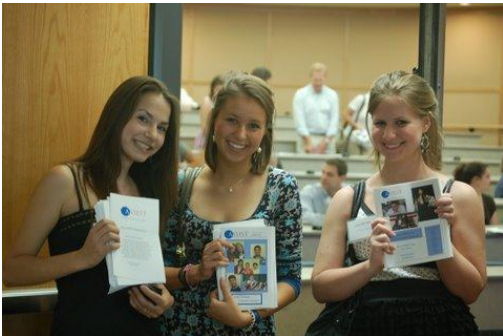




Washington, DC Chapter Newsletter

Spring 2010

DC ASSIST Celebrates a Successful Year



Left: Scholars Teddy Rousseva, Julia Reszel, Luca Bartek; right: ASSIST Chair Dick Hall and scholar Chen Wang with ASSIST friend at the May 2 Reception at Holton-Arms School

There was much to celebrate at the May 2 gathering of more than 60 members of the Washington area ASSIST community, at Holton-Arms School in Bethesda: a spectacular group of 11 ASSIST scholars, a growing list of participating area schools, and an active area alumni community of former ASSIST scholars. Our profound thanks go to Holton-Arms, and the organizers of the gathering: **Melissa Brown**, global education director at Holton, **Ann Misback**, and **Kate Meenan-Waugh**, both members of the ASSIST DC Leadership Committee.

ASSIST is alive and well in our nation’s capital! Alumni, students, host families and ASSIST scholars all offered perspectives on their experience with ASSIST:

- Alumna **Pia Bungarten '85**, remembered the year that changed her life – as an ASSIST scholar at Suffield Academy, when wonderful teachers provided positive feedback and support, changing Pia’s sense of herself, and she started on the path to a career in European/American relations.
- We heard reports from three scholars, **Theresa Schafer**, German scholar at Episcopal High School (VA), **Yifan Liu**, Chinese scholar at Washington International School (DC), and **Miriam Mahmoud**, German scholar also at Washington International School. All three students spoke of their warm welcome to both school and host families, the multitude of surprising, new, and different aspects of life they encountered – “food, people, cars, houses, streets, money, language, school, friends, family, homework,” to quote Miriam’s list – and the profound personal growth each feels that she has experienced. “The things I found strange are normal to me now,” Miriam continues, “and I think and dream in English now.” Theresa’s report is summarized below.
- **Emily Atkinson**, director of admissions at Episcopal High School (VA), expressed all our sentiments most eloquently when she spoke to the gathering about the ASSIST experience from the point of view of the participating schools. Here is her warm “thank you” to the students who were with us this year:



Emily Atkinson

In a couple of weeks, students, you will return to your countries and to your families, full of stories about your year in the U.S. You know, and I know, that

you will return a different person than when you left. You are not and cannot be the same. My guess is that you're a better person – that your experience here, the lessons you've learned and the challenges you've faced have allowed you to grow in unimaginable ways. And that your new outlook on life and the world has given you a unique perspective which will guide you for the rest of your days.

Well – the same can be said for our schools and for all those in our schools. We, too, are different than you found us back in late August. Our communities have been enriched by your presence, and though you may have learned a great deal about us, I can assure you, you have taught us much, much more. We are not, and cannot be the same either. We are better, because of you.

Leaving your family, friends, country, language and tradition took an enormous amount of courage. You taught us an invaluable lesson about inner strength and will, and you've inspired us to look beyond the known and the “safe & easy” and stretch ourselves. Because you've done it, you've given us the courage to do it too. Thank you for being an example to all of us.

You've shown us that “curiosity doesn't always kill the cat” -- sometimes, it makes the cat stronger and wiser!! There was something in you that said “What else is out there for me? What more can I learn about the world? What can I share of myself?” This kind of genuine curiosity – about the world and one's self – is a key ingredient in great leadership. Thank you for teaching us how important it is to know the world around us.

You have taught us to be open-minded....that each experience and opportunity in life is made richer when the mind is open and the heart engaged. You have tackled new challenges, eaten new foods, visited new places, made new lifelong friends, tried new sports and activities, and pushed yourself academically (and succeeded) in a language not your own. Thank you for reminding us how much can be done when one is open to change.

You have demonstrated stamina and resiliency: I know there were times when you wanted to go home. When you wished you could see your families and friends for just a minute. When you thought you'd never get to June (and now it's just around the corner). You have handled these hard times with grace and dignity. You dug your heels in and willed yourself to get the most of out the experience. Thank you for showing us how to be strong and optimistic.

Finally, you have given us hope. I am quite certain that you will go on to do great things, that your success in life will be tied somehow, in some way, to making our world a better place, just as your success at our schools have made them better places. This year was just the beginning. Let your courage, curiosity, open-mindedness, resiliency and hope be your guide in life. Thank you for giving us faith that tomorrow's leaders will accomplish more together than today's.

