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### **CSU INTERNATIONAL STUDENT NEWSLETTER ARTICLE**

#### ***The Courage to Embrace the Unfamiliar – Interview with Anayondu Diliora***

by Olufunmilayo Sofoluwe

My name is Olufunmilayo Sofoluwe and I am a graduate student at CSU in the Educational Leadership, Higher Education track program. As an intern with the Center for Global Engagement, I am excited about the prospect of learning about the experiences of international students here at CSU as I contemplate a future role in international student advising. I am particularly interested in understanding the unique challenges faced by students pursuing academic goals while simultaneously attempting to acclimatize to life in a foreign country. Though I now regard the United States as my home, I was once an international student. I can recollect the exhilarating experience of travelling thousands of miles from Nigeria to Philadelphia to attend college, but then feeling utterly overwhelmed as I tried to adjust to life in a new country. Thinking back, there were moments when all I wanted to do was just get on a plane and head back to everything that was familiar! Thankfully, I eventually adjusted to the enriching and enlightening experience of studying in a foreign country.

I recently had the opportunity to interview Anayondu Diliora, a fellow Nigerian who is currently completing an undergraduate program at CSU, and she had a lot of valuable insights to share about her own experiences as an international student.

Anayondu is from Anambra State in the southeastern part of Nigeria. She came to the United States two years ago and is currently a sophomore at CSU majoring in biochemistry. Anayondu was always interested in travelling to the United States or Canada for college because of the exposure and global competencies she felt could be attained from studying in a foreign country. CSU

was her choice because quite frankly, she was granted admission very quickly. During our interview, Anayondu highlighted several unanticipated features of studying in the U.S.

- *“I didn’t think everything would be computer based here. Back home, things are on a very manual system”* Anayondu expressed appreciation for the ease and efficiency of being able to conduct administrative and academic tasks online. She mentioned that activities like course registration, course access, grades access, housing registration can be accomplished via a few computer keystrokes unlike the predominantly paper-based processes at college institutions in Nigeria.
- *“Casual dressing was a pleasant surprise. Back home, people dress more formally in the universities!”* Anayondu pointed out that college culture was certainly more formal in Nigeria compared to the U.S. From her perspective, students, faculty and administrative staff in the U.S. generally have a more casual and laid-back attitude.
- *“Faculty here is much more approachable”* Anayondu appreciated the access to her professors at CSU even outside of class time. She talked about having open discourse with her professors in class and the option to seek them out via appointments during office hours or via email if she had questions or concerns. She pointed out that in comparison, faculty-student relationships back in Nigeria are definitely more reserved and aloof.
- *“Class Scheduling is much more flexible here”* Anayondu highlighted the flexibility in the academic curriculum in the U.S. She stressed that students in the U.S. received general guidance from advisors to stay on track, but pretty much had the autonomy to select classes that suited their interests and schedule. This was in stark contrast to the rigid class scheduling options at institutions back home in Nigeria.

Anayondu and I also chatted about the expectations she had before coming to the U.S. She expected diversity and emphasized that her expectations had been fulfilled. She has enjoyed the exposure to diverse people and perspectives during her time so far in the U.S.

I asked Anayondu to share some of the challenges she has encountered living and studying in the U.S. She talked about the difficulty of being a minor when she started college and not having her parents or guardians available to address certain requirements of settling into life in the U.S. For instance, she could not open a bank account as a minor and she did not have a driver’s license, so mobility was an issue. Anayondu also found it challenging being on

her own and not having the supportive network of relationships she had back home in Nigeria to help ease the strain of transitioning to college in a foreign country.

Anayondu experienced some aspects of culture shock. She initially enjoyed the novel experience of American cuisine but after a short while, began to crave some of her native meals. She also dealt with loneliness as she found it initially challenging to make friends so just attended classes and retreated back to her dorm without much interaction with other students. When she finally did start making friends, she gravitated towards other Nigerian students. "I hung out with a lot of Nigerians. It wasn't intentional, it was just easier, they got me, my jokes were relatable." It took some time but fortunately, Anayondu mentioned that she did build a network of relationships that included other American students.

I asked Anayondu to talk about aspects of the institutional support system in place at CSU that were particularly helpful in transitioning to college as an international student. She pointed out the value of the international student orientation program. "Orientation was good, they gave me information on things I needed to get started like how to set up a bank account and how to get my books. They gave me a tour of the school, a flyer of all CSU events and generally advised me on what to do to settle in." Anayondu is also a member of the International Students Association at CSU. She did express an important point about making the most of the international student experience even within the context of institutional support: "this is all about how you can relate, it is really up to me to be able to relate."

Anayondu discussed aspects of the American educational system she had to adapt to including adjusting to the GPA assessment system and embracing opportunities to develop meaningful relationships with faculty. "As a freshman, at first I did not want to talk to my professors. As a sophomore, I am much more open with my professors and can have a relationship and bond. I have people to go to for advice about the future."

