

THE NEWS SOURCE FOR WEBSTER UNIVERSITY

# THE JOURNAL



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ignites passion  
for far-reaching sport**

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break bread with  
neighborhood  
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Volume 83

Spring 2024 Special Edition

websterjournal.com

## DESTINATION: WEBSTER

### BOARDING PASS

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VANESSA JONES / *The Journal*

We choose to enter this world of academia for our own reasons. For some, it was expected – the natural next step after receiving a high-school diploma. For others, they may be first-generation college students, the first in their family to seek higher education ... or perhaps they're here for graduate school or athletics, recruited to play for one of Webster's many decorated sports teams.

Or maybe, you flew across mountains and sea, uprooting your life and leaving your family, to enter the "land of opportunity." You stepped off the plane with a suitcase of clothing, keepsakes and a whole lot of hope that Webster University would be a good home to you.

If this is you, welcome! Webster is better off with you, and The Webster Journal's goal with this special edition, Destination: Webster, is to help tell the pieces of your story that might not be seen behind the big statistics.

If this isn't you, keep reading. You might just find that the student from Nepal seated to your right in math class gave up a lot to sit beside you. You might gain a better understanding of the nearly 1,900 international students you dine with, live with and learn with.

Webster University saw its largest-ever class of international students this academic year, contributing to a 27% increase in enrollment throughout the entire university system. These new arrivals now make up a third of the student body at Webster University's main campus in Webster Groves.

The history of Webster making waves with international enrollment is not new. In 1919, Webster welcomed its first two international students from France. This was highly unusual for a school that was not an Ivy League institution.

Now, it seems that to survive as a private, nonprofit university amid growing financial strife, international recruitment is a beacon of hope for a sustained future. This is the case for Webster.

Within Destination: Webster, you will find context to this massive spike in international enrollment. You will read about the educators who are working to make their classrooms more accessible, and about students who are making Webster more like home.

Destination: Webster offers a glimpse into the lives of our classmates, students and friends who form the evolving identity of Webster University.

**- ZOE DEYOUNG**  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

## New Beginnings: Sanskriti Bohara

BY EMME GOELZ  
STAFF WRITER

After an emotional goodbye to her family, Sanskriti Bohara boarded the plane to begin the journey she had waited for her whole life. But sitting on the plane triggered second thoughts in her mind.

"Should I get off the plane?" she thought, but quickly gave herself a pep talk. "No, this is what I have chosen for myself, I need to go!"

With that, the plane rumbled to life, and Bohara was off to her new beginning.

Bohara was in the middle of her junior year of university in Nepal, where she was studying

finance. It was during this time that she was granted her visa to travel, so she dropped out and left her country for the first time. She was starting from scratch.

After graduating from high school, Bohara first brought up the idea of studying abroad. Her mother responded with tears, asking her not to leave. With that, Bohara applied to college locally and began working toward a bachelor's degree in banking. But the idea of moving abroad was still itching in the back of her brain.

"I did not want to leave them yet ... [but] I wondered, 'This is not where I belong, I want to move out, see how things work,'" Bohara explained, add-

ing she craved the independence that came with being abroad.

Bohara describes her family as "typical." She has an older brother and younger sister, a father who takes charge and a stay-at-home mother. Her parents did not understand why she would want to leave them, making it difficult to achieve her lifelong dream of studying overseas.

Coming to Webster meant uprooting everything she was comfortable and familiar with, and entering a world of new and different experiences.

Upon her second attempt to go to a college abroad, Bohara applied to schools in Australia, but then COVID-19 hit.

"That was the second time my dream got squashed," Bohara said. "Everything was shut down."

Even her family in Australia told her not to come, saying "There is a lot of unemployment, you're just going to suffer."

And while Bohara continued her studies in Nepal, the voice in the back of her mind telling her to seek education elsewhere only got louder. So, she woke up one day and began researching colleges in the United States.

**See New Beginnings  
on page 7**

## Through his lens



BY ELSA CONNOLLY  
MANAGING EDITOR

Abhinay "Abi" Parre rang in his first American New Year on the day he arrived. As the clock struck midnight on Jan. 1, 2023, his plane touched down from Hyderabad, but his journey with photography was just taking flight.

Abi's photography journey began two years ago in India while hiking with his friends. Drawn first to nature for inspiration, he explored landscapes through his lens, snapping shots of lake views and flying birds. One time while photographing a snake, he was almost bitten by another one lurking close by.

Abi received a photography certificate from a school in India. Upon arriving in America, he embarked on a new photography path. He slowly began drawing inspiration from faces on the street.

"I love capturing their feelings and freezing moments and memories in time," Abi said. "I like to show it to people so they can feel that emotion, too."

When Abi comes across particularly interesting individuals, he stops and asks to take their portrait. After photographing them, he asks his subjects questions like "What makes you happy in life?"

"I take my camera everywhere with me," Abi said. "You never know when you are gonna get a good photo."

For The Journal's special edition, Abi captures the faces of Webster's international students and asks them a question that strikes at the heart of who we are, where we came from and where we are going.

