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The University of
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NEWS RELEASE

Jan. 26, 2005

Contact: Yukari Zednick, administration associate, Foreign Student and Scholar Services, 243-6040.

FOREIGN STUDENTS AT UM SHARE CULTURE WITH COMMUNITY

MISSOULA –

Explaining perceptions of foreign citizens to Americans can take a lot of effort, says a University of Montana international student from France.

“There is a lot of work that could be done to show Americans that the world is a complex thing and that different does not mean bad – or worse – evil,” said Jean-Bertrand Ribat.

Bridging the international community with Missoula and the University are a few of UM’s foreign students. They are involved in the Foreign Student and Scholar Services’ Speakers’ Bureau, which is designed for students to devote energy and time to meet with classes and civic groups in the community.

UM has 419 foreign students from 73 countries on campus this year. During spring and summer of 2004, 23 students participated in the Speakers’ Bureau, said Yukari Zednick, an administration associate in Foreign Student and Scholar Services.

During UM orientation foreign students learn about public speaking around campus and Missoula. A questionnaire asks students if they brought any natural dresses or artifacts with them to UM and if they are willing to share these with others. Between 80 and 90 percent of students indicated interest, Zednick said.

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The amount of student involvement and what material is presented is based on community requests.

"I think it's really important that people in the United States meet people from overseas," Zednick said. "When you live in a little community like Missoula, you don't have that opportunity to hear other perspectives."

Requests from people in the community were broad. Some students talked in classrooms about their culture, while others translated documents into or from their native language. One group of students presented African dances to a Girl Scout troop and another student talked about Islam to a Lutheran church group.

Ribat spoke to students in a UM communication studies class.

"I explain that when they (Americans) travel in France, Americans should not be worried to see unwelcoming people, especially waiters," Ribat said. "It is not because they are serving Americans that waiters are sour. They do the same thing with French patrons. It is not in our culture to smile if we do not feel we want to."

Ribat says he doesn't like speaking English in classes because it is so taxing for him but he does like the process of speaking to students.

Martin Twer, a German student, spoke to a political science class at UM of around 150 students about Germany and its context in the European Union. He covered issues like current development in Germany's domestic politics, population and economic developments, social and tax systems, and current government.

Twer found his experience rewarding, and he hopes that through the Speakers' Bureau

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more people can better understand the international community.

“I think having so many international students and scholars on campus is a great opportunity for any class to broaden the horizon of education and provide different perspectives,” he said. “It is good for us foreign students to have the experience to talk to larger groups in a more or less formal setting, and beneficial for American students to get more exposure to international perspectives.”

Community and University members interested in submitting a request for a foreign student volunteer can call Foreign Student and Scholar Services at 243-2226.

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