Anayondu has capitalized on the opportunity to explore the U.S while she is in the U.S. So far, she has visited New York, North Carolina and Saint Louis. She enjoyed North Carolina but could not quite get used to the frenzy and pace of New York, especially after living in a small and quite city like Columbus. To cap off our interview, I asked Anayondu to share one specific element about American culture that she truly enjoys. "I love that people are carefree here and independent minded." Anayondu also shared a few interesting aspects of her culture. Her native language is Igbo and she enjoys Abacha, a native dish made out of coconut flakes, water and palm oil.

At the end of the interview, Anayondu shared insightful advice for other international students looking to transition to life in a new country. "Tell them to

be very open, to learn new stuff. Always ask questions. It is better to ask any question to get clarity rather die in silence. Also, don't judge people right off!"

I enjoyed the interview with Anayondu immensely. She struck me as a poised and confident young woman. Anayondu has embraced the experience of studying as an international student with an open-minded attitude that has served her well in the incredibly disruptive process of living and studying in a foreign country. Like me, she has probably at some point, contemplated getting back on a plane to head back home to the familiar rather than deal with the unfamiliar. However, like most international students, she has persevered and is courageously making the most of the valuable opportunity to acquire a global perspective.



### **CSU Lessons From Abroad Article**

*From Student Attendee to Conference Chair – Interview with Katherine Grego*

by William Harper

I had the opportunity to sit down virtually with the LFA Southeastern conference chair, Katherine Grego and discuss the two-day virtual 2020 Lessons From Abroad conference and what it means to her. Katherine is the Study Abroad Coordinator for the Center for Global Engagement.

LFA is a conference set up for recent returnees from study abroad to have a place to unpack their stories and connect with other students around several other institutions. During this event, students gain the advice of applying their experiences to their resumes or job interviews. This conference teaches what resources are available to go back and live or work abroad, as well. The planning committee also had Dr. Ian Bond, a Columbus Rotarian, as the keynote speaker.

This year LFA took on a new look by moving onto the “Zoom” virtual platform due to the 2020 pandemic. The pandemic has caused major speed bumps for study abroad campuses worldwide, but this did not stop Katherine from being able to continue the conference tradition. As chair, she clearly did her job well with the amount of returning attendees, no hiccups in the conference, and inputting a new session into the conference about “diversity and social justice” abroad. When asked about how the attendance was affected, she explained how they were able to have participants from 14 different institutions across 4 different states in the U.S because the online format made the information more accessible.

During the event, Wendy Ramirez-Mayen won the 2020 LFA Southeastern Photo Contest for her picture from Korea.



*“While nearing graduation, I kept thinking, “what am I going to do with my geology degree”? After attending LFA as an undergraduate student, I realized*



*my passion was in international education and quickly got my master's in education which led me to my dream job at CSU. It has been a privilege to bring students to the conference over the years but one of my greatest professional achievements has been to lead the planning for LFA 2020 while providing students the same support I received all of those years ago."*

Students can learn more about their own adventures and what it truly means to go abroad from this conference. Clearly from the success of the conference and the positive evaluations given, Katherine did an amazing job as Southeastern Chair for LFA and should be recognized for making history coordinating their first successful virtual conference.



Lessons from Abroad 2020: World Cloud - Describe LFA 9/20 in 1 word



## **CSU International Event** ***Live from Sao Paulo: CAPOEIRA***

by William Harper

On October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020 I had the chance to attend a virtual event over the demonstration one of Brazil's historic martial arts form called "Capoeira". This spectacular event was held by Pamela who works at an institution called "Campus B" based in Brazil. The campus provides experiential learning through offerings of virtual experiences, which is what we needed during these times.

Before the demonstration, we went through the exotic history of Capoeira. *"Capoeira started as a 'Fight/Resistance' from African slaves over 500 years ago."* -

Pamela as she is introducing the instructor. We learned how the slaves had no instruments to fight against their masters, so they created Capoeira in Brazil to fight back. Though interestingly enough, Capoeira is neither created from Portuguese or African, it is originated from "Tupi". The meaning of the word is "forest", "round" and low vegetation which is where they would train or dance in this art form.

After the introduction, we were able to stand up and actively participate in Capoeira in a training session with the instructor. We learned very quickly that every Capoeira starts with a song. The reason for the song is because Capoeira is now a form of dance for their fighting stance! Capoeira now is used to practice martial arts in the form of dancing. Noticing how quickly you can learn Capoeira; you can feel the importance of this tradition for Brazilian's culture.

After the performance we were invited for a 2<sup>nd</sup> performance in which we learned about Patota do Galo. This event held in Rio de Janeiro demonstrated the importance of Capoeira and the important awareness of Rio de Janeiro. Students during this virtual event showed us what they have learned including their first instruments.



Capoeira was shown under several events about the importance of the Brazilian historical culture and the meaning that derives about learning more of it. Even during pandemic times, this event showed the perseverance of understanding how we can continue international learning even through a virtual world.