**See Abi's photos on  
page 5**



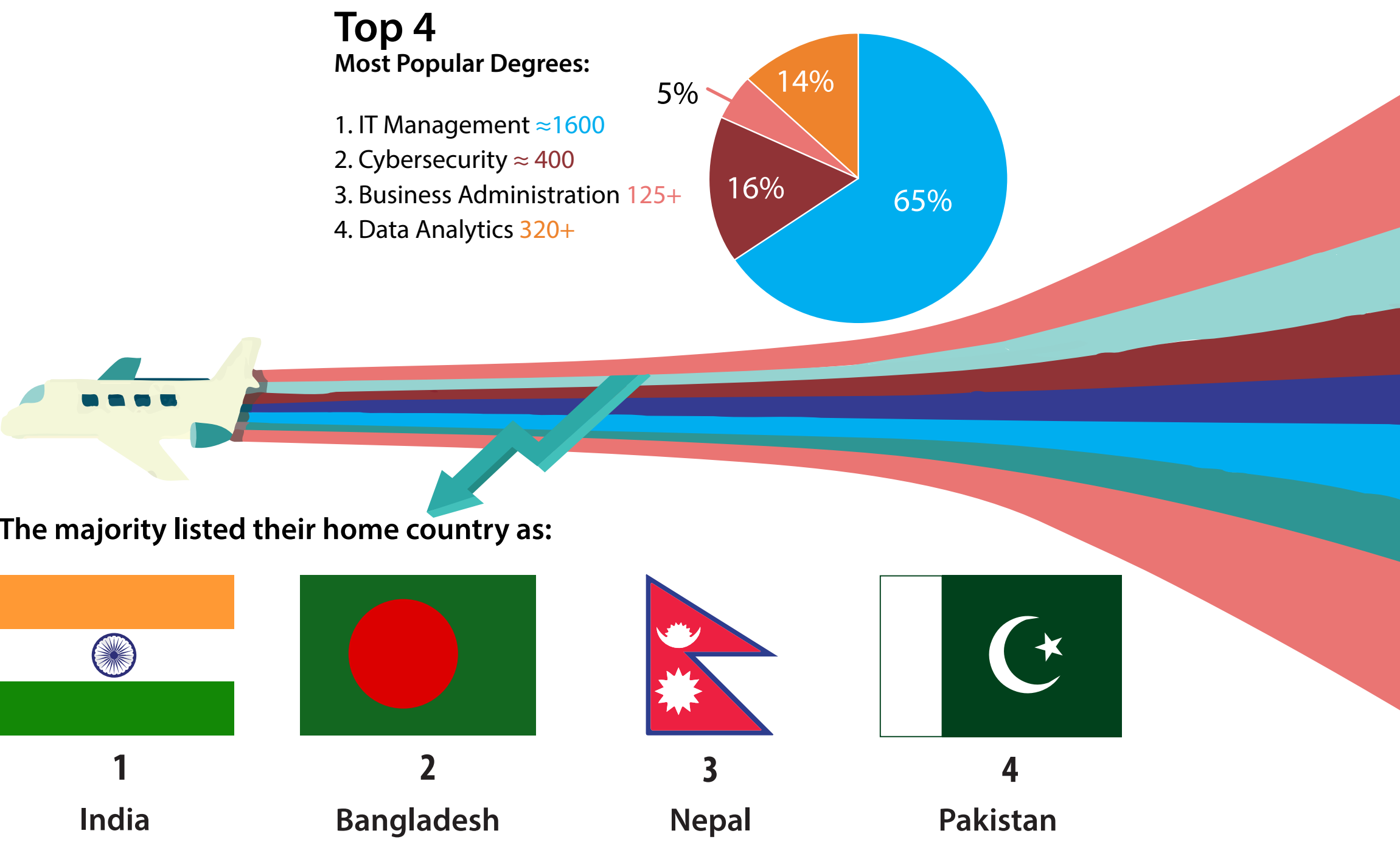
JOE CLEVER / *The Journal*

Sanskriti Bohara



# THE WEBSTER WORLD AT A GLANCE

## International student demographics



# Recruitment success aided by global partnerships

**By CHLOE SAPP  
STAFF WRITER**

Every year, first-year international students land in St. Louis and are dropped off in Webster Groves, their new home in a new country. It's an event school officials get ready for every summer, preparing taxis and buses for students to get to campus safely and quickly.

This academic year, Webster University recruited the largest ever class of international students in its history, thanks to partnerships that increased its ability to enroll foreign students.

Since 2017, Webster has partnered with Global University Systems (GUS), an international network of higher-education institutions that helps students get bachelor's and master's degrees and English-language training. GUS operates across the globe with approximately 60 locations.

Subas Thapa is GUS's regional manager and a representative for Webster University. Under the partnership, GUS representatives meet with prospective students and applicants on behalf of Webster.

"The recruitment number was small before I started recruiting students from Nepal for the U.S.A. campus," said Thapa, who started working at GUS in May 2021.

Thapa also works with Alfa Beta, an education



Webster students gather in front of a banner at St. Louis Lambert International Airport.

consultancy in Nepal that is also partnered with Webster. Alfa Beta helps students with things such as test preparation, study-abroad guidance, visa assistance and language proficiency.

On its website, Alfa Beta describes Webster as an international university "which guarantees excellent educational opportunities that prepare students for civic engagement and personal greatness."

It continues to say Webster "is popular for sustaining a personalized approach to a worldwide, student-centered education through small classrooms, intimate interactions with teachers and staff and attention to student life," making it an institution "dedicated to creating educational programs that integrate theory and practice, offer a global perspective, nurture creativity and cultivate a lifelong drive to learn and actively serve communities and the greater good."

In the "Financials" section of Alfa Beta's website, the average cost of tuition per year to attend Webster is listed as \$24,300, while cost of living per year comes in at \$13,000. In comparison, Webster's website has full-time undergraduate tuition per year at \$31,450, while university housing ranges from \$3,250 to \$6,200 per semester. Eleven majors are listed on Alfa Beta's website, most relating to science or business, while the university's website lists more than 160 majors.

In early February, Thapa spoke at an Alfa Beta event in Nepal titled, "Webster University Open Day," focusing on informing students on the value of an American degree.

"We do regular school visits twice yearly via USEF-Nepal and events with our recruitment partners in various cities. We have 150-plus recruitment partners in Nepal," Thapas said.

Samrat Ray Chaudhuri, assistant vice president for International Enrollment, says Webster mostly works with recruitment partners, including high school and college counselors, education agents, lead-generating companies, and government and non-governmental organizations such as the Education USA and IIE/Fulbright Scholarship Program.

"We try to promote across the world via our available resources and partners," Chaudhuri said. "It is very common for U.S. universities to have a large number of international students from India and China due to the huge population and demand for U.S. higher education in these places."

Avila University is the only other college in Missouri affiliated with a similar partnership agreement, working with GUS beginning in late 2023. Avila, located in Kansas City, currently has 27 international students enrolled out of a total student population of 1,307. Webster has 13,448 students worldwide, with one-third of them listed as international students. The majority of international students enrolled at Webster lists India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan as their home countries.

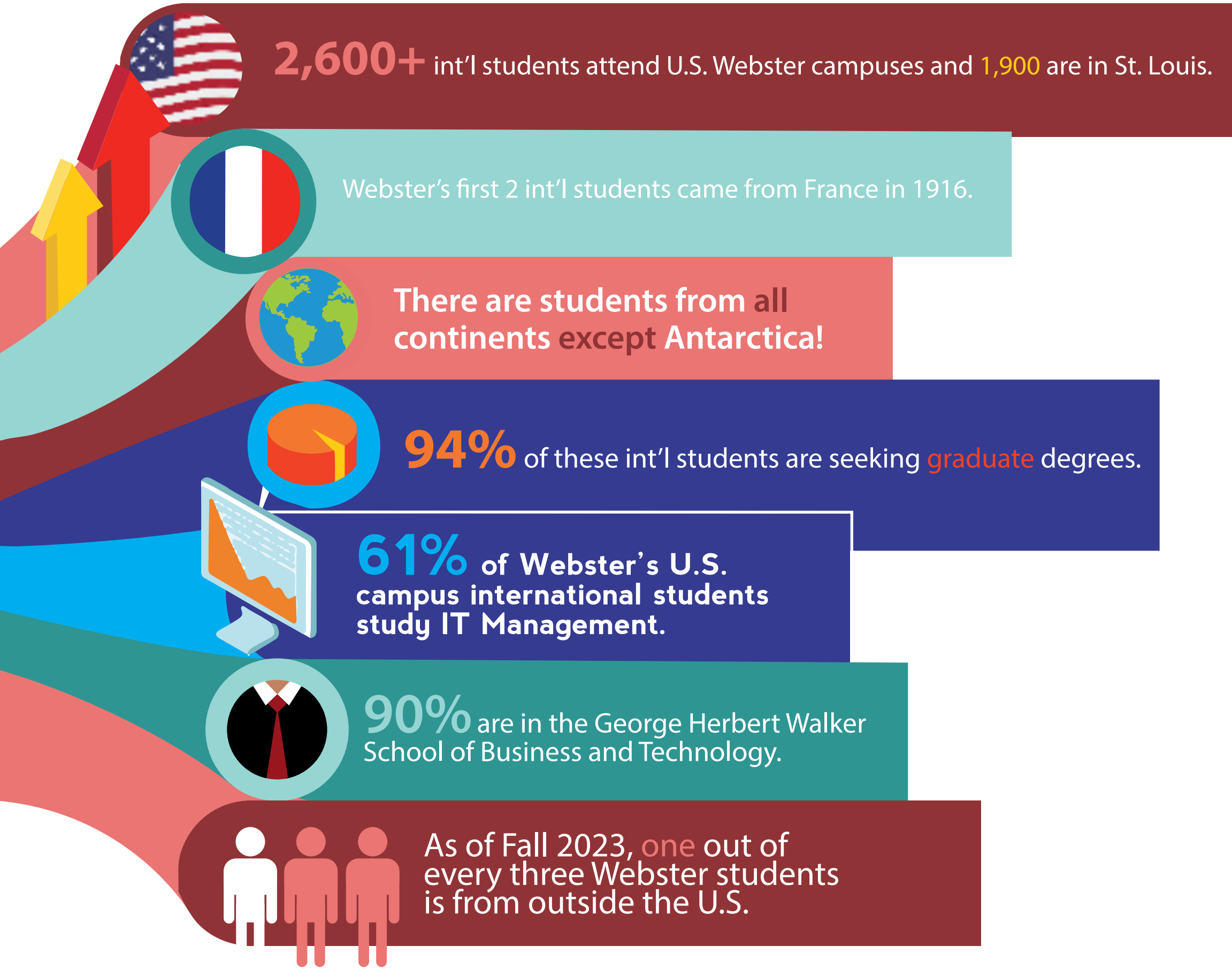
Chaudhuri says the university has been expecting and preparing for the giant boost.

