

UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

# VOICES

A Publication from the Language and Culture Center

GLOBAL  
CITIZENS  
FESTIVAL  
DREAMS  
UNDERSTANDING  
TRADITION  
MERRY  
FAMILY  
LISTENING  
STUDENT SERVICES  
VOICES HOPE  
FIREWORKS  
FESTIVAL  
FRIENDSHIP  
FUN  
A SEASON OF CELEBRATION  
LANGUAGE AND CULTURE CENTER  
CELEBRATE FAMILY GIFTS  
WINTER CHEER  
HAPPY  
AUTUMN  
EXCITING  
PLAY  
JOY TESHACADEMIC  
INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION  
CULTURE FEST  
DIVERSITY  
LOVE  
FOOD  
CHEER  
PEACE  
COOL

FALL 2017

# THE LCC TEAM

## Leadership Team

Joy Tesh – *Director*  
 Dr. Jodi Nelms – *Associate Director*  
 Adam Chen – *Program Director of Counseling and Student Services*  
 Douglas Jones – *Program Director of Assessment and Technology*  
 Jeanne Peine – *Program Manager of Training and Development*

## Teachers

### Level 2

Barbara Kennedy  
 Vincent Tran  
 Alida Nakic

### Level 3

Velva Fallin  
 Dale Craven  
 Jana Mouton

### Level 4

Jenifer Edens  
 Michalina Mrugala  
 Bushra Zaidi  
 Cory Stewart

### Level 5

Katey Porter  
 Saima Khan  
 Greg Urquhart  
 Farideh Nekoobahr

### Level 6

Susan McAlister  
 Anna Hood



(Top left) Thao (Tiffany) Le – *Assistant Department Business Administrator*

(Top right) Wa (Mark) Vuong – *Microsystems Analyst*

(Bottom left) Jessica Cruz – *Office Supervisor*

(Bottom right) Andrea (Andie) Goatley – *Admissions Manager*

## Support Staff

Andrea Goatley – *Admissions Manager*  
 Jessica Cruz – *Office Supervisor*  
 Thao (Tiffany) Le – *Assistant Department Business Administrator*  
 Samrach Long – *SEVIS Compliance Coordinator*  
 Wa Vuong – *Microsystems Analyst*

## VOICES – Fall 2017

### Editors

Jeanne Peine – *Managing Editor*  
 Caitlin Sapaugh – *Teacher Editor*  
 Saima Khan – *Teacher Editor*

## Graphic Design and Layout

Seleste Bautista – *UH Printing*

## Contents

The LCC Team .....	2
From the Director’s Desk .....	3
Assessment and Technology .....	4
LCC Counselors .....	5
Teacher Spotlight: Susan McAlister .....	6
LCC Summer Student Scholarships .....	7
Class Pictures .....	8
Holidays Around the World .....	12
First Field Trip .....	15
A Memorable Holiday Experience .....	17
Renaissance Festival .....	22
Why We Celebrate .....	24
Fall Festival .....	27
Christmas Stories .....	29
Culture Festival .....	31
LCC Student Council .....	33
Alumni .....	34
LCC Calendar .....	36

# From the **Director's** Desk

by Joy Tesh – *Director*

On the morning of February 1, 2006, I woke up as the new director of the Language and Culture Center. I felt the awesome responsibility and the excitement anyone feels when beginning a new job. I was not new to the LCC. I began working as a teacher in this hard-to-ever-leave program in 1979. I loved teaching! I later served as associate director and loved that job for many good years before becoming director. I have loved every day of this job and cannot imagine a better way to have spent my time and my life. I am deeply grateful.

I am the third director of the Language and Culture Center. Dr. Joyce Merrill Valdes, our first director, served from 1975 to 1983. She was the director who had the vision and who did the hard work to get this program started. She was also the director who hired me as a teacher and gave me the opportunity to begin this journey. Dr. Joseph O. Davidson followed Dr. Valdes and served as director from 1983 through 2005. Dr. Davidson was my mentor and my friend, and I am sure that the only reason I had the courage to apply for the job of director is that I had learned from him exactly what is involved in directing an intensive English program.

On the morning of February 1, 2018, I will wake up and remember twelve wonderful years of serving as director. The fourth director of the LCC will be in place on January 1, 2018. I will be here when many of you return in January, and I will have the privilege of seeing you again while working with the new director until January 31, 2018. I am genuinely excited about the possibilities for talented new leadership in this amazing program. Wonderful students will continue to arrive. The LCC will remain an exciting destination for those who wish to study English and to participate in life-changing cultural experiences.

As for now, you, my dear students, are completing the fall 2017 term in the LCC. You did not let Hurricane Harvey keep you away – and, in the simple act of showing up for the fall term, you helped the LCC, the university, and the city recover. You were here to see the dancing in the streets when the Houston Astros won the 2017 World Series. You have studied with classmates and friends in a dynamic and resilient city in an extraordinary Tier One Research University, which celebrates and welcomes international students. As you have shared experiences with students from all over the world in LCC classes, you have engaged in intercultural communication, and you have made friends. These friendships will be important to you throughout your lives.

In this issue of Voices, we are launching an alumni page. We invite you to read about former LCC students in the Class Notes section of this magazine. If you are leaving the LCC, we encourage you to stay in touch with us through email [lcc@uh.edu](mailto:lcc@uh.edu), through Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/UHLCC/>, or through our web site <http://lcc.uh.edu>. We are eager to hear from students as they continue their studies at the University of Houston or elsewhere. We invite you to join a great network of former LCC students, now living and working all over the world. Please stay in touch. We are always delighted to hear from you.

This fall, we have been pleased to have students from 38 countries in our program and on our campus. As the fall term of 2017 closes, we wish you a safe and productive academic break. Fall classes will end at the close of graduation ceremonies on December 14, 2017. The LCC office will remain open through December 22, 2017, and then will close for the Winter Break and open again on January 3, 2018. Online registration for the spring term will begin on January 9, 2018.

Please accept our heartfelt congratulations as you complete this unforgettable term of study in the intensive English program. We look forward to seeing many of you again as we celebrate new beginnings during the spring 2018 term in the Language and Culture Center.



*From left to right:*  
Dr. Jodi Nelms, Associate Director, Language and Culture Center  
Dr. James Kastely, Chair, Department of English, University of Houston  
Joy Tesh, Director, Language and Culture Center

# ASSESSMENT AND TECHNOLOGY



by Doug Jones

**WELCOME TO THE CALL LAB!** Over seven thousand students have seen that message during CALL Lab orientation over the past seven years during which I have been taking care of the lab. And I do hope they feel welcome! The lab is in use almost every day of the term, with eight hours devoted to class sessions and one “Open Hour” reserved for individual study. We have thirty-four computers for student use, with specialized software that can help students with vocabulary, TOEFL prep, and even typing skills. I know that many students have their own computers today, but they still come to Open Hour to surf the Internet, to check email, and to work on compositions and research papers where they can save their work securely and print a copy to hand in to teachers.

LCC teachers use the lab resources to make lessons interesting and fun. It has been my privilege to observe many fantastic class sessions in the lab during which teachers and students took full advantage of today’s learning technology. One of the resources that comes to mind is Kahoot! (<https://kahoot.it>).

Teachers use Kahoot! to create a game that is a fun alternative to a quiz. Normally, teachers do not allow students to use their phones during class, but when it is time for Kahoot!, the teacher will say, “OK students, take out your phones!” Students log in to Kahoot! on their phones and create a screen name that the teacher and other students will see. They then turn their attention to the front of the CALL lab as questions are projected on the screen. Students will see a prompt for a few seconds, for example, “I enjoy \_\_\_\_\_ movies.” Then color-coded answer choices will appear on the screen and on their phone. For this example, the choices might be “watch,” “watching,” and “to watch.” Students will then have only a few seconds to choose the correct answer. Whoever gets the correct answer and does so in the shortest time will accrue the most points. After each question, the students’ screen names appear on the screen ranked according to score, and everyone can see who is winning. As you can imagine, Kahoot! games get very competitive as students strive to come out on top!

For the teacher, Kahoot! is a non-threatening way to find out what items from the lesson the students have learned and which they still need to work on.

Kahoot! can be played in any classroom that has a projector and screen, but in the CALL lab an advantage is that if a student does not have a phone (!), then he or she can log in to Kahoot! using one of the computers.

I expect to see more and more teachers using Kahoot! in our lab. Kahoot! is one of the many ways technology can make language learning more exciting!



# LCC COUNSELORS



*LCC student Bryan Mauricio Benitez Reyes (left) from El Salvador speaks with Adam Chen (right). Adam is the Program Director of Counseling and Student Services at the Language and Culture Center.*



*Samrach (Sam) Long is the SEVIS compliance coordinator and Principal Designated School Official (PDSO) at the Language and Culture Center. Sam conducts F-1 student visa workshops for students to explain how to maintain F-1 status and what to do at the end of the term.*

*Sam Long (left) with LCC student Abdullah Alkhuraim.*



*Program Assistants Allyson (Ally) Yolland and Yu Ting Huang help plan and support LCC student activities.*

## Susan McAlister

by Dr. Jodi Nelms, *Associate Director*



The reason so many students return to the Language and Culture Center is that the teachers in the LCC are outstanding professionals in our field. In each edition of *Voices*, we profile one of our teachers, and this term we have chosen Susan McAlister. Susan celebrates multiple decades teaching at the LCC; therefore, it is most fitting to publicly showcase her incomparable character and accomplishments in this issue.

Susan McAlister experienced international travel at an early age, which sparked her lifelong interest in multiculturalism. When she was five years old, her family moved to Maadi, Egypt where she began kindergarten. The following year, she attended first grade at the English Girls College in Alexandria, Egypt. During her junior year in college, she studied abroad in Lebanon at the American University of Beirut. Later, she worked as a YMCA volunteer teaching English at Al-Tanoukhigh School in Abey.

