



Washington, DC Chapter Newsletter

Spring 2011



Fourteen of sixteen DC Assist Scholars shared their year's experiences at the Spring Gathering at Holton-Arms School.

Spring Gathering: DC ASSIST Scholars Embrace the Unexpected

We wonder what gives these young students the courage to leave home at sixteen to spend a year in another country, go to a new school, and live with a family of strangers. It turns out that in addition to showing courage, they also have a great curiosity about the world and a willingness to embrace the unexpected!

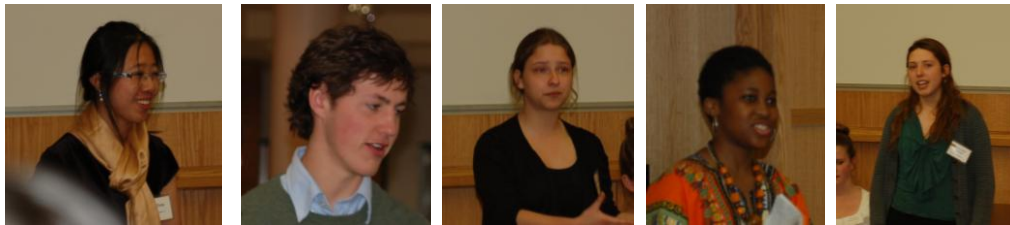
This was made abundantly clear at the Spring Gathering of ASSIST DC Scholars at Holton-Arms School (MD) on April 10, when some of this year's Scholars shared perspectives on their year in the U.S. Emily Atkinson, director of admission at Episcopal High School (VA) and a member of the ASSIST DC Chapter's Leadership Committee, noted that the students "are different people now, and the schools that they have attended are different, too, because of their presence in the community." She asked a panel of DC Scholars to talk about their year.

Why did the students apply for the ASSIST program?

Mbali Khumalo (Maret School, DC) said life at home in South Africa is much influenced by American culture. She wanted to experience it herself, to visit "the land of opportunity, the land of the free."

What new experiences did the students try?

Mireia Lozano Carbassé (National Cathedral School, DC) tried public speaking, something she says she has been too shy to do at her school in Spain. “Standing in front of people and talking was a new experience for me,” she says. Mireia learned to argue a point in her political science class at NCS, and she joined the government club. Most impressive of all, she argued a Supreme Court case in front of a federal judge! **Indre Bilvinaite** (Washington International School, DC), who comes from Lithuania, joined the WIS student newspaper staff during her year. Trying her hand at journalism, she interviewed reporters at Al Jazeera and the Washington Post, among other news outlets, to report on current international news in the school’s award-winning International Dateline. Indre had also never been on the stage before – most recently she played a pink fairy in a WIS production of Shakespeare’s “Midsummer Night’s Dream,” set in the 1970s. **Yiran Zhang** (Holton-Arms School, MD) tried sports that she had never played at home in China – field hockey in the fall and crew in the spring. Yiran, a solo violinist, learned to play orchestral music at Holton, a whole new musical experience. Her teacher also encouraged Yiran to learn to play the viola. She and the Holton quartet, in which she plays the viola, participated in a Maryland school music competition.



First impressions of the US?

Sandy Jin (St. Alban’s School, DC), from China, learned quickly that sports are an important part of U.S. culture. “It creates a spirit that glues together the community,” he says. **Mbali Khumalo** notes that though she was greeted with many smiles and much love, “you need to be strong, not weak in this big country.”

How did they share their own international perspectives with their school?

In her American History class at Maret, **Mbali** was able to elaborate on the fact that music was important in the lives of the slaves, that they brought their music from Africa, and that the style of the music is familiar to her from home. **JoJo Hammerstein**



(Holton-Arms School, MD) was interested to hear the American perspective on World War I and II. In her history class, she tried to help her fellow students understand how easily swayed Germans were during those wars. **Erik Skytting** (Episcopal High School, VA) spoke at a school chapel on Christmas in Sweden. He noted that he had a very different Christmas during his year here – his family took him to the Bahamas!

What good tips did you get from your ASSIST training?

Erik learned to keep his dorm room door open, and to be ready for everything. **Indre** learned to try as many new things as she could. **Mireia** learned that it's okay to have ups and downs. You don't have to feel guilty because you're not happy all the time.

We think our Scholars can teach us some lessons about embracing the unexpected!

“ASSIST works because of people of good will.”
Bob Stanley, President, ASSIST

Bob Stanley with new ASSIST Board member Grace Tompkins

Bob Stanley, president of ASSIST, thanked the Washington-area schools that have been willing to offer scholarships to ASSIST Scholars, even in these difficult economic times.

