A Burmese Scholar’s Paean to IU

Just like Anna Lennowens from the King and I, who met the king of Siam through advertising, I found my way to the kingdom of Indiana University, through an announcement posted by my university.

I had been doing coursework for my international doctoral degree in the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) for about a year when I heard that a couple of candidates were to be selected for participation in a scholarship exchange program with Indiana University.

My first reaction, naturally, was “Where is Indiana and what is it famous for?” I went straight to the program director’s office and asked for materials about IU.

He handed me a brochure with pictures of IU in all her magnificence, cloaked in the red and gold of Autumn’s falling leaves.

I fell in love at first sight. Never had I seen such beauty nor imagined such perfection possible.

I came to IU expecting to see the Bloomington pictured in the brochure. What a shock I encountered. In the first few weeks after my arrival, I saw nothing but snow, rain, sleet, and mist. I was truly disheartened. If that was the way IU wanted to greet me, I thought, I had better leave as soon as possible. Like Anna and the King of Siam, I thought of fleeing the scene on arrival.

Yet, something held me here. It was the attitude of the people that greeted me at the airport in the middle of the night. It was the day after New Year, when everybody was away enjoying their holiday. All the dining halls were closed and I didn’t know where to eat or drink, but somebody showed me where the amenities were and another person cooked for me. Yet another showed me around Bloomington.

I have been to many places, and I come from a country renowned for its hospitality, but I think the people of Bloomington (This includes everyone, the faculty, the students, the janitors, the porters, and even the bus-drivers,) are in a class by themselves. They evince a genuine desire to help foreigners.

IU’s library, one of the best in the United States and a federal depository for the Library of Congress, awed me. I approached it gingerly at first, as if it might drive me away. I soon learned that there was no reason to fear. Even the young women at the counters, who didn’t look a day over 15, could and did manage to overcome the clerical errors in my book-borrowing adventure with ease.

I am now attending lectures in the School of Public and Environmental Administration that require scores of books. I thought I would never be able to get that many books at once, no matter how well-stocked the local bookstores were. But, somehow they either had all the books I needed or were able to obtain the passages I wanted from books that were unavailable. It was like meeting my fairy godmother.

Now that my first months here have come to an end, I know I have found the true IU. Like Anna, I have come to love the King’s attitude and all that he stands for: not snow, rain, or mist but sincerity and genuine pleasure in helping lost souls like me. This is the real beauty of IU, far exceeding the lovely pictures of Bloomington in the fall.

— Ko Ko Gyi

Fulbright Scholar Awards for U.S. Faculty and Professionals: 1998-99 Competition

Opportunities for lecturing and advanced research in nearly 130 countries are available to college and university faculty and professionals outside of academe. Awards range from two months to a full academic year, and many assignments are flexible to the needs of the grantee.

The basic eligibility requirements for a Senior Fulbright Scholar Award are U.S. citizenship and the Ph.D. or comparable professional qualifications. For lecturing awards, university or college teaching experience is expected. Foreign language skills are needed for some countries, but most lecturing assignments are in English.

Applications are encouraged from faculty at all types of institutions as well as from professionals outside of academe. Every academic rank—from instructor to professor emeritus—is represented. Academic administrators regularly receive Fulbrights, as do independent scholars, artists, and professionals from the private and public sectors.

The deadline for lecturing or research grants is August 1, 1997. Other deadlines are in place for other special programs: distinguished Fulbright chairs in Western Europe and Canada (May 1) and Fulbright seminars for international education and academic administrators (November 1).

For further information and application materials contact Roxana Ma Newman, assistant dean for International Programs at the following address:

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