A Night of World Icons

AIS amazed audiences yet again this year with a new approach to International Night. This year, organizations were asked to develop their performances around iconic figures or concepts from their countries or regions of the world. There were six performances this year: Reach for the Stars (Malaysia); The Legend of the Sacred Cakes (Vietnam); Fathers of Africa (West Africa); African American History (the United States); The Teacher for Centuries (China); and Ha Ha Land (Evan Ng, Rizka Aprilia, Selma Sentissi, and Sadaf Amani). The event closed with the annual presentation of the International Service Award, this year given to AIS President Aiken Sujana for his leadership and outstanding academic achievements. Enjoy photos (below and on the following page) from International Night 2017, taken by TU student Luke Lau.
ISS Spotlight: Reeza Redzuan Rosnan

Reeza might best be known for his charm and charisma, co-hosting TEDx University of Tulsa and emceeing AIS International Night for the past two years. His singing, dancing, linguistic prowess, and quick wit make him a dynamic stage presence, but he has accomplished so many things off stage and away from the spotlight as well.

Reeza has been a tireless champion of diversity and inclusion at TU and in the Tulsa community. As leader of the Malaysian Student Association, he has organized the World Hijab Day on campus to educate non-Muslims about the meaning of the hijab and to provide non-Muslim women with the opportunity to wear a hijab and have their photo taken. Reeza’s work with the Malaysian Student Association has been so impactful that this organization was chosen as the best Malaysian student association in the Midwest region and he was invited to moderate a discussion at the National Assembly of Malaysian Students in America.

Reeza’s efforts do not end at teaching non-Muslims about Islam. He has worked to help everyone learn more about the various faith groups represented on our campus and in our community. Reeza proposed the idea of the TU Interfaith Tour and worked with Sharp Chapel for funding and assistance with the organization of this event. Attendees of the Interfaith Tour had the opportunity to visit houses of worship on campus and learn a bit about each group’s traditions and beliefs. This continued with a week of events organized by Reeza as the TU Enlightenment Week, culminating in an Interfaith Dinner featuring prayers or brief performances from several religious and non-religious TU organizations. When ethnic or religious minorities have experienced persecution in any part of the world, Reeza is the first to examine how we can reach out to people in our own campus community who may be affected by these events.

Finally, Reeza has been involved in numerous fund-raising efforts for victims of natural disasters and cancer. He worked diligently to organize the recent Relay for Life event in conjunction with AIS and has participated in countless other community service projects throughout his time here. When he’s not in the classroom or doing an academic project, it’s safe to assume that Reeza is putting every ounce of his time into making our campus and our community a better place to live, work, and study.

"Never underestimate a small impact," Reeza says. "because it might change someone's life forever."

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ISS is on Twitter!

If you use Twitter, you can keep up with us at https://twitter.com/tu_iss.
Sarah Azami has never regretted her decision to follow her aunt’s advice and come all the way from Malaysia to TU. She found the warm, friendly, and supportive environment she was promised in TU and the Tulsa community, but she never imagined how much she would learn from becoming socially involved on campus and how attached to Tulsa she would become.

Sarah has held positions with the Malaysian Student Association, and most recently, with the Association of International Students (AIS) as Event Coordinator. She believes student organizations at TU do so much to bridge the gap between students from different backgrounds. AIS, for example, has co-sponsored events with a number of other international and cultural student groups.

“If you don’t get involved, you’re missing out,” Sarah says. “You need to give groups a chance and see what they offer, and they can teach you so much.” She shares how she hesitated to get involved with Greek organizations, but now feels fortunate that she did. “Don’t judge,” she advises. “Because you can’t believe everything you’ve heard.”

Sarah has always loved that there are a variety of events happening on campus throughout the year. She knew participating in AIS would help build her leadership and event planning skills and allow her to gain practical experience in her field (Marketing), but what she did not expect was the strong bond built among AIS officers. She has been surprised to see how many close friendships were formed and how cohesive a team really becomes after organizing so many events.

In her time away from studying and event planning for student organizations, Sarah has managed to cover a lot of ground traveling the United States. She has been to multiple cities and states, but her strongest memories have been of Walt Disney World in Orlando, Florida; Nashville, Tennessee; and Antelope Canyon in Arizona. Nevertheless, she always looks forward to coming back to Tulsa and has developed a deep appreciation for the beautiful architecture of downtown and the historic homes of midtown.

Having grown up in a family that was very open culturally, Sarah did not face many obstacles when she came to the U.S., though it took some time for her to adjust to casual conversation and small talk. Coming from a culture with more formal conversational rules, she was surprised to see people pass by and casually ask “How are you?” while continuing to walk. Nevertheless, she got used to the idea of always responding with “Fine” and it soon became second nature. Upon arrival, she lived with two American roommates at TU, both of whom she describes as wonderful and helpful friends. Through her involvement with organizations, has continued to make friends from the U.S. and elsewhere around the world.