Susan returned to the Middle East with her husband, Ken, and taught in the ARAMCO training department in Saudi Arabia. In 1980, Ken was transferred back to the United States, and they moved to Houston. It was at that time that she was hired by Joyce Valdes, and to our great fortune, joined the LCC family.

Ms. McAlister is a colleague extraordinaire. She recently shared that at the LCC, it's "all about relationships, both with students and colleagues." She recalled how she and her first co-teacher, Mega, were as different as two people could be. However, they quickly bonded over their shared connections to the Middle East and formed a strong relationship. It was exactly this family atmosphere that helped Susan forge connections in this huge, hectic city and is something she values to this day.

Susan is essential to the success of the Language and Culture Center, and to the success of her students. She has taught every level offered at the LCC. She has frequently taught writing, a subject that can be a challenge for students in their native language, let alone in English. She enjoys helping students overcome this challenge and become better prepared

for future challenges in university settings. Susan is passionate about getting to know each of her students, their cultures, and how she can help them reach their goals. Her main priority may be student success, but she also works constantly to improve herself. She is always willing to try and use different technology and techniques to strengthen her teaching skills.

Susan McAlister is truly exceptional, and her colleagues share this opinion. Jenifer Edens admires her "easygoing attitude combined with her serious dedication to teaching." These qualities make working with Susan a real pleasure. Jenifer also shared that her "enthusiasm for true collaboration is contagious, and her willingness to share her knowledge with others has been helpful to students and other teachers" in our program.

Anna Hood, Susan's current co-teacher, has been "impressed with her creativity, her commitment to professional development, and her high expectations of students." She deeply appreciates that Susan never stops learning—even with more than twenty years of teaching experience. Anna adds that, "She is always growing professionally and bringing the new ideas and activities she learns to the classroom. She puts the students and their needs first." Ms. Hood finds teaching with Susan to be professionally and personally enriching. "She is the most cooperative cooperating teacher" a colleague could ever have.

When asked what words of wisdom Susan has to share with us, she responded, "Keep yourself open. Take advantage of opportunities that present themselves." She says that she reminds herself to focus on each day and opportunity rather than on the negative. She also says that, whether it's between students and teachers or colleagues, communication is key.

We celebrate the outstanding work of all our teachers, and this term we acknowledge Ms. McAlister's dedication to her students, her colleagues, and to the future of the LCC. We thank you, Susan, for your important and highly valued contribution to our teaching program, and for sharing your gifts with the Language and Culture Center.

# LCC SUMMER STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS

*The Language and Culture Center awards three scholarships each term to returning students who best combine academic excellence and leadership with international awareness and cross-cultural understanding. One scholarship honors Joyce Valdes, founder and first director of the LCC. A second scholarship honors Joseph Davidson, who served as director of the LCC for 22 years before retiring in 2006. A third scholarship honors Brad Powell, who worked for 12 years in many capacities at the LCC, ultimately serving as Program Director of Counseling and Student Services.*



**KANGNING (CONNIE) WU** received the Valdes scholarship. Ms. Wu is a Level Six student from China and has been at the LCC for two terms. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Accounting from her country and plans to earn a Master's in Business after she graduates from the LCC. Ms. Wu expressed her appreciation to her teachers and classmates for their constant encouragement and for helping her to broaden her horizons.



**SÉPHORA YAMEOGO** was awarded the Davidson scholarship. She is a Level Six student from Burkina Faso. She has studied at the LCC for two terms, and after graduating from the program, she plans to pursue a degree in Math at Houston Community College. Ms. Yameogo attributes her success to hard work and staying true to herself.



**IRENE ABESO** was awarded the Powell scholarship. Ms. Abeso is from Equatorial Guinea and is studying in Level Six. She holds a degree in Business Management and plans to pursue a degree in Supply Chain and Logistics Technology after graduating from the LCC. She describes receiving the scholarship as a “shot of confidence” that reminded her she can achieve anything with determination. Irene treasures “all those little moments as well as those significant moments” she has shared with her friends and classmates at the LCC.

# CLASS PICTURES







# CLASS PICTURES





5C AND 5D



6B



6C



## Ngondo Festival in Cameroon

**Michelle Carole Foyen Ongyemban**

*4B – Cameroon*

Each December, my hometown in Cameroon has a local festival called Ngondo that celebrates the water divinities of the Sawa people, who live near the Wouri River. The first day, the traditional authorities and dignitaries gather at the river and

send a representative in the river with the sacred vase to bring a message from the water divinity. Many people come to admire this demonstration of our traditional custom. Another activity is the canoe competition, where the best men demonstrate their talents. Young and old enjoy this team competition, which brings everyone together. The last activity is the Miss Ngondo competition, based on criteria like beauty, traditional clothes, and historical knowledge of the Sawa. The goal of the Ngondo festival is to involve the young generation with their roots and cultural background. It is an essential tradition in my hometown because everyone participates, feels happy, and is proud to be Sawa.



## The National Day

**Bao Ngan Ho**

*3C – Vietnam*

In my country, the National Day commemorates the declaration of independence of Vietnam from France on September 2, 1945. This is a time Vietnamese reflect and give thanks to soldiers for the peace in their lives. Nowadays,

Vietnamese have a day off on the National Day, so they usually go to the beach with their family. Swimming and eating seafood are the most popular activities for many families. However, I will not forget the National Day this past year. I received the United States student visa on that day, so my family spent time celebrating at home. To begin with, we had a small party with all members in my family instead of going to the beach. We decorated our house, cleaned our house, and arranged chairs and the table before we invited some good friends and relatives to attend this party. Next, we made the menu for this party. We made Thai hotpot instead of eating seafood on the beach. In fact, we got up early to buy fresh seafood and beef for the Thai hotpot. Finally, instead of talking about the life of all the members in my family, we just watched the documentary film about the National Day in 1945. As you can imagine, I will never forget that National Day.

## The Mid-Autumn Festival

**Zixin Yang**

*6A – China*

Every country has many festivals that people celebrate to commemorate an event, a day, or a person. In China, the Mid-Autumn Festival is one of the important festivals in the fall. Because the shape of the moon is more circular in mid-autumn than on other days, it means people can get together with their families. Therefore, I do lots of things with my family while celebrating the Mid-Autumn Festival. During this holiday, eating mooncakes is my favorite thing to do because mooncakes come in different flavors; some are sweet and some are savory. In my opinion, the flavor of red bean paste is the best because it is delicious and smells good. Another thing I do at the Mid-Autumn Festival is to have barbecue with my friends and family. The barbecue is outdoors, and I love the feeling when we sit around the grill and chat. At that moment, the beautiful moon and people's happy voices fill me with happiness. The last thing I do at the Mid-Autumn Festival is to put my palms together and close my eyes to pray for my family and myself. In the end, the reason I love the Mid-Autumn Festival is because this day brings me love and peace. I'm so glad people can be together on this day because people are usually separated from their families because of their jobs. Therefore, it is fortunate that the Mid-Autumn Festival offers special moments and tasty food, and it ends with a blessing.

## Eid al-Fitr

**Safwan Baduwais**

*4B – Saudi Arabia*

I celebrate Eid al-Fitr every year after Ramadan, on the first day in the month of Shawwal. Since Eid al-Fitr is the end of Ramadan, which is a month of fasting, it is an important religious holiday celebrated by Muslims worldwide. Eid al-Fitr is special to me because it's the only time my whole family meets together in the same house to celebrate and have a good time. Eid al-Fitr has a particular salat (prayer) consisting of two rakats (units). It may be performed in congregations or a large hall. It has six extra takbirs (raising of the hands to the ears and saying, "Allahu Akbar," which means, "God is the greatest"). Traditionally, Eid al-Fitr starts at sunset after salat (prayer). The common greetings in Eid al-Fitr are "Eid Mubarak" (blessed Eid) or "Eid sa'eed" (happy Eid). Many countries have their own way of greeting, and Muslims are encouraged to forgive and forget any differences with others. Eidi is a present or money that is given to friends or family members to celebrate Eid. In Saudi Arabia, it is common to have an Eid breakfast. After we finish eating, my father and my uncles start giving money as Eidi to all the children in the house as part of the celebration.

## The Lantern Festival

### Jinpeng Jiang

2B – China

My name is Eddie. I am from China and live in Shandong, Weihai. Shandong is a province and Weihai is a city. My favorite festival is the Lantern Festival. The Lantern Festival is a Chinese festival. On this day, the moon is round, and everybody eats dumplings. The Lantern Festival is very important for China. It is my favorite festival because we eat dumplings and look at the moon with our families. So, I like the Lantern Festival!

## International Children's Festival

### Doktor Mervan Ozpinar

2C – Turkey

My country has so many special days and festivals. There are different celebrations everywhere. However, I will talk about the International Children's Festival that is celebrated each year in Turkey. This festival gathers children from all over the world under the motto of "Love, Friendship, and Peace." The doors of our country are opened to a lot of children from different countries and cultures. Foreign children also participate in the special sessions of the Grand National Assembly. This is for "Peace and Brotherhood." On this day, there are many different activities for children. There are also different dance shows in big stadiums in all cities. There is a lot of traditional food given to these children. This is all for their happiness. People hope that children will be happy on this day.

## Chinese New Year

### Jiaxin Jiang

2B – China

New Year's Eve is the most wonderful day of the year. The dinner on New Year's Eve is a family reunion. Families eat dumplings, which play an important role on that special eve.

