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I-CAMP: New students find support

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ISA, said I-Camp was started last year to help international students become acquainted with student life and traditions at A&M.

Since the students have to be at A&M two weeks before classes in order to register, Hinojosa said I-Camp gives them something to look forward to.

"They're here for two weeks without doing anything, so we did this so they can make friends and be more comfortable," Hinojosa said.

Students at I-Camp were put into discussion groups, and Hinojosa said the camp was successful with the help of 40 volunteer group leaders.

"They've been tops," she said. "They've helped me with everything. Without their help, it wouldn't have been a success."

Karl Schwerdt, a graduate electrical engineering student from Germany and a group leader, said the leaders' main goal was to make the new students feel comfortable.

"The group leaders help them to communicate with each other," Schwerdt said. "They give them an idea of what it means to be an Aggie. It's their first real encounter with the traditions."

Schwerdt said A&M is unique because its students offer comfort to foreign students through I-Camp.

"I don't think there's any other place students can see this," he said.

In addition to meeting other international students in discussion groups, the campers had special visitors through the day, including the yells and the yell leaders.

Gerhard Linse, an industrial engineering change student from Germany, said a highlight of the day was visiting Kyle Field, where the students learned about American football and the football players.

"I've never been in a football stadium," Linse said. "In Germany, we know nothing about American football."

After being at A&M for a week, Linse was still intimidated by the University's size.

"It's a very big university and I'm not used to all of the different buildings," Linse said. "I always need a map to find something. We have a university in Germany like this."

I-Camp helped Linse to adjust to A&M traditions and culture, he said.

"I'm learning a lot of positive traditions at A&M," Linse said. "It's very interesting to meet students from different countries."

Surya Shandy, a freshman aerospace engineering major from Indonesia, said his favorite part of I-Camp was meeting other international students.

"It's important for me to know more people from other countries," Shandy said. "I-Camp is quite interesting. There are a lot of activities that are helping us learn about traditions."

Shandy came to A&M because there is a university in Indonesia that offers aerospace engineering courses.

"When I was 13, I had a dream to become an artist, and I think coming here is a way to realize my dreams," he said.

Hinojosa said ISA will continue to support international students on campus through the year by sponsoring a mini Olympics in October, National Week in March and a Muster ceremony for international Aggies who die each year.

"What we try to do is represent them on campus," she said. "We also try to work with the government to facilitate the needs of international students that students from the United States and neighboring countries don't have."

Leading ISA events has taught Hinojosa about different cultures, she said.

"I have met so many people from all over the world," Hinojosa said. "We build an international Aggie network."



Stew Milne, THE BATTALION

Wide receiver Chris Sanders gives international student Yves Marekani his autograph.

FISH CAMP: Class of '99 arrives

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with his discussion group, or "DG," was his favorite part of Fish Camp.

"DG time is an important part of Fish Camp," Ilschner said. "I met a lot of good friends that I'll have to lean on when school starts, and our counselors answered all our questions about things we've been worried about."

Aggie Challenge, an activity in which counselors create a simulation of a typical freshman year, is a chance for freshmen to actually act out their first year.

Amber Cavaness, a freshman electrical engineering major, said the Aggie Challenge opened her eyes to things she would encounter in life at A&M.

"Aggie Challenge was a good way to get acquainted with people, but it also helped me see how many things A&M has to offer," Cavaness said.

"I had no idea how much there is to do."

Campers also attended nightly mixers and were encouraged to participate in intramurals during free time.

Although the atmosphere at Fish Camp is purely fun and games, Winn said counselors have a serious purpose in mind.

"Without Fish Camp, the traditions at A&M would die away," Winn said.

"Not all freshmen can attend, but enough are able to go every year that we are able to rekindle the spirit in them and keep the traditions alive for everyone."

Ilschner said that not only has he learned a lot about A&M, he has also learned a lot about the transition he faces in life.

"Last night after the mixer, my counselors took my DG out to the lake and gave us each three rocks," Ilschner said. "Each rock was supposed to represent something we wanted to change about ourselves from high school."

After we thought about it, we threw the rocks into the water. It really made me think about moving on and starting my new life as a college student."

Ajene Hill, a freshman biomedical science major and member of Camp Funkhouser, said he hopes to be a counselor so he can return the favor to next year's freshman class.

"Everyone should go to Fish Camp," Hill said. "I learned so much about A&M that I never knew and would probably have never learned without Fish Camp."

T-CAMP: DGs gain friends

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Discussion groups, or DGs, of two or three members and 10 to 12 campers that meet throughout the day. During group discussions, transfer students can ask questions about A&M and get to know each other.

Kendal Laskowski, a history major who transferred to A&M from the University of Texas, said he liked meeting other campers at mixers.

"The country dancing was the favorite part of camp," he said. "The Aggie Wranglers came and gave free lessons. Last night, there was a mixer where we were able to get what we learned."

Laskowski said he didn't want to go to camp but that he was thankful he went because he was comfortable starting at a school with friends he had kept for life.

"When I started out as a man at UT, we did not have anything like this," Laskowski said. "It was like they just threw us into a meat grinder and expected us to fend for ourselves. T-Camp showed me that A&M really cared about the students. I got a lot of help about starting a new school set to rest all of my anxieties."

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