International freshmen get jump on Orientation

by ELIZABETH YELLEN
Daily Editorial Board

While most of Tufts' new freshmen arrived on Wednesday, 95 members of the Class of 1995 began their Orientation last Sunday. These students are international students, a growing population at Tufts.

According to Jane Etish-Andrews, director of the International Center, international students at Tufts originate from more than 90 countries, and there are approximately 100 international students per class. However, she pointed out that the term "international" encompasses more than "foreign" students -- those whose permanent addresses fall outside the United States and are visiting on visas. International students also include Americans who studied overseas, foreign-born students who recently achieved US citizenship, and occupants of US-held islands, such as Puerto Rico.

Etish-Andrews noted that this year's foreign freshmen are from diverse nations, ranging from Kuwait to Panama to Aruba to France. Other participants in International Orientation included upperclassmen, many of whom are themselves foreign, serving as host advisors for the three-day period of scheduled events.

According to Etish-Andrews, the philosophy of the International Center is, "the best friendships that are formed are formed during Orientation." She said that in order to make the program more diverse, Tufts invited some local incoming freshmen to International Orientation because of their interest in the International Relations program.

Junior Vladimir Ristanovic, who was born in Yugoslavia, lived in Zambia and attended school in Sweden, said that his positive experiences at last year's International Orientation inspired him to become a host advisor this year. He described Orientation as a time when the advisors make the students feel comfortable at Tufts, or more broadly, an American university; most international students have never visited the United States, so are nervous about meeting people and dealing with problems such as course registration and opening bank accounts, he said.

Ristanovic feels that this supplementary orientation is important because the international students need to meet people in the same situation.

Ristanovic said that the basic format of the International Orientation is informal, revolving around social activities, discussions of life at Tufts, and answering questions as they arise. The freshmen are divided into groups of ten, each with two host advisors. The advisors initially help acquaint their advisees with one another via games and excursions to attractions in the area, such as Harvard Square and downtown Boston.

Etish-Andrews also characterized the International Orientation activities as mainly social, saying that they "don't compete with the academic [orientation]" held a few days later. Rather, this Orientation covers campus resources and new concepts such as the process of adding and dropping courses. This year also featured a performance of skits by the advisors meant to depict cross-cultural experiences, another issue encountered as close to home as the dorm room.

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Ristanovic feels so positively about his experiences last year at International Orientation because as soon as he stepped on campus, his host advisors made him feel comfortable and included, and he immediately met people to whom he could relate. He recalls his nervousness, but since "everyone was willing [to be friendly], there was no time to worry; we were too busy." As a result, by the time the rest of the class had arrived, he had made a number of friends.

Etish-Andrews said that the Orientation for international students is held before the general Orientation because while "every freshman feels at a loss," but that to introduce the international students to Tufts ahead of time "gives [them] an idea of equal footing" so that they "go ahead and do fine."

Although only approximately four percent of Tufts' undergraduate student body is foreign, Etish-Andrews said that last year's figure had doubled from two years ago, following a national trend. But she also pointed out that it is particularly difficult for foreign students to attend Tufts: since Tufts does not grant them financial aid, they must find other sources. Yet, one can be certain that the growing population of foreign students displays the diversity of which Tufts is proud.