Most Chinese people stay up to watch the Festival Gala on TV until the beginning of the New Year. Children can wear new clothes, set off fireworks, and get money as gifts. The festival is usually a long holiday. During this holiday time, every family has interesting guests. People put New Year scrolls on the wall for good fortune. This is Chinese New Year, so it is everyone's lucky day.

## National Day of China

### Yinhao Chen

2B – China

National Day is the birthday of my homeland, China. It falls on October 1st, and it is a very important festival for Chinese people. Most people get a seven-day holiday to take a rest. Before this festival starts, the government decorates the square very beautifully. On the first day, many people watch the military parade. Many other presidents are invited to visit our military parade. After the military parade, we usually go out shopping or visiting with our families. The young people usually go to watch movies, sing, barbecue, drink milk, tea or beer, and do a lot of other fun things. Some people take a trip with their friends. However, this happy time goes by very fast. On the last day, people must go back to their home and prepare for the next day's work or study. This is the National Day of China.

## National Day

### Mohammed Alqahtani

2C – Saudi Arabia

My favorite holiday in my country is the National Day. It is a fun day with lots of activities. Everyone loves this day's interesting celebrations, fireworks, and popular dances. On National Day you learn about the customs and traditions of all the regions of your country. National Day is the best holiday.

## The Tet Holiday

### Minh Tam Trinh

2C – Vietnam

During this holiday, many people come to my hometown. They enjoy having food with their family. During the Tet holiday, people do not work for about ten days. They just relax, play with family, and have a happy new year with their grandparents. Grandparents always give children gifts and a lot of money. Everyone is very happy. Adults let the children go to the park to play. In addition, they go to flower markets and sightsee on the streets. The Tet holiday helps many people be together with family after work every year. People always look forward to the Tet holiday!



# HOLIDAYS AROUND THE WORLD

## My Favorite Fall Holiday

**Claudia Pamela Villarroel Flores**

*2B – Chile*

In Chile, my favorite holiday is Independence Day in the fall. It is a day for my family and friends to get together. Every year, my daughters attend the national dance classes “Cueca”, and when they finish, we all go to see them. The dance simulates the courtship of the rooster to the hen. The children in my city are dressed in typical costumes. The food is delicious, for example fried empanadas, meat, and choripan, which is a bread with roasted sausage. We also drink “chicha”. It is an unfermented grape juice. We eat a delicious dessert called “mote with huesillo”. It is made of wheat and peaches. This holiday begins on September 17 and ends on September 19 with the military parade in the city of Valparaiso. Everyone participates in this parade. It is so beautiful and exciting!

## Orange Day in My Hometown

**Jill (Yuhan) Xiang**

*4B – China*

My hometown, Taizhou, Zhejiang, which is near the coast of China, grows oranges that are more delicious than oranges from any other place. As a result, oranges are popular there, and we have celebrated Orange Day every November 15, for two thousand years. When I was a child, my mother told me a story about how this tradition began. She told me that my city was once very poor because a huge, bloodcurdling monster used to attack it and eat pigs, cows, and small children every winter. Consequently, every year, when winter was coming, people were scared, hid their animals, and made their children stay home to be safe. While many people wanted to migrate, an orphan decided to find the monster because it had captured his sister. He asked some villagers where the monster lived, but people thought that he was crazy and stayed away from him. He never gave up finding the monster. One day he saw a trail of blood on the ground, and he followed it until he reached the top of a mountain. He saw the monster was asleep, surrounded by the bones of the dead. When the orphan saw his sister's clothes and the bones, he was so angry that he killed the monster with a knife. He hadn't realized that its blood was poisonous, so when the monster died, the boy died too. After that day, the weather was warm, and people found more than one thousand orange trees at the top of the mountain. After people started selling the oranges to make money, the poor village became an affluent one. To thank the boy for making their village safe and prosperous again, every November 15, they eat oranges and cherish the memory of the orphan.

## The Most Anticipated Holiday

**Mariangel Oberto Reyes**

*6B – Venezuela*

November is the most anticipated month in my city Maracaibo, Venezuela. We celebrate the fair of the Virgin of Chiquinquirá, or as we call it “La feria de La Chinita,” with joy and enthusiasm. That month is dedicated to the Virgin Mary because years ago an old woman who was washing her clothes on the shore of Maracaibo's lake found a little piece of wood which she thought could be useful to use as a lid of a jar. One year on November 18th at sunrise, as the sun's rays reflected on the wood, the old woman was astonished to see a spectacular shine from the wood in which she could observe the Virgin's silhouette. For that reason every November 18th we celebrate the occasion. November is also a special month for Catholics because most of the events are related to the Virgin Mary, and it is also the start of the Christmas season. In that month, we have a specific day on which we celebrate our Mother, and in different places of the city, people gather together to wait for the sunrise, or as we call it, “El amanecer gaitero.” Additionally, outside of the Basilica, an event is organized where singers and musicians meet to sing happy birthday to our Mother at midnight on November 18th and where individuals can watch and enjoy fireworks. Then, Christians go to church in order to celebrate mass at 6:00 p.m. the next day. In addition, the city organizes different events where people meet to dance to regional music such as “Gaitas” and eat delicious traditional food or desserts. Other events are the baseball game in honor of the Virgin, bullfighting, which includes bullfighters from Spain and other places, and exhibitions where people gather together to show and sell their creations, such as pottery, crafts, and food. Furthermore, the city hosts beauty contests, and the queen of the fair represents the fair in every event for one year; she also participates in the parade for which schools and organizations create their own floats, and groups dance to choreography. Finally, some avenues are decorated with lights and objects related to Christmas, and everyone goes to see them and celebrate the arrival of Christmas.

## Halloween

**Ali Al Abushaheen**

*2C – Saudi Arabia*

Halloween is the night that people celebrate every year on the last night of October. People wear strange costumes to celebrate Halloween night. Also, most of the houses give out candies to the kids who knock at their doors. It's my first Halloween here in Houston, and I will be wearing a Spider-Man costume. Also, I will hang out with my friends on Halloween night. I think that this night will be so great and fun.

# FIRST FIELD TRIP



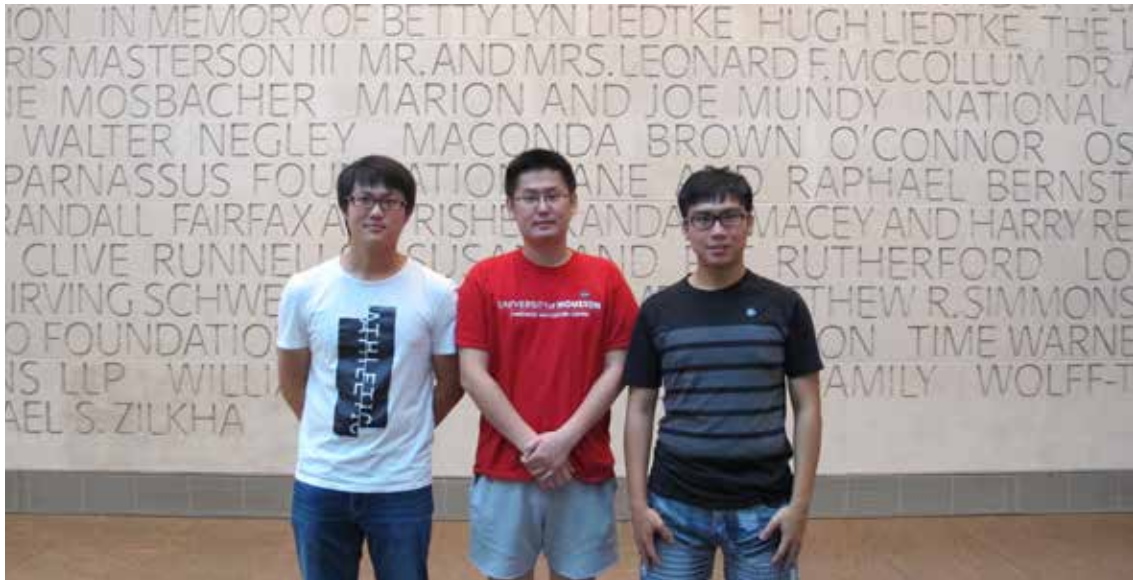
*Since there is nothing so well worth having as friends,  
never lose a chance to make them.*

– Francesco Guicciardini



FALL TRIP

# FIRST FIELD TRIP



FALL TRIP



# A MEMORABLE HOLIDAY EXPERIENCE

## New Year's Day 2014

Camik Agonkpahoun

3B – Benin

My heart will never forget New Year's Day 2014 in Benin. I remember I got up to study although it was a holiday. My family lived in one city, and I went to school in another. I decided to stay at my school because I had an exam just after the holidays, so on New Year's Day I was alone in my room. I texted my family to get their news. Then, I cooked food and ate while I played music and watched TV. During the day, many friends texted me to ask why I hadn't gone home to enjoy the New Year holiday. We exchanged New Year wishes like "Have happiness in this year." My day ended, and I went to sleep. In short 2014 New Year's Day was a very unique holiday that I will remember the rest of my life.