She is in no hurry to leave the U.S., but looks forward to returning to Malaysia and sharing the many wonderful experiences she has had here, particularly in Tulsa.
ISS Spotlight: Teljan Ali Kizi

Teljan Ali Kizi’s arrival to Tulsa was quite a coincidence. She had been perusing the web for universities that offer scholarships to international students when she came across The University of Tulsa. She was already strongly considering applying to TU when an Education USA advisor spoke to her the next day and, out of the blue, suggested that she look at TU. Teljan and her mother decided this must be fate, so she applied, received an International Leadership scholarship, and came to TU in the Fall of 2014 to major in Biochemistry (Pre-Medicine).

Teljan’s brother had come to the U.S. before her and knew firsthand the challenges she would face. He encouraged her to practice her English every day before leaving her home country of Azerbaijan. She already had full command of Azerbaijani and Turkish, strong command of English, and some knowledge of Russian (her mother is half Russian and her father is Turkish), so language learning has not been a challenge for her. Still, she says the English practice was helpful in preparing her for the leap to the U.S. She also believes her multicultural background helped her adapt and fit in quickly, not just with international students but also those from the U.S. What was a struggle for her was adapting to a new (much warmer) climate and trying to get over homesickness. The kindness and helpfulness of TU staff and the close-knit campus community helped her overcome these challenges. “This became home,” she says. “Everyone was so nice when I came to ask questions and my Orientation Leader was so helpful.”

It didn’t take her long to become an active member of the campus community, taking part in community service projects and campus activities, volunteering to assist with research, joining Alpha Epsilon Delta (AED) and Iota Sigma Pi (a National Honor Society for Women in Chemistry), and eventually becoming Vice President of the 2015-2016 Association of International Students (AIS) team. Teljan says volunteering for research projects really helped her get to know faculty and led to her current work on polymer batteries with Dr. Angus Lamar, which has been approved by the American Chemical Society, published with Teljan as second author, and presented internationally by Dr. Dale Teeters, Chairman of the Department of Chemistry. She has also served as a research assistant at SUNY Downstate Medical Center on a study presented at the American Association for Allergy, Asthma and Immunology.

As if all of this weren’t enough, Teljan works on campus for both Dining Services and TU Annual Fund and has been appointed as Student Association’s 2017-2018 Executive Director of International Student Relations. She has added Art as a minor and discovered her talent for painting. A fifth language is being added to her repertoire (Spanish) and she has plans to start studying for the MCAT and do volunteer work at a hospital. Teljan understands that medical school in the U.S. is extremely competitive, but she fully intends to shoot for the stars. “I use every opportunity to take part in things that will encourage me to be better,” she says.

New AIS Leadership Team 2017-2018 Announced

We will miss the amazing 2016-2017 AIS leadership team, but we look forward to welcoming a strong group of leaders for 2017-2018. Elections were held Friday, April 21 through Monday, April 24 and the races were very tight for some positions. On April 25, the new team was officially announced. We want to congratulate both the new officers and those who worked so hard in their campaigns.

President: Vandit Trivedi
Vice President: Rizka Aprilia
Associate Vice President: Ahmed Al-Suwat
Secretary: Danish Zuhaidi
Treasurer: Evan Ng
Event Coordinator: Mohammed Al-Farsi
Mohammed “Meddi” Al-Hajri thought coming to the U.S. was only a dream. He left an empty space on his wall that he would stare at and envision his life here. Fortunately, Meddi’s sister had the opportunity to come to the U.S. as an exchange student and returned to Oman telling him not to give up the dream. He didn’t and soon after high school graduation, he received offers of admission to universities in North Carolina, Texas, Louisiana, and of course, Oklahoma. He chose Tulsa based on its ranking, location, and size. He arrived in Fall 2012 to study at the English Institute and began his academic study in Petroleum Engineering the following year.

Having already faced a major cultural and linguistic transition in his life, Meddi found the move to Tulsa easy. His grandparents immigrated to Tanzania, the country where Meddi was born and spent the first seven years of his life. He learned Swahili and English in school and some Arabic at home. When his family moved to Oman, he found it initially challenging to be taught completely in Arabic, but fortunately, children adjust quicker than adults, and he soon found himself fitting in and speaking the language as fluently as his peers.

When Meddi arrived to Tulsa, he and some friends didn’t hesitate to get involved with campus activities. “We arrived on Homecoming week and met people” He recalls. “We went to a football game and it was nice and sunny and they were giving out blue TU t-shirts, but we were completely confused by the game.” Still, he says they had a great time and felt like they had experienced the local culture. He kept going to football games and reading about football and would leave each game with a bit more knowledge about the rules and objectives. He now has a full understanding of the game.

