for the needs of the international students. For this reason, Anne

Bollati, the Coordinator of the Program, worked cooperatively with other faculty and staff to produce what the ESL Program is made of today.



The Coordinator started the ESL Program in 1991, with the aim of setting up levels of academic classes for international students, so they could succeed when furthering their studies at the university. The Program shows that there are motivated students who want to achieve their academic goals and devoted teachers filled with that readiness to transmit the knowledge. About ten students started in the ESL Program, and the initial goals were to train and prepare these students for academic courses, to familiarize them with computers and the Internet, and also to help them get to know more about the university system in the United States.

The major goals have been achieved through the ESL program today, and this is proven by the fact that many students who have completed the ESL program have succeeded afterward in academic classes and have good jobs today, according to various testimonies of alumni of the program. However, "The growing number of new international students that are settling in the Quad Cities may be due to the consistency of its economy," noticed Dean Murray. Consequently, the academic needs of the new-comers tend to change frequently, and it is then the responsibility of the ESL Program to identify the new trends in needs in order to adjust accordingly.

Moreover, the office of the ESL Program continues to receive positive feedback from both former students and their teachers of the academic levels, which encourages everyone to move forward.

Reading, writing, listening and speaking, and grammar are the main courses of study of the English as a Second Language (ESL) today at Black



Hawk College, at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels. The online component which was added to the ESL Program ten years ago is an important component that contributes greatly to the learning. Also, the number of

students has also evolved consistently, reaching one hundred and twenty students who enroll for classes each semester. This number has especially gone beyond the threshold.

Furthermore, concerning the payment of tuition and fees, and the books needed for a class, only eligible students are entitled to receive financial aid from the federal government. Besides, a private fund established by former students in 1993 also contributes to help students in financial need through scholarships that are available to ESL students.



One important feature for the future of the ESL Program is a grant of hundred thousand dollars to be used over a period of two years that is provided by the government for the benefit of the ESL Program. This new allocation will help to improve tutoring and other clerical duties within the entire program. It will allow the extension of the working hours of the current administrative workers of the ESL department and the hiring of a permanent secretary. Another interesting point about the grant, which will surely make the international students rejoice, is that they can become student tutors after completing the ESL program. The fund will also see the ESL Program move into an extended facility in the future due to the progress in enrollment.

Moreover, a formal program to evaluate the success of ESL students will also be shaped soon. It will concern the students who have completed the ESL program, and who are pursuing their studies in advanced academic levels.



Also, another important aspect of the future perspectives will be to further consider the comments and suggestions of the students in a view of improving the whole program. In fact, this is already being done because the students are always asked to evaluate the Program in their graduation essay. This allows the ESL teachers and the coordinator to make

adjustments to the program, based on the comments of the students.

Furthermore, the way forward in the ESL Program will be marked by a continuous growth in the number of enrollment of students in the ESL program and also a will of the department to keep building a strong connection with the partners in the community, according to Dean Murray.

In conclusion, the ESL Program at Black Hawk College has become a training center for excellence for the international students who are willing to pursue their studies at the advanced academic level.

The various changes and developments that occurred over two decades since the beginning of the



program in 1991 are a proof of the commitment of educators, students and any other players to achieve the goal of learning English as a second language. In addition, everyone wishes that the future will consolidate the vision of the ESL Program at Black Hawk College, marking another milestone in the Quad Cities in the upcoming years.

These articles were written by the students in our advanced writing classes. We would like to thank Jenni Wessel-Fields, Assistant Professor, and Anne Bollati, ESL Coordinator, for assisting with the editing and revising process. A special thanks goes to Sheryl Gragg, support staff for the Humanities, Languages, and Journalism Department, for her time, effort and energy in editing and formatting this newsletter. Her creativity and patience are much appreciated. Additionally, we want to express our gratitude to Mike Winter, who took our individual and group photos, and Akiko Edmondson, who designed the cover. Thanks to all.

Nina De Bisschop and Lisa Torres, ESL Instructors