## My First "Dia de los Muertos" at Home

Elizabeth Gurrola Cantu

6A – Mexico

"Dia de los Muertos" (Day of the Dead) is a traditional celebration in Mexico in which we honor our relatives and friends and sometimes other people to remember them and celebrate that they are in a better place now. My family didn't use to celebrate this at home until a few years ago. It was after my mother's father died when she and I decided to make a traditional shrine for him and our loved ones who had died. I remember that a couple of days before November 2 (when it is celebrated) I persuaded my mom to help me; she loved the idea and agreed. Even though we used to do shrines for school contests, this shrine would be very special for us because of our recent loss. So, we started on our way to find every single thing we needed. As we entered the store, we took some time to choose the most beautiful papers, flowers, candles and, of course, "calaveritas de azucar" (sugar skulls) because we knew our dead relatives deserved that and much more. In the shrine we needed to place some photos, and while we were looking for them, we started to feel their absence. We couldn't avoid being sad when we realized that the top of the shrine would fill up over time. Definitely it wasn't as simple as we thought. We had to take care of every little detail because everything has its own meaning. However, at the end, all of our effort was worth it. I wanted to make a frame for the shrine we had made. It had four steps filled with white and purple papers and bright candles, which would show the souls the way back home. On one of the steps, we put their favorite drink and food so they could feel welcome and alive. We also put other things that have a specific meaning, but I think I don't have enough space to describe everything here. The only thing I could say is that my first "Dia de los Muertos" at home was very challenging and emotional with our feelings bubbling up to the surface. After we finished the shrine, all my family joined together to pray for them and remember them as they were when they were alive. Now, "Dia de los Muertos" has become our family tradition in which we take time to celebrate our lives and remember our loved ones who have gone ahead on the road of life. I love them so much and miss them even more.



## Lunar New Year in Vietnam

Quang Chanh Giang

3A – Vietnam

Today, I want to tell you about the most important holiday in my country. Traditionally, Lunar New Year is an ecstatic time where Vietnamese families meet together once a year. It takes place from the first day of the first month until the third day of the lunar calendar. We usually go shopping and buy some things for the celebration such as cakes, food, candles, and vegetables. Preparing some food to pray for ancestors is the most crucial aspect of this popular holiday in Vietnam. However, there is one holiday in 2015 that I can't forget. The first difference was that instead of celebrating the holiday with my family and siblings, this holiday was celebrated with my cousins at a cold place six hours away from my city. We stayed at a hotel for three days and had fun together. The second major difference was that I ate many special foods and visited many wonderful places I had never ever seen around the place I lived. As in previous years, my parents and siblings gave me lucky money, but especially that year, my older cousins gave me lucky money. They wanted me to say something as a blessing, as beautiful as possible to them, which was a really happy surprise. We sat around a hotpot, which smelled really delicious, ate, and talked about many old stories in the past of each person, such as fun things, and happiness or sadness in their lives. Finally, we welcomed the new year and watched fireworks when they shot them in the sky. It was awesome. As you can imagine, a holiday is not simply a holiday. It is culture and custom, and it helps people grow through experiences.



## Happy Lunar New Year

Thi Huyen Tram Nguyen

3A – Vietnam

When I was young, I expected and counted down the days until Lunar New Year. I had a new year I will never forget in 2007. First, my family celebrated the Lunar New Year outside my country. When we went to Singapore, we went to Maria Bay Sand. Then we visited Lion's Park and took pictures together. In the evening, my family ate chili crab, and it was delicious. Second, it was thrilling because it was the first time my father traveled with us. He surprised us and made us happy when we had an opportunity to spend time together. Also, my family prepared lucky money for the trip. Finally, we had an opportunity to set off fireworks because I had never bought fireworks in my country. We watched them and gave every member in my family best wishes. It was one New Year I will never forget for the rest of my life.

# A MEMORABLE HOLIDAY EXPERIENCE

## A Romantic Carnival Samara Tumajan Youssef

4A – Venezuela

In Venezuela, the Carnival celebration is fun because people dress up, decorate the streets, and dance in the streets. Last year was my favorite Carnival because I went with my family, and it was my mother's birthday. That day was unforgettable because my father arrived with red flowers for my mother, and he brought her favorite singer to the festival. I thought it was romantic, and my mother started crying because she was so happy. Many people noticed my parents, and they sang happy birthday to her. My father's surprise was a fantastic way to make Carnival even more special. I admire the way that my father makes us happy and the way that my mother loves our family. That Carnival made me realize that my family is my greatest treasure.



## A Spring Festival to Remember Xue Zhao

3A – China

The Chinese Spring Festival is the most important holiday in China. Most families go back to their hometown and reunite at this special time. The whole family has a delicious dinner together on the Eve of the Spring Festival.

The most traditional food is meat dumplings. The Chinese believe it will bring them good luck in the next year. However, there is one Spring Festival I will never forget. It was a meaningful holiday because we celebrated it in a different way. To start with, we decided to spend the holiday with our extended relatives at my grandparents' home. Because my grandparents believe in Buddhism, they ate vegetarian on the Eve of the Spring Festival. Compared with previous dinners, this was especially light. The second major change we made was the clothing. Instead of wearing our red clothes for the occasion, everyone wore a tang suit, which is more suitable for solemn occasions. Last but not the least, the most impressive thing for me was to provide sacrifices on Spring Festival Eve to worship our ancestors, which shows that we have not forgotten our ancestors. After offering food and other sacrifices, we knelt down to worship our ancestors according to our hierarchical position in the family. As far as I'm concerned, I will never forget this Spring Festival. This was the first time I had ever eaten a vegetarian dinner, wore a tang suit and worshiped ancestors on Spring Festival. Even though the way of celebrating was different, we enjoyed this Spring Festival.

## Moon Festival in the United States

### Tsung-Han Tan

3B – Taiwan

I will never forget my first celebration of the Moon Festival in the United States. The Moon Festival is a holiday for Chinese people, but the Taiwanese have a different way of celebrating it. We always barbecue outside. We usually prepare the food before the Moon Festival. We often barbecue for two days. We eat barbecue and mooncakes, which are a special small round dessert. We talk together and look at the moon outside. I will never forget this time in the United States because my aunt had gone back to Taiwan. Only my uncle and I celebrated the Moon Festival. This time we just ate mooncakes. We didn't have barbecue because my uncle thought it was too much trouble to cook. I felt very sad because I couldn't celebrate with my whole family, and I couldn't enjoy our traditional foods. I hope on the next Moon Festival, I can celebrate with my family.

## An Unusual Festival

### Huachen Qin

3B – China

I will never forget the Spring Festival three years ago in my home town in China. That night, I stayed at home, watching a boring festival show on TV. In China people light firecrackers during the Spring Festival and that is really noisy. I couldn't bear it, so I made a decision to go outside. I walked alone on the streets, and I finally went to an internet bar. Three years ago, I was a teenager, so I shouldn't have gone there. I broke the law, but no customers were there. I paid admission and sat on a chair. I felt very lonely, and I needed some light or music, so I opened 100 computers just to make some noise. I felt relaxed when I heard that. Then I called a friend to join me there. He also thought the Spring Festival TV show was very boring. However, when we played computer games together, I felt unusually bored by the games, so I went back home and watched the TV show. I don't know why, but I felt warm and happy to be with my parents.

## My Unusual Halloween

### Meshary Aldukhail

3B – Saudi Arabia

Last Halloween was my first Halloween and holiday in the United States, and I did not know enough information about it. When I woke up, I thought it would be a normal day like any day in my life, and I ate my breakfast with my family at home. In the evening, I was surprised when many of our neighbors knocked on our door and pressed the doorbell. Then my father got angry because he did not know what happened on Halloween. When we saw our neighbors wanted candy, my father told me and my brothers to go to Walmart to buy some candies for our neighbors' children. It was an amazing day in our life because everyone took and ate candies and the children were happy. Although our neighbors had told us about Halloween, we did not pay attention to it. After I ate a lot of candies, I decided to call my friends to hang out and see what

happened on the streets on Halloween. We went to a buffalo wings restaurant, and we saw many people wearing weird costumes and masks. I really felt surprised because I could not believe that happened on Halloween, but I learned a lot that day, and I was excited to experience this holiday in the United States.

## An Unforgettable Christmas

**Kevin Ekofo**

*3C – USA Resident*



Christmas is the day when Christians and non-Christians celebrate the birth of Christ. People often celebrate this event by going to the church and spending time with relatives. But the Christmas on December 25, 2010 was completely different and unforgettable. First of all, I celebrated this Christmas with my mother's

family instead of my father's family. It was very interesting for me, because I enjoyed the ceremony with my new family for the first time. So, we spent more than half of the time getting to know each other, instead of partying. It was cool and enriching. Also, I was excited to celebrate this day with my new friends in a new country, France. Back home, on Christmas Day after church, I was used to playing a soccer game with my old friends. However, this Christmas was different. We started to celebrate it one day before by playing with snow all night. We had such a good time that it seemed too good to be true. It was unique. Then on D-day we had a little reception in the morning before church. By celebrating this Christmas, I acquired new experience. I met my new family and new friends. I only want to say behind every new experience is hiding a great thing, even if it seems very challenging to you.

## An Unusual Holiday Experience

**Hui Zhou**

*3B – China*

The Mid-Autumn Festival last month was the most unusual holiday I had ever had. It was on October 4. I had just been in Houston for one month studying at the Language and Culture Center. It looked like a usual day, but it was not. Not only was it the Mid-Autumn Festival, but it was also my birthday, my first birthday without my family and friends. In China, this festival was an important holiday to celebrate. People would come home and eat together some traditional food such as mooncakes and crab. This Mid-Autumn Festival coincided with the National Day holiday, so people had more time to get together. However, no one celebrated the Mid-Autumn Festival in America. So, I bought some mooncakes to share with my classmates and teachers. I hoped they could feel the Chinese traditional atmosphere. I was so glad they liked it. During the break, we tasted mooncakes together and told some short stories about the Mid-Autumn Festival. It was fun, but I still felt unhappy because that day was also my birthday. I missed my family and my friends a lot. Each year my father gave me a bowl of noodles which meant longevity. My friends would take me to a nice restaurant and give me presents. But when

I came to Houston, I was lonely, and I didn't tell anybody about my birthday. I didn't want others to know that because they would feel embarrassed if they didn't have a gift for me. However, after class, I was so surprised when they brought me a small cake for my birthday. Although we hadn't known each other a long time, they were kind and lovely people. I will never forget that Mid-Autumn Festival!

