

group of students at least three times a week, and invariably they will get to know one another."

The first two or three weeks of a term are when most students are apt to get lonely, Wade says. At the end of this time, however, most people have gotten their bearings and identified some groups with the same interests, he says.

"The students that have the most difficulty are the ones that pretend to be OK," he says. "They pretend to have friends. But what they really have are acquaintances rather than close, feeling, contact relationships. They put up a front, but underneath it they are really lonely."

Students also make it harder for themselves when they believe they are the only ones who are lonely, Wade says.

"My experience has been that students talk about everyone else having friends and being accepted but them," he says. "What they don't realize is that those who seem most at ease are usually continuing students or people who are naturally very gregarious."

Orientation and advising programs also are offered for transfer students and those entering the University from a foreign country. The latter also receives information about the social and cultural environment of the University and the United States. But despite these measures, loneliness still may remain a problem for foreign students.

"Many foreign students experience loneliness," says Peter Briggs, an adviser for foreign students at the University. "They may have people around them, but it's usually new friends. It takes awhile to build up that trust level."

Efforts are made to introduce foreign students to other people on campus who are from the same country, but these measures do not ensure that foreign students will not experience loneliness, Briggs says.

"Physically they're here and mentally home," he says. "The friends they make here will never replace the ones they have in their own country. But most gradually develop a new life here and come to like it. It would be wrong to say that foreign students spend their four years at the University being lonely. For most, the loneliness lasts from three to six or seven months before they make their peace with it."

There are some exceptions, Briggs says.

"Recently I took a student to lunch who had never been to a restaurant in the two years that he had lived here," he says. "The student knew how to cook rice and other foods for himself. So he found it easier to just stay in his room and not go out."

Other groups, such as the Korean students, may react to loneliness and culture shock by forming close-knit family units and communities here in America, Briggs says.

"Such groups are very supportive of the people within them," he says. "But sometimes they have a difficult time integrating with the rest of the culture. In the case of married students with children, the stress of being in a different country can be very hard on the marriage. Often the wife stays home and raises the kids while the man studies. Women in these situations are typically nervous about integrating and don't have the confidence to go out by themselves. It's easier for them to just withdraw, stay home and watch TV."

To encourage more participation of foreign students and their spouses in campus life, the University sponsors language and cooking classes as well as periodic outings.

"Our goal is to encourage them to

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— Joe Wade

get out into the community and participate in the life here rather than just stay in their rooms," Briggs says.

American students studying abroad also may have problems with loneliness.

"When people first arrive in a new country, they usually are too busy adjusting to their surroundings to be lonely," says Paul Primak, the foreign student adviser at the University. "But when Christmas comes, nearly everyone feels the pinch."

To combat their loneliness, many students abroad seek the company of other students in the same situation, travel or seek solace with a host family.

"The host families will usually be very sensitive to students," Primak says. "Even if they are not living with a host family at the time, many programs make an effort to make it possible for them to share the holidays with a host family. We do the same thing with foreign students here at the University."

Another step the University takes to reduce entering students' loneliness and disorientation is providing opportunities for students to learn about the school and community resources. More than 200 social, cultural and academic programs are presented to incoming students during fall orientation, and most are designed to help people with similar interests meet one another.

"We try to give incoming students enough programs to choose from so that they won't be lonely," says Roger Morris at the University orientation office. "The New Student Host Program also gives students the opportunity to get to know an upper division student that they can call for information or support during orientation."

"Next year we also plan to add programs, specifically one that will talk about the adjustment to college life and the loneliness that can occur," he says. "We'll deal with questions like, 'What sort of problems might I have at school?' and 'What can I do to make the transition easier for myself.'"

Morris also indicated that out-of-state students, or those from eastern Oregon and other rural areas, may have more trouble adjusting than others to college.

"Most of our students come from the Willamette Valley and the western side of the state," he says. "We don't draw many people from the rural areas. So if people do decide to come here, it is usually a big decision and a really radical one. They may be the only one from their high school that comes here."

Students who enter the University during winter and spring terms also may have problems with adjustment because there are fewer orientation programs available to them, Morris says.

"A few weeks into the term we try to contact them by phone or letter," he says. "Sometimes faculty or staff also volunteer to call and check on how the student is doing. The main thing is that they know there is a living, breathing person who does indeed care about them."