“ASSIST works because of people of good will,” he said, noting that not only schools, but the families that open their homes to the Scholars, are wonderful examples of the good will it takes to keep the ASSIST program going. He thanked the schools, the ASSIST representatives, and all the host parents and siblings for making the student exchange – and the possibilities for international understanding that exchange offers – happen.



News from the Home Office...

Speaking of good news in hard times, ASSIST continues to thrive as the U.S. economy slowly recovers. There are **86** member schools nationally in ASSIST, including six new schools that have joined the program for the 2011-2012 school year. New schools in the Washington chapter are **Bullis School**, Potomac, and **Key School**, Annapolis, bringing the Washington, DC total to **12** schools participating in the ASSIST scholarship program. That makes the Washington school network the largest area group in ASSIST. Here are some other national data for 2011-12:

- There will be **144 Scholars** from
- **17 countries**, including
- ASSIST's first Scholars from **Turkey**
- There were **1500 applications**, from which
- **652** students were identified for interviews
- **9.7 percent** of applicants were chosen as ASSIST Scholars.

Eighty-six (**86**) of the Scholars will be on full scholarships from the hosting school. Fifty-eight (**58**) will be on partial scholarships from their schools, which means that in some cases, they are sponsored by individuals who are interested in supporting the mission of ASSIST by assuring the participation of a qualified student. The Washington Chapter of ASSIST hopes to raise money for a DC scholarship for one ASSIST student for our own community. There will be more information about this later in the summer.

And here's an early report on *our* Scholars for next year – 17 students from seven countries in 12 host schools:

From Germany, five students:

Maximilian Kress (at Episcopal High School, VA)

Paul Grube (at Landon School, MD)

Frauke Grundmann (at St. Timothy's School, MD)

Annie Li (at St. Timothy's School, MD)

Anne Stegemann (at St. Timothy's School, MD)

From Spain, three students:

Jana Martinez Robert (at Bullis School, MD)

Marta Montobbio (at National Cathedral School, DC)

Julia Cueto (at St. Timothy's School, MD)

From Bulgaria, three students:

Tihomir Tihomirov (at The Key School, MD)

Irina Dihanova (at The Potomac School, VA)

Stefani Kostadinova (at Washington International School, DC)

From Austria, two students:

Hannah de Goederen (at Holton-Arms School, MD)

Constanze Vorrath (at St. Timothy's School, MD)

From Lithuania, two students:

Simonas Bartulis (at Maret School, DC)

Linas Ramanauskas (at St. Alban's School, DC)

From Palestine, one student:

Ranim Amra (at Sidwell Friends School, DC)

From China, one student:

Rui Liu (at Washington International School, DC)



Save the Date!!

We will have a chance to meet all the new Scholars at the Fall Gathering of the Washington ASSIST Chapter on **Wednesday, October 5, early evening at Washington International School**. This is an event for Scholars, school liaisons and their families, and a good time for host families to meet each other and the ASSIST community. Put it on your calendar now!



Making it easier to say Goodbye: A DC Pilot Program

Dian Yu (Potomac School, VA) with some of her host family

Just as we are thinking about greeting a new crop of ASSIST students, we are facing the challenge of saying goodbye to the current crop, who have become such an important part of our community.

Our Scholars are not only leaving behind their yearlong adventure, they are leaving a new family and friends, and returning home, indelibly changed. The organization, understanding the importance of a good beginning to a Scholar's year, has put a lot of thought and energy into creating a helpful orientation, in late August, for each new class of Scholars. This year, Bob Stanley, president, and the ASSIST staff began thinking about an "outbound orientation" program, to help Scholars adjust to their return home.

They tried out their ideas in a pilot program for the 14 of the 16 Washington-area Scholars at the home of Annie and Whit Farquhar in April. Emily Atkinson, Director of Admission at Episcopal High School (VA), also participated in the program. Using role play and group exercises, Scholars, volunteers and staff explored possible readjustment challenges, including:

- Boredom: Returning home may seem dull after a year of stimulating newness
- Reverse homesickness: students may miss their new friends, family and environment more than they had expected
- No one to tell your stories to: students have had profound experiences, but while people may say “how was your year in the US?,” nobody really wants to hear their stories. And it may be hard to explain the powerful impact of those experiences

Students were urged to prepare mentally for their adjustment process (and the possibility that there might be some “cultural catching up” to do at home); to give themselves time and to practice thoughtful, sensitive and flexible responses to the reentry process.

“The students were very helpful with each other,” Annie and Emily reported. “They gave each other lots of reentry strategies and support.”

Calling for Volunteers!

Cathy Tinsley, chair of the Washington ASSIST Chapter’s Leadership Committee, is looking for volunteers to help find host families, organize events, host gatherings, and generally be a part of the ASSIST community here. Those interested in volunteering for ASSIST may contact her at catherine.tinsley@gmail.com.

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