On January 22, a group of Portuguese-speaking Angolan students arrived on the IU-Bloomington campus just in time for one of the coldest winters in recent memory. Despite the ice, snow, and sub-zero temperatures, the 21 Angolans quickly settled into their rooms in Eigenmann Hall to begin a program of intensive English language training and academic preparation geared toward their placement in U.S. universities. This special preparatory program for outstanding Angolan students is being administered by the IU Office of International Programs (OIP). The students were brought to the U.S. by West Africa Management Services—the U.S. representative of SONANGOL, Angola’s national oil company.

According to Charles Reafsnyder, OIP Associate Dean for International Research and Development, the presence of Angolan students at a U.S. university is a relatively new development, and IU is fortunate to have the opportunity to participate in this new international initiative. The first group of Angolan students came to the U.S. in 1992 for preparatory studies at the University of Michigan. Indiana University was recommended as a host institution for the current group of Angolan students, due to its successful track record in the training and placement of students from Malaysia. After visiting the Bloomington campus, SONANGOL Director Laurence Bennett was impressed with the range of services available to international students and recommended IU-Bloomington as the new training site.

The 21 Angolan students have come to the U.S. at a time when U.S.-Angolan relations are improving, despite civil war between the Angolan Government and UNITA in rural areas. The thaw in relations, supported by the fact that approximately 10% of all U.S. oil imports come from Angola, has resulted in the establishment of embassies in Angola and the U.S., and the development of closer ties which may lead to further academic exchange programs between the two countries.

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The IU program of academic preparation for Angolan students is being managed by International Programs, with Ann Burke serving as Training Coordinator. The International Programs’ staff has developed a specially-tailored preparatory program which includes: computer literacy training; math remediation, if necessary; and SAT / ACT preparation. The OIP office has also arranged for tutoring and placement services to assist the Angolan students in applying and gaining admittance to suitable U.S. universities.

The Angolan students participating in the IU-B program are a diverse group in terms of gender and age, composed of eight women and thirteen men ranging from 18 to 33 years of age. The students possess a wide range of academic interests, with possible majors in business, computer science, economics, management information science, and engineering. After the completion of their training program, the academic placement of the Angolan students is to be handled by International Programs’ Placement Services staff, in consultation with Laurence Bennett, President and Director of West Africa Management Services. Associate Dean Reafsnyder hopes some of the Angolan students will be placed within the Indiana University system.

IU’s Center for English Language Training (CELT) is providing a program of intensive language instruction and TOEFL preparation for the students, who currently attend these classes 5 days a week for a total of 23 hours weekly of intensive English study. According to Marlin Howard, CELT Director of Intensive English, the Angolan students “have proven themselves to be serious students” who are quickly adapting to academic life at Indiana University.

While the students’ adjustments to life on the Bloomington campus have gone smoothly, inevitably there are people as well as social opportunities and facets of “home life” in Angola that they miss. According to Angolan student Esther Duete, it has taken her classmates some time to adjust to the food served at Eigenmann Hall, which is very different from the typical diet at home. At a reception held for the Angolan students by the African Studies Program on March 4, several also commented that Bloomington was “too quiet.” Compared to their home city of Luanda, with a population of 2 million, Bloomington lacks the range of social activities to which many of these students are accustomed.

Yet, despite the intensive schedule of their OIP academic preparatory program, the Angolan students attended Bloomington’s Brazilian Carnival Night in February as well as a March 4th African Students’ Association party. From March 16-20, the students also had the opportunity to get a taste of “big city life” in the United States during a spring-break trip to Chicago.