"This means more faculty members to teach the courses, more off-campus housing options and so on and so forth," Chaudhuri said. "We did plan this for the past several years."

Chaudhuri sees an even brighter future for Webster's international student enrollment.

"Most major analysts of the industry see international education as a future for the U.S. and Webster is a significant player in this," Chaudhuri said. "So we are very optimistic of a sustained future."





## Breaking down barriers to communication

**By ELSA CONNOLLY**  
MANAGING EDITOR

When professor Allison Gorga checked her course roster at the beginning of the Fall 2 term last semester, she noticed something highly unusual: Her Introduction to Sociology class – one she has taught for about a decade and usually never fills up – was at full capacity.

Gorga estimates newly arrived international students made up 75% of the class. She realized teaching a course about the intricacies of a society in which the majority of students did not grow up, in a language that is not their first, was a challenge she had to face head on.

“I immediately knew I had to change the way I teach in a variety of ways,” Gorga said.

Professors and students alike across Webster’s home campus are working through the demands of an increasingly multilingual classroom.

Webster’s international students can choose from a variety of English proficiency testing systems, including Duolingo, and must meet required scores upon admission. The score requirements for Duolingo were lowered by Webster for the 2023-2024 school year, allowing for more students to be admitted.

Students also can enroll in the English as a Second Language (ESL) program. In theory, this would mean uniform English usage in the classroom. But in practice, language proficiency is a spectrum.

Carolyn Trachtova, director of the ESL program at Webster, currently works with 21 students and is the program’s only full-



**ELSA CONNOLLY/ The Journal**  
Carolyn Trachtova, director of the ESL program at Webster, teaches students about linguistic tools as well as cultural differences they may encounter in U.S. classrooms.

time staff/instructor.

“I am sorry to see some of the negativity surrounding discussions about working with the students. I know professors really want them to succeed. So many professors have reached out to me and really want to help,” Trachtova said.

Trachtova explains there are a variety of factors that may contribute to international students’ decision whether to enroll in the ESL program.

“Often students don’t want to be seen as ESL students because they feel it implies deficiency rather than proficiency,” Trachtova explained. “Students want to be seen as *university* students.”

On top of the persisting stigma surrounding ESL, being a student of the program also comes with other implications.

“It’s financially a bigger impact. It lengthens the amount of time you are in the U.S. paying for university,” Trachtova said.

In some cultures, asking for help is viewed as a sign of weakness. Cultural differences like these can sometimes hold students back from seeking assistance.

In an effort to counteract these disincentives, the university started offering “Language Enhancement” courses for international students last fall. These courses are not coded as ESL, giving students the opportunity to access the same resources without facing the potential risk of stereotyping, among other concerns.

The resources available for professors and faculty navigating English proficiency concerns are limited, and their questions may not always have answers.

Grading, for example, is one of the most significant gray areas. Currently, there is no concrete set of criteria, leaving professors to their own discretion.

Laylo Khosimova, an international student from Uzbekistan, spent two years preparing for and successfully completing the IELTS (International English Language Testing System).

“Most professors feel this, they try to take this into account. I feel that they will not judge us as they would a native speaker, so they are kind of biased in that situation,” Khosimova said. “I feel they cannot talk openly about this sometimes. They give a score that might be one point higher because they know we are trying to learn.”

For Gorga, she puts less weight on grammar and syntax,

and more importance on areas like evidence and sources for written assignments.

“I take the rubric and then I fudge the numbers,” Gorga explained. “You gotta put words on the page, summarize this reading, connect it to other course material and tell me what you think about it.”

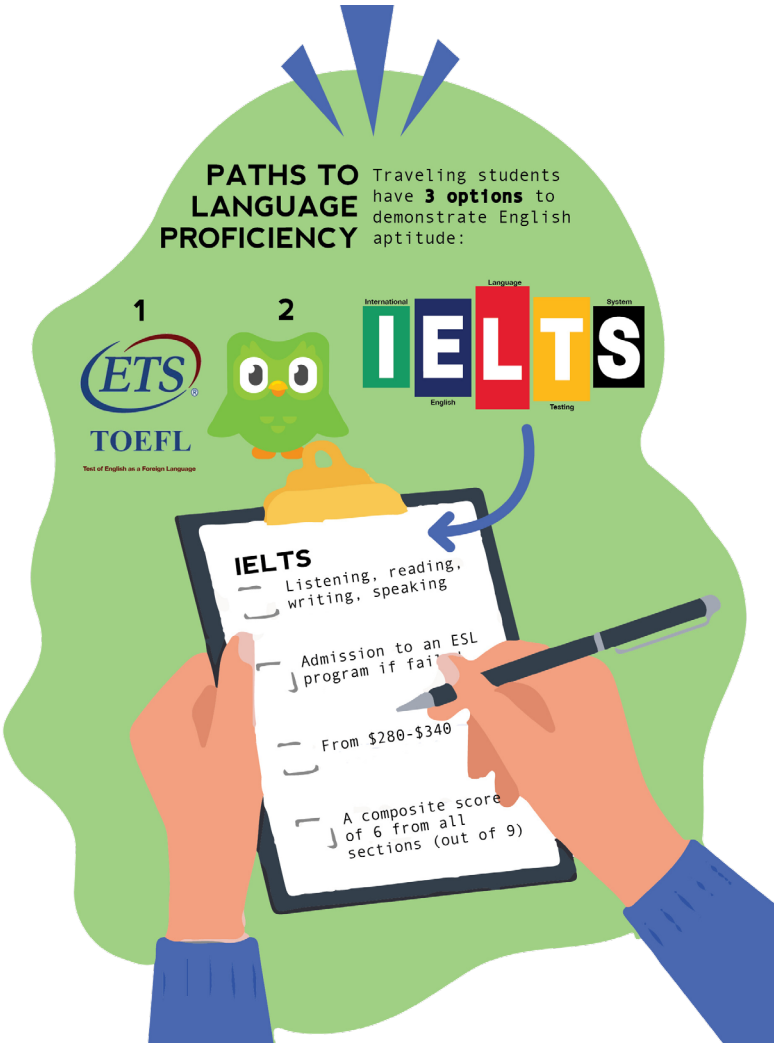
Khosimova feels much more comfortable giving an oral presentation as opposed to turning in a written assignment. She has worked with her professors to come up with alternative ways of completing assignments that better suit her level of proficiency.

Khosimova also finds tools like Google and the artificial intelligence text chatbot, ChatGPT, helpful for information-gathering and translations.

Professors have the ability to raise an “English Proficiency Concern” (EPC) flag in Starfish, which is fielded through the ESL program. Trachtova only receives a handful of referrals each semester, but this may be due to the lack of awareness about the tools available.

Trachtova is working on a more comprehensive workshop to help faculty and staff during this transitional period, equipping them with the tools they need to help every student in their classroom succeed.

