

*“What? You don’t drink vodka? How come? So, do you ride bears instead of cars in your country? No, don’t tell me you are cold. You must like this weather. You are Russian!”*

This is the usual set of questions I got every day when I met new people at UD a year ago, when I arrived in the USA. Seriously, I even had a standard list of replies in my head that I learned by heart in order to save me some time. But I was incredibly excited to answer these questions each time, because I realized that I got into the brand new world, where people do not know anything about me and about my life back across the ocean. The understanding that I also knew very little about people and culture here came quite fast.

The first thing that struck me was that I could easily understand what my professors were discussing in the classroom, but too often I had no idea what my new friends were talking about. *“Hey, what’s up? Hyped for the weekends? Wanna hang out tonight? You’ll nail it, don’t freak out. Okeydokey, see ya then! Seriously? Would you be so kind to say that again for me and a bit slower, please? Why on earth did I spent 15 years of my life studying English not to understand a word of what people my own age are saying to me?”*

Don’t worry, this goes away pretty fast, especially if you spend a lot of time with your friends like I did. Soon enough I was *just killing it!* One might ask where I found the opportunity to make so many new friends outside the classroom. Well, I was extremely lucky to be accepted particularly to UD because our University has one of the best college swing dance clubs on the east coast! What is swing dance? It is when you improvise to jazz music with your dance partner whom you might have never seen before. And UD does it and does it wonderfully! Just in a week after my arrival, I have already travelled to Baltimore and Philadelphia with the club to dance with new people! In two weeks I found myself in Philadelphia getting my first medals in dance competitions! In three weeks I was helping to teach in the club which of course helped to gain a

lot of confidence and a feeling that you are needed (this is extremely important!). But, actually, it doesn't matter of what kind of activity you choose to do, the key is not to hide behind closed doors. There is, maybe still a bit foreign, but such a wonderful world outside! If this world doesn't snow, of course.

Yes, I am from Russia, but what is wrong with you, Delaware? Why do you have such a rough winter? Although it was so amusing when it was 5 degrees Fahrenheit (this is another whole topic for jokes: try to cook the pie in the oven at 150 degrees Fahrenheit because you forgot to convert Celsius!) and everybody was touching my fluffy Russian winter coat and I saw they were envious. Also, what a joy to have classes cancelled when there was a light snowfall outside! It was a real shock for me and one more reason to make fun of my American friends who were clearly suffering from *terrible* weather conditions. When they asked me what to do to warm themselves up, I would say: drink hot tea (not vodka!) and eat hot home-cooked meal. And here comes another surprise. We do have different eating traditions.

You really don't have to cook anything in America. Almost everything is already done for you. The grocery stores here have an excessive amount of prepared food to offer. I remember myself wandering between shelves in ACME and wondering how much food does a human being need for life. Also, sometimes really unusual ingredients are mixed inside the meal: salad with lettuce, apples, strawberries and bacon? Sure. As a friend of mine (American) said: to sell this salad to an American, you have to put bacon inside.

Well, all this is about living in a new environment, but as a student, I also had some surprises to encounter in the classroom and on campus. First, the University is amazingly beautiful! I always wanted to feel how it is to study in a castle-like buildings like in Harry Potter movies! Some would question my judgment now, but these people should see how campus buildings are

designed in another country (like mine). Nothing as exciting, believe me. Furthermore, the University provides excellent facilities such as gym, food courts and library. There were days when I stayed in our library till 2am because it is an excellent place to study. And to sleep.

One of the unusual things about the studying process in the USA for me was individualism and overall control during the semester. In Russia we often study in the groups and we are really open to share the ideas about homework with classmates. Here it is more about individual progress and knowledge. Also, you have to be focused during the whole semester in order to succeed. No worries, constant deadlines, midterms and quizzes will keep you in shape. I think it is really crucial to know these facts about higher education in America to be prepared.

All that being said, I want to conclude: studying at UD and being an international student is a wonderful opportunity to explore the world, to widen your horizons and to break stereotypes. Each day you find something new. Yes, there are some moments when you have to be flexible and adjust, but isn't this ability a sign of a mature person? I spent 1.5 year at UD and I can tell that my world has changed a lot: I learned so much, I have so many new friends and I finally fell in love. I even can put bacon in his strawberry salad.