Congratulations and good luck to our scholars!

Student Roundup:

Theresa, Chen, Zaid, and Teddy Reflect on a Memorable Year

In our winter newsletter, we heard from six of the 11 area ASSIST scholars in Washington schools. Now that the school year is almost at an end, four of the other five scholars share with us some thoughts about their year in Washington:



Zaid Malhees came to Sidwell Friends School (DC) from another Quaker school, Ramallah Friends School (<http://www.palfriends.org/>) in Palestine, a school established in 1901 by the Society of Friends. At Ramallah Friends School, he studies in Arabic, but has a number of courses in English, so that his English is virtually fluent. Because of visa problems, Zaid didn't begin his studies at Sidwell until January, but nevertheless considers this “one of the best years of my life.” With his host family, he has been to

New York City, Hollywood, Jacksonville, Baltimore, and even Chincoteague Island. Though he came as a 10th grade student, Zaid found himself in AP courses in biology and chemistry, and he admits that he found the first month in biology “very challenging.” He likes it when students ask him about Middle East crises from the Palestinian point of view – “Most Americans know the Israeli side of the issues,” he says, “and don’t have much opportunity to talk to Palestinians.” And he loves the diversity of backgrounds he finds at Sidwell. Always eager to experience new cultures, Zaid hopes to participate in Seeds of Peace International Camp in Maine, (<http://www.seedspeace.org/>) and perhaps go to college in the U.S.



Theresa Schafer, who came to Episcopal High School (VA) from Munich, Germany, admits that in the beginning of the year, it was a shock to spend 24 hours a day, seven days a week at school, and to have at least four hours of homework nightly (compared to a half hour in Germany). But she soon realized that this year “was going to be the time of my life. I love to experience new things,” she continues, “and that’s what makes this experience abroad so special.” Theresa is glad ASSIST requires that all scholars take American history, because it’s helped her to understand “why America is the way it is today...” and she found geometry more interesting and Shakespeare’s writing style less challenging as a result of her studies. But she feels she learned even more outside the classroom, about the U.S. and about herself. With her host family she went to Charleston, South Carolina, to Colorado and to Florida, which left her amazed at how big the country is, and she says she learned about her own strengths and weaknesses, too – in sports, in time management, in being surrounded by people all the time. She hopes to stay in contact with her friends, and she hopes to come back to the U.S.



Chen Wang came from a public high school in Beijing, China, to study at St. Alban’s School (DC) this year. In the intervening nine months, he has been so busy, and become so immersed in his life at school and with his host family that he anticipates he will have a reverse culture shock when he goes home to Beijing! At school, Chen has participated in track and field, basketball, clubs, and a foreign policy roundtable as well as keeping up a brisk academic pace. While he lives in the dorm at St. Alban’s, he goes “home” to his host family every weekend. The biggest surprise for Chen has been the small classes and the close attention students receive from their teachers at St. Alban’s. He is grateful for many good talks with faculty. Chen has also been surprised – and stimulated – by the level of competition he finds in American culture, particularly in sports, and perhaps as a result of the environment of a single sex school – which he has found different but good. But he has found competing useful as a spur in studying – he says he has learned to push himself academically. Chen anticipates plenty of continued contact with his host family, who will travel to China soon. And he may apply to colleges in the U.S.



Teodora (Teddy) Rousseva comes from Bulgaria’s second largest city, Varna, on the sea coast, where she attends a prestigious language high school. There, she studies in English and German, so she found herself well equipped to study in English at Holton-Arms School (MD). Teddy, too, found the experience of a single sex school different, but very comfortable and hospitable. She enjoyed being with all girls, and made some great friends. “I was really excited to try new things, and to discover the opportunities available to me in the U.S.,” she says. Here, she acted in a one-act play, something she had never done before, and she joined the track team – at home she plays volleyball. Teddy went to New York with her host family, and during spring vacation she went to California, where she and her brother, who is studying in an American university, visited Los Angeles, Santa Barbara, and San Diego. Teddy, too, is thinking about studying in an American college when she has completed her high school education.

I missed **Luca Bartek!** A Hungarian student at St. Timothy’s School (VA), Luca has now left school, but perhaps we can reach her for a later story.

Life after ASSIST: Ioana Niculcea '01



Ioana Niculcea

Nine years after attending Mercersburg Academy (PA) as an ASSIST scholar from Romania, in 2000-01, **Ioana Niculcea** has nothing but positive memories of her experience. In fact, she calls it “the defining experience of my life, setting the stage for everything that came after.” After returning home to finish her high school career, she was back in the U.S., studying at the University of Virginia, with a major in economics. “My counselor at Mercersburg had attended UVA,” she explains, and that connection helped her to make a decision about a return to the United States. And though, during college, she went home to see her family every summer and winter holiday, she has never really left the U.S.