“There’s no easy fix. It’s not a quick fix. It’s gonna take people coming together and working together to best help the students,” Trachtova said.





# Gainful employment limited for those on student visas

By KARLA VASQUEZ MEJIA  
STAFF WRITER

With 1,900 international students attending Webster University’s home campus, there has been a bigger demand for on-campus jobs. The problem is, there is not enough for everyone.

For the average college student, finding a job – whether on- or off-campus – is relatively easy. But for those on a student

visa, the only form of income they can have is working a job within campus.

Unlike a domestic college student, international students must follow a set of guidelines to keep their student visas active. One of the requirements is to only work campus jobs in their respective schools. If they fail to comply, they could lose their visa. Additionally, international students can only work 20 hours a week during the semester.

Mehakdeep Purewal, who is from India, works as a student-titled design 3D assistant at the Academic Advising Center. She is getting her master’s in Criminal Justice with a minor in Paralegal Studies. She began classes in the fall and started her campus job in January.

While Purewal may have an on-campus job, she knows of other students who struggle to find employment at the university.



JOE CLEVER/ The Journal

Situated right in front of the dean’s office, Taraneh Shalchi is ready to welcome and direct students throughout the Interdisciplinary Science Building (ISB).

“I’ve observed we have limited job offerings. We don’t need that much manpower. But still, people apply for one certain job, and there are 50 to 60 applicants for that particular job,” Purewal said.

The reason that many foreign-born students fail to find work is due to the lack of available on-campus jobs.

“They are literally struggling because there are some financial issues people are facing, especially international students, because they have a lack of resources. I have a number of friends who have applied to on-campus jobs, but they’re getting rejected,” Purewal said.

Even for those who have jobs, keeping up with the cost of living remains a concern. Purewal tried to find on-campus housing but was unsuccessful, forcing her to find a place elsewhere.

“When I came here, there were no rooms available. So, I had to search for off-campus accommodations. It took two weeks to get an off-campus accommodation,” Purewal said.

Purewal works 15 to 20 hours a week with a job that pays her \$12 an hour. She lives in an apartment with her parents’ support, as she would be unable to afford it on her own.

The lack of available on-campus jobs has prompted some students to take a different approach, one that can place their education and student visas at risk.

Taraneh Shalchi, an international graduate student from Iran, says she knows of people who work off-campus.

Shalchi, who is studying for her master’s in Business Analytics, has been a student employee since December. Like Purewal, she works 20 hours a week for \$12 an hour. She currently lives off-campus with family.

“One of my acquaintances told me that they work off-campus. I always was worried about them, that something will happen to them,” Shalchi said.

To protect her friend, Shalchi is declining to provide further information. However, she notes this person tried to seek an on-campus job.

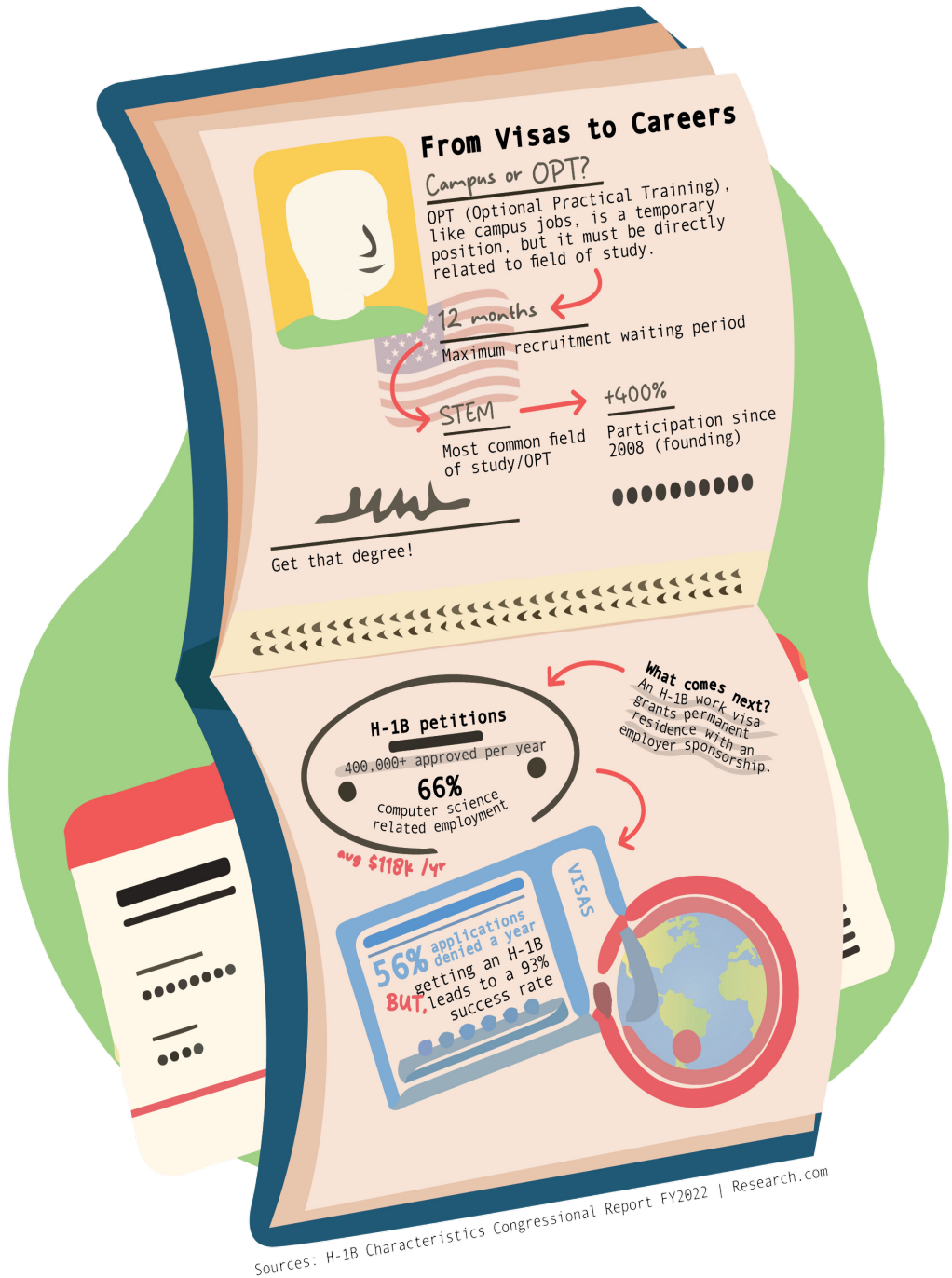
“They told me that they have to work because they have to pay for their tuition and other things,” Shalchi said.

The risks for students working outside of campus are serious, including losing their visa status and being asked to leave the country before finishing their studies.

“I think Webster can provide students with more jobs because I know a lot of students are looking for a job on campus. There are not enough jobs on campus, unfortunately,” Shalchi said.

Purewal is in agreement.

“I think Webster University should give more opportunities for international students to work on campus because people who are citizens here have opportunities; they can work off-campus, too – and they don’t have any restrictive number of hours, they can work 30 to 40 hours a week,” Purewal said, adding the university should also consider offering international students more financial aid options such as scholarships.



# Finding home half a world away

By KP BENTON  
GRAPHICS EDITOR

Graduate student Paritosh-nand Dusa’s hopes of an American Dream quickly became a rude awakening.

“This isn’t what I wanted or what I expected when I saw the Hollywood movies. This is not the ideal American dream, son,” he said.

