Study Abroad: The United States International Student Shares Difficulties of Schooling

By Hanh Nguyen
Contributing Writer

Ambitious and hard working 26-year-old Jill Thomas (name changed for anonymity) decided to leave behind her business in her home country in Asia to further her education. She has been attending EMU for one year and still struggles to adapt.

For Thomas, the hardest thing about studying abroad is the language. “When I first came, I even hardly spoke any English,” she said. Thomas first spent a year in the intensive English Program (IEP) at EMU. She then entered school as a psychology major.

“Two years are not enough to climb over the language barrier. “I still have to meet my professors every time after class to show them I got the assignments every time after class to make sure that I got the assignments right or to ask them things that I did not understand in class,” said Thomas.

Thomas also found it extremely difficult to adjust to the teaching method used in the Psychology department. “Many psychology classes require independent study,” she said, “which means that the students have to read the book and study by themselves. The class meets only once a week. The teachers do not have enough time to teach and explain. It is very hard for me to read the book without explanation from the teachers.”

Moreover, schoolwork is often too much for Thomas. She usually gets about three or four hours of sleep on weekdays. She

often takes a much longer time to read and write than the average American student. Also, extra work, such as having to review a video that was shown in class because she could not understand it, is common for her.

Thomas often feels isolated and disrespected in group discussions. She is not fast enough to keep up with her group and her peers are often ignorant of this fact; so she falls behind in class participation. “I always feel I am slow in conversation,” she said. “It is so hard for me to express myself freely. I cannot easily understand people either, especially when I am among a group of native speakers,” Thomas said.

Besides language difficulty, culture shock presented another unavoidable problem. Asian culture, she feels, is very collective. “Human relationships are so much closer and based on sharing,” said Thomas. “The culture here is so different, too individualistic. I still have a hard time trying to adapt.”

Thomas says her social life has narrowed in the environment. She can hang out with few friends, who are mainly also international students. “My life changed a lot since I left home. I was a very social person who enjoyed friends’ company. However, now I feel my life is just full of books and schoolwork. I am not me anymore.”

One thing that bothers Thomas deeply is that she is losing relationships with friends back home. “We began not to be able to understand each other very well because our experiences are different. I face my life different than they do. I have problems that they have never experienced. It is so hard to make them understand me and vice-versa,” Thomas said.

Thomas is not the only international student dealing with the difficulties of language barrier, cultural differences, and acceptance of sacrifices while studying abroad. Research conducted by a group of students from the Introduction to Peace Building class in fall 2001 found that many other international students struggle with the same issues.

When asked why she chose to study abroad and about the trade-offs that accompany the choice, Thomas said, “I am from a third-world country. Where I am from, we do not have much opportunity to access information and knowledge. I want to learn more about what is out there in the world.”

The Western world is also attractive to her because in more open-minded than the region she is from. “The Asian culture is very conservative. We do a good job in preserving our tradition but it also prevents us from adopting new things,” she said.

Also according to Thomas, one of the factors that brings a lot of international students to the States is the “social acceptance.” “People in my country believe that the best place to study is the U.S.” she said. “Having a degree in America is the best guarantee for my future. It will be so much easier for me to get a good job at home if I am a graduate from an American university.”

Thomas says she does not regret her decision. “I do feel lost sometimes,” she said. “I do have a lot of bad days. But I understand that it is just right now. I know the purpose I am here for. It is good preparation for my future. Moreover, I cannot say that I regret after my parents spent so much money for me to be here,” she concluded.

The piece was contributed by the student presses of the universities.

People who want to believe in something and they would rather be told what to believe than to figure it out themselves. This play is symbolic of the dangers of that.”

Said Doyle, “This show is about extreme choices. It is about not looking out of your boxes. It is about the need for change and the hope that [change] can always be around the corner.”

The cast prom-

ised that the produc- tion will offer audi-

tences a powerful story. “When I first meet the mature audiences. It addresses the issues we care about and brood over in dark corners. It does what theater is meant to do: reflect society as in a mirror-in hope of some change.” Prepare to be uncomfortable, challenged and changed. You may even find the meaning of life.”

Keely and Du open Thursday, Nov. 21 at 8 p.m. in the Studio Theater in the Commons. Performances will also be held Friday and Saturday, Nov. 22-23 at 8 p.m. Tickets are $2.00 for adults and $1.00 for students.

After the Friday performance, a professional facilitator will direct a discussion on the issues raised in the play. “This will be an open forum to discuss opinions and hash out answers,” said Dengler.

Keely and Du opening night. Also, there will be an art show before the curtain goes up. The show is rated R, mature audiences. Students with either I.D. or EMU ID can attend for free. No one under 18 is allowed to attend.

The show was performed by Emory Senior theater company in 2002.

By Rebekah Miller
Contributing Writer

A pair of handcuffs holds a troubled soul to the bed, but that soul is not alone.

Keely and Du, according to Senior Carrie Dengler, “is about the coming together of opposite viewpoints and about the relationships that can form when we acknowledge the human on the other side of the issues we stand for.” Dengler chose to direct the production according to her interest in peace building.

The show was performed by the senior theater company in 2002.

The lights rise on Du, portrayed by Senior Joanna Doyle, making a bed in a small room in a basement. Walker, played by Sophomore Rodney Umble, soon enters. He carries a body. Keely, (Sophomore Shannon Terranova), Graduate Clay Hewitson, portrays Cole, Keely’s ex-husband. Cole has raped Keely; she is now pregnant.

Keely has been kidnapped from an abortion clinic by a pro-life activist group, Operation Retrieval, before she can termi- nate the pregnancy. She is now being held in an abortion clinic, handcuffed to a bed until she reaches full term in her pregnancy and given birth to her baby.

Keely is under the care of Du, a member of Operation Retrieval who remains with Keely in the basement. Walker, the leader of Operation Retrieval, visits them often.

Keely and Du has a message to bring to its audience. “I hope people can see that when we believe so strongly in something that we can bring other people pain by imposing that belief on them, said Umble.”

Hewitson thinks Keely and Du is not primarily about abortion, but “about the dogma of the people who do not want the universe to change. It is about the need for change and the hope that [change] can always be around the corner.”

The cast promised that the production will offer audiences a powerful story. “When I first meet the mature audiences. It addresses the issues we care about and brood over in dark corners. It does what theater is meant to do: reflect society as in a mirror-in hope of some change.” Prepare to be uncomfortable, challenged and changed. You may even find the meaning of life.”

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