Program helps international graduate students adapt to American life

BY EMILIA LUNA Daily Editorial Board

Adjusting to the American collegiate lifestyle is difficult for any arriving student, but for some international graduate students, the adjustment can be quite a challenge.

To help out these students, every year the International Center directs the Intercultural Conversation Program, through which incoming international graduate students are paired up with English-speaking faculty, staff and students to help them practice English and adjust to life in the United States. For most of these students, it is their first time coming to the United States and entering an American university setting.

The program started in 1996 as a response to the needs of international graduate students. "The program is for students to get acculturated, to have an English speaker help them with adjusting and asking day-to-day questions," Jane Etish-Andrews, director of the International Center, said.

In order to participate, international graduate students and the undergraduates English-speaking students fill out a survey at the beginning of the year. "We try to pair them with someone that has similar interests, and we have had very good pairs that have become very good friends," Fletcher student Barbara Bravo Flores, the program coordinator of the Intercultural Conversation Program, said.

The English-speaking students participate in the program because of different motivations. The program is a requirement for the residents of the International House (I-House). "It is their community service contribution," Etish-Andrews said. The International Center also recruits returning study abroad students for the program.

Sophomore and I-House resident Kia Widlo said that participating in this program was a rewarding experience.

"It is a program where I can meet someone that I probably wouldn't meet otherwise, and it is an exchange of culture, understanding and views," she said.

"It is a way to gain a friend and build a relationship that you otherwise might not be able to." For sophomore Christina Aguirre, the program has gone beyond the weekly one-hour meetings.

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I-Center Program helps international grad students settle into Tufts

INTERNATIONAL continued from page 1

Aguirre got involved in the program through the student activities fair last year. After their successful pairing, she and her partner decided to keep participating this year.

"We still wanted to meet, and we decided to stay a part of the program and the events," Aguirre said. "I'm actually surprised more people don't do that." Aguirre said. The Conversational Day-to-Day English program is for the students, but the English speaker is not necessarily the same language skills as the undergraduates.

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