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# Student Voices: Prospects and Challenges of Global Consciousness

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# **Student Voices: Prospects and Challenges of Global Consciousness**

*In this session, student leaders discussed global engagement and consciousness and how they have promoted it within UD campus organizations and the larger community. They concluded by making specific recommendations on what needs to be done to enhance global consciousness on campus and the larger Dayton community.*

## **Maya Smith-Custer**

Good morning, everyone. My name is Maya Smith-Custer. I am a sophomore, International Studies major, minoring in Spanish and Economics. I have lived in West Dayton for my entire life. I chose to stay close to home for college, but my mother always wanted for me to understand that there is more to the world than my West Dayton. Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook, once said that studying Latin was one of the best decisions he had ever made; so in middle school, instead of placing me in Spanish or French classes with my friends, my mother enrolled me in Latin classes. My high school presented me with an opportunity to apply my studies in an experience traveling to Europe. This inspired me to choose my major, International Studies. I became fascinated with learning about other world cultures, history and history's impact on society today. I must say I'd agree with Mr. Zuckerberg because by the time I reached high school, my Latin class became the only part of the day I looked forward to more than lunch.

I share my story with you to speak on global awareness at home, because not everyone may be afforded the opportunity to travel



abroad, or study abroad in college. Many of my peers are studying to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, or math. They will have significantly less of an emphasis on social sciences and humanities in their coursework or experiential learning opportunities. How do we connect to those students and community members to our greater global community? There are global and intercultural engagement opportunities in our communities that we have a tendency to overlook.

Almost a year ago, I began my internship with Welcome Dayton. My opportunity there has changed my perspective. Welcome Dayton provides resources to immigrants and refugees. This is achieved through education, outreach, resource assistance, and community partnerships. I had little to almost no knowledge of presence any multicultural resources beyond the NAACP in my hometown because the NAACP was the organization that directly applied to my identity. My familiarity was previously limited to seeing Welcome Dayton on the News. With Welcome Dayton I have been connected with community partners such as Latinos Unidos or Catholic Social Services which offers direct support services to refugees. I have been connected with local immigrant community leaders, advocates, English as a Second Language teachers and immigrant business owners, some of whom have been doing advocacy work in my hometown for the entirety of my lifetime. I had been previously



unexposed to these efforts in my own community because it did not directly apply to my identity or reach my immediate social circles.

On college campuses, we can increase global and intercultural engagement by expanding students' social circles to leap beyond their own identities. We have a tendency to stay within our networks, so we should encourage different student organizations to connect. Many campuses, and UD is no exception, have a strong presence of active student organizations. In fact, many students choose Dayton because we have over 200 active student organizations, so everyone can pursue their interests and passions. Amongst these are several multicultural organizations and student unions. For example, UD has an International Club that takes students off campus for fun activities on the weekends, such as bowling or skating. It is open for anyone to join and is intended for domestic and international students to make friends and have fun.

On campus, I am involved in the Student Government Association as the Director of Campus Unity. It is my role to represent all minorities and historically marginalized groups. Through this, I dedicated myself to supporting our minority student unions in reaching their goals and partnering to plan events. The partnership I appreciate and am most proud of this year is with the Asian American Association. We all match each other with strong enthusiasm about our missions and encourage one another in

achieving goals. I am not at all of Asian American heritage, so when first connecting with them, I did not expect that very soon they would invite me to become a member. Not taking “No” for an answer. I found family on campus in a place I could not have foreseen, outside of my identity. It happened naturally and through this, I learned that you can build your multicultural engagement and is not about your individual identity group. Instead it is about your approach **when** connecting with others and **why** you do it.

In January, I held my first student government event in partnership with Welcome Dayton on my campus for students. I was amazed to have received overwhelming support in attendance from the African Coalition and other locals. We ran out of places for people to sit. I openly invited a few individuals to the event to connect with students and I that I would appreciate their support if they could. In turn, they told their network and friends, who also shared simply to come and support a student’s event and efforts to engage the University of Dayton. It was then that I realized the strength, support, and connectedness of the immigrant and international community. It absolutely warmed my heart. I connected two worlds, my peers here at my university and members of the Greater Dayton area, both within 10-minute drive time of the other. Global engagement is not in far away and simply reaching out to others to connect can receive a great response.

We do not all have to be Welcome Dayton interns to connect with our local multicultural, immigrant, and refugee communities. If you are passionate and have time in your schedule to do community service, you can volunteer for local immigrant and refugee support groups that support these communities. Here in Dayton you can help children with their homework afterschool at El Puente or volunteer to teach English as a Second Language to adult learners at St. John’s Church. You can help with refugee resettlement at Catholic Social Services of Miami Valley.

I challenge you to also look for ways you can engage in the spaces you already find familiar. Do you pass an international grocery store on your commute to work? Have you taken a Spanish or French lesson on a free mobile app such as Duolingo? Are there

any other immigrant-owned businesses in your community? My favorite experiential learning activity is supporting a local immigrant-owned restaurant. These are all small steps that make great leaps. By taking steps such as these, we can build interpersonal relationships and global awareness with one another.

We can increase interracial and intercultural acceptance, welcome immigrants, learn from one another, foster a climate of inclusivity and celebrate diversity that will set a precedent of community building for future generations to follow—all without traveling far from home.

