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# The New York Times

## STUDENT JOURNALISM INSTITUTE

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### Far From Home, International Students Get a Crash Course in Americana

By MATT LEWIS

International students say they often face distinct challenges when they arrive at American colleges.

"In the beginning it was hard to talk to girls," said Mohamed Al-Shehri, 20, a Saudi Arabian student at the University of Arizona.

A fellow Saudi student, Salman Albalawi, 23, agreed. "I can't talk to them as girls," he said. "I have to imagine them as boys, and I still have that problem."

International students make up almost 1 in 10 students at UA, which is home to more than 2,300 international students. Among the 29,000 undergraduates at the university, 117 countries are represented. The largest numbers are from Asia and the Middle East, according to 2008 figures from the UA Factbook.

The Chronicle for Higher Education reported that the number of foreign students who attended higher-education institutions in America hit a new high last year. Almost 700,000 foreign students came to the United States for higher education, an increase of 8 percent from the previous year.

Because of their large numbers, international students both stand out and blend in. One thing that they say unites them is a desire to learn about and participate in American culture.

In the case of the University of Arizona, the number of international students has risen by almost 100 since last year, but the number of countries represented is down.

Al-Shehri said he came from the Middle East to study accounting because he could get a better education in the United States. Khuyen Huynh, 20, from Vietnam, who is also an accounting major, said she had the same idea.

"The education is very wonderful; that's why I came to America to study," Huynh said.

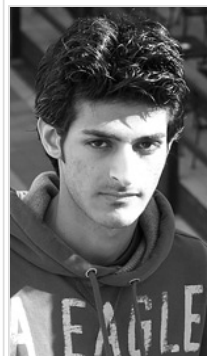
Huynh's parents encouraged her to study abroad, but it was a search on U.S. News and World Report's Web site that led her to UA. The school was highly ranked in accounting, and tuition and living costs were more affordable than at other colleges.

The price tag and ranking might have stood out at first, but cultural diversity is what has left an impression, these students say.

Albalawi explained that Saudi Arabia wasn't very diverse. "In big cities there are maybe three foreigners," he said. "There's few different cultures."

Al-Shehri said he had never seen an Asian person before coming to Arizona. Huynh said she had not seen many foreigners in Vietnam, either.

Being foreigners themselves has made the Saudi men aware of the biased views held by people of certain nationalities, they



Mohamed Al-Shehri, 20, a student from Saudi Arabia. (Luciana Morales/NYTI)

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"Over there they have the stereotype of Americans that Oh, he

is smart, cool and friendly,' but the stereotype of someone from