Dusa, who is studying Cybersecurity, is from India. He is among the hundreds of international students on F-1 visas, which restricts their prospects for getting a job. F-1 student visa holders are only allowed to work for pay on campus for the first academic year upon arrival, severely limiting their options.

Initially drawn in by America’s booming technological advances, its infrastructure and wealth, Dusa’s expectations were far different from the reality of his living situation.

Dusa shares a two-bedroom townhouse in Maryland Heights with four other people, most of whom carpool to Webster. He says the West St. Louis County suburb has more affordable housing and is safer. He also notes the presence of a large Indian community in the area.

“Carpooling is a big thing, and trust me, St. Louis public transit is a bummer,” he said. “It is not at all good. If I was to come to the UC (University Center), taking a bus or Metro for my shift

at 11 o’clock, I should probably get out of my house at 8:30 or something.”

The U.S. Census Bureau report from 2020 shows Indian immigrants are indeed moving west to Maryland Heights, as well as Chesterfield and Town and Country. Between 2010 and 2018, nearly 8,000 Indian-born immigrants now call St. Louis County home.

Since 2000, St. Louis has seen a 194% growth in Indian-born residents, one of 15 cities experiencing this trend along Interstate 270.

When he first arrived here, Dusa took an Uber to the movies and had a conversation with the driver, a Mexican immi-

grant, who used to live around Maryland Heights. The driver informed him what the neighborhood was like just a few years ago when the area along Dorsett Road was the only community where a greater concentration of Indian-Americans lived.

“Slowly, slowly Indian people started to spread and they’re across Maryland Heights, not only Maryland Heights, even Chesterfield, Bridgeton, Ballwin and Manchester,” Dusa said.

Now, Indian and international grocery stores, temples and other gathering places are sprinkled across the west end of the county.

Back on campus, Smarika Rajbhandari, a Nepali student from Kathmandu who is studying Data Analytics, lives across the street at Eden Seminary.

“I live in a shared room with one roommate. It has its pros and cons,” she said.

The communal living space provides companionship, but also requires compromise and understanding, keeping Rajbhandari from having alone time.

Dusa and Rajbhandari are among the large number of Indians, Nepalis, Pakistanis, Sri Lankans and others from South Asia who are students at Webster. After traveling nearly 9,000 miles, over six continents and seven seas, the two found they have mutual friends from their home countries living in the same city.

“It’s like coming from Nepal to stay in smaller Nepal,” Rajbhandari said.

To which, Dusa added, “I came out of a rabbit hole to land in the same rabbit hole.”

Out of the 825 students who live on campus, 220 have home countries other than the U.S., according to Housing and Residential Life director Rachael Amick. With the approximately 1,900 international students currently at Webster, the diverse cohort faces a myriad challenges, from homesickness to navigating the intricacies of campus life in a foreign land, all within the confines of their dormitories and apartments.

Amick’s department works to amend these gaps with inclusive campus events. For instance, the Global Village Committee is a group of campus employees available for support and assistance in transitioning students to live in residence halls and apartments. The department also coordinates with other Student Affairs staff for a range of services, including airport pickups, creating welcome kits and linen kits, and assessing meal options for the new arrivals.

“Housing and Dining work closely together to review food options, including increasing Halal options this year and hosting more Taste of the World Tour events that feature food from different countries,” Amick said.

Sophomore Valentina Arevalo, who is pursuing a Music degree with a minor in International Human Rights, hails from Ecuador. She says getting used to her new surroundings was challenging.

“My first year was chaotic. It was hard to adapt,” she said, adding she feels her home in Ecuador has more noise, more music and more warmth. “There’s more space I need to take with people

in the U.S. I feel more familiarity with other people from my culture.”

The transition from being with her close-knit family in Ecuador to the more solitary arrangement of her campus apartment serves as a poignant reminder of the distance from home – something Dusa agrees with.

“It’s like you’re on your own,” he said. “You have to stand on your own goddamn feet and prove that you are worthy.”

Dusa and many others like him say they cannot afford campus pricing; and compared to off-campus living, the conditions are not all that different.

“I live [with] the bare minimum, maybe four-point-five or five out of 10?” Dusa said.

“I feel the same,” his friend, Rajbhandari, said.

“I’ve witnessed a lot of people each semester,” Dusa said. “There’s at least 800 to 1,200 people coming from India, but there’s a valid reason. There’s consultancies which counsel students and provide them various other opportunities, which happen to be all directed towards Webster.”

While Webster’s residential options offer a semblance of home for international students, challenges remain. But while language barriers, cultural differences and the absence of familiar comforts create obstacles, most find their shared experiences of being away from home foster camaraderie and resilience.



RACHAEL AMICK/ Contributed Photo

International students in West Hall answer their dormitory door to a surprise trick-or-treat event on Halloween.



New arrivals break bread with neighborhood church

By BRIAN OSTRANDER  
STAFF WRITER

Sujanna Raj would not have imagined herself in the role of charitable beacon for international college students in the American Midwest just 10 years ago.

Raj, from India, was sent by the Church of England on a full-ride assignment to the U.S. to Eden Seminary to earn her master’s in Theology in 2017. Three years later, Raj found herself at Emmanuel Episcopal Church on Lockwood Avenue in the vortex of the pandemic.

Raj believes her arrival at Emmanuel is no coincidence at all.

“God doesn’t stop surprising me,” she said.

Every Wednesday night in the spring and fall, Raj and her clergy host an interfaith dinner for dozens of international students studying next door at Webster University.

The university’s worldwide enrollment swelled to 13,448 students last fall, with much of that wave coming from South Asia.

Even as early as 2020, when Raj first arrived at Emmanuel, she was already seeing a growing population of Indian and Nepali students out and about in Old Orchard, some of whom were seeking help.

“They said they want groceries and supplies, and even sometimes work,” she explained. “I cannot give all that, but any essentials, human needs, we would be willing to help.”

Essentials such as a well-stocked pantry, winter coats, wool socks, beanies and even mattresses are also supplied to students in need by Emmanuel, due to Raj’s efforts.

With many of the new students from central and southern India, they are more acclimated to a humid, tropical climate year-round.

“You only have three seasons: hot, hotter and hottest,” Raj joked.

The Midwest’s four seasons are hard on the recent arrivals, she says. When temperatures drop below freezing, some of the students are ill-equipped for frigid cold snaps and are unable to access warmer clothing, making them reliant on places such as Emmanuel to stay warm.

Food, clothing, transportation and language aren’t the only obstacles for students, who face the culture shock of coming to America, as well. Seemingly banal details of everyday American living such as proper footwear – closed-toed shoes for cooler seasons – are not intuitive changes to make for some of the students, according to Raj.

“Even these tiny details are things they miss because there’s nobody to tell them,” she said. “When I meet with them, I advise them, I counsel them, I teach them.”

In addition to the pantry, the ministry has begun hosting culturally informed dinners on Wednesday nights during the spring and fall that used to only be available to the congregation. The idea was born on a Wednesday evening last fall when Raj convened her clergy with a proposal: Why don’t we offer some hot food?

The proposal proved wildly successful. The South Asian students were especially pleased to see Indian cuisine offered at the dinners.

“Our staple food is always rice. If you give them bread, they think it’s [just] for breakfast,” Raj said, adding other food commonplace to Americans like tacos seems unfamiliar to the foreign students at first.

The church has also had to adapt to the individual palates and religious sensitivities of some students by offering vegetarian dishes with every meal.

“That is when hospitality comes into question,” she said. “When you give hospitality, you have to make sure that you accommodate them, according to their needs, not what you want to give them.”

Raj says her hospitality is still in its early stage. She has many more ideas to help accommodate international students in the future. One of these ideas is parking the church’s charity food truck in one of the university’s parking lots and distributing free meals to anyone who needs them.

