Students back on campus for first day of spring semester

Wearing a customized white Gators jersey bearing his last name on the back, David Nassau settled into his seat and chatted with classmates before the professor began.

“Today, I want to talk to you about economics,” said Mark Rush, microeconomics professor at the University of Florida.

It was one of Nassau's first classes on the first day of his freshman year, as he is a student in Innovation Academy, a new program where students attend classes on campus for only the spring and summer semesters.

UF applicants can on their applications express interest in the Academy, which accepts students with majors from varying fields, including math, science, engineering, mass communication and the humanities.

All students in the program will graduate with an innovation minor, which requires them to take a set of classes that focus on creativity, entrepreneurship and leadership.
The nearly 350 freshman from the Academy joined those returning from winter break Monday as UF campus teemed with students and faculty getting back to the work.

Winter coats, boots and hats could be spotted all over as masses of students clogged sidewalks, intersections and hallways.

Nassau attended his morning classes — pre-calculus and microeconomics — before heading back to Beaty Tower East, where the Academy's students who live on campus reside.

Nassau, who went to high school in Coral Springs, said he's already bonding with his fellow students in the Academy.

“We're like our own little fraternity,” he said.

Nestled on the second floor of Beaty East, Nassau's dorm room already had a college feel — air hockey table in the kitchen, a bicycle parked near the bed and a poster of Neil Patrick Harris riding a unicorn hanging on the wall.

“I like to watch ‘How I Met Your Mother,’ ” he said.

Andrea Aguilar, who lives down the hall from Nassau, said she spent her fall semester living at home in Miami and working.

Missing football gamedays in Gainesville didn't seem to bother her much.

“I'm not really into sports,” she said. “It wasn't too bad.”

Nassau decided to move to Gainesville early. He lived in an off-campus apartment, took two online classes, joined as many student organizations as he could handle, interned at local mobile application company SceneTap and worked at La Lola Loca, a campus food truck.

He already sees his falls as summers and springs as falls.

“I'd get very distracted during the fall,” he said, saying he feels like he'll be able to focus on his studies more during the summer.

Sitting in Aguilar's kitchen, she and Nassau chatted as Marielis Nieves rushed into the dorm carrying a pile of freshly purchased textbooks.

She panted as she dumped her haul onto her bed. She couldn't get the one book she needed for her afternoon class, so she considered a quick trip to the library on the way to the lecture.

To her, moving in and attending the Academy's social events has made her feel like she's part of a special group on campus that will stick together.

“We're kind of growing into a family,” she said.
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