## Chinese New Year with a Turning Point

**Chunhui Yang**

*3C – China*

Normally, Chinese New Year is a very important time for families to come together to relax. Almost all Chinese people go back to their hometown. Families eat traditional food together and talk about important things. But I had an unusual New Year in 2017. It was special because it was a turning point in my life. My husband was planning to come to Houston before the Chinese New Year. At that time, I was traveling in the United States, and my husband was working in England. Unfortunately, my husband told us that he couldn't come to Houston before the Chinese New Year, so there were only my son and I during the Chinese New Year. This was the main cause for the change. The second major cause was the ambiance. Houston is an American city, and there wasn't any good Chinese food. There are only a few authentic Chinese restaurants, and they were closed. Also, there weren't any crowds of people as in China, so I felt a little alone. Finally, I realized that it was a special day after all. So I took my son to the Children's Museum. He was very happy all day. When the museum closed, he was tired. After we returned home, he was sleepy instead of being excited all night. I thought that New Year was special for him and me. Tired as he was, he went to bed early. So I had some free time to think about my life in the future. I decided to change my life. I realized we can have a good life even if it is only us in the United States. I will never forget that Chinese New Year because I decided to do something to change my life. I hope I won't regret that decision.

## My Family's Special Tet

**Tri (Le Minh Tri) Pham**

*4A – Vietnam*

When I was twelve years old, the Vietnamese New Year, Tet, was the most incredible day of my life. My family members were usually busy with their work, so we rarely had time to eat together. However, that year, my family met together to make Tet different. As the youngest child in the house, I suggested we try to make *banh chung*, a traditional Vietnamese sticky rice cake made from glutinous rice, mung beans, pork, and other ingredients. The night before Tet, my family gathered, and while we made the cakes, I loved the feeling of working together. After we finished and waited for the cakes to cook, we were talking, singing, and eating around the fire. Then we finally went to sleep. It was the most enjoyable time our family ever had. Time might change a lot of things, but my love for my family and happy memories with them will never change.

# A MEMORABLE HOLIDAY EXPERIENCE

STUDENT VOICES

## A Special Valentine's Day

Luu Cam Giang Nguyen

3B – Vietnam

I will never forget a special Valentine's Day two years ago. My boyfriend and I had a very special memory together in Thailand. On that day, we had an anniversary date at a restaurant in Bangkok. It was three years since we started dating. First, early in the morning he sent me a text message with a simple sentence, "Love forever!" I jumped up at that moment and smiled all day. I felt so happy. After that, I prepared for the date. I chose a gorgeous red dress and put on my best makeup. When I arrived at the restaurant, I was surprised by his appearance. He was very handsome and elegant in a black suit. Then he gave me a bouquet of red roses with a sparkling diamond ring in it and a note saying, "Will you marry me?" I felt so happy and wanted to cry right then. He wanted to marry me the next year, and I agreed to be his wife. That was a special Valentine's Day in my life. He always brings me something special every day.

## An Independence Day I Will Never Forget

Bo Zheng

3B – China

I attended an exchange program in the summer of 2015. It was a work and travel program, so I worked in South Dakota for three months from June to September. One of the best things that I experienced was the Independence Day there on July 4. On that day, American flags were everywhere. People and their families got together; most shops were closed and everyone enjoyed a happy and relaxing time. My coworkers told me that there was going to be a big fireworks display at night and invited me and my friends to join them, so we drove to a field close to a mountain. When we arrived, there were a lot of families who had arrived already. They were talking to each other and lighting some firecrackers, and I remember it was around 8 p.m. when the fireworks display started. People yelled and cheered, and not only children but also adults were very excited! After it ended, we went home. That was a very special experience for me because it was my first time to join in an American holiday. Although it was not as big as Chinese fireworks displays, it was still amazing!

## My First Jack-O-Lantern

Charles (Jiliang) Zhang

4B – China

I carved my first jack-o-lantern at a Halloween party at a church this fall. I had never seen a pumpkin before, so when the teacher and her husband brought a huge pumpkin, I couldn't wait to look at it more carefully. After the teacher taught us the names of the parts of the pumpkin and explained how to make jack-o-lanterns, I tried doing it on my own. First, I cut a circle around the top of the pumpkin so I could remove the stem. Then, I scooped all the seeds and fibers out of the pumpkin. After that, I drew the outline of a face on the outside of the pumpkin and cut out the eyes, nose, and mouth. Last, I put a candle inside the pumpkin, lit it, and replaced the top. Creating my first jack-o-lantern was a simple achievement, but I was excited about it for several days.

## A Memorable Valentine's Day

Bosen Liu

3A – China

Valentine's Day is a popular holiday in the current society. On this day, many boys and girls go on a special date to show love to each other. However, I had a special Valentine's that was different from all others. The story started with the artificial flower that I didn't want. I was very busy at work until ten o'clock that day because I had an urgent task to complete. So I hurried to buy flowers in heavy rain. I chose a little flower that had already opened to give to my wife when I saw her that day. I found this flower wasn't real after I got to my house. The second surprise of the story happened after I got the artificial flower for my wife. I took the flower to go to my house in a hurry. At the same time, she left the room when she heard the sound of the opening door. I walked in the room quietly with the flower behind me, but when she returned, she was frightened when I appeared in front of her and the cup in her hand dropped to the floor. The third interesting part of the story happened when she cooked a lot of delicious food and waited for me to eat. She was too angry about the terrible fake flower and the scary incident to share the food that she had cooked for me. In the end, even though we had a bad moment, she now enjoys telling the story, and we laugh about it till this day.

*"As you can imagine, a holiday is not simply a holiday. It is culture and custom, and it helps people grow through experiences."*

– Quang Chanh Giang, Vietnam



## My Holiday

Rui Zhao

2C – China

My most memorable holiday was my winter holiday last year. I went to Hainan with my family, and I think it was a very beautiful city. It had charming seaside scenery, delicious seafood, and fresh fruit and vegetables. I was really captivated by this seaside city.

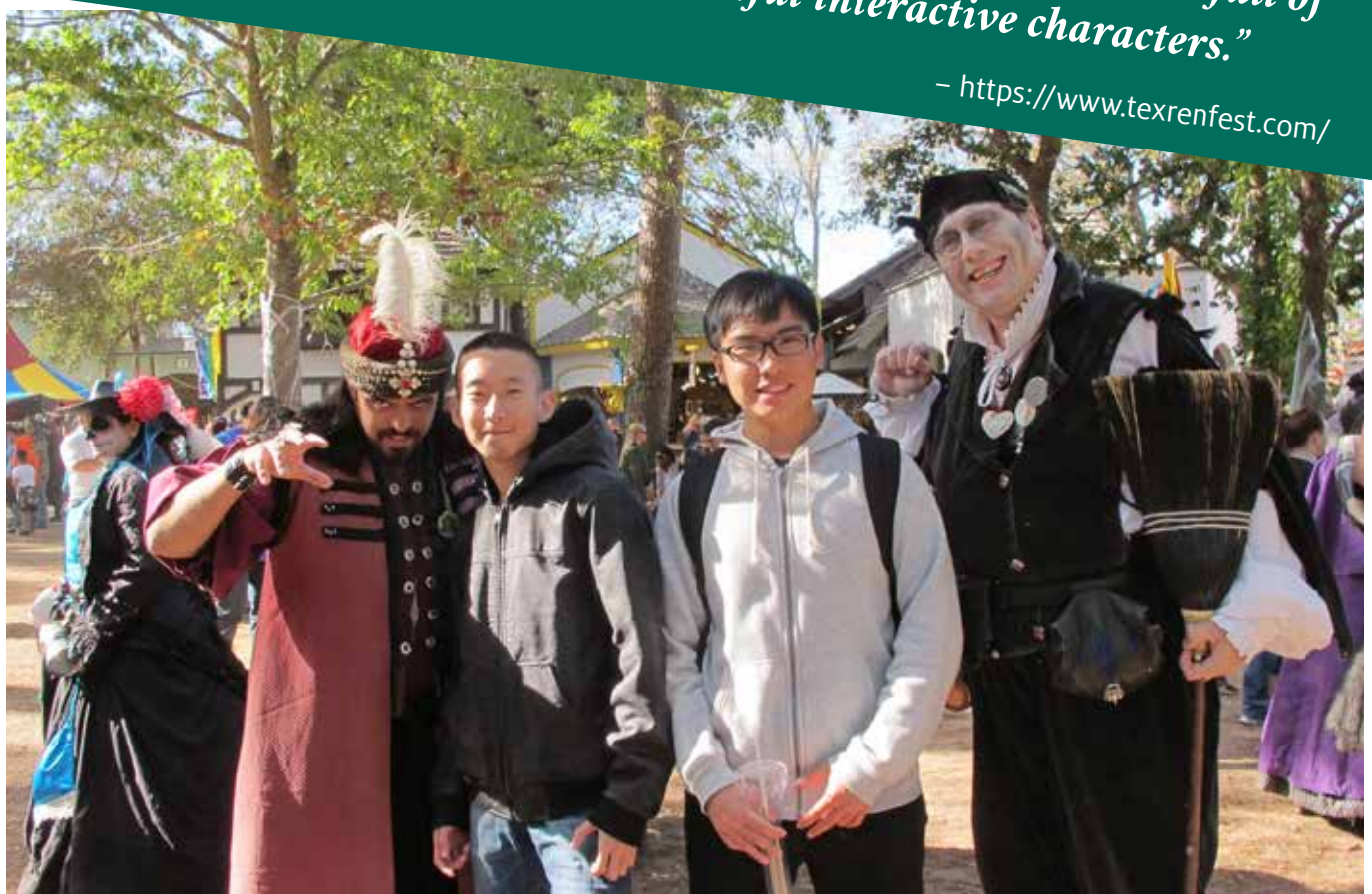


# RENAISSANCE FESTIVAL



*"The Texas Renaissance Festival presents an enchanted world full of Kings and Queens, ... and other fanciful interactive characters."*

