

Canisius College International Students Story  
By, Robert Creenan

We've heard stories of Americans going abroad and finding it hard to adjust to life in another country. What happens when that situation is reversed? There are plenty of international students going to American colleges, making friends and learning subjects they wouldn't have the opportunity to back in their home country. But what's it like for them to try and adapt to a new country and lifestyle? And how helps them along the way?

### **1. Joana Moraes**

Joana Canot Porto De Moraes is a sophomore double majoring in psychology and creative writer. She is from Sao Paulo, Brazil, the largest city in South America and the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest in the Western Hemisphere, after Mexico City. 7 million people live in the city limits, with around 20 million living in the Greater Sao Paulo area. Her family lives in the southern part of the city, which is the most educated.

Moraes came to school in America because she could double major, something you can't do in Brazil. "I like how the education system works here better," Moraes said. "How people live in a dorm room and go to the library to work. It feels like a real college."

Schools in Brazil are mostly run as private institutions. The best ones are more often than not public the opposite of common perceptions of American colleges. The best school in Brazil is the public school University of Sao Paulo, but the downside for someone like Moraes was people go for only STEM professions, like doctors, lawyers, and engineers. Liberal arts careers like writing, psychology, or journalism are nowhere near as popular.

Buffalo is certainly a lot colder than Brazil, especially since Sao Paulo lies right on the Tropic of Capricorn. Moraes doesn't go out that much, since Buffalo isn't a city that easy to get around, requiring a car to go anywhere. She misses the public transit in her city, made up of lots of subway lines and bus routes. "In Sao Paulo, it doesn't matter where you are because there's always tons of people," Moraes said. "Here, it's mostly empty by comparison."

It's mostly the little Canisius things that get to her, like the Internet not working or no open food places during long breaks. "The weather isn't always cooperative and the tunnels don't go all the way to health science," Moraes said while also giving the advice, "Don't be a science major if you don't want to walk through the snow."

Moraes has lived only with American roommates during her time here. They don't care that she's international and would introduce her to new people the ways most college students meet each other, through friends of friends and classes. "If I was put with other international students," Moraes said, "I think I wouldn't get out of my space and meet new people."

The clubs Moraes is currently involved with the Griffin, where she's the sports layout editor, the Quadrangle, and the Honors Student Association. She doesn't see herself as into the club thing, since her friends brought her into them.

When Canisius is on a short break, Moraes will stay either on campus or stay with one of her roommates. When it's a longer break, she'll travel. Her parents have visited her on school breaks over the past year. She usually stays on the East Coast, since places like California are too far. "The places I've been too the most are New York and Boston," Moraes said. "I went with my parents to New York over the past winter break." The only aspect of home Moraes is homesick for is her her dogs. Every dog that she sees, she'll has to pet it.

"People don't really care if I'm international," Moraes said. "If you present yourself that way, they'll just go, 'Oh, you're international,' and just accept it." On the bright side for Moraes, the professors she has understand that her English is different, and they don't take points off because her grammar stinks.

## **2. Tamara Miskovic**

Tamara Miskovic is a junior, majoring in Spanish, Management with a minor in Human Resources, and a member of the Canisius women's basketball team. She hails from Belgrade, the capital and largest city of Serbia, with a population of about 2 million people. She regards it as very busy and very loud, but also very different from the rest of the country. "Serbia itself is made up of mostly villages and not completely developed towns, Miskovic says. "It's kind of poor, but not like a third world country. We still have movies and theaters."

Miskovic has played basketball throughout her grade school years, but when the time came for looking at colleges, she was at a crossroads. In Europe, you have to sign a professional contract with a team at age 18 if you wish to continue playing sports. The colleges over there don't support collegiate athletics the same way Americans do. The U.S. is the only country that has scholarships for athletes. She thought going to an American school it would be a good opportunity to get a new experience, see something different, and getting a better education.

Basketball is very popular back in Serbia, with the country having some of the best professional and national teams in Europe. The women's team won the European championship in the summer of 2015 while the men's team was runner-up to the United States in the 2014 Basketball World Cup.

Miskovic's process of applying for American schools was different, since she wasn't familiar with how the system worked. She emailed a bunch of coaches in the states of New York, Florida and Ohio. Canisius was the first that showed a whole interest in her. "A coach I knew in Canada knows the women's basketball coach here and recommended the school," Miskovic said. "I also have cousins in Canada, so it's always good to have someone close. So as soon as I got the Canisius offer, I said, 'I'm taking it.'"

She had to start learning English in first grade throughout her. It was mostly Basic English, but most people in non English-speaking Europe don't learn English from school. The majority of young people in Europe are able to speak English, since it's the most common language spoken. "For me," Miskovic recounted, "it was mostly through TV shows, music, and just being surrounded by the language. Since I've arrived, it's just been getting better and better."

Miskovic, as with other student athletes, lives with her teammates. She stated she gets adjusted to new situations easily, and prepared herself for the move to

America. "A year and a half before coming to Canisius, I moved to another town in Serbia and changed schools to play basketball, along with living with a roommate," Miskovic recounted. "It was kind of a practice run for her and helped me with being on her own." The roommates she has now don't judge her based on cultural differences. "I'm a pretty open and has a similar personality to them, so it wasn't a drastic change," Miskovic said.

