

Values unify university's spirit

International student answers 'what is a Blugold?'

By: Celia Joachim

When you are a French teen, whether you like it or not, you grow up with all those American TV shows and movies. We see high school and college according to the stereotypes that those shows convey.

Most girls of my generation dreamed at some point to be a cheerleader, to date the hot captain of the basketball or football team, to have a mascot such as the Ravens or the Wildcats, to have a school song and so on. Beyond all that, I think that what we truly envy is a sense of belonging, something that would help us to develop and build up a sense of community, solidarity, and somehow, security.

All students come from different backgrounds and parts of the country, and having at least one common feature or sense of belonging helps to feel more integrated, and so, more secure.

In France, it is very simple; we do not have this school spirit at all. Part of it is that sports, especially at school, are not extraordinarily developed. There are a couple of teams in the most popular sports such as soccer or volleyball, but the championships are basically followed only by the students who practice and their friends - if the team is good enough and their games worth watching.

Part of this lack of sport expansion at school is due to the fact that most of the students who do practice sports do so in clubs out of school and compete against each other during the season.

Groups and organizations are not common either; school tends to be very personal. We go there as individuals evolving in our own little worlds and circles of friends, but there is nothing to tie us together, to give us a mainstream to follow, or a reason to be proud of our school.

Completely different from France, the United States is seen as the total opposite, and it is something that deeply intrigued me. We do not have that energy, this craze or cheerful attitude. I think French students miss a lot by only exploring the academic opportunities that a school can provide, and when growing up, I didn't forget that image about American high schools and universities that I had imagined.

A couple of years later, I had a deep and intense desire to travel the world, and the perfect opportunity to study in the United States came up.

When the process of coming and studying abroad eventually started, I had high expectations both academically and socially. I was first looking for a school that could provide the classes I really wanted to attend and be competently liberally educated. But I also looked for a university

that had a lot of social opportunities. I had a choice between several universities, and amongst them was UW-Eau Claire.

As I was filling out my application, the "Blugold" concept was a real mystery to me; I had no idea of how to interpret it!

The name itself calls the obvious and is the mix between the colors of our University, the Blue and the Gold.

So far, I would say that it is not that hard to deduce, but why?

The shadow was dense, but I thought that it would probably make sense once here.

Well, it did not!

I remember during my orientation week in January, we had a quiz, and one of the questions was, "What is the mascot of UWEC?" Someone shouted "A Blugold!"

Wrong answer!

They taught us that the university currently doesn't have any mascot, and a "Blugold" simply refers to us - Eau Claire students.

What an explanation! Imagine the frustration when coming from overseas to study and explore the American culture!

Later on, I was reading the first pages of my planner, and on page 52, there is a list of the 60 things that a Blugold should do - and I encourage everyone to try to do so.

The last thing on that list is "Find out what a Blugold is."

To be honest, I did not collect much information, but there had to be something because if not, I assume that students would not be wearing Blugold or UWEC clothes every day!

I had the chance to meet one of the most amazing students on campus, Jamie Daley, with whom I discussed the query. After many conversations with her, I perceived another dimension of what a Blugold could be.

It is an ensemble of values that makes us Blugolds, some values that the university honors and that we commit to honor as well by attending this university: to seek for excellence, promote integrity, recognize civility, be engaged, responsible and respectful.

Those values are our mainstream to follow, and they are applicable in every context and every moment of our journey at Eau Claire, and later in life.

There is no right or wrong answer, and it is something that I actually like. Not having a strict definition can tie up together value and spirit, but it also lets us have the freedom to let our own perception take its significance.

We do not need to specifically be a cheerleader, a basketball player - or even American - to appreciate being a Blugold.

Each of us has his or her convictions and part to bring to that concept. Individuality is not lost in unity. I am a Blugold, you are a Blugold, we are Blugolds. Blugolds now, Blugolds forever.

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