The International Center welcomed Neriliz Soto González as its third International Student and Scholar Advisor on Jan. 21. In this role, González focuses on programming events and immigration advising.

González explained that her goals as a new advisor include running different cultural programs, such as those introducing incoming students to Greater Boston, sharing the history of the state of Massachusetts and promoting understanding of different aspects of the American culture.

González said she hopes to get to know students and bring new events, knowledge and experience to the International Center. She said that she is excited to work with Tufts’ non-English speaking community, saying that she can relate to those students because of her experience moving to the United States from Puerto Rico.

“I come from another country where English is not my first language, and I am hoping that students who are also struggling with English can come talk to someone who understands going through that experience,” González said. “I’m hoping I can connect to the Latino community here at Tufts.”

González attended the University of Puerto Rico, where she received a bachelor’s degree in Comparative Literature and French. In 2011, she moved to the United States and attended graduate school at Lesley University, where she focused on Intercultural Relations and worked directly with international students living in Boston.

“At Lesley University, I worked with Chinese students from the Boston area, performing research about their experiences in Boston, their experiences at home, their opinions of the Chinese economy and how they were adapting,” she said.
More recently, González worked as the International Student Specialist at Yale University.

According to International Center Director Jane Etish-Andrews, the search for a new advisor began in November last year.

“Three finalists were brought to campus and the candidates were interviewed by the [International] Center staff members, Rubén Salinas Stern — Latino Center Director — representing the Group of Six, Dean John Barker, Dean of Undergraduate and Graduate Students and a committee of six representing both undergraduate and graduate students,” Etish-Andrews told the Daily in an email.

Based on the interviews and recommendations, a decision was made in mid-December last year, she explained.

In the past, the International Center has had only two International Student and Scholar Advisors who serve international students and faculty on all three of Tufts’ campuses. González now joins Patrick Himes and Whitney Sullivan, who serve as the other advisors at the International Center.

According to Etish-Andrews, adding a third advisor will allow for more interaction between students and advisors.

“By adding a third advisor…all the advisors will be handling work with foreign scholars, post-docs or short research projects,” she said. “Every advisor will be handling scholars directly, which was not done before.”

Kayla Blackborow, a student assistant at the International Center, agreed that adding González’s position will benefit the International Center as a whole.

“I only met Neriliz once, but she talked passionately about the work that she does with international students and engaging with the greater community,” Blackborow, a senior, told the Daily in an email. “Neriliz’s position [is] very similar to Pat and Whitney’s, but I’m sure they’ll adjust based on their interests and strengths – some may work more on programming while others work more on visa regulation and other technical stuff.”

Etish-Andrews hopes that having González as an additional advisor will make the International Center more prominent on the Tufts campuses and will enable it to provide more resources to students. Both undergraduate and graduate students, for whom English is a second language, will now have better, more personal access to advisors, she said.

She also hopes that increased visibility of the International Center on campus will help strengthen its community and the programs that it offers.

Etish-Andrews said the International Center serves a very important role in the lives of Tufts international students, faculty and scholars. Advisors provide individual counseling, advising and cultural readjustment services, as well as immigration and visa services, according to the International Center’s website. Additionally, advisors help international students throughout the course of their Tufts careers and after they graduate, including with assistance with paying taxes.

“We do a lot of immigration work,” Etish-Andrews said. “The Center is very insular, so the idea is that with more people we can have more people talking and making more connections.”

In the larger Tufts community, she said the International Center hopes to improve intercultural relations on campus and aid in the personal and academic success of Tufts’ international population. This includes raising intercultural awareness on campus and increasing the knowledge of immigration laws that affect international Tufts students, according to the International Center’s website.

“We are strong for providing for students and also for foreign faculty and scholars,” Etish-Andrews said. “We do not just provide immigration services, but also resources and counseling.”
González agreed that having a more accessible center will bring many benefits to the students and its staff.

“It’ll give the advisors the freedom to work on projects and programming for students and faculty that they might not otherwise be able to do,” González said.

She said that her first day on the job was both new to her and comfortable.

“It was relaxing and a different environment,” she said. “Very welcoming. It was different but at the same time it felt like I was at home.”