

An International Perspective

By Scott Foster

At age 18 everyone in Israel goes into the Army. Michal Levartovsky was no different. After two years serving as a flight coordinator, Levartovsky did what many young Israelis do. She traveled. Unlike many others of her age who go to Europe after military service, Levartovsky decided to travel by herself around the world.

After seven months, Levartovsky was in Alaska. "I liked Juneau so much I wanted to stay," she said. And she did.

Levartovsky has started her third year of study at the University of Alaska Southeast (UAS).

Dambo Sakala also had a fascination with Alaska. He grew up in Zambia, South Africa. After high school he worked on the family farm and then got a job as a government surveyor. Sakala, however, was more interested in business than

surveying and he was still intrigued by Alaska. He learned there was a university in Juneau and decided to attend.

Not surprisingly, Sakala had to make some adjustments to Southeast Alaska when he arrived. "Last winter I'd be covered in four or five layers of clothing just to keep warm," he laughs. "But now I can walk out in just a tee-shirt."

The Israeli and the African are just two of a group of international students who have chosen to attend UAS for their college education. They join other international students on campus under semester or yearlong exchange programs. The mix of students from many countries brings an important diversity to the Juneau campus population.

"They help our other students realize there's a much bigger world out there," Elizabeth Schelle said. "That's

the first step in learning about the world and growing."

Schelle coordinates international and national student exchange programs at UAS. The programs are for students wanting to combine travel and study.

Rosa Fonseca is from Brazil. She learned about Juneau while hosting a Juneau Douglas High School student in her Brazilian home. In the process, Fonseca became close friends with the student's mother and happily accepted her invitation to move to Juneau and study at UAS.

"I had studied the language," Fonseca said, "but I didn't know anything about the culture."

In at least one case, learning about the American culture came at a price. Once, while driving in Juneau, Fonseca noticed red flashing police lights behind



Scott Foster

"UAS is a perfect spot for international students," according to student exchange coordinator Elizabeth Schelle. In part that's because of the campus size, beauty and safety.

her. She had forgotten to turn on her headlights and did so as soon as she saw the police lights. Then she waved "thank you" to the police and drove on. That's an appropriate response in Brazil.

So Fonseca drove on but when the flashing lights continued she eventually did pull over and stop. She was startled when several police cars quickly pulled in to block her and when officers with guns drawn opened both her doors and began yelling. The matter was later cleared up in court but for Fonseca this lesson in American culture was one she would have just as soon avoided.

Most adjustments for international students are less traumatic.

Virginie Duverger grew up in Cognac, the town in France where the brandy is made. "Everywhere you walk it smells like cognac," she said. "We are used to it,

but tourists can become dizzy because of the evaporation of the alcohol."

Initially, Duverger came to Anchorage to work as an au pair and moved with the family to Juneau during the legislative session. Part of the au pair arrangement was for Duverger to attend a university, so she enrolled at UAS.

"When I went back home," she said, "I was depressed. I wanted to finish my degree at UAS. So that is the reason I came back." She will graduate in May with a Bachelor of Liberal Arts degree and wants to become a teacher.

Like most of the other international students, Duverger likes the small campus atmosphere at UAS. "It's one-on-one," she said. "You get to talk to your teacher. You can call him by his first name. That is pretty amazing."

Pasha Shalimov grew up in Russia's

Kamchatka Peninsula. "The first month I had trouble with some of the English. It was hard to understand people," he said. However he made a quick adjustment and plans to graduate from UAS in another year. He's studying business, and combined with his increased proficiency in English, plans to return to Russia and go into business.

There are a number of full-time Russian students on the UAS Juneau campus. In part that's because of the proximity, and in part because students from sister cities pay in-state tuition.

Yulia Ponomareva, from Kamchatka, first experienced Southeast Alaska as a high school exchange student in Sitka. She is working toward a Bachelor of Liberal Arts degree and then plans on returning to Russia to teach English as a second language.

In addition to classes, Ponomareva also works on campus. Her job is to call high school students who have expressed an interest in UAS. "Usually I introduce myself as an international student," Ponomareva said. "It's funny. People start asking me more questions than I ask them."

When Ponomareva finally is able to ask them questions, she finds most high school students ask about the teacher/student ratio, programs, and entertainment. "I tell them the advantages of small campuses," she said, "because I have experienced great advantages like getting help whenever you need."

Like Ponomareva, Oksana Kadachigova came to UAS after first visiting Alaska as a high school exchange student. Kadachigova, from Petropavlovsk-Kamchatski, Russia, is now finishing her Bachelor of Business Administration degree. She had planned on returning home after graduation, but she met UAS student Arlo Midgett while both were on a UAS language trip to Venezuela during a winter holiday break. They were married this past August.