For the last four years, Ioana has worked in the research assistant program in international monetary development at the International Monetary Fund. In addition, she has been active in supporting ASSIST by working to build a Washington area alumni network (there are, as it turns out, a number of ASSIST alumni who have come back to the U.S. and gravitated to the Washington area). In addition, Ioana has been a gracious hostess to current ASSIST scholars. This fall, she hosted a tour of Washington, and she served on the Leadership Committee of the Washington ASSIST chapter, helping to plan events for the scholars, the host families, the alumni, and participating schools.

But she has saved the best support for last. In 2000, Ioana was a part of the last generation of Romanian students sponsored by an ASSIST scholarship in partnership with the Soros Open Society Institute, which had sponsored 38 ASSIST students between 1992 and 2001. At the end of Soros’ support, there were no longer sufficient funds for Romanians...until this year. With Ioana’s help, ASSIST has received a commitment from the Dinu Patriciu Foundation (<http://fundatiadinupatriciu.ro>) to fund three Romanian students as ASSIST scholars this year. It was Ioana who connected ASSIST to the foundation, in the hope that other Romanian students would have the same kind of life changing experience that she has had.

What now for Ioana? Business school! She is currently deciding between Harvard Business School and London Business School. With much pride and much gratitude for her support, we wish Ioana well on her next adventure

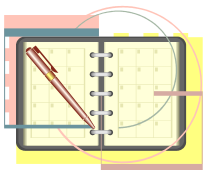
DC News from the Home Office

ASSIST just keeps growing! While our students have been working diligently to make the most of their year in an American private school, ASSIST staff and board members have been jetting around the world to find next year’s scholars, and around the country to introduce ASSIST to a broader network of schools. **Ten** new schools have joined the ASSIST network, bringing the total to **87** American independent schools that work with ASSIST to provide a rich and stimulating exchange year for outstanding 11th graders from around the world. There will be 145 scholars next year – a new high.

Potomac School (VA) will host its first ASSIST scholar in the fall, the 10th school in our network. Next year, we will have **16** ASSIST scholars in the Washington area (WOW!), from eight countries – in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Here is the list:

Yiran Zhang (China)	Holton-Arms School (MD)
Johanna von Hammerstein (Germany)	Holton-Arms School (MD)
Mufan Zheng (China)	Landon School (MD)

Mbali Khumalo (South Africa)	Maret School (DC)
Mireia Lozano (Spain)	National Cathedral School (DC)
Erik Skytting (Sweden)	Episcopal High School (VA)
Dian Yu (China)	Potomac School (VA)
Aziz Shehadeh (Palestine)	Sidwell Friends School (DC)
Qiuyuan Jin (China)	St. Alban's School (DC)
Zrinka Lesic (Croatia)	St. Timothy's School (VA)
Jimena Nowack (Spain)	St. Timothy's School (VA)
Luisa Melloh (Germany)	St. Timothy's School (VA)
Ngoc Nguyen (Germany)	St. Timothy's School (VA)
Lisanne Liebich (Germany)	St. Timothy's School (VA)
Siran Tang (China)	Washington International School (DC)
Indre Bilvinaite (Lithuania)	Washington International School (DC)



Save the Dates:

The Leadership Committee of the Washington DC Chapter of ASSIST is already thinking about a schedule of events for next year. ASSIST board member Cathy Tinsley, who chairs the DC Leadership Committee, has penciled in some dates for ASSIST gatherings, and we'd like you to do the same. They are:

- **Thursday, October 7 – Scholar/Host Family Gathering** (location to come)
- **Early November – DC area ASSIST Alumni Gathering** (date, location to come)
- **April 10, 2011, 1:30 to 3:30 pm – Spring Gathering**, Holton-Arms School

2009-10 Washington DC ASSIST Leadership Committee

Cathy Tinsley, ASSIST Board of Directors, committee chair
Emily Atkinson, Director of Admissions, Episcopal High School, VA
Graham Down, community member
Annie Farquhar, Director of Admission and Financial Aid, Maret School, DC
Richard Hall, chair, ASSIST Board of Directors
Selby McPhee, community member
Kate Meenan-Waugh, Director, Center for International Education and Service Learning
Washington International School, DC
Ann Misback and Chris Kojm, former ASSIST host parents
Ioana Niculcea, ASSIST Alumna, Class of 2000

Pia Bungarten will join the Leadership Committee in the fall of 2010.

Fall 2010 Issue: We'll report on the new crop of ASSIST students in Washington area schools. For more story ideas, contact Selby McPhee, editor, at selby.mcphee@gmail.com.