

TechNews

STUDENT NEWSPAPER OF ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF
TECHNOLOGY SINCE 1928McCormick Tribune Campus Center
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International Students Feature: Central Asia

Alexandra Detweiler

TECHNEWS WRITER

Central Asia, also known as Middle Asia, is a region in the core of Asia that is framed by the Caspian Sea in the West, China in the East, Afghanistan in the South, and Russia in the North. There are many students attending Illinois Tech that come from this group of countries. Madina Tahmas, a second year undergraduate student studying business finance, was born and raised in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan had previously been a part of the USSR, and in Tahmas' words, "it's very Russianized." Wayiti Kawasaier, a second year undergraduate student studying Mechanical Engineering, is from an ethnic minority group in China called the Uyghurs and attended school in Urumqi, a city in China near Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan's border. Because of Wayiti's proximity to Uzbekistan, when Waiti and an anonymous Uzbekistani student who wished to be referred to as Murod were interviewed together, the two were able to communicate in Uyghur and Uzbek because the languages sounded remarkably similar. According to Murod, Uyghur and Uzbek are about 80% the same.

One major difference between life in Central Asia and life at Illinois Tech is, predictably, the diet. "I miss my food mostly," Wayiti said. "Back home, we spend a lot of time cooking. My mom, she comes home from work and she spends 2-3 hours cooking." According

to him, the food back home consists of a lot of vegetables served upon noodles or rice. According to Murod, "the food is completely different."

Additionally, the three students remarked upon the absence on holidays and celebrations that they were used to at home. Tahmas first mentioned Navros, a celebration on the 21st of March that she said was, "basically new year's." Navros celebrates the beginning of the year, with spring as a fresh start. "On the night of the 21st," Tahmas described, "we make a special dish made out of seeds from a certain plant." According to her, the dish, called sumalack, is stirred constantly the whole night. At the end, the eldest of the family throws in a rock, and when the dish is distributed, whoever gets the rock will be the luckiest that year. The night is full of tradition, singing songs, and making wishes. In addition, Wayiti and Murod noted the absence of Eid, an Islamic festival in which the family sacrifices a sheep or a cow.

From an academic perspective, the differences are abundant. According to Tahmas, in Uzbekistan, the schools are "more focused on how the group does. It's more focused on overall achievements, overall success. It's very school oriented, nothing beyond that. Here, what I like is that ... professors have an approach for every single student [and] make sure you understand the material." School in Urumqi was very different for Wayiti, who went to a boarding school-style high school there. According to him, the rooms there were a little bigger than the ones at

McCormick Student Village, yet eight people lived in each one. Wayiti explained, there were "four beds, with one stacked on top of each." There was no shower in the building; students walked to a public shower instead. Wayiti remarked upon the fact that there weren't electrical outlets in the rooms, something he couldn't imagine living without now. Murod, a transfer student who attended university for some time in Uzbekistan, said that both high school and university held classes on Saturdays. Additionally, Murod claimed, the "teachers here act more friendly. It makes class more interesting." All three students had nice things to say about attending school in Chicago. "I like [Illinois Tech]; it's not that big," Wayiti said. "There are people from all over the world. I meet a lot of friends."

Another difference, according to Tahmas, was the "vibe itself. We treat each other as if we are family ... If you're on the street and you're carrying really heavy bags, someone will come up to you and say 'hey sister, can I help you with that?'" However, while the countries may be, as Tahmas said, "completely, 180 degrees different," when people from different cultures meet, they can learn a lot from each other. In Tahmas' words, "the more different someone is from yourself, the more you learn who you are. It makes you look at things from a different perspective."

Next week, watch for an international students feature focusing on various countries in Africa!

Staff Spotlight: Thomas Henehan, Facilities

Khaleela Zaman

TECHNEWS WRITER

Meet Tom Henehan, currently Project Manager in Design & Construction for the Facilities Department on campus. If you have ever wondered what goes on in that building north of Main Building, Machinery Hall is the building that houses the Design & Construction components of Facilities, which is where Henehan's office is located. In his role as a project manager, Henehan is the contact person for contractors and architects on building renovation or new construction projects on campus. Henehan acts upon requests from users and departments on campus for building renovations by hiring an architect and engineers who produce the drawings that go out to contractors for bidding. He then looks at the bids, chooses a contractor, and then works hand-in-hand with the contractor managing the project.

This was not Henehan's first position on campus, however. Since 1980, Henehan has been working at Illinois Tech. His first job here was with the on-campus police, which was "exciting, because there was lots of crime back then." After getting to know some people working in Facilities, Henehan moved over to the housing side, spending most of his working hours "fixing what students broke" for over 20 years. In 2001, he was promoted to Facilities Supervisor. For a short period of time after this, Henehan attempted to leave Illinois Tech for a different job due to a big promotion accompanied by a big raise. However, his previous boss from Illinois Tech kept calling him to come back, and he mentioned that a position in Design & Construction was

open. Henehan ended up happily accepting the construction management position in Design & Construction at Illinois Tech after an unrewarding three months at the higher-paying job. As he reflects back on it now, in terms of the pay raise he received at the job where he lasted three months, he feels "sometimes that doesn't mean a lot." Since 2007, Henehan has held his current position as Project Manager, which he says is "absolutely [his] most favorite and rewarding job."

Henehan has truly enjoyed "seeing the biggest changes to the academic buildings since [he's] been here" at Illinois Tech for all these years, and he believes we are "finally catching up to being modern on this campus." He also knows "whenever you do something, you don't know how much students will like it." Therefore, when he "sees new things come here and students use them," that is one of the most rewarding parts of his job. For example, from all the feedback he has received, he believes the renovations to the Lewis Hall bathrooms in McCormick Student Village (MSV) "went over really well." Additionally, Henehan usually sees the E1 back lounge area filled with students, as well as the outdoor patio area of Life Sciences. With the campus being designed by Mies van der Rohe, and having such historical significance, Henehan says it is also always a highlight getting to work with historically significant architects. For the E1 renovations, he was in collaboration with Mies' grandson as the architect, and he worked with Harboe Architects on the renovations to Carr Memorial Chapel.

For Henehan, "the interaction with students" is his favorite part about working at Illinois Tech. He says it is "so nice, because

[the student body] changes all the time." Sometimes at graduation, he is able to meet students' parents, and his involvement with the Alternative Spring Break (ASB) student organization on campus allowed him to meet even more students and staff at Illinois Tech. Being a "big international university," Henehan thinks it could be easy to "question, what is our student body like here? And then you get to know them, and they are normal people." He thoroughly enjoys always seeing "that new excitement," getting to "hear what [students] are working on, what creations" they are producing. There really is nothing Henehan does not like about Illinois Tech.

If Henehan could provide any advice to students, faculty, and staff here on campus, he highly recommends everyone to "stay involved on campus, and things will happen!" He has witnessed many projects, and he knows "a lot has been done here based on student voices, committees they are on that drive things we do on campus." Recalling a student who actually was able to take part in the design process for the new chairs in the E1 classrooms, the student's design ended up being physically made by a furniture company and now so many other students can enjoy using the student-designed chairs. Both students and staff are encouraged to give their voice, like what staff might want to see in their offices or what faculty might want to see in their labs. And if you are ever looking for a smiling face to cheer you up, you can always stop by Machinery Hall and visit Henehan!



Photo by Khaleela Zaman