The International House has been located at 13 Sawyer Ave. for more than 3 decades. (Zach Sebek / The Tufts Daily)

**FEATURES**

**History on the Hill: International House**

By **Sean Ong** • October 20, 2016
When home is overseas, the International House (I-House) can be a necessary home away from home for some students at Tufts. Situated at 13 Sawyer Ave., the I-House is considered a place for the international community at Tufts to gather for conversations, community and fun. But when its existence was first proposed, it faced resistance.

The house itself was constructed in 1894 for the Delta Upsilon fraternity, according to the Tufts International Center's website. In 1941, it was converted to a women's dormitory for Jackson College and named after Caroline Davies (1864–1939) who served as the first dean of Jackson College. It takes its official name, Davies House, from her.

According to Jane Etish-Andrews, the director of the International Center (I-Center) and a former advisor to the I-House, students involved in the Center petitioned the Dean of Students' Office in 1972 for a new special interest house for international students. At this time, the Center had been on campus for 20 years, but there was no corresponding housing.

“The purpose was just to have a place, a community for international students to be with each other,” Etish-Andrews said. “But the administration pushed back … they didn’t [want] to have a separate house for international students.”

To assuage concerns from the administration that the creation of a house specifically for international students could increase existing tensions and divisions between groups on campus, a compromise was reached: the House would consist of both domestic and international students, according to the I-Center's website, as a way to facilitate cross-cultural understanding and reduce divisions between students.

Ioannis Miaoulis (E ’83, AG ’86, EG ’87), trustee and former dean of the School of Engineering was the I-House house manager from 1982 to 1983, according to Miaoulis. He said he believes that having both international and domestic students living together in the House was a key part...
of the house experience, and of the international student experience in general.

“I believed that if you’re an international student and you come to study in the United States, one of the things you should do is meet and socialize with Americans,” Miaoulis said. “[Having American residents] enriched the whole atmosphere and climate of the house.”

Etish-Andrews echoed the importance of having a good representation of people from all over the world — including the United States — live in the House.

“We really tried to ask people to … be more open to living in an intercultural house, because that’s one of the things the house really does well,” Etish-Andrews said. “If we don’t push people, then it would just be a dorm and there wouldn’t be anything unique about it.”

Etish-Andrews, who has been the director of the I-Center since 1983, said that the I-Center was also housed in Davies House from 1979-1988, allowing the center to work closely with the students in the house during its formative years.

“We were really close to the residents because we saw them all the time … although Monday mornings could sometimes have [been] challenging after a weekend of parties,” she said. “Now we’re independent but we’re … nearby so we have still been able to do a lot of programming [at the House] easily.”

According to Miaoulis, part of the House’s popularity indeed stemmed from the fact that it threw some of the best parties on campus — virtually every Friday night.

“We would invite people from all around campus … and sometimes it would even be students from other universities, with the best music,” he said. “We would have [parties] at the house, or Eaton Hall. It was a lot of fun.”

Whitney Sullivan, the current adviser to the I-House, described the parties as a bonus, emphasizing that strong programming is at the core of what the House does.

“It’s a safe space for students to come and engage in different intercultural programs,” Sullivan said. “We really are working to strengthen the programming throughout the year so that we can continue the message that the House is a support center, even for students who are not residents.”
According to Etish-Andrews, past residents used to put on musical recitals and poetry readings, in addition to hosting “cross-cultural conversations.” However throughout the House’s history, Etish-Andrews pointed to food as a consistent reason for people to get together.

For Miaoulis and his housemates, it became a way to share their cultures with each other.

“We were not big cooks, but once in a while, one of us would cook a meal from our country and we would share it with others in the house,” Miaoulis said.

Etish-Andrews also said that the house’s residents have traditionally hosted food events for the Tufts community including potlucks, dumpling nights and other themed events. I-House members also contributed to larger events such as the Parade of Nations, the annual spring culture show currently sponsored by the International Club.

“They used to do an International House of Pancakes on one of the nights before the Parade of Nations,” Etish-Andrews said. “That’s a fun event, and it became a tradition they would do every year.

In addition to events, the House’s living room has served as a space for residents and non-residents alike to congregate and discuss issues of global significance.

In an interview posted on the I-Center’s website, Mehrdad Toofanian (E’73), the first house manager, emphasized the significance of the living room while he was a student. During the Vietnam War, he said I-House residents would crowd around the television to watch the news and learn how many soldiers had been killed in combat that day.

“That living room space is really the pulse of the house … it is a place of tolerance, acceptance and sharing of ideas,” Sullivan said. “I’ve seen … a lot of students and friendships grow and it’s all around that living room and that space.”

This was certainly true for Miaoulis.

“Some of my best friends now we had lived together in the House,” he said. “I also spent two years there with my girlfriend, who ended up being my wife after that.”

Miaoulis added that as house manager he worked to change the opinions that his fellow international students sometimes had about domestic students.
“I did make it a point to … break up the clique of international students,” he said. “It was kind of snobbish. A lot of the international students back then thought, ‘Oh we are the cosmopolitan ones, and the rest are the stupid Americans.’ I tried to break that [stereotype].”

Daniel Goldstein, a sophomore and current resident of the I-House, said that people have sometimes assumed that he and his housemates have frequent disagreements over their cultural differences. Instead, living at the I-House has made him more aware of his friends’ cultural identities.

“Hearing different people’s perspectives on how things should be done, and how they are subtly influenced by their own cultures, I just found myself very intrigued by it,” he said. “It’s an intrigue that really developed from being in that space and in that community. That will stay with me after I leave the House.”

While the I-House is celebrating its 45th anniversary in 2017, its size has remained stagnant since its founding, despite appeals from the Center to the administration for an expansion.

“I’ve always wanted it to be bigger and we could fill it with graduate students and undergraduate students, and have a big, beautiful function room,” Etish-Andrews said. “So every new dean that I have, I ask [to expand]. But it costs a lot of money, and it’s not a priority … We could really fill a bigger house.”

According to Miaoulis, when he was house manager the I-House was known as the “headquarters of the international community.” However, Goldstein believes that the I-House can no longer claim to be representative of the growing international community in Tufts.

“It’s more of a living arrangement, for anyone who’s not a first-year who’s either American or international and would like to be a part of that,” he said. “In some ways, the relevance [of the I-House] is diminishing, but in a good way because the international community at Tufts is growing.”
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The I-House can be an important stepping stone for many because being an international student isn’t easy. Given our complex culture and language, assistance must come from numerous sources to aid these young people embarking on life’s journey. Most struggle in their efforts and need guidance from schools’ international departments, immigration protection, host families, concerned neighbors, and fellow students, and even informative books to extend a cultural helping hand so we all have a win-win situation.

One such new award-winning worldwide book/ebook that reaches out to help anyone coming to the US is “What Foreigners Need to Know About America From A to Z: How to Understand Crazy American Culture, People, Government, Business, Language and More.” It is used in foreign Fulbright student programs and endorsed worldwide by ambassadors, educators, and editors. It also identifies “foreigners” who became successful in the US and how they’ve contributed to our society, including students.

A chapter on education explains how to be accepted to an American university and cope with a confusing new culture, friendship process and daunting classroom differences. Some stay after graduation. It has chapters that explain how US businesses operate and how to get a job (which differs from most countries), a must for those who want to work with/for an American firm here or overseas.

It also has chapters that identify the most common English grammar and speech problems foreigners have and tips for easily overcoming them, the number one stumbling block they say they have to succeeding here.

Good luck to all at Tufts or wherever you study!