Anita Johnson, who coordinates this activity at the orientation office, agrees

with Morris.

"Everyone is always appreciative and seems willing to talk about their problems or make suggestions," she says. "We are still compiling statistics, but at least 12 people have said that meeting people has been a problem for them. That is a substantial increase over last year."

In addition to college students, many other groups are prone to loneliness. Single parents, who must try to balance children, jobs, sometimes school and their own personal life and adjustment report high rates of loneliness. Alcoholics are also apt to suffer from it.

"Loneliness can be one motivating factor behind alcoholism," says "Harold," a volunteer for Alcoholics Anonymous. "Before alcoholics find a program, they are lonely people. They may cover it up by surrounding themselves with a crowd, but the loneliness is still there inside. This feeling of loneliness usually continues until they 'hit bottom' and realize that they need help. At that time groups like Alcoholics Anonymous can step in and start supporting them on the road back toward recovery."

Loneliness also may strike when intimate relationships break up and both partners have to cope with being single again. During this period of transition almost everything in our environment can serve to remind us of the other person and our loss — the empty bed, a dark house, no one eager to see us and ask how our day went. Even certain songs, books or other sensory stimulus can act to increase our sense of isolation.

To avoid these feelings of loneliness, some people bury themselves in work or studying, or move into another relationship. Others may have the opposite reaction and show reluctance to get back into romantic circulation.

"When my last relationship broke up, I felt completely devastated and lonely for months," says "Irene," a 24-year-old University student. "Once I got myself back in order, I decided, 'That's it; I'm through with men.' It's easier to be by myself than risk getting hurt again."

For other people, loneliness may result from their perception of being "different" from others and not fitting in.

Blacks, Asians and other minorities in America may experience this type of loneliness as an outcome of discrimination, poverty and racism.

Loneliness in this racist context can be intense and not easily alleviated for the individual, accompanied as it may be by feelings of helplessness and frustration.

*I could tell you
If I wanted to,
What makes me
What I am.*

*But I don't
Really want to —
And you don't
Give a damn.*

— L. Hughes in "The Panther and the Lash"

For other people, their perceptions of being lonely and different are more existential.

"I think I first realized how different I was from the rest of my family when I was seven," said "Lea," a 27-year-old graduate student. "I remember very clearly sitting under the cottonwood trees at my parents' house in Michigan and sobbing because every moment my life was passing by — virtually slipping through my fingers — and I couldn't stop it from happening. My mother asked me what I was crying about, and when I told her, she said, 'Oh, that's silly!' It really hurt. I became a lot more careful about opening up to her or other people after that because I knew they wouldn't understand what I'm thinking or feeling. And most people don't, even today. So I keep to myself a lot."

Individuals like Lea are usually referred to as loners, and their sense of difference and discontinuity may haunt them for their entire life span. Some accept the loneliness of their condition and learn to live with it. Others may withdraw from life totally, retreating into mental illness or perhaps resorting to suicide. The despair such people feel is eloquently but tragically expressed in the following poem written by a high school senior who took his own life.

*He always wanted to explain things,
but no one cared
Sometimes he would draw and it
wasn't anything.
He wanted to carve it in stone or write it
in the sky.
He would lie out in the grass and look
up in the sky
And it would only be him and the sky
and the things inside him that needed
saying.
And it was after that that he drew the
picture.
He kept it under his pillow and would
let no one see it.
And when it was dark, and his eyes
were closed, he could still see it.
It was all of him. And he loved it.
When he started school he brought it
with him
Not to show to anyone, but just to have
it with him like a friend.
It was funny about school.
He sat at a square, brown desk.
Like all other square, brown desks.
And he thought it should be red.
And his room was a square, brown
room
Like all the other rooms.
And it was tight and close. And stiff.
The teacher came and spoke to him.
She told him to wear a tie like all the
other boys.
He said he didn't like them.
And she said it didn't matter.
After that they drew.
And he drew all yellow and it was the
way he felt about morning.
And it was beautiful.
The teacher came and smiled at him.
"What's this?" she said. "Why don't
you draw like Ken's drawing?"
"Isn't that beautiful?"
After that his mother bought him a tie.
And he always drew airplanes and
rocketships like everyone else.
And he threw the old picture away.
And when he lay alone looking at the*