“Because there’s a need for the students, I think I’m appointed here,” she said. “Otherwise, I would’ve been at any other church.”

The pantry at Emmanuel operates Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

But not all students experience hardship like those who rely on the kindness of neighbors like Raj and Emmanuel Episcopal Church. Goutham Adulapuri, a graduate student who is getting his master’s in Information Systems, says the key to adapting is finding a way to become involved with campus life and all it has to offer.

“When I first got here, I was not in the SGA [Student Government Association],” he explained, “I didn’t know that a lot of things were happening on campus.”

Adulapuri is from a mechanical engineering background in India, where he first became involved with student governance. There, he rose



VANESSA JONES / The Journal

The front parking lot of Emmanuel Episcopal Church marked by a sign on the corner of S. Bompert and E. Lockwood avenues

through the ranks of his university’s mechanical engineering association.

When SGA elections were announced, Adulapuri nominated himself for comptroller and was elected with the help of his adviser, Jennifer Stewart. But prior to his election, he would only come to campus for classes and then go home to his apartment off campus.

“I always want to stay on campus, I always try to have some other work with some other clubs,” he said. “I even [tried out] for the lifeguard position on campus.”

Adulapuri says he likes being in-the-know, and the only way to do that is getting involved with the university. He even spreads word about campus events through a WhatsApp group for other international students.

His biggest advice for new international students is not to just get involved, but also spend time in spaces outside of normal classes like the University Center.

“Once they get into the UC, they may find opportunities to talk to students from different countries,” he said. “Don’t be ashamed to talk!”

“What does home mean to you?”

By ABHINAV PARRE



“My home means my mom to me. Whenever I used to return from school, she used to cook delicious food for me and taught me so many things in life. I miss the nature and mountains, they are beautiful in my country.”

- Dipika Giri, Nepal



“My home means family and community. I miss my country food and speaking my language so that you get shared experiences in your language. I like Webster, I like the campus events and I met a lot of people from different backgrounds here. That’s what I like about Webster I never expected to have friends from different countries. Looking forward to having more beautiful experiences at Webster.”

- Maxwell Korletey, Ghana



“I am missing my home a lot. My home means culture, tradition and food. Home means everything to me.”

- Manoj Ghimire, Nepal

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# Cricket club ignites passion for far-reaching sport

By **GABRIELLE LINDEMANN**  
STAFF WRITER

Picture a stadium packed with screaming fans, the excitement radiating off the building like an aura, with spectators bonding over the same thing: a love for the sport.

The same excitement radiates off a quiet, grassy field in St. Charles. There is no mass of people screaming. In fact, there are no fans watching this game at all. But the love for the game cuts through the wind and shines like the sun beating down on the players in the field.

In spring 2023, a handful of international students created the Webster University Cricket Team. They started with a few students playing for fun, and then registered the group as a club with SGA. Faheel Akhtar, Khoushleem Bano and Vinay Kumar Polavarapu kicked off the club with an event in April. Their hope is for the club to create a community for students to play a sport they love, even when they are so far from home.

Business professor Joe Roberts, the adviser of the club, says the idea for it came about when the International Recruitment and Services office was discussing how to get international students involved on campus. Roberts says many of his students are from Asia, where cricket is most popular.

“A large number of international students were seeking some type of ongoing activity that will keep them engaged and bring a sliver of familiarity from their home country to campus,” Roberts said, adding holding one-off events like the

Holi festival or Eid festival is great, but there was no continuity.

“We asked what we can do to help make the international students feel welcome at Webster. What is the best way to give them a taste of home? [With] no family, no friends, they kind of uproot themselves from everything they know and then travel a long way to come to Webster,” Roberts said.

Today, Dhileep Kumar Reddy Nukala, who started as a player on the original team, leads the club as president. Nukala began playing at age 10 with dreams of becoming a professional player. However, he sustained an injury and his family wasn’t supportive of his plans.

“The least I could do is play and satisfy my soul,” Nukala said.

The team now consists of 30 players and five administrative staff members. The team plays in the St. Louis Cricket League along with 20 other teams, and hold matches in Manchester, St. Charles and Hazelwood.

Cricket is a sport played worldwide, but mainly popular in Asia. It has characteristics similar to baseball, with players who bat and field; instead of a diamond, the field is an oval. Both teams (or sides) bat twice, and then the match is over. The average length of a match is two hours.

“Cricket club is where our international students can show the love they feel when they are in their home country playing their most-loved sport,” Nukala said.

The empty bleachers at the matches don’t diminish the



Faheel Akhtar bats during a cricket match on Sept. 9, 2023.

players’ spirits. Nukala says their excitement comes from the passion for the sport and the connection between their teammates.

“Most of the Asian students are passionate about cricket and they show real enthusiasm for the sport,” Nukala said. “They have been showing their cricketing skills on the ground and the field.”

Sai Bhargav Raavi began playing cricket at 7 years old when he watched a professional Indian team play the sport.

“Although cricket may be a hobby for some people, it is my source of happiness in places where I am stuck,” Raavi said.

Raavi has nicknames for some of the players he’s closest to. They tease each other like kids on a playground. During a recent match, Raavi and a few of his friends sat and ate French fries as they waited to bat. They had missed lunch for a match earlier in the day.

“This club provided me with a sense of belonging and community. I have great respect for the team and made good friends. Shyam, Varun, Sai Kumar, Dinesh are my best buddies on the team,” Raavi said. “Rather than just a connection, I have a cricket family with Webster cricket club.”

Nukala is working to have

cricket recognized by the university as an official sport.

“Our intention is to include cricket under the sports and athletic departments so that every student can have the opportunity to represent cricket at the university level,” Nukala said.

The NCAA doesn’t recognize cricket as an official sport for college athletics. However, there is an organization called American College Cricket that officially acknowledges college cricket clubs. Webster’s cricket club is not recognized by the organization, but is hoping to be in the future.

Nukala is also working to

create a women’s cricket team.

The club will have a meeting in the coming weeks, inviting all who are interested to attend, and then have a selection process to determine who will be on the team.

Thousands of miles away from the familiar comforts of home can leave some foreign-born students feeling out of place.

“It’s a feeling of bringing home and bringing a sense of, ‘You belong here,’” Roberts said.

# Student spotlight: Rivaldi Hartanto

By **DREW KOENIG**  
STAFF WRITER

This year’s record number of international students hail from more than 50 different countries. With all that’s involved in getting acclimated to new surroundings, as well as rigorous academic work, very rarely do international students become involved in athletics. But graduate student Rivaldi Hartanto of Surakarta, Indonesia, has established himself as a standout, both on and off the court.

When he was growing up, Hartanto admits basketball was not his first sport.

“Growing up in a country like Indonesia, soccer is the No. 1 sport, and I grew up playing the sport,” he said. “My mom took me to a basketball club when I was 12 years old and I fell in love with the game. Ever since then, it’s been my primary sport.”

Hartanto started his collegiate basketball career at Hannibal-LaGrange University, a Division I school in northeast Missouri. For his final year of basketball, he came to Webster as a graduate transfer.

“Webster – being a different play style and different coaching philosophy – the first few weeks, it was a little



WEBSTER UNIVERSITY / Contributed Photo

Rivaldi Hartanto (third from right) poses with teammates.

bit difficult to adjust,” he said. “The pace of game is much faster than Hannibal-LaGrange. They were a much more set offense; they ran a lot more in the half-court. Guys from Webster are more athletic, faster and they make shots much quicker.”

Hartanto credits Webster Men’s Basketball head coach Chris Bunch and his teammates for making the transition as smooth as possible.

