

English Conversation Partner Information Sheet

International Friendships, Inc.

One of the most felt needs of an international student is to practice their spoken English with a native speaker. This is a wonderful opportunity to both serve a student in an area of felt need and to develop a friendship with someone from another culture.

When will I be needed?

The largest number of volunteers will be needed at the beginning of the fall quarter at OSU, near the end of September. However, students request conversation partners throughout the year. Usually we have a waiting list of students desiring American conversation partners, so in most cases you can be matched quickly at any time of the year.

How will I be matched with a student?

After training and application approval, you will be contacted with the name and email address of a student who has requested a conversation partner. You should then contact the student and set up a time and place to meet that is mutually agreeable. Note that it is our practice to match you with a student of the same sex. If you have a preference for any specific culture you may indicate that at the time of your application and we will do our best to honor your request. The large majority of our students are Asian.

What if I am unable to contact the student I have been assigned?

Please remember that you are the “host” to a guest in our country and realize that it can be very intimidating for an international student to make the first contact, especially using a second language. Please do not give up after one attempt; try the student several times, and call them if your emails are not answered. If after these attempts you are still unsuccessful, please contact the IFI office (294-2434) so that we can either facilitate the contact or rematch you with another student.

How long is my commitment?

At least one quarter, or three months. Our hope is that a good friendship would be established and that you would like to continue meeting with the student. However, you may choose not to renew your commitment to the student.

What kind of time commitment is expected?

We ask that you meet with the student on an average of (at least) one hour per week. If your schedules are such that you can only meet every other week, then try to meet for a couple of hours. Or perhaps spending a half-day with each other once a month works best. If you don't meet each week, try to send the student an email just to see how he or she is doing.

Do the students speak English?

Yes, at least to some degree. They are taking classes or working in the Columbus area. Most are students (or spouses of students) at Ohio State University. They mainly want help practicing their pronunciation with a native speaker and having someone gently correct both their grammar and pronunciation.

Do I, as the volunteer, have to speak the student's language?

No. Because they want to learn English, it is not necessary for you to know their language.

Is there any curriculum?

Usually not, unless the student is enrolled in an English as a Second Language program. For the student in an ESL program, there is curriculum used in their classes. You may help them with this as needed, or you may choose to just use natural conversation. IFI offers ESL classes at times during the year, and you are welcome to attend the Saturday

morning class with them, but this is NOT a replacement for meeting them one-on-one at another time. Accompanying them to class is an optional extra.

For all students, natural conversation is encouraged. We can provide a sheet of possible conversation topics to get you started. Create your own opportunities: go out for ice cream or coffee, look at photo albums and share stories about your families and life experiences, go to a park for a walk, etc. This is a friendship, as well as conversation practice, so feel free to have fun! If you need some further suggestions, give us a call.

What about sharing my faith?

Your commitment to the student should be that of unconditional friendship and love. Please be sensitive to the fact that the students come from many different cultural and religious backgrounds and may have little or no previous exposure to Christianity. Hopefully over time, you will build a relationship of trust which would be an appropriate context for sharing spiritually. We ask that you not force spiritual discussion but be sensitive to the student and follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. In many cases, the students are very open to such discussions. It is appropriate to naturally include your faith as it relates to your life experiences.

What if I am unable to meet with the student I have been assigned?

Please contact the IFI office to let us know you will not be able to continue. Our desire is to serve the students in the best way possible. If you are unable to continue meeting your student, we would like to be able to match them with someone else so that they may still have the opportunity to meet with an American volunteer.

Can I be matched with another student if mine leaves Columbus?

Definitely yes! We hope that you have such a wonderful experience that you will want to continue with another conversation partner. Since we almost always have a waiting list, we should be able to match you again right away.

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