– <https://www.texrenfest.com/>



FALL TRIP



# WHY WE CELEBRATE

## An Exciting Celebration

**Lolita Laktionova**

*5B – Russia*

One day I suggested going to the shopping center and buying presents for the New Year to my friend Adam. He answered that he never celebrated. It was sad to hear that because, in my opinion, celebrations bring happiness in our lives. Happy New Year symbols awake happy memories which bring a good mood for two whole months even before the actual celebration. I am one of those lucky people who celebrate, so I can feel how holidays come in my town every November. The atmosphere of celebration is everywhere: Christmas trees on neighbors' front yards and supermarkets, garlands on every house, and the smell of gingerbread from each restaurant are evidence that holidays are coming. On the other hand, I feel sad for people for whom winter holidays mean nothing; they will never feel that holiday spirit. Furthermore, the New Year gives me a unique chance to see my family members and old friends because I have no-study days during holidays. This situation is the same for my relatives and friends, so winter holidays are my best opportunity to spend time with people dear to me. In addition, celebrations bring a lot of fun in my daily routine. Also, there are several kinds of entertainment which are available only during the Christmas season, like watching thematic movies, making snowballs, and dressing the Christmas tree. Holiday celebrations bring a lot of positivity in my constantly boring life. As Ostrovsky said: "Celebrations are a treatment from boredom. They are little miracles in our adult lives."

## Enjoying The Flower Festival

**Jorge Valencia Marin**

*5A – Colombia*

After several years of trying to see my favorite salsa band, I was able to attend a spectacular concert during The Flower Festival in Medellin. This Festival is great for many reasons. One of the most important reasons why the festival is important for me is the unique opportunity that it provides to share and enjoy nice events which are presented during the festival. Bands, traditional parades, and other cultural events take place during the Flower Festival. Additionally, people from Medellin who live in different countries return to Medellin during this festival. I spend great moments with old friends who are living far away; we attend and enjoy many parties together. Finally, the "food parade" that is organized by the festival permits me to taste special meals and traditional foods, and I can try special local beverages. These are some of the reasons why I enjoy this festival. In short, attending interesting and fun events, meeting old friends again, and enjoying traditional food and drinks make the Flower Festival a great moment every year, and it makes me realize that time spent with friends is better than having money.

## Songkran Festival

**Patthakorn Pimnak**

*5A – Thailand*

To celebrate Songkran Festival, I have to go to Nakhon Sawan province to meet my mother's relatives. Waiting for my relatives and my cousins to come to my grandmother's house is exciting for me. This special memory reminds me that Songkran Festival is especially important to me. A family reunion is the first reason why I visit Nakhon Sawan province to celebrate Songkran Festival. My mother has eight siblings, but five of them live in different provinces. It's difficult to me to meet all of my extended family members at the same time, so my mother and my relatives decided that everyone should come to meet each other every year during Songkran Festival. Because I'm the only child in my family, meeting mother's relatives such as uncles, aunts, and cousins is the best time for me because my uncles and my aunts usually give money and spoil me. Also, I have my cousins to play with, and that makes me feel happy. Therefore, meeting my relatives is an important reason that I go to Nakhon Sawan to celebrate every year. The tradition of splashing water during Songkran festival is another important part of the celebration for me. Having friendly water fights with my cousins and the others is a fantastic thing that I enjoy during the Festival every year. Moreover, I believe that sprinkling water onto Buddha images and monks is a good chance to receive blessings for the New Year. Eating traditional foods is the last reason why I enjoy this celebration. Although this festival doesn't have any special food, I enjoy eating traditional foods from Nakorn Sawan province. It's not easy to find some drinks and foods such as hot fresh milk, sticky rice with beef jerky, and pounded pork jerky in Bangkok. As a result, eating traditional foods is one reason that I like to go to Nakhon Sawan for celebrating. The celebration during Songkran Festival is the only event that is very important to me because I can meet my mother's relatives, I can have water fights, and I can eat traditional foods. These unforgettable moments stay with me. Dr. Seuss once said, "Sometimes you will never know the true value of a moment until it becomes a memory."

## The Most Important Celebration in My Life

**Minh Anh Nguyen**

*5B – Vietnam*

While I was decorating my house a day before Lunar New Year; a person opened the door, came in, and hugged me tightly. After a second, I recognized that it was my brother coming home for the Lunar New Year celebration which is the most important celebration in my life. It is a great time for reuniting with family, giving prominence to family values, and praying for a prosperous year. Lunar New Year is a valuable time dedicated only to family. The most appropriate time of year to hold a reunion is during Lunar New Year when children are out of school and the adults are free from work. Every family member



goes home and spends precious time together. Having a meal, talking to each other, and playing some traditional games are simple activities, but they strengthen family relationships, and remind everyone what is important in life. Also, the celebration is the special time to give prominence to family values by worshipping ancestors. My grandfather played an important role in my life, and he passed away a few years ago. During the celebration, he is present spiritually with our family through ritual practice and storytelling. Therefore, it becomes so important to me because I can find the value of family through showing respect to the departed. Finally, Lunar New Year is a time for welcoming the new year with eager wishes for the prosperous year. The past year is gone and a new year is coming. The celebration is the message of letting go of bad things and wishing for a successful year. This time is significant to me to look back on my goals, have a plan, and decide what I want to achieve for a better tomorrow. Someone said, "You define what is important to you by what you dedicate your time to." Lunar New Year is the great significant time for me because I can spend precious time with family, show respect to my ancestor, and look forward to the promise of the coming year.



### Global Teacher's Day Jared (Chi-Te) Hsin

4B – Taiwan

Teaching has been a highly respected profession since ancient times. Even the emperors and kings needed teachers to instruct them how to rule, manage, and maintain the stability of the empire. Teachers are still cultivating the talents of countries' future leaders. Because of teachers, people learn how to speak and read

so they can succeed in society. Confucius was one of the most famous teachers in ancient times and was considered the greatest of the ancient Chinese sages. People in some areas of Asia, such as Taiwan and Hong Kong, used to celebrate his birthday as Teacher's Day to appreciate teachers' contributions to society. However, Teacher's Day has gradually lost its meaning, and many students have forgotten to express their gratitude and respect for teachers. People need to pay attention to educators and remind their children to show appreciation for them. Since the occupation has a major impact on national development, teachers deserve to have an official celebration. This would be a sign that teachers are respected by the entire world. Not only do teachers give us a better future, but they also determine the rate of society's progress.

## The Importance of Celebrations in Life

### Eunice Ilunga

5B – Congo (Kinshasa)

About two years ago, one of my uncles died during the time of end-of-year celebrations. That year, we celebrated neither Christmas nor New Year. For someone used to celebrating all those, it was really difficult. Such celebrations are really important to me for several reasons. First of all, celebrations allow me to spend time with my closest family. Since I was a kid, the New Year's party has always been loud, fun, and really entertaining. It is a reason to gather all the family we couldn't see a lot during the year. Then, I've always found celebrations really important because of what they mean. In my country, we celebrate New Year every January 1st. It's an important celebration because it represents hope for a new year, many more good things to come, and the beginning of something new. When people celebrate, the reason why those celebrations exist should matter. Finally, I've always celebrated because celebrations give me a reason to relax. A person who has a lot of pressure at work, for instance, must want to relax, so if she goes to celebration parties, she can relax, drink, and have fun with people she loves. I think these are really good and important reasons for people to celebrate. In conclusion, celebrations have always been important to me because I celebrate them with my closest family, I like what they represent, and also I get time to relax and have fun. Like Osho said: "Life should not only be lived, it should be celebrated."

## The Most Important Celebration in My Life

### Ming-Shuo Huang

5B – Taiwan

Wake up at 7:00, take a shower, suit up, go to work, have lunch, get off work, go back home, walk the dog, have dinner, and go to sleep. This is my daily routine. I don't spend much time with my family most of the year because I am very busy, and my job is far from my home. Nonetheless, I schedule my vacation carefully in order to have free time to go home every Mid-Autumn Festival because Mid-Autumn Festival is the most important celebration in my life. Reuniting with my family on Mid-Autumn Festival has been my first priority for many years. Mid-Autumn Festival is celebrated on the fifteenth of the eighth lunar month; therefore, the full moon can be seen at night. The full moon, a circle, reminds me of my family as it is a symbol of reunion in China. Thus, it makes me want to see my family and be with them. Because autumn is also the harvest season, in addition to a reunion, helping my father harvest is another important thing we do during this festival; my siblings come home to help as well. We all enjoy this moment and fervently look forward to the coming of the next Mid-Autumn Festival. Moreover, on Mid-Autumn Festival, my family holds a ceremony to worship our ancestors and gods to thank them for blessing each year and pray for the next. In order to show the highest respect,

# WHY WE CELEBRATE

I must not be absent at this ceremony. Because of these three meaningful activities, not only I, but also my family considers Mid-Autumn Festival to be a significant celebration. Although many Chinese might not agree that Mid-Autumn Festival is the most important celebration, reuniting with my family, helping my father harvest, and being part of the family ceremony have always delighted me and made Mid-Autumn Festival a great asset to me. No wonder a Chinese proverb said, "The roundest and the brightest moon can be seen in autumn. It is time for reunions."