Meddi believes coming from the capital city of Muscat was another factor in his ability to reach out and make friends. He says the culture of his city is one of warmth and outgoingness. It’s no surprise then that he’s gotten involved with campus activities, serving leadership roles in both the Omani Student Association (OSA) and the Association of International Students (AIS). His work with AIS has allowed him to pursue his photography and videography passions and he has been involved in the making of several popular widely-shared AIS videos. He urges all international students to get involved, get connected, and participate in as much as possible outside of the classroom. “Don’t be afraid, even if you have trouble with the language barrier,” he says. “People are not here to judge you.”

Iss Spotlight: Misael Morales

Of the 13 highly selective universities to which Misael Morales applied, he was accepted to all but one. He had some serious decision-making to do, but fortunately, The University of Tulsa shined brightly to him, due in large part to the interactions he had with TU staff members upon his admission. The small size of TU was also appealing to Misael, who attended a close-knit school in Venezuela and graduated with a class of 16. He eventually made up his mind to come to TU and has never regretted this decision. In fact, he has found so much more to love, including the strength of the academic programs, the attention he receives from faculty, and the opportunities to really get involved on campus.

Misael is very proud of his academic success at TU, particularly given that he has chosen one of the more challenging paths (PE/Math major with minor in Geology). Attentive faculty certainly help to make this load more manageable, but Misael is also deeply passionate about the subjects he is studying. He is a self-described “geology nerd” and loves to marvel at rocky outcroppings on road trips. Misael hopes to remain at TU for a Master’s degree before moving into a Petroleum Engineering career and maybe even some adjunct teaching down the road. He’s hoping for a Teaching Assistantship in Calculus I to give him a feel for what to expect in the classroom.

Because Misael had attended a school with the same classmates and teachers from primary school to graduation, he had not had a great deal of experience reaching outside of his comfort zone socially. (Continued on following page)
ISS Spotlight: Misael Morales (continued)

Misael realized, however, this getting involved is key to growth, and he started joining organizations and meeting new friends. Misael is now President of the Latin American Student Association (LASA) and is involved in the Society of Petroleum Engineers (SPE), Mathematical Association of America (MAA), and Kappa Sigma Fraternity.

Outside of student organizations, Misael has also been busy as an Orientation Leader (OL). He became an OL for the New to the U.S. Orientation track in Fall 2016 and will continue in this role for Fall 2017. Watching Misael interact with incoming students from around the world, it is clear that he is a natural leader with confidence and outgoingness that make it seem as though he has been doing this job for years. Asked what advice he has for incoming students, Misael says, “Be open-minded and accept any challenge that comes your way.” It appears that he has done exactly that during his time here at TU.

ISS Spotlight: Zishu Luo

Zishu “Cloria” Luo has been studying English since primary school in China. However, when she arrived in the U.S., she found that her nervousness, the speed at which locals talked to her, and the dizzying array of new vocabulary made it very challenging to communicate. She has since built her confidence, her vocabulary, and her fluency through the English Institute Pathway to Academics program. The Pathway program allows students whose TOEFL scores are slightly less than 70 to be enrolled in academic coursework while also building their English language abilities through English Institute courses. Cloria started the Pathway program in Fall 2016 and is very proud of the progress she has made as she prepares to enter full academic classes in Fall 2017 as an Accounting major.

Cloria’s English has improved dramatically in the past year, but she recognizes that the hard work is not over yet. She knows that new academic vocabulary will continue to be a challenge but she is secure in the knowledge that the Pathway program has helped her develop the skills necessary to overcome this. She says being required to speak and interact in English with classmates, instructors, and people in the Tulsa community has led to rapid improvement in her language skills. Her English classes in China, according to Cloria, were largely based on rote memorization and test preparation. Here at TU, she says, the English instruction is much more practical and applicable to daily life.

How does Cloria relax and clear her mind when the stress of her classwork looms? “I love swimming,” she says. Cloria started swimming about two years ago as a way to get physically fit, but she said she grew to love it as a hobby and relaxation technique. She swims as often as possible, covering about one mile in each workout. She knows this will help her unwind when academic classes begin in the fall, but she also expects to be busy with various student organizations. Cloria understands that building a social network in a university setting is also important to academic success. Outside of studying, swimming, and socializing, she appreciates action and adventure movies.

Cloria is very satisfied with her experience living and studying in the U.S., but she hopes to see more of the country during her time here. Thus far, she has had the opportunity to see Tulsa and New York City as well as Dallas, Houston, and Portland, Texas.

We are proud of Cloria’s achievements in the English Institute Pathway program and look forward to seeing her progress through her degree program!

AIS Shares Culture, History, and Science with Children of Kendall Whittier