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ELI helps Wilmington students celebrate diversity

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UDaily is produced by the Office of Public Relations The Academy Building

4:27 p.m., March 27, 2006--Wearing traditional Saudi Arabian garb--a long-sleeved, full-length black body covering and a head scarf, Najat Fahd Abuhabrah, told students at the St. Mary Magdalen School in Wilmington, "In my country, women can't travel alone. If I want to travel, I need my father or brother with me, otherwise, I can't go."

The school invited UD's English Language Institute (ELI) to participate in its third annual Respect "Ability" Day for its fourth- fifth- and sixth-graders. This year's theme was "Celebrating Diversity."

Abuhabrah and nine other ELI students spent Friday telling the school's children what it is like to be from another country.

The conference began with a multicultural prayer service followed by a keynote speaker, then six breakout sessions in which ELI students from West Africa, Saudi Arabia, Peru, Colombia, Jordan, Korea and China spoke to the children in groups of 30, describing their homelands, customs, traditions and economies.



Pierre Yao
African nations.



Najat Fahd Abuhabrah

Representing West Africa were Folly Amenounve from Togo and Pierre Yao from the Ivory Coast. Paula Palacios Morales and Cesar Diaz spoke about Peru and Columbia, respectively. Abdallah Ajlouni described life in Jordan, Hyung-An Park, Hyun-Woo Kim and Sung-Bok Yeo talked about their native Korea, and Qing Wan represented China.

"Ham and pork are forbidden and can't be found in Saudi Arabia. Alcohol is also forbidden," Abuhabrah said. "All girls are together in my school in Saudi Arabia. Girls and boys don't go to the same schools. My country is very important because it has oil that other countries need," she told them.

Just down the hall, Yao and Amenounve were describing their



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Yao, who just graduated from high school, is studying English because he needs a higher level of English proficiency before he can enroll in a U.S. university. He told St. Mary Magdalen students that he prefers to call his country Côte d'Ivoire because that's its name in French, which is the language of his countrymen.

"We were traditional a few years ago, but the whole world is changing to modern life like the West," he said. Yao told them the Ivory Coast exports coffee, cocoa, petroleum and has beautiful beaches on the Atlantic Ocean. "We eat rice, yams, casaba and our favorite sport is soccer. We have 62 traditional languages but everyone speaks French," he said.

"Togo is a little country close to Ghana," Amenounve said. "Its official language is French, but we have many dialects. We have two seasons, wet and dry."

Dressed in a dashiki, Amenounve told them, "We have supermarkets, elementary, high schools, colleges and universities, clothing stores with clothes from France, China and America, but some still wear traditional clothes like this [pointing to the dashiki he was wearing]. Our favorite sport is soccer, and Togo will compete for the World Cup."

Article by Barbara Garrison
Photos by John Cox



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Folly Amenounve