Cultural Exchange Circle Supports Foreigners

Campus Group Hopes to Unite First-Year International Students With Orientation

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Coming to Tufts from a different country can be a harrowing experience. To help international students adjust to life on campus and in the United States, the Cultural Exchange Circle has been established.

“The program is the brainchild of Saskia Meckman, who herself grew up in Europe. It began last semester in order to supplement International Orientation.

“International Orientation was definitely a good starting point to learn how to integrate into the new environment. Yet, when this short experience was over and the semester really started, the initial warm international contact was missing,” Meckman said.

The Culture Exchange Circle consists of small, ten member groups who provide an intimate surrounding to talk about anything the members want.

Some of the topics the group has covered include the differences in social life between the U.S. and other countries, the Greek System and Women’s issues. Other topics include news censorship, diversity, equality in students, first name basis, and underage drinking. Meckman stressed that the group operates in a relaxed, informal situation. There are usually about ten people at the meetings.

The groups not only attempt to accommodate the members of the international community, but to integrate them into the Tufts community. The group hopes to add students who were born in the U.S.

“I hope that [the Circle] can help bridge the gap between international and American students. This will make more of an awareness and more coming together of the two groups,” Meckman commented. “In order to do so, we need more American involvement.”

The group was originally started as support system for first-year or new students, but Meckman said she realized that the group would be short-lived if support were the only thing for which it existed.

“As the semester progressed, the group would not be needing the same initial support once they would begin to feel less intimidated and lost in an American environment. The group needed something to aim at in order to keep it together,” Meckman wrote in her proposal to the International Club.

“Finally, we all realized one important thing: even though ’support’ and comfort were going to be less and less needed from the Circle, the idea of keeping a group of socially aware people interested in discussing international issues relating to group members appealed to all of us.”

A regular meeting starts when a member, chosen from a previous meeting, brings a topic up to be discussed. The group then participates in an informal talk and the subject, as Meckman wrote, “will be taken where the group wants it to go.”

Each member has time to develop his or her topic and Meckman helps the member if needed. The meeting is then open for discussion on any topic the members wish to discuss, or they may choose to simply adjourn for refreshments. In short, the group provides the opportunity for anyone who wants to talk about anything they want in an informal context.

In an attempt to become recognized throughout campus this semester, the group plans on putting up flyers before the meetings and setting up information tables in the Campus Center.

The group is composed of mostly international members, but the members said they want to stress that even though the name implies a very, rigid and structured program, the people in it are very social and want to enjoy meeting and including new members.

The Culture Exchange Circle is financed by the International Center and aided by Susan Carlisle. Carlisle has much to do with the early development of the club.

Much is still being developed for the Cultural Exchange Circle. Meckman hopes to one day incorporate the Circle into International Orientation and even the regular Freshman Orientation. By doing so, she hopes that the Circle will gain more members and more people will be able to bridge the gap that so often occurs between people of different countries.

Perhaps she has not found the path to world peace. Even if global harmony isn’t achieved next Wednesday, one can expect a nice time.

The Cultural Exchange Circle meets every other Wednesday, starting this semester on January 27, in the Schwartz room 209 upstairs in the Campus Center.