## Chun Jie Festival

**Liyin Zhang**

*5A – China*

Last year was a busy year. All the family members were working and studying in different countries. For the Chun Jie Festival, all of us went back to China to visit our grandma. That time reminded me that celebrations are important in my life. There are three reasons why this particular celebration is important to me. First of all, any celebration is a good chance for all family members to meet each other. In ordinary life, people have things that they need to do such as work, study, or travel. We live in different countries or cities. Even when we have vacations, the time is different and not enough to meet each other, so for Chun Jie, we visit grandma because that is our tradition, and it is the only time in the year when all family members get together. Another reason is that during this celebration we can get a lot of traditional food. Every year the elders of my family prepare traditional food for all family members. We rarely eat these foods except in our hometown and for this celebration, and these traditional foods remind me of my childhood. Finally, this celebration is important to me because we can get couplets written by our elders. Couplets represent good luck in China. Elders give me a couplet to bless me and wish me a happy and healthy New Year. That's why this celebration is very important in my life. During this celebration, I can meet my family members, eat a lot of traditional food, and get couplets written by elders. My grandfather always says, "You must go home for this celebration, and it will make you happy." I agree with grandpa and go back to my hometown every year for Chun Jie Festival.

## The Muslim Holidays

**Montaser Abukharshiq**

*3A – Palestine*

Every year the Muslim people celebrate two feasts: Al-Fitr feast and Al-Adha feast. The feasts for Muslim people have special morning prayer. The feasts are good days for the people to meet each other and exchange wishes. The Al-Fitr feast comes every year after Ramadan, and it is four days of celebration. The whole family enjoys it, and they visit their relatives and neighbors. They make delicious and fresh foods, and they share with their relatives. They clean their houses and cars, and they buy new clothes for it. The Al-Adha feast comes forty days after the Al-Fitr feast. It is like the Al-Fitr feast, but the difference is we slaughter the lambs. We slaughter the lamb to give to the poor people. The Muslim people have this feast to show the poor people they care about them. The feast is something very beautiful because it unites family members, and they are days to bring peace between people.





*"I'm so glad I live in a world where there are Octobers."*  
-L.M. Montgomery, Anne of Green Gables

# FALL FESTIVAL

FALL ACTIVITY



## How I Celebrate Christmas

**Dania Sierra Hernandez**

*2C – Honduras*

Christmas is a wonderful time in Honduras. Excitement is in the air. Many people do not have to work the last few weeks of the year. People who live far away from their families can travel back to their hometown and spend time with their family and old friends they grew up with. It is also a great opportunity to prepare traditional Christmas food, such as tamales. Yummy! Another fun tradition is to have house parties and dance all night with family and friends. Some families give wrapped gifts to each other. However, what makes Christmas so special for me is that it is also my mother's birthday!



## A Special Holiday Story

**Narcisse De Saron Nsala**

*6A – Congo (Kinshasa)*

It was a December 25 almost like all the others. In Lubumbashi, DRC, it was the afternoon, and the weather was pleasant. The sun was only a little covered over, and soft, fresh air was touching my skin. My extended family had gathered, and everyone was moving around in the house. My mother and my aunts were cooking in the kitchen, and the men were talking in the living room. From everywhere in the house, we could hear their bursts of laughter; some were so loud that we felt we were going to lose our hearing. But this joy, these bursts of laughter, and all the magnificent smells were what made this Christmas Day one of the most fabulous days of the year. Meanwhile, my brothers, my cousins and I were in the small living room playing video games while waiting for the meal to be ready. We were so enthralled by the games that we almost forgot our gurgling bellies. However, two very important people were absent that day: my grandparents. They were living in another town two hours from Lubumbashi, and again, we were having a Christmas party without them. At a certain time, we heard my

mother and my aunts laugh. Then my sister, my cousins, and I looked at each other and were excited, having understood what was happening even without speaking. We promptly got up and rushed towards the kitchen. As we had guessed, my mother and my aunts were chatting with our grandmother by a video call made from my mother's laptop, which was lying on the large table in the middle of the kitchen. They were all assembled in front of the machine, their faces all lit by the happiness of being able to talk with their parents on that special day. Then my sister, my cousins, and I ran to the computer and yelled, "Merry Christmas, Grandpa and Grandma," with a very long extension on the last syllable of "Grandma". They laughed so much that my grandmother shed a tear on her little cheek. While we were talking with our grandparents, the ladies were setting the table. After having said goodbye to Grandpa and Grandma, we went to the dining room. As usual, my father said a little prayer and blessed the meal while we were all gathered around the long rectangular table. The meal took place in a warm atmosphere, and our taste buds thanked us for allowing them to enjoy the delicious dishes cooked by my mother and my aunts. The smells of roasted chicken, grilled sausages, and all kinds of salads filled the whole house. Nevertheless, there was a vacuum. The meal was plentiful on the table, so everyone was satisfied, and it was time to clear the table. Then my mother, who had been talking with the rest of the family, stopped to look at my brothers, my cousins, and me. Finally, she said with an intriguing smile, "Go and get your things. Take everything you need for a week because we are going to Kolwezi." We all knew who lived there - our grandparents. We thought it was a joke. Hence, we looked at my mother suspiciously, waiting for her to say with a big smirk, "That was a joke!" However, when we realized that she was really serious, and we were going to go visit our grandparents, we started to jump and run joyfully around the table, our eyes wide open. That was the best news we could ever receive on that day. A few minutes later, we were ready and headed toward the cars. After two hours of driving, we finally saw our grandparents' house. It was large and beautiful, painted in yellow and white, and covered with a brown roof. Fruit trees and flowers dotted the yard. The grass, so green and carefully maintained, reminded us of the extent to which our grandmother was meticulous and always ensured that the work was perfectly done down to the smallest detail. At the entrance, a large alley led to the garages. Arriving in the compound, my uncles began to honk rhythmically in order to draw my grandparents' attention. They knew the latter were going to come out to see what was happening. It was 6:00 p.m., and as expected, my grandparents came out. The main entrance door opened slowly, and my grandfather came out of the house and looked in our direction with an inquisitive expression. Then my grandmother emerged behind him with the same expression on her face. Afterwards, when we came out of the cars like a river leaving its bed and flowing over the city, we rushed upon our lovely Grandpa and Grandma. And then when they saw us, the

# CHRISTMAS STORIES

expression on their faces gave way to an expression of surprise, and they finally burst out laughing when we threw ourselves upon them. A tear sparkled on my grandmother's cheek, so glad to see her beloved gathered around her on Christmas Day. Then my parents and my uncles joined us, so delighted to see the whole family. A few hours later, the adults were sitting in the living room, and from my room, I could hear the voices and laughter that made Christmas Day so special. Nonetheless, what made that day even more special was the happiness we brought to our grandparents.

## A Christmas to Remember

**Filipa Costa**

6A – Angola

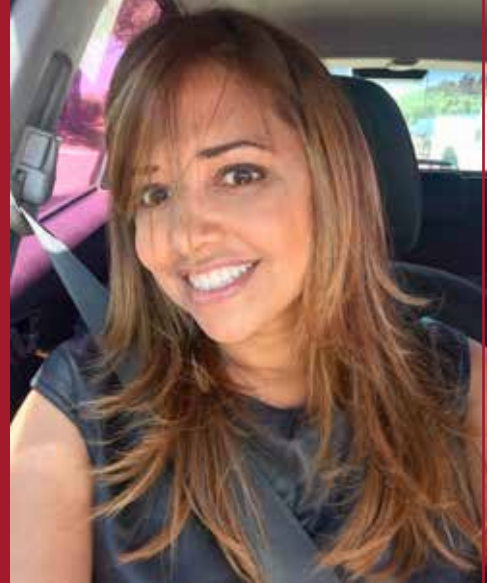
I remember it like it was yesterday - December 24, 2009, Christmas Eve at my grandmother's house. On that day, my parents went to work half day, and when they came back, we put all the gifts and suitcases in my Dad's spacious blue jeep and drove to my grandma's. Along the way, we opened the windows of the car, so that we could appreciate the beautiful green landscapes, the high mountains, watch the cattle, and breathe that fresh air that we weren't able to breathe in the city. When we arrived, all my relatives were already there, and it was time to prepare everything. The ladies were in the kitchen, while the men were preparing drinks, such as caipirinha, natural juices and Sangria. My cousins and I were responsible for decorating the big back yard and setting up the equipment for the games. We used a large red tablecloth to cover a huge rectangular table, and many Christmas lights; we also decorated a pine tree near the table with colorful lights and put all the presents under it. After all that work, everybody got dressed in red clothes and sat down at the table for dinner. There was a large amount of food. We had Cozido de Bacalhau, which is a kind of cod stew, roasted turkey, rice with duck, and cod with cream. My favorite part of dinner was dessert. I ate delicious French toast. It was so tasty that I can still remember when it dissolved inside my mouth; the combination of sugar and cinnamon melted on my tongue. After dinner, we played games: UNO, Monopoly, and the one that I like most, Secret Friend. This last game consists of preparing a bowl or bag with folded papers with all the relatives' names. A month before, each person had picked a piece of paper that had the name of his/her secret friend. Then each of us bought our "secret friend" a present. On Christmas night, we revealed the names of our secret friends and gave out the presents. I remember that I got a purple t-shirt that had my name on it from my aunt; I still have it. Because I had picked my uncle's name, I gave him a blue and salmon-colored tie. By then, it was four o'clock in the morning, and most of us fell asleep, some on chairs, some on the sofa, while others even slept on the floor. At that time, I didn't know how great that particular Christmas celebration was until I realized, some years later, that that was the last Christmas that we all were alive and together, and I think that it was so memorable for this reason.

