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There are almost 10,000 students attend Radford University, yet less than one percent of those are international students.

According to the RU International Education Center, RU has had on average between 68 and 75 international students in the fall semester over the past four years.

RU's international student population is diverse, since it represents more than 30 countries worldwide. However, it's still small.

According to the Institute of International Education, the U.S. enrolled the highest number of international students in its history during the 2013-2014 school year, welcoming 819,644 undergraduate and graduate students to colleges and universities throughout the country. The number of international students studying in the U.S. has been increasing for eight consecutive years.

Radford's situation, though, doesn't seem to match the national trend. According to Teresa King, Assistant Director and Immigration Counselor at the RU International Education Center, Radford's international student populations have decreased over the last few decades.

"In earlier decades, we did have significantly more international students enrolled, and there were likely several things that created the decrease," King said. "The economic crisis around the world, health issues from certain countries like the Asian Avian Flu years ago when we were receiving more students from China and Japan, and of course 9-11 and the aftermath of that tragedy creating immigration changes," King added.

King also said that some campus changes, such as the closing of the then English Language Institute, affected this decrease as well. This past summer, though, the university opened the Language and Culture Institute. King hopes to see increases again in the near future.

Sophomore Mauricio Rancel, a student from Caracas, Venezuela, came to Radford to study sports administration. "I decided to come to the U.S. because the situation in my country is not good and I knew I would have a better life and education here," Rancel said.

Isabel Yuxiu Wu, who graduated from Radford in 2013, also decided to leave her country, China, and came to college in the U.S.

"I always enjoyed studying languages, particularly English. Also, there's a common tendency in China that parents would send their kids overseas for education to increase competitiveness in job market and things like that. It wasn't too hard to convince my parents to send me to America," said Yuxiu Wu.

International students bring a wealth of knowledge, and provide a rich diversity to both classes and the campus culture. They also have an economic impact on both the community and the commonwealth. International students bring a global element, and a global connection that some students from southwestern Virginia would probably never be exposed to elsewhere.

"International students offer a better understanding of other cultures to students, faculty, and staff, and of course, all of these help promote peace on a larger scale," said King.

So how can Radford try to make its international population bigger?

RU International Education Center now has a new director, Paul Carrant, and according to King, he is already working on recruitment. Carrant attended a college fair in China, and is in Saudi Arabia this week.

"There are plans for more overseas recruitment fairs, changes to the RU website to help draw more students to information needed, and some other ideas floating around," King said. "We hope to increase numbers significantly in the next five years," King added.

Having international students enriches the experience of other students on campus and also gives international students the chance to immerse in a new culture. For this same reason, more American students from Radford should also study abroad. RU offers exchange programs that allow students to study for a semester abroad at certain locations while paying RU tuition and RU room and board. In addition, students who receive financial aid packages can use that financial aid for a semester abroad program.

Ariel Diaz, a RU graduate student, from Marion, Virginia, studied abroad in Spain for two months in 2013, and said that trip has been the highlight of her life.

"I would definitely recommend it to others. It's affordable and leaves students with an outlook on other cultures they wouldn't understand without spending time outside their own country," Diaz said.

She thinks it's good for Americans to interact with foreigners in college so they can learn more about other cultures. She wants to work in law enforcement, and so plans to work with individuals with various nationalities.

"In my hometown there weren't many foreigners. College introduced me to many foreigners and exposed me to different aspects from their countries I would have never known if I hadn't encountered these people. I think my experience with foreigners will help me interact with any international co-workers I may have in the future by better understanding them," Diaz said.

Globalization is here to stay, and everyone should be prepared. Studying abroad should be a requirement for all college students. There is no better way to learn a language, improve communication and social skills, meet all kinds of people, discover new things, gain independence, grow up, and learn more about yourself than moving out of your comfort zone and taking on new challenges in a different country.