

## International Student Connections Program Takes Root at UPEI

Kimberley Johnston  
A&E Editor

Feel like you're stuck in a rut?

Does a bowl of yogurt have more culture than you?

Wanna make new friends?

Well, the international student connections program may be for you. The pilot project, which is funded by the Webster Foundation for Teaching and Learning, offers International students a chance to become better acquainted with UPEI and Prince Edward Island. It also allows their buddies to receive a chance to gain insight into another culture.

"The International Student Connections Program was created to provide assistance and a smooth transition for new International Students," explained program coordinator Pang Chia Yee. "It pairs a returning UPEI student, (a buddy), with a new student from another country and culture."

Pang said international students have varying levels of abilities when communicating in English, but buddies are given the choice of what level of English they would like to partner with. It is Pang's job to partner buddies with international students who meet their desired level of English, with international students coming from as far away as Japan or as close to home as Arkansas.

"It is very hard to generalize as International students are coming from all around the world to study at UPEI. There are international students which English is their first language; there are international students who practiced English since they were born, even though English is their second

language, (and there are) some who did not practice English until a later age ... it is very varied," explained Pang.

Even the backgrounds of their buddies are varied. Dorea Reeser, who hails from New Hampshire, said she wanted to become a buddy for an international student because this project did not exist in her first year. She has already made plans for her buddy, Liv Bengtsson, who she just met Friday.

"We're going pubbing. She doesn't know it yet, but we're going." Bengtsson, a psychology student from Sweden, said she joined the program to make new friends and seemed to have the same recreational interests as her buddy.

"I just wanted to meet some people who know the place, meet some buddies ... and do some pubbing." Laura Waddell, who is studying Anthropology, said she joined the program because of a desire to find out about other cultures and to put a deposit in her karmic bank account.

"I did some ESL last year, and I'm going to Australia next year so I'm hoping there will be someone there for me when I get there."

Her buddy, Ronni Geary from Arkansas, said she joined the program in order to meet new people, which at home she did not like doing.

"I joined the program to meet new people. I hate meeting new people," she said, smiling shyly. "I never know what to say. When I'm at home, I just sit in the corner."

Pang said the length of time a buddy spends with their international student depends on the pair, but it is

preferable that buddies spend a fair amount of time with their students at the first of the school year. "It really depends. At the beginning of the semester, volunteers are recommended to spend more time with their buddies because the international student might need help with many things such as banking information, registering, getting to know the place, etc. After they get used to the environmental stage, it is all about hanging out as friends."

She said the best candidates for the buddy program are people who are willing to take an interest in another person and are genuinely interested in making a new friend. Buddies willing to put in more time with their international students will get more out of the program.

"I think as long as one has the initiative to make an international friendship and is sincere in making one (they would make a good buddy). Active participants would receive the most benefits compared to those who are inactive in the program," said Pang.

Pang, who is a fourth-year psychology major from Malaysia, said she enjoys helping people, but she has a soft spot for first-year international students because she was once in their position.

"In general I enjoy helping others...especially international students, because I am one of them."

If you are a returning UPEI student who is interested in joining the International Student Connection Program, or if you have any questions, e-mail Chia Yee at [buddy@upei.ca](mailto:buddy@upei.ca).

### TIBETANS AND STUDENTS PROTEST VISIT OF CHINESE PRESIDENT: Canadian Government Urged to Press Hu Jintao on Tibetan Issue

OTTAWA, September 9th – China's President Hu Jintao will be met with protests calling for Tibetan independence during his first official visit to Canada today. Members of Students for a Free Tibet Canada (SFT Canada) are planning a demonstration in Ottawa to bring attention to China's ongoing military occupation of Tibet and pressure Prime Minister Paul Martin to ensure that Tibetan self-determination is on the agenda for discussions with the Chinese President. Protests are also planned for Vancouver, Toronto and New York.

"The situation in Tibet has not improved since Hu Jintao came to power," said Dechen Goff, a young Tibetan-Canadian lawyer and Chair of the SFT Canada Board of Directors. "The Chinese authorities continue to imprison and torture Tibetans for nothing more than the peaceful expression of their religious and political beliefs. The only change we've seen lately is the effort by the Chinese government to improve their public relations on the Tibetan issue."

Hu Jintao's visit to Canada comes on the heels of China's recent celebrations of the "40th anniversary" of the establishment of the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) – the Chinese governments' most recent attempt to depict Tibet as an integral part of China rather than a distinct nation and people with a rich history of independence.

"The image Beijing is attempting to put forth in anticipation of the upcoming 2008 Olympic Games—of China as a progressive and modern democratic nation—is grossly inaccurate," said Kate Woznow,

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