## French Christmas Markets

**Sarah Moya Machado**

6A – France

Some weeks before Christmas, Christian people celebrate the Advent season. However in France, especially in all the small towns in Alsace, it doesn't matter what your religion is. During this period of the year, we celebrate this holy time in a magical place: the Christmas Markets. All the farmers come downtown and sell their fresh



homemade products. At night, everybody goes to the market to meet their relatives and friends to eat, drink and celebrate all together in a charmed atmosphere. All the small streets have a lot of gorgeous illuminations which are in harmony with the other decorations. You feel that you are in a fairyland. Most of the houses are with half-timbers in a German style but of course with a French touch. The music cannot be missed and you can hear the accordion everywhere; in the background are the voices of people talking nonstop. At the same time, you hear the manege (carousel) with many children. Adding to the atmosphere are the different delicious smells wafting toward you, but the most popular at this time is the scent of apples with cinnamon. Last but not least, for me, one of the best parts of these Christmas Markets is the food. I wait all the year to taste a "Boudin Blanc," a white sausage which has milk, chicken and other ingredients. The taste of "Boudin Blanc" can improve with a hot red wine. Believe me, eating one makes you feel you are in heaven. To finish my feast, I always choose the famous "Creme Brulée" with golden sugar on top. This dessert is served hot, which is good for winter. From the beginning until the end, I really enjoy Alsace's Christmas Markets. Each time that I just think about it, all the good memories come to my mind.

# CULTURE FESTIVAL



FALL ACTIVITY

# CULTURE FESTIVAL



FALL ACTIVITY





# LCC STUDENT COUNCIL



Alida Nacic,  
LCC Student  
Council Advisor

I have been a student representative since I began to study in the Language and Culture Center. I will continue to be one until I graduate from it. My experience with the student representatives is wonderful, and I would advise other students to try it. The Council is not just about words; It is about good qualities like honesty, courage, and a strong desire to help others.

– Montaser Abukharshiq 3A

I am very happy to be a part of the Student Council. I never imagined having the opportunity to meet people from different parts of the world. I am so grateful to have registered at the LCC. Being a part of the student council is one of the best experiences I have ever lived.

– Karina Varela Torres 5C

Being a part of the Student Council is a great opportunity to share ideas and improve our performance in the process of learning English. It is important to be a leader in order to enjoy every activity, and encourage people to do it as well.

– Jorge Valencia 5A

Being one of the LCC student representatives was an experience that will be with me forever. I have had the opportunity to meet and exchange knowledge with people from other classes. I have also served as a liaison between the LCC and my classmates. In addition to this, it has made me feel more open to interact, share experiences and help others.

– Filipa da Costa 6A

Being a representative has been a great experience. During this time, I have learned how to be more responsible, confident, and social. As a leader of my class, it is my pleasure to help my classmates and cover all the events at the LCC.

– Hatem Saleh 4D

I have had a very good experience with the Student Council. They do many activities and make the international students feel good. They are responsible with every job they do and help students to learn new things and have good English practice.

– Dania Sierra 2C





**1985**  
**SIMON (SUIGUANG) TAN**  
 HOME COUNTRY: China  
 DEGREE: M.S. in Computer Science  
 from the University of Houston  
 EMPLOYMENT: DXC Technology



**2000**  
**HANA HEIPLIKOVA**  
 HOME COUNTRY: Czech Republic  
 DEGREE: BBA in Management,  
 University of Houston; currently  
 pursuing a Masters of Accounting at  
 Boston University

EMPLOYMENT: Finance Director at

HawkPartners, LLC

LIFE EVENTS: Hana reports: I married Michal Heiplik, my high school sweetheart, also from the Czech Republic, in 2004. Michal graduated from UH with a finance and entrepreneurship degree and is currently executive director at WGBH. He did not attend the LCC, but he participated in many activities and parties along with my LCC classmates. In 2009 my daughter Anna Marie was born. Currently we live in Boston, MA.

*– I have so many great memories and also kept in touch with many of my former LCC classmates. This was definitely a great experience which helped me to start my career here in the USA.*



**2008**  
**FABIOLA LUCES**  
 NICKNAME: Fabi, Fabs  
 HOME COUNTRY: Venezuela  
 DEGREE: Post-Baccalaureate Degree  
 in Petroleum Engineering from the  
 University of Houston

EMPLOYMENT: Application Engineer at

Weatherford International

LIFE EVENTS: After working in the United States for two and a half years, Fabiola has worked in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia for more than 18 months with an oil and gas service company. She loves living in southeast Asia, traveling, and getting to know amazing people from around the world. She says that she has been enjoying this blessing every day. Her travel blog is at [www.fabiscrapbook.com](http://www.fabiscrapbook.com).



**2008**  
**GEORGE (GEORGIY) GOLOVKO**  
 HOME COUNTRY: Ukraine (now an  
 American citizen)  
 DEGREE: Ph.D. in Computer Science  
 from the University of Houston  
 EMPLOYMENT: George is a Senior

Research Scientist at the University of Texas Medical Branch, and the Founder and CEO of Industrial Metagenomics, LLC.

LIFE EVENT: George is married to Anastasia Golovko.



**2008**  
**MINGHAO ZHANG**  
 LCC NICKNAME: Rainie  
 HOME COUNTRY: China  
 DEGREES:  
 - Ed.D. Candidate in Applied  
 Linguistics from Teachers College,  
 Columbia University

- M.A. in TESOL from San Francisco State University  
 EMPLOYMENT: Prior to pursuing a doctorate in education, Minghao was an IELTS examiner and taught English at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University in China and San Francisco State University.



**2010**  
**ARMAGHAN SADEGHBEIGI**  
 HOME COUNTRY: Iran  
 DEGREE: Master's Degree in  
 Hospitality Management from  
 the Hilton College of Hotel and  
 Restaurant Management at the  
 University of Houston

EMPLOYMENT: Armaghan has been a hospitality trainer for the first Iranian passenger train company—Raja, the first Iranian bank—Bank Sepah, Sheikh Bahaaei University, the Iranian government's Ministry of Tourism, and the Ministry of Health and Education. She also owns a hospitality consulting company called Eqlimah, established for those who are building hotels and restaurants or in need of continuous improvement within their systems. The company has carried projects such as creating two luxury restaurants, three cafés, and one sports club.

Are you a former  
 LCC student?  
 Let us know what you've  
 been up to!  
 Email [lcc@uh.edu](mailto:lcc@uh.edu),  
 subject line "Alumni"



2011

**ARAM MOHAMMED RAHEEM**

HOME COUNTRY: Iraq  
DEGREE: Ph.D. in Soil Mechanics and Foundation Design from the University of Houston

EMPLOYMENT: Aram is a Faculty Member in the Civil Engineering Department at the University of Kirkuk in Iraq.

LIFE EVENTS: Aram is married and has two sons.



2014

**OMAR ALVARADO**

HOME COUNTRY: Venezuela  
EMPLOYMENT: Co-Founder and Manager of Ragu & Pesto

LIFE EVENTS: Omar was recently selected to be one of only 35 new students of the Class of 2019 for the Wolff Center for Entrepreneurship in the C.T. Bauer College of Business at the University of Houston



2011

**KOFFI BIOVA CLEMENT AFANOU KASSA**

LCC NICKNAME: Clement  
HOME COUNTRY: Togo  
DEGREES: M.S. in Petroleum Engineering from the University of Houston

EMPLOYMENT: Owner of Tactical Drilling Services

LIFE EVENTS: Clement got married in 2015 and has a daughter.



**UELINE CAROLINA SARDI LOYO**

HOME COUNTRY: Venezuela  
DEGREE: Master's Degree in Industrial Engineering from the University of Houston

EMPLOYMENT: Production Planner at Schlumberger

LIFE EVENT: Married to Jesus Barrios, who also attended the LCC. Jaqueline and Jesus are expecting their first child, a girl, in December 2017.



2013

**SUDDAN NARATHIPAT**

NICKNAME: Dan  
HOME COUNTRY: Thailand  
DEGREE: Master's in Logistics and Supply Chain from the University of Houston

EMPLOYMENT: Nemaco Technology LLC



2015

**EL HADJ FOFANA**

HOME COUNTRY: Ivory Coast  
DEGREE: Bachelor's in Petroleum Engineering from the University of Houston (graduation date fall 2019)

EMPLOYMENT: "I work part time at the Children's Learning Center on the University of Houston campus, and I am a 2nd black belt instructor at Young Brothers Taekwondo in Houston.

# LCC PROGRAM ASSISTANTS FALL 2017

Left to right:

Jasmeet Punia

Phuoc (Joseph) Nguyen

Jasmin Rico

Sarah Jackson



# LCC Calendar

Spring 2018

## Important Dates

January 9-16

Online Registration Begins

**Monday, January 15**

Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday  
Campus Closed

Tuesday, January 16

Student Check-In  
Tuition and Fee Payment Due

Wednesday, January 17

Testing  
Late Online Registration

Thursday, January 18

Student Activity / Late Online Registration

Friday, January 19

First Assembly/Orientation  
Last Day of Late Registration

Monday, January 22

Classes Begin

**Monday-Friday, March 12-16**

Spring Holidays – No Classes

April 16-20

Promotion Tests  
Final Exams

Monday, April 23

Testing

**Tuesday, April 24**

No Classes

Wednesday, April 25

Final Student Activity

Thursday, April 26

Student-Teacher Conferences (morning)  
Graduation Ceremony (afternoon)

UNIVERSITY of  
**HOUSTON**  
LANGUAGE and CULTURE CENTER



Roy Cullen Building, 3687 Cullen Boulevard, Room 116 • Houston, TX 77204-3014  
Tel: 713.743.3030 • Fax: 713.743.3029 • lcc.uh.edu • Email: lcc@uh.edu