"To say 'Yes' to Arlo's question was not hard," Kadachigova said, "but to admit and agree with the fact that I am going to live on a different continent than my family was an extremely difficult decision to make."

Yana Polykova came to UAS with the equivalent of a master's degree in English Philosophy from the Far Eastern State University of Vladivostok. She has since earned a Bachelor of Liberal Arts degree from UAS and is currently studying French in Quebec while applying to Ph.D. programs in Comparative Literature.

There's a big difference between UAS and Russian schools, Polykova said. "UAS is small and personal. The instructors are accessible. The school I had attended in Russia was the opposite."


Another difference between UAS and



Scott Foster

Oksana Kadachigova met Arlo Midgett at UAS and married last year. She came to UAS after first visiting Alaska as a high school exchange student.

Focus on your future!



Juneau - 465-6457
Ketchikan - 225-6177
Sitka - 747-6653
www.uas.alaska.edu

**University of
Alaska Southeast**

UAS is an AA/EQ employer



Scott Foster

Dambo Sakala from Zambia works as a Community Advisor on the UAS housing staff. He is pursuing an accounting degree and would like to work in corporate finance in Georgetown, South Africa.

schools that some of the international students attended in their own countries is the freedom to choose classes in their major, rather than having to take prescribed classes. "In Russia I had no choice," Polykova said. "The whole program from the first to the last semester was decided for me."

Nellie Fluty, who is from Bulgaria, had previously studied in Indiana and wanted to return to the U.S. to complete her bachelor's degree. While teaching in Bulgaria, the son of one of Fluty's co-teachers, who was from Juneau, visited. They started dating, and Fluty decided to finish her education in Juneau. "I really liked UAS and the small class size. The education I got was excellent," she said. "I would have stayed even without Chris."

The UAS Ketchikan and Sitka campuses also have international representatives. On the Ketchikan campus, for example, Victor and Natalia Zinger are from Russia. Victor teaches math. Natalia teaches language and Russian culture. Victor was interested in Southeast, in part, because of the Russian heritage and because of the outdoor opportunities. "Sea, water, forest. It can't be better," he said.

Roman Sorakin, also from Russia, is finishing his associate degree in Computer Science on the Sitka campus. Sorakin said he is studying in the U.S. for "both culture and school education."

UAS students are from many countries and backgrounds. Vincent Onuorah, from Nigeria, had attended community college and worked in California, but realized that in

order to advance beyond low-paying jobs he needed to complete his college education.

"I wanted a small, academically oriented school where you can meet nice people," Onuorah said. He visited UAS during vacation and met some of the staff. "I had the feeling they were nice people and this was a nice environment."

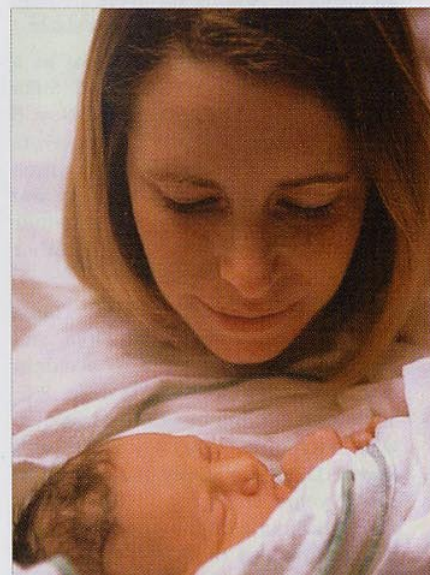
Onuorah is studying business administration and expanding his interest into computers. He plans to graduate in a year or two and remain in Alaska. "I come from a third-world country and know there are so many privileges that exist here that don't exist where I come from," he said.

A similar understanding that Alaska offers something unusual came from Levartovsky. "It's a different lifestyle in Alaska and Juneau. Life here is what you make of it. What you create. Nothing happens that would stop you from where you want to go. That's not the case in most of the world. This is a very peaceful place."

This peaceful place makes an ideal setting for international students according to exchange coordinator Schelle. "We've had several groups of Chinese on campus, for example. They say they would like their children to come here. It's so safe, it's beautiful, it's small."

As much as UAS may offer international students, the students themselves give back in at least equal amounts. "They have such a breadth of experience," Schelle said. "It is a big deal to come all the way to Alaska. They've

obviously got a level of maturity that allows them to really excel. Every faculty member I've talked to really likes having international students because they bring a whole new perspective." **AS**



pregnant women and new moms need help? just ask!

- Walk-in pregnancy tests
- Free and confidential assistance
- Resources for housing, financial and medical help
- Maternity & baby clothes
- Baby furniture

Sitka Pregnancy Aid
403 Lincoln Street in Sitka
(above Colliver Shoes)
Call 907-747-6955