“The guys are amazing. They are very selfless, and they really encourage you to get the ball and get more confident with it,” Hartanto said. “Coach Bunch is an amazing coach. He makes you feel comfortable playing here.”

Bunch has similar praise for Hartanto and his attitude coming into the new environment at Webster.

“He’s a great guy. He’s as

good of a guy as there is,” Bunch said. “It’s hard when you are only around for a year. A lot of the time, you build a bond with the team over a longer period.”

It may seem like a difficult task – coming from a country on the other side of the world for collegiate basketball, but that is not the only hardship Hartanto had to overcome playing the game at this level.

Hartanto has had four

knee surgeries in his time in college. But even with all these setbacks, he has continued to work hard and come back to play.

“It’s for the love of the game,” Hartanto said. “I realized when playing sports that you can’t play forever. At a certain point, your physical capabilities go downhill.”

Bunch says Hartanto’s positivity is one of the things that has endeared him to the

team.

“We all knew everything that he went through just to be here playing and practicing, and everybody respected that,” Bunch said. “We were glad he was able to be here and get to play one more year.”

Hartanto’s time at Webster is coming to an end. However, he’s making the most of it, leaving a lasting impact on his teammates in his single year as a Gorlok.

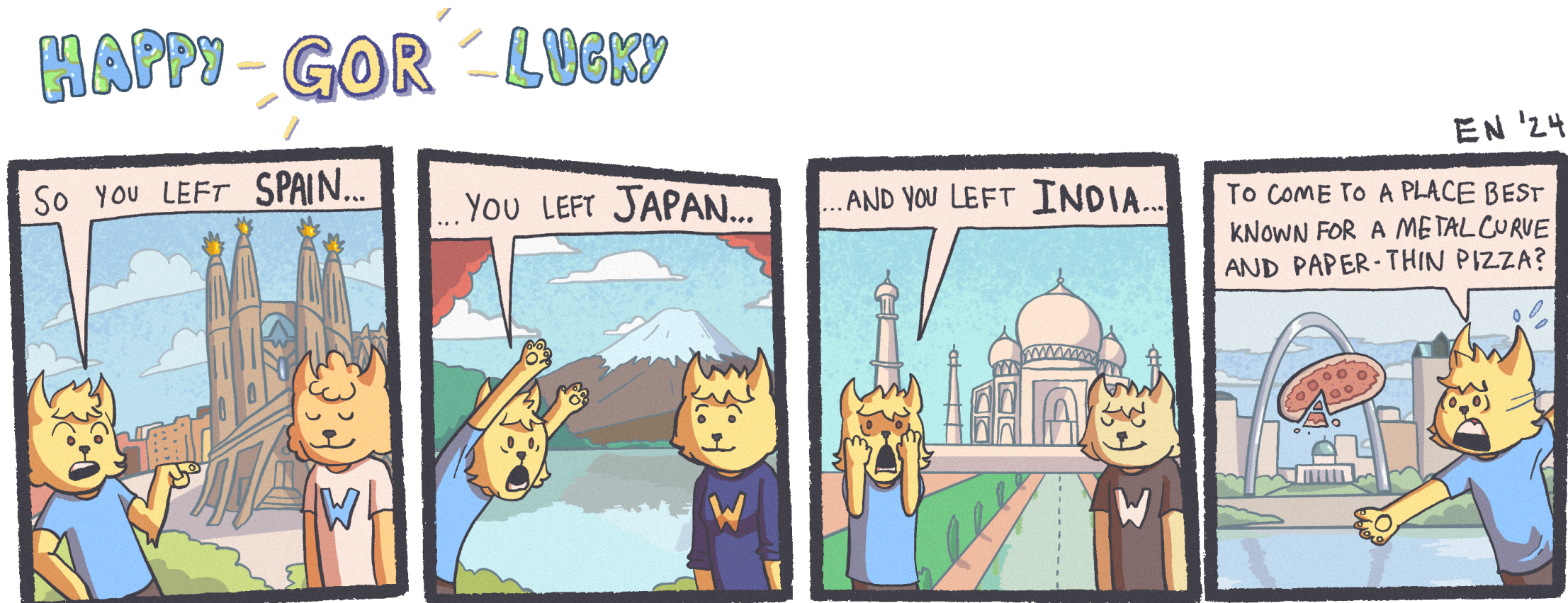
“By the end of the year our guys absolutely loved him. I mean, what’s not to love?” Bunch said. “He’s a good person, he shows up for everything, he works hard, and he’s very appreciative of everything.”

Hartanto is thankful for the experience, not just with the team but as a Webster student, as well.

“Coming to the United States is one of the best things to ever happen to me,” he said.

“Over my time here, I realized to never take things for granted. Sometimes you have it, and another day it’s not there anymore. I just take it day by day and really appreciate what I have.”





Graphic by Ethan Nieroda

New Beginnings continued from page 1

She began working through the English section on Duolingo. The English proficiency test on Duolingo is accepted by over 5,000 universities, including Webster University.

Bohara and her father made the trip to southern India after she was invited to be interviewed for a visa. But her application was rejected, making her feel as though her world was crashing down.

“I was crying on my way back to the hotel, I was saying, ‘Oh, my god, this is the end of the world, this is it. I am never moving abroad. This was my last attempt,’” Bohara said, now laughing at the situation.

Even after a successful second attempt at a visa, her family continued to urge her not to go. She explained that in Nepal, children rarely move out of their parents’ house until past the age of 18, when they are expected to get married, start a family and settle down.

But Bohara had different plans, which included education and traveling the world. She wanted to explore, not settle.

The day before she left Nepal was when all of the pieces began to fall into place. Her family held a get-together and gathered everyone for one last meal and to bid her farewell.

“That was when it hit me, I

am leaving tomorrow, home is never going to be home again. Even if I go home now or maybe after a year, I will have to go back, it’s not going to be what it used to be. I don’t have a home anymore and that’s something that every international student feels,” Bohara said.

Once in St. Louis, Bohara locked herself in her campus apartment for two days. Typically a sociable person, she became a “hermit” as the anxiety of being alone in a new place set in. The idea of not making any friends and being alone scared her, and she began second-guessing her choice to leave home.

“Everybody has a circle back home, someone you grew up with, someone you played with, someone who knows all of your secrets. Now you just move to a whole different country, a whole different culture, that was a cultural shock,” she said.

That was then. Now, four months into her studies at Webster, Bohara has been able to establish a group of friends and relationships she can rely on.

She and her roommate have been sharing and learning about old and new culture. Bohara incorporates a “rule” in their apartment of immediately removing shoes upon entering. Her roommate has introduced

Bohara to traditional American eats such as spaghetti, and eating mac and cheese as a meal rather than a snack. Bohara also feels her teachers truly care about her success and will do whatever they can to assist her.

Bohara admits she misses her home and family every day, especially her mom’s cooking and the family dog. And with the 11-hour time difference, communication with her family is a challenge, her grandparents calling in the afternoon in their time zone, but in the early morning hours for Bohara. It is a challenge but they make it work.

Bohara is majoring in Psychology with an emphasis on mental health – a complete flip from her original intent to study banking. According to her, women in Nepal suffer from substance abuse at a higher rate than men, but there is a lack of resources for those who need them. She hopes to open a women’s rehabilitation center in Nepal after completing her studies - and embarking on more world travel.



Sanskriti Bohara

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DESTINATION: WEBSTER

From Singapore to the States: Webster student navigates mental health, social challenges

BY LAYLA HALILBASIC  
STAFF WRITER

Conservatory student Beverly Joy Goh's journey at Webster has been rockier than anticipated.