Like Moraes, the majority of Miskovic's friends here are Americans, so she wasn't put an entirely international environment since she's a four-year student. She has heard if international students are put together, they'll usually stick together instead of mix into American circles. Miskovic thinks she's in a better situation as she's experiencing the culture and being a citizen.

Miskovic is quite involved for an international student. She is the treasurer for Global Horizons, a senator for the Class of 2017 (on the finance committee, diversity committee, and dining services committee), a tour guide, an orientation leader, and a SAC representative for the women's basketball team. "Everything changed for me last year when I became an orientation leader," Miskovic recounted. "I met so many new people, became a much more open person, and had such a good experience." For senate, she was lucky that her basketball schedule would allow her to be at the meetings. "I would rather do stuff and be busy all day than just sit in my room," Miskovic said.

Over school breaks, Miskovic remains on campus for basketball practice. "It's nice to hang out with them since campus is empty except for the players," Miskovic said. She usually gets 4 days off for Christmas, where this past Christmas, she went to NYC to a friend's house. Two years ago she went to a friend's house in Canada. Over spring break, she just remained here due to continuing rehab on her left knee. Over the summer, she usually gets to go home for a month, but can't go back this year because of further rehab.

Travelling across America on her own is expensive for her and her schedule doesn't allow for much. Her main travelling comes with the basketball team to road games and various tournaments. "We go to NYC often, I went to Texas this year, which I've never done before, and I've been to Connecticut, Vermont, Michigan, Syracuse, and Chicago," Miskovic said.

Living on her own in a new country kind of hard for Miskovic since it's just her. Her parents and brother are back home, though she talks to them all the time on Skype and Facetime. "It's happens to everyone when you get mad or sad about something and you want to talk to someone about it, but you can't physically be with them," Miskovic said. "It's hard, but I learned to go through it. In my sophomore year, I had a point where I was nostalgic for home, cause it's weird being away for so long." Academically and basketball-wise, everything came together for her, so there was never a moment where she outright hated it.

Miskovic feels like she's still in high school here, since the routine is similar to her high school routine. You go to classes, the teachers take attendance, do homework and quizzes. Back in Serbia, students still go to lectures, but attendance isn't taken and the classes often have one big test at the end of the semester. If you fail a class in an American semester, you have to take it again at some point in the future, but in Serbia, there 6-7 times a year you can take the exam for a class. "I

thinks it's better organized and structured," Miskovic said. "From what she hears from my friends and brother, who are in university back home, you read a whole 1,000 page book for a class, but it doesn't give the reader practical knowledge. Here I feel I do get practical knowledge."

### **3. The International Student Office**

Kathleen Farley is the director of the Office of International Student Programs. Her office is meant to support the international student population on campus. They do all the immigration paperwork required by the college and for maintaining the student's visa status. They are the designated school officials for CEVIS, the government's student and exchange visitor information system, which tracks all international students in the U.S. The staff is made up of Farley, an administrative associate shared with the study abroad office, 1 full-time grad assistant, and 1 part-time grad assistant.

Farley is also the academic advisor for the international students. She teaches Griff 101 classes for freshman international students, and helps with any student academic concerns, since that impacts their visa.

The office does a lot of cultural programming that allows students to share their culture with general population throughout the year, such as Global Fest by Global Horizons. They have a peer mentor program where they connect international students with American students and a community family program, where students get a host family usually either an alumnus or staff member. The department assists them with anything that has to do with their college experience.

The office runs a weeklong orientation for the students done before regular college orientation begins, as they go into regular orientation afterwards. Those are for graduate, undergraduate, and exchange students. "Within 5 days, we're helping students acclimated not only to Canisius, but also to the United States," Farley said. "A lot of presentations are done on cultural adaptation, what the American classroom is like, and what to expect from Americans in general."

"We try to be close with the students to make them as comfortable as possible," Farley also said. "They're just like any other college student. They're going through the same things Americans are, with an added layer of cultural adaptation and being homesick."

The number of students on campus fluctuates year by year. During the spring 2016 semester, the number is about 200 across all levels. Canadian students who commute across the border make up a good portion of internationals. Last fall, 28 countries were represented among those students. "It may be a small number for a campus like UB who has thousands of international students, but our population is very diverse," Farley explained. "You may have just 1 person from a particular country."

International students get put in random housing assignments like all Canisius freshman and are able to make their own roommate choices. Farley said it depends on student's preferences for what they want out of experience, as living with other Americans will help the students go through the cultural adaptation process. She doesn't request anything directly from student housing on their behalf.

The things that the Office for International Students does for the students are intentional, as Farley explains, “It can be overwhelming being in a new country, so we try to respect their desires. The people of this office are the first faces they see when they arrive in Buffalo. We pick them up from the airport and get them settled into housing. If they have a question about something strange in American culture, they can go down to the office to ask and be given an explanation.”