

Greenville University Creates Support Plan For International Students In Light of Coronavirus Crisis

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GREENVILLE - The 34 international students from China on Greenville University's campus face challenges as coronavirus impacts their home communities and prevents them from returning for visits. As the virus spreads, families of more international students may soon be affected. GU's Office of International Affairs, already building a reputation for its stellar service to international students, is taking steps to support international students during this crisis.

Dean of International Affairs Dr. Geet Vanaik and her team have already begun implementing measures of specialized support that benefit all 100 international students on campus, regardless of country of origin.

- Spring break accommodations. GU residence halls, typically closed over spring break (March 9-13), will accommodate international students who cannot visit home due to travel bans.
- Emotional support. Office of International Affairs staff check in personally with students to see how they're feeling and what they've heard from families back home.
- Relief from worry. A calendar of engaging activities, such as movie nights and organized trips out of town, will give international students positive things to focus on.
- Supplies to China. Vanaik and her colleagues have launched an effort to gather and ship needed medical supplies to China, such as masks and medical gowns. Unfortunately, the increased demand for these supplies in China has created shortages in other countries, meaning long wait times for institutions like GU to purchase and ship them. Nevertheless, Vanaik remains hopeful that they'll have supplies in hand soon.

So far, Vanaik reports, GU's international students seem to be "in pretty good spirits."

"We're trying to do everything we possibly can to support the people in China and the people here," Vanaik says. "We're just doing our part."

Vanaik challenges schools like GU that host international students to proactively serve during this difficult time: reach out to students, help them manage changes to travel plans, offer emotional support, send medical supplies to their home countries.

In the end, Vanaik says, serving an international student community is not about reacting to problems that surface; it's about anticipating needs in the midst of an ever-changing world.

Greenville University is an accredited Christian liberal arts university with more than 1,100 students, including traditional undergraduate, graduate, and adult degree completion students. Founded in 1892 and affiliated with the Free Methodist Church, the University is located in Greenville, Illinois, 45 miles east of St. Louis, Missouri. www.greenville.edu.