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Roland Grenouillou oral history interview by Andrew Huse, May 25, 2004

Roland Grenouillou (Interviewee)

Andrew T. Huse (Interviewer)

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TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

Mr. Grenouillou came to USF in August 2003.

Experiences prior to USF

Before coming to USF, Mr. Grenouillou was working in Venezuela with exchange students, not unlike the work he does at South Florida. He returned to the United States in 2001, and, after spending some time in Virginia, was referred to a position at USF through contacts at his alma mater, the University of Miami. After attending an annual Friends of Internationals conference in Chicago in May 2003, he made the decision to move to USF.

Friends of Internationals

Friends of Internationals was begun in 1998 at the University of South Florida, where it is currently based. The founders' intent in creating the organization was to provide services for international students who were not receiving a lot of assistance otherwise. It has now spread to six different cities throughout the state of Florida with plans to expand nationwide over the next several years. Mr. Grenouillou was recruited by the founder of the organization, who was responsible for bringing him to South Florida where most of the work is done for the international students. "But it's not just myself. There are many many people throughout the community ... who just have a heart for these people and who are getting involved."

Background

Mr. Grenouillou was born in Raleigh, North Carolina, and moved with his family to Virginia where he lived from the age of two until the age of seventeen or eighteen. He was fortunate to receive a scholarship to the University of Miami after graduating from high school, where he earned his degree four years later.

Exposure to foreign peoples and cultures

Mr. Grenouillou remembers that until he moved to Miami, he had never met people from other countries. "I grew up in a place where ... you were either white or black, and most of my friends were actually black, so I think that even prepared me because I was a minority myself, and so it led me to understand ... different cultures." When he moved to

Miami for college, he recalls interacting with people “from all over the world – and they became my friends ... and I had a special heart for them.” Being a Christian, he also particularly appreciates the opportunity to serve others in that capacity. “Everyone is made, I believe, in the image of God, and to be able to help them in any way that I can ... so that’s what started [it].”

After graduation

Though he had been hired to work for Arthur Anderson consulting after his graduation from college, his personal beliefs and passions led him to become involved in working with international students overseas. “That’s been the path, you might say, that I’ve chosen – for now.”

Christianity on a college campus

The Friends of Internationals occupy an office in the Baptist Student Organization’s building. Not only does Mr. Grenouillou share a physical space with the Baptist students, but also a similar philosophy. “All people are made in the image of God ... we treat them that way.”

Organization’s services

Among the organization’s services, they provide such things as donated used furniture to international students who have very little of their own to speak of. Additionally, they often serve as an international student’s first point of contact upon their arrival in the United States. They will also pair the students up with local families in order to ease their transition into a new and unfamiliar environment. “I believe that’s one of [our] best services ... because it spreads the work [out] ... to involve the community.” They are looking to expand their programs in the coming years to include language classes for all university students.

Activities and events

The organization also works to get international students involved in various activities and events in the local community. In recent years, they have gone to the Kennedy Space Center, Walt Disney World, Busch Gardens, Lowry Park Zoo, USF football games, and local beaches as well as an annual international retreat that is held in different locations throughout Florida. Occasionally, the organization invites speakers to talk with students on such subjects as culture shock and finding a job after graduation.

Apartments and vehicles for international students

The Friends of Internationals also provide access to apartments and vehicles for students who are staying on a short-term basis and cannot commit to long-term leases or financial obligations.

Relationship with the Baptist Student Organization

Though the Friends of Internationals are not linked directly to the Baptist Student Organization, they are a “general Christian organization,” and have become more involved with the Baptist students over the years. “We appreciate what they’ve done. It is a good working relationship ... [We] want to show Christ’s love to these students.”

Christian international students at USF

Of the 2,500 international students at USF, Mr. Grenouillou estimates that approximately five percent are committed Christians.

Plans for Friends of Internationals

In addition to organizational expansion, they plan to continue working on campus in conjunction with other student groups in order to more effectively and comprehensively reach out to and provide services for students. “Plans? – Keep doing the same, but expanding and getting others involved. That’s how we see our work.”

Sports

Because cricket is a popular sport among international students, the Friends in conjunction with the Students of India Association plan to hold clinics in order to introduce university students to the games. They are also involved in soccer and football tournaments.

Cultural awareness

The organization also emphasizes cultural awareness among students. For instance, they have held potluck dinners where each student brings in a dish from his/her native country. They have also hosted parties celebrating the Chinese New Year. “Christianity is the mold, you might say, that holds it together for us ... The thing is that they are shown that they are accepted [and] that we do want them to come here.”

Personal benefits

“The work that I have done with students from other countries ... has forever changed me,” Mr. Grenouillou comments. “People don’t see as ‘us’ and ‘them,’ people see as ‘us.’ We are all the same. We may look different, but deep down ... we all have the same needs: physical, emotional, intellectual ... and spiritual as well.”

Student involvement

Of the 2,500 international students at USF, Mr. Grenouillou believes that his organization is in contact with nearly 700 of them, more than doubling their past efforts.

Religious services

If students are interested in attending religious services of any kind, Mr. Grenouillou welcomes them either to attend with him or he will gladly put them in contact with representatives of other organizations.

End of Interview

(please see text below)

Mission Statement, Friends of Internationals:
(<http://www.internationals.org/03/03staff.php>)

We are committed to helping international students adjust to their new setting, enjoy their time in the United States and help them meet and understand North American Christians.

We do this through promoting open dialogue and discussion that results in psychological stability, spiritual transformation and lifelong friendships.

Our Role: We hope to fulfill our mission by doing the following:

1. Offering and arranging [friendships with North Americans](#) for students.
2. Securing [free airport transportation](#).
3. Conducting free conversational [English](#), [Spanish](#), and [German](#) classes.
4. Providing [household and personal items](#) for students, i.e.: bikes, microwaves, beds, desks, etc.
5. Sponsoring retreats and trips.
6. Holding group Bible studies.
7. Organizing and sponsoring parties and activities.

Friends of Internationals actively seeks to treat all Christian and Non-Christian international students with respect, dignity, assistance and honor. We will never forsake helping a student based on their gender, ethnic background or religious identification.