International House Influence

By CLIFF SLATER

If you look closely, if you peer down Sawyer Avenue and stop at number 13, you will find a group of internationally oriented students who reside under one roof. They had to apply to dwell there and some students were turned down. They room in the Tufts International House and their motives for choosing it are as diverse as their nationalities.

Jane Etish-Andrews, Head of the International Center, looks for a “balance between Americans and foreigners and men and women,” when she selects candidates from among a pool of applicants. “We have done very well this year,” she said, “We have a good cross-section of students.”

For Manuel Vega, the decision to apply for residency was an easy one. As a junior, Vega was not given housing, and at the end of his Sophomore year, he recalled, his many good friends in the I-House encouraged him to apply. They were one of two predominant factors in his mind when deciding upon his living arrangements. Vega also wanted to remain on campus. Now that he inhabits the I-House, he understands his friends’ encouragement. Vega enjoys the close relationships fostered in the small house not too far from his fraternity, Zeta Psi, andusto over the cable TV and large rooms.

The I-House. (Photo by Chris Stevens)

House manager Liglia Brickus is a first generation American whose parents came from Lithuania. She said of her freshman year, “everyone in my dorm was from Massachusetts, so this move was a real change.” It is not that Brickus has anything against Bay State residents, but she has always been interested in people from other countries. “The guys on the third floor speak Spanish and there are a lot of different languages spoken here.” Brickus returned to the I-House this year for its diversity and the opportunity to form close intimate relationships with people she would not have known otherwise.

One problem with the I-House that Brickus and many other residents often face is its reputation. Students living in the I-House are often considered by others snobby and elitist, and knocking down that stereotype has been their biggest challenge.

Audrey Stevenson, also an American, believes people should “just be open-minded.” Naturally with only 15 students living in the house the group will be tight-knit, but they do not base their relationships on the backgrounds of others, Stevenson espoused.

After being turned down sophomore year at the I-House, Stevenson reapplied when she met more of the international crowd who loved living at the house. Successful see HOUSE, page 9.

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This time around, she has deluged in meeting and getting to know students from other countries and cultures. “I’ve met people who are already becoming my good friends,” she said. Stevenson added that “you learn a lot about what other people think of Americans and the stereotypes break down.” To this effect, each year the I-House has a workshop, prepares a dinner, and fulfills a culture requirement. During the three-hour workshop, “the kids get to know each other beyond just names and majors,” said Erin Andrews. In addition, the group works together to “put together an intercultural dinner” she continued. Erin Andrews said that everyone usually enjoys cooking and eating the many different types of foods prepared and the dinner further helps everyone to learn more about each other.

Finally, each semester the I-House does something to enhance the Tufts community culturally, appropriately termed, “the culture requirement.” Alex Meyer, the President to the I-House described it more as a challenge than a mandatory task. The event cannot be a party for which the I-House is famous but rather an experience for the community at large, bringing people into the I-House and letting them feel positive about what is going on there. Hopefully this will help to break down the barriers some students erect when dealing with the international community. Currently the House is working on a small concert or a possible slide show.

Meyer, a sophomore who chose the I-House over all other possible options, summed up his thoughts, “I like the place. It’s small, has a nice lounge, a kitchen, it’s private, cozy, and you feel like you are part of a family.”