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VIRTUAL ENGLISH CONVERSATION PARTNER INFORMATION SHEET

VISION

One of the most common 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?

ALWAYS! The virtual nature of this activity make it a new opportunity. IFI has had an in-person conversation partner program for over 20 years, but due to social distancing this “virtual” opportunity started in Winter 2020. We expect that a large number of volunteers will be needed over the summer and at the beginning of the fall semester at OSU, near the end of August. However, students can request virtual conversation partners throughout the year. There will likely be a waiting list of students and spouses 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 virtual conversation partner. You should then contact the student and set up a time to meet that is mutually agreeable. You can meet with the student by video chat using your android phone/tablet/PC or FaceTime for Apple devices, or other video applications, such as Messenger, Signal, Skype, or Zoom to maintain a close friendship and connection. This is an opportunity for the international student to make an American friend and to learn firsthand about culture in the United States. We encourage you if you are able to also look for opportunities to meet in-person.

Note that it is our practice to match you with a student or international spouse of the same sex. We also try our best to match you with someone of the same age and interests, although this is not always possible. If you prefer any specific culture you may indicate that at the time of your application and we will do our best to honor your request. Most 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 or text them if your emails are not answered. If after these attempts you are still unsuccessful, please contact the IFI office (614-294-2434) so that we can either facilitate the contact or rematch you with another student.

HOW LONG IS MY COMMITMENT?

You will be matched with a student for no more than one semester (4 months). However, our hope is that a good friendship would be established and that you would like to continue meeting with the student beyond this. However, both you or the student you may choose not to renew your commitment, or you may decide to meet less often.

WHAT KIND OF TIME COMMITMENT IS EXPECTED?

We ask that you meet with the student on an average of (at least) 30 minutes per week. OPTIONAL: If you are able to meet in-person plan to meet longer probably at least one hour or consider doing a half-day activity together once or twice a month. If you cannot meet one week, please try to send the student an email just to see how he or she is doing.

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DO THE STUDENTS SPEAK ENGLISH?

Yes, at least to some degree. The college students and those working in the Central Ohio area have better English. The visiting professors, researchers or spouses of college students and scholars may need more help with their English. You are not expected to teach them English, mainly help them practice their conversation skills and gently correct both their grammar and pronunciation.

DO I, AS THE VOLUNTEER, HAVE TO SPEAK THE STUDENT'S LANGUAGE?

No. They want to improve their ability to speak English and make a new friend so it is not necessary for you to know their language.

CORE EXPECTATIONS

Please show students respect and seek to develop an unconditional friendship regardless of their spiritual interest. Also, avoid topics such as politics, anything that implies their country is less than the U.S., and persecution of Christians in their country. Please do not try to evangelize students in your initial contact. As trust is established, these topics will naturally come up.

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 the English Conversation Club (virtual options) on Saturday mornings for 6 weeks each semester. Students can sign up for it on the IFI student web page

For all students, natural conversation is encouraged. Create your own opportunities: share electronic photos of family members and your life experiences, etc. This is a friendship as well as conversation practice, so feel free to have fun! If you need some further suggestions, email or give us a call. For ideas about activities and conversation topics, please check out resources at: <https://columbus.ifipartners.org/ecp/>

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 WHEN MY OTHER STUDENT IS NOT AVAILABLE?

Definitely yes! We hope that you have such a wonderful experience that you will want to continue with another conversation partner.