

## Culture Talk

### International students make friends in Conversation Partners

By Nishat Fatima  
THE BATTALION

Arriving in an entirely new country and learning to speak a language other than your native tongue can be a difficult experience for most people. Because many international students face this difficulty every day, the English Language Institute has now created Conversation Partners, a program that pairs student volunteers with international students.

Through this program, international students are provided exposure to the English language, as well as to the complexities of living in America.

Dexing Dai, who originally hails from China, joined Conversation Partners four months ago and said his English language skills have improved drastically.

"My partner and I have conversations while we are doing fun stuff like playing soccer or eating," he said. "If I have any problems with my homework, then I read it to him, and he helps me smooth it out. I feel like I have improved in my oral and listening English."

Dai said that aside from improving his grasp on English, he also uses the time with his partner to familiarize himself with American culture.

"My partner tells me a lot of things about typical American life that I didn't know before," he said.

"He helps me out by exposing me to different norms and ideas of the culture," Dai said. "In turn, I also like to share different facts and aspects about the Chinese culture. We both learn a lot from the experiences."

According to the Web site, <http://studyabroad.tamu.edu>, the idea is to meet and talk about literally anything the students desire—food, customs, music, movies and so on—in a casual environment. The foreign students improve their ability to speak English,

with the help of native English-speaking students.

Kristine Winters, who is in her fourth year of volunteering for the program, said Conversation Partners is a good way for international students to make friends as well.

"I studied in France for a semester and I know how hard it can be to meet people, especially if the culture that you hail from is a lot different from where you end up," said Winters, a senior international studies major. "The international students enjoy the program because they can use it to learn more about the English language, and also to make American friends."

Winters said the club has long-term and short-term benefits for all involved.

"Most of the time, the relationship goes from being a formal one to a friendship," she said. "Although the minimum time for the buddy program is an hour a week, I usually end up spending a lot more time with my conversation partners. There have been times when my partner made authentic international food for me, and it was great."

"This semester is going to be especially interesting for me because my new partner is from South Korea, and I am very eager to hear her opinion about the situation between the United States and South Korea," Winters said.

Cecilia Solis, an English Language Institute student from Mexico, said the program helped her adjust to life as a student at Texas A&M.

"My partner from last semester took me to places like the MSC, the different cafeterias, libraries and other interesting places on campus," Solis said. "She also told me about all of the different customs and traditions that Aggieland has."

Solis said the program helped her out a lot. "Since I joined last semester, it has definitely helped in improving my English. The buddy that I was paired with was very nice and helpful."

"I have always had a new partner for each semester and I am always excited about the event," she said. "It is a fascinating experience because each of the students have so much diversity that they bring with them."

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— Kristine Winters  
senior international studies major



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