TO STAY, OR NOT TO STAY...
by Aileen Carr

A major decision that international students face as they conclude their careers at Tufts is whether they should remain in the United States or return home to begin their professional lives. In order to help international students making decisions on their futures, the International Center interviewed two students who graduated in 1994, each who made a different decision and speak below on the pros and cons of their decisions.

GOING HOME

Diala Al-Alami, a Jordanian national who lived in Kuwait until the Gulf War in 1990, returned to Jordan soon after graduation. The beginning of her life at Tufts was chaotic because it nearly coincided with the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, forcing her family to relocate to Jordan.

Diala spoke with the International Center staff about her decision to return home, the adjustments she had to make, and how her education at an American university has affected her life at home. She also gave advice to students who are facing such decisions now.

Diala's decision to return home was based mostly upon what she referred to as "cultural fatigue." "I needed to be around people who spoke my language and who understood my traditions without any explanations," she said. She was urged by her parents to remain in the U.S. after graduation, but she "wanted to get away from it all." "I committed to doing research abroad and to studying...."

Adjustment to life in a different country, even your home country, can be difficult after four years in the U.S. Diala was happy to be back with her family, and did not have problems relating to friends from home, but she missed certain things about American culture. For example, it was difficult for her to get used to the lack of privacy of her family life. "You can't just pick yourself up and disappear for a few hours at a cafe to read on your own. Because you're bound to bump into someone you know." she said. Also, though she does not mind much because she enjoys living with her family; it is unacceptable for a woman to live alone in Jordan. She also says that she has been spoiled by the United States' service-oriented industry. "In the U.S. I

STAYING HERE

Thais Höyer, a native of Venezuela, graduated with a bachelor's degree in International Relations in 1994, and currently works as a Community Organizer in a local Massachusetts town. She spoke to the International Center staff about her decision to remain in the U.S., obtaining work visas, relationships with family and friends and the adjustments she had to make to life here.

Both personal and political factors influenced Thais' decision to remain in the U.S. after graduation. Her strong sense of independence gave her the desire to succeed on her own. "It is exciting to be able to make my own decisions and feel that I am capable of living in a responsible and fulfilling way," she said. "Moving back to Caracas would mean giving some of it up or at least exchanging it for something else." Also, due to Venezuela's current political and economic instability, Thais doubted her ability to get a desirable job in her field at home.

Finally, Thais expressed her concerns about the serious challenges of being a professional woman in Caracas.

As a student, Thais was on an F-1 visa, and used the Practical Training option after graduation, which allows a student to obtain permission to work in the U.S. for up to one year after graduation. Although she did not have any job offers at the time, Practical Training gave her a chance to figure out the mess that I was after graduation," she said. She resolved all of her immigration matters after that by hiring an attorney to help her extend her employment eligibility under a different status when her Practical Training ran out. When asked about problems

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued on page 10)
obtaining work visas after Practical Training, she said, “I guess that answer depends upon whether or not you have money to cover lawyers’ expenses!”

Most of her family members and friends in Venezuela support Thais’ decision to live in the U.S. “They understand that it’s the best option for me, taking into consideration the state of affairs in Venezuela,” she said. However, she did confess that it is still difficult at times to be so far away from her home. She said that the ‘combination’ of growing up and being separated makes being an adult much harder than being a student.

The greatest adjustment Thais has had to make since graduation is the difference in her social life after college. “Not only is everyone busier or has moved away, but somehow budget needs to be balanced, the definition of fun changes and the number of responsibilities increases,” she said.

Finally, Thais gave some advice to students thinking about staying in the U.S. after graduation. “The truth is that it’s hard to make it on your own and that sometimes it takes time for things to work out, to brighten up somewhat. Give yourself room, time and money to think about what you want to do.”

---

IN MEMORIAM

The International Center remembers the gentle smile and kind words of George Korizis, a summa cum laude undergraduate and returning Mechanical Engineering graduate student from Greece who recently passed away. We will truly miss his presence.