

## International students attend Michigan Secretary of State workshop

DETROIT, Mich. - Ninety-five international students participated in the Michigan Secretary of State Workshop for obtaining a driver's license on Sept. 26 in the Greek Room of Manoogian Hall. The event was sponsored by the Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS) and was designed to make the process of obtaining a driver's license a smooth and stress free experience.

Interested students registered online and either came to the 9 a.m. or 1 p.m. session. Upon arrival, students filled out an application and presented two documents that proved their residency. Secretary of State (SOS) workers would then verify the students' customs and immigration documents on a federal website sponsored by U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. Students were directed to take a vision and written test. Pending a satisfactory completion of both exams, students were sent to the Detroit supercenter branch of the SOS where they would encounter one of two situations. If they had their license in their home country, they would acquire a road test slip which would allow them to take the driving skills test and eventually receive their license upon completion. The other outcome was the student would pay \$25 to get a temporary instruction permit that would allow them to drive with an adult that was 18 or older. Once a license is obtained it is valid until the student's legal presence in the country expires.

"I like it [Secretary of State workshops] because students are helped on campus. Some students have difficulty getting to campus," said SOS analyst, Ardi Cera. These events have come to be quite common at universities in Michigan. John Strodbeck, another SOS analyst, mentioned they usually take place in the fall and spring at schools that include the University of Michigan, Michigan State, Oakland University and Wayne State University and are frequented by students from all over the world. "All international students are welcome," said Cera.

The University of Michigan-Dearborn has a slightly different approach for their approximately 700 international students. Dr. Monica Porter, the director of international affairs, explained she would entertain the thought of putting on a SOS workshop but the students spur the need for these events and her office has not been receiving any requests.

"Undergrads typically have a car by their second year—especially the men. A lot of the females, depending on what country they are coming from, have to go through drivers ed," said Porter. She added the university will provide transportation for interested students to the SOS but, "a lot of the times students just pair up and go. They are pretty self-sufficient in that area."

Several students commented on their experiences with the event. Lucas Silva, a junior from Brazil, stated he was excited to have more freedom with his license. So far he has not had any problems with the process and mentioned that it was similar to the one in Brazil except for you have to be 18 to drive.

Another Brazilian student, Vitor Anastacio Da Silva, had a slightly different opinion on the matter. He thought it was much more difficult in Brazil because, “it takes a lot of time, it’s expensive and there is lots of bureaucracy.”

Yuliya Harris, the program coordinator for the WSU Office of OISS, noted that last year only three people showed up so she was happy with this year’s result. Harris plans on expanding the event next year to span over two days with larger rooms so they are able to accommodate more of the international students on campus. She recognized the only problem that arose from this event was the same reason it turned out so well: there were too many participants.

At 8 a.m. there was a large influx of students that quickly overwhelmed staff while they were trying to set up tables and establish Wi-Fi connections, explained Harris. She suggested that next year they ensure more SOS personnel come to help with the event. This might become an issue because according to Strodbeck, “one challenge is having enough staff at events.” Occasionally branches need to pull managers in order to provide enough assistance at these workshops.

Michigan ranks ninth in the country with 26,930 international students while WSU ranks third in the state with 2,330, reports a 2013 statistical analysis conducted by the Institute of International Education.