Born in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Goh moved to Singapore when she was only 9 years old. Coming to the United States flipped her life upside down.

Aside from cultural differences, the way people in St. Louis treated and acted toward Goh was jarring to her. Even now, she is still adapting to culture shock after living in the U.S. for eight months.

International students currently make up more than one-third of all students enrolled at Webster's U.S. campuses.

Webster University counselor Hemla Singaravelu explains that international students face a unique set of losses: their family, familiar foods and lifestyle, culture and customs, a sense of belonging and overall normalcy. Without a sense of community, students are at risk of experiencing loneliness, homesickness, isolation, confusion, depression and anxiety and have a difficult time making new friends.

"While many internationals have a desire to form friendships with their American classmates and the local community, language barriers, including different accents and experiencing micro-aggressions, present major obstacles," Singaravelu said.

Goh encountered homogeneity among her peers and felt isolated being in a space where "no one else looked like her" in the Conservatory.

"When you're alone in an environment, you start feeling a sense of loneliness," Goh said. "When you come to a different country, systems change, the way of life changes and the people change. It's very different from coming to a place where a lot of people have never really interacted with someone from your part of the world."

Conservatory department chair Gad Guterman believes that while students working in close proximity cannot prevent loneliness or homesickness, it does prevent them from being by themselves.

"We strive to create a sense of family within our ensemble of students and artists," he said. "They're drawn together because they share a passion for theater

and they end up working together in a really intense training program, which means our students are rarely alone."

Guterman says the Conservatory encourages its students to interact with diverse voices through coursework. By exploring the works of playwrights, he hopes students are intellectually and creatively contending with the questions of racism and discrimination.

Guterman also recognizes that it is paramount that students engage with people of different cultural backgrounds because it is critical to their developmental trajectory, both as artists and human beings.

"Theater is about living in other people's shoes," he said. "How do we create worlds on stage dreamed up by somebody else? And how do we make them come alive? It's an exercise in empathy. We really can only practice our empathetic muscles if we are being asked to see the world through the eyes of people different from ourselves."

While Goh doesn't expect her white friends and classmates to fully understand, she believes her situation is not unique among other minority students. Despite people's best intentions, she acknowledges no one would not be able to speak authentically about an experience that is not their own.

"You never expect your white counterparts and your white friends to be perfect. That's never to say I'm perfect. We are never going to be able to speak about an experience that's not ours and not our lived experience. I'm a very firm believer that there is a shared struggle of your minority race," she said.

Going to school in Singapore gave Goh a distinction between her academic and personal life, giving her more freedom to do what she wanted in all aspects of her life. But in the U.S., she says both sides of her life have meshed together into one.

Even Goh's parents noticed that she struggled with the shift in her environment, adding that their daughter constantly looks forward to going home.

"It's hard for her to find community and a separation from her life in the Conservatory," her mother, May Chan Goh, said.

Singaravelu has seen the struggles students can face firsthand, too. She's noticed that a lack of understanding



about stigma often leads to students not seeking out support services.

"Students hailing from collectivistic cultures tend to harbor deep-rooted stigma and taboo related to discussing mental health, fearing the shame it will bring upon their family," she said.

Guterman also believes it is crucial that students utilize counseling services. He said that students are referred to services such as Student Counseling & Life Development, Multicultural Center & International Student Affairs and the Reeg Academic Resource Center in times of need.

While some believe that the symptoms of mental illness stem from weaknesses in personality, they can be overcome through positive thinking and willpower. Goh tries to embody that mindset.

Like other international students, Goh now knows how to conquer her mental health battles. She's learned the

importance of being discerning with her time and presence during her first semester. She also stays in touch with friends and family in Singapore every day.

She says finding and keeping up a daily routine and actively searching for happiness in her daily life has helped her "protect her peace."

Goh also stressed the value of being content with something she never thought she would experience: solitude.

"You never want to fall into the trap of forcing yourself into groups of friends that you don't naturally gel with just out of the fear of being alone or being lonely," she said. "The reality is that there's no greater loneliness than being with people who are never going to take the time to understand you, anyway."

A day in the life: Anna Tulachan

BY ELISE PALMER  
CULTURE & LIFESTYLE  
EDITOR

College students are relatively busy, with the demands of the school week seemingly increasing as the semester progresses. It shouldn't come as a shock most students look forward to the weekend to catch a break.

It's no different for computer science major Anna Tulachan, a Nepalese international student. Compared to her busy Mondays, which consists of four classes throughout the day, and the rest of the week, the weekend offers her a brief respite.

Tulachan starts her day off connecting with family members by calling home to Nepal.

"I call to the point to where my mom says 'Stop calling me, you call too much!'" Tulachan said with a laugh. "We call in our homes every morning or every night. When it's morning here, it's midnight [there]. We have to call when we're about to sleep or when we wake up."

The remainder of the day is centered on rest. Naps are enjoyed until Marletto's, the on-campus dining hall, opens at 11 a.m. There, Tulachan and her roommate, fellow first-year student and Business major Sadiskshya Bayalkoti, share a meal together.

Pastries, eggs, potatoes, bacon and even pizza are up for grabs. While the food isn't anything to write home about, moments like these at brunch are treasured.

"We've known each other before coming here. We applied together and we got here together. If she hadn't been here with me, it would've been so different," Tulachan said. "It feels safe having her here. Even if you're so far away from home, she's someone who has my back. Being together feels like home."



ANNA TULACHAN/ Contributed Photo

Anna Tulachan (second from right) with friends during the Chinese New Year celebration on campus

As the two eat away at the assortment of food, they share inside jokes and references to popular TikTok videos. The dining hall may not be full but the sound of their laughter is enough for the space come alive.

After finishing their meal, the real question is posed: How will they spend the remainder of the day?

"There are a lot of good restaurants in Old Webster...sometimes we go there," Tulachan said.

The gym is also a regular part of Tulachan's routine, but due to the lack of time, it's out of the question for the day. Tulachan and Bayalkoti mull over the possibility of going to the mall, but ultimately decide against it.

"To go anywhere [in St. Louis], we need a car, an Uber or a Lyft. It costs so much," Tulachan said.

The day is spent in the comfort of their cozy dorm room, located conveniently in Maria Hall, Webster's freshman dormitory. There, they relax and, of course, nap, until the dining hall opens again at 5 p.m.

However, the dining hall's slim offerings pose a challenge.

"We go to Walmart every two weeks. The food here is sometimes not it," Tulachan said.

"Sometimes?" Bayalkoti interjected. "Most of the time," Tulachan said with a laugh.

The two keep noodles and other dorm-friendly foods stocked in their room on the off-chance that Marletto's doesn't satisfy. Following dinner, the two spend time working on assignments for their courses. The importance of studying and staying on top of the workload is emphasized.

"As an international student, we have to maintain our grades; otherwise, our visas will get terminated," Tulachan said. "We have to be there in classes for attendance...sometimes when we feel like we don't want to go to classes, we have to push ourselves to go."

The stakes between receiving schooling in the U.S. and receiving it back home in Nepal are drastically different.

"We didn't have to worry about be-



VANESSA JONES/ The Journal

Anna Tulachan walks to class.

ing [told] 'Go back to your country. You don't study? Go back to your country,'" Bayalkoti said of being a foreign student in America.

When evening comes, it isn't all about work, as the friends take time to indulge in their favorite shows, which has become part of the routine, as well. Tulachan and Bayalkoti often do this together, reinforcing their tight-knit bond.

While their day seems ordinary, it is the point.

"Our lives are not as different as yours. It's just that we are so far from our country..." Tulachan said.