

International Happiness

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By Asia McGill

Kim Algeo has been the director in the office of international education at Rider for 17 years, and is responsible for the transition of study abroad and international students.

“When they [international students] arrive in the United States for the first time, our office picks them up at the airport, we do a one week long orientation with them, and we just take care of anything they need,” Algeo said.

Some of the help these long distance students can receive are things like getting a driver’s license, a job or a counselor to talk to when they are home sick.

“We try to have mentors for them as well when they arrive at orientation, and students can sign up to kind of be their buddy,” Algeo said.

According to [“Facts and Figures”](#) on the university website, Rider University is home to students from 54 countries. This stands as the only statistic on international students on the university website.

Christina Peterson is the Assistant Provost for Institutional Research and Assessment, and tallied a total of 36 countries to be home to undergraduate students, which make up 3% of Rider’s student population.

“We have 180 international students on campus. Asian, European... I mean we have so many,” Algeo said.

While students come from places all over the globe, Algeo noted some of the furthest places students have come from are Australia and India.

Students from other countries get to experience American culture early on in their arrival, with opportunities for them that range from visiting other countries to a trip to Shady Brook farm.

“It’s kind of like a kid thing, [visiting the farm] but they love it because they don’t have pumpkins and hayrides in their country,” Algeo said.

Algeo believes that Rider’s smaller student population is what drives so many students to the university, as well as its proximity to New York, often being a main attraction.

“I think most international students want a small community, where they know they are going to get small class sizes and extra attention,” Algeo said.

Data from the Higher ED Immigration Portal showed that “international students make up one out of every three students enrolled in higher education in the U.S.”

In New Jersey alone, there are 18,946 students enrolled in higher education according to data from the immigration portal.

One of the 18,946 students is Maya Hyacienth, a senior graphic design major from Nottingham, England.

Hyacienth came to Rider to continue her basketball career, and it had always been her dream to play in America.

“Learning a different way of culture and a different way of living, it's been good meeting different people,” Hyacienth said.

Hyacienth first visited America in the winter before she came in as a freshman in 2019, and by that summer had already moved to the states to pursue her journey as a women's basketball player.

Hyacienth's happiness at Rider stems from her close relationship with her roommates that play beside her on the court.

“I came into the basketball program with them, and we all had our own journeys and our own ups and downs. But we've been there for each other this whole time,” Hyacienth said.

Hyacienth found joy in not only playing basketball at a high level, but also the opportunity of “playing all around the country.”

Hyacienth never felt too far away from home being at Rider, and noted that there weren't too many differences between her living in England versus in America for her.

While Hyacienth knows the support she has from the university as a foreign student, most of her adaptation to going to an American university came from her personal efforts.

“I would say the preparation came more so from my end, but being here it wasn't a struggle to fit in or anything,” she said. “There's a lot of people out here to help you.”

Ajiri Ogemuno-Johnson is a graduate student that will earn his master's degree in homeland security this May, and is an international student from Delta State, Nigeria.

Ogemuno-Johnson is one of nine children in his family, and like Hyacienth, he too came to Rider to further his basketball career.

Ogemuno-Johnson began playing basketball out of rebellion of his family, who have no history of athleticism.

He fell in love with the sport, and moved to Florida in his freshman year of highschool to live with a host family.

Ogemuno-Johnson was not fond of his living experience in Florida, and decided to leave and move to New Jersey, where he would later play for Rider University's men's basketball team.

Being the only ballplayer in his family, he learned a lot of what he knew through people outside of his family, and picked up on his technique early on. He received many offers from different schools.

“What drew me to Rider was how close it was to Philly, and near my support system and host family,” he said.

Ogemuno-Johnson was already somewhat prepared to go to college in America being that he had already lived in the states previously, but had to adapt to the physical demands of college basketball.

“The physicality of it [basketball] was kind of different. The speed, the pace... everything was different. So I had to adjust and get better with that,” he said.

Though Ogemuno-Johnson had to quickly adjust to the physical standards of college basketball, he was not on his own as a student, and remembered how much help he got from staff from the international program.

“I would say they did a pretty good job,” he said. “Even after I graduated undergrad and was going to get my master's, they made sure I had the necessary information I needed.”

Ogemuno-Johnson had a commendable career as a college athlete, and played in a total of 137 games since his arrival in 2018 according to ESPN.

But Ogemuno-Johnson is ready for something new in his life, and after five years of college is ready to close this chapter of his life.

“I want a change of scenery in a sense. Right now I won't miss anything, but probably when I leave I'll miss something,” he said.

Ogemuno-Johnson still wants to play basketball when he can after graduation, and will “miss the athletic department the most.”

“They have been very supportive throughout my journey and there are people I will always look back on and they have supported me all the way through,” Ogemuno-Johnson said.

Algeo expects to bring in 17 international students for the next academic year, and will also be part of the launch of a new partnership in India, Miles Partnership.

Hyacienth and Ogemuno-Johnson both stated to have had their own pleasant experiences at Rider, and thank that to the support from the university, as well as the bonds made with their teammates.

Both are expected to graduate in May 2023.

International students at Rider are shown to do well at the university, and have a high graduation rate among their classmates according to Algeo.

“I would say the transfer rate is extremely low, we [Rider] don’t get a lot of international students transferring out. If they come here, they graduate,” Algeo said.



Ajiri Ogemuno-Johnson steps out of basketball practice for a moment and smiles in front of the Alumni Gymnasium.

Photo by Asia McGill



Kim Algeo smiles for the camera in front of the world map that glows at the entrance of her office.

Photo by Asia McGill



Kim Algeo both collects and receives a variety of souvenirs from the different countries her students are from.

Photo by Asia McGill



Maya Hyacienth poses for the camera outside of the Student Recreation Center, where she met with her teammates to hang out at Starbucks.

Photo by Asia McGill

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