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## Global friends acquaint students

By Mandy Baucum  
Emerald Reporter

University student Julie Jones, a senior majoring in Asian studies, didn't learn about Japanese culture from a textbook. Instead, she found herself a Global Friend.

The Global Friends program, created by the Office of International Education and Exchange in 1989, matches University and international students so they can meet new people and enjoy a cultural friendship.

Jones, who frequently meets her Japanese "friend" for lunch and other activities, said the program provides students with an opportunity to learn from other cultures, which she believes is important because "I don't think there is enough cultural education at this university."

Jones said she believes the program is not only good for University students, but also benefits international students.

"After spending a year in Japan, I know how hard it is to make friends when you're in a foreign place," she said.

Rhea Connors, a graduate student, said she took on the position of acting coordinator for Global Friends as an internship through the Office of International Education and Exchange. She said she is trying to make the internship available to other students so the program can continue after she graduates.

"The purpose of Global Friends is for University students to get to know an international student, learn another culture and see how they view the world," Connors said.

Neither the University student nor the international student is supposed to spend a certain amount of time with the friend, Connors said.

"The friendship is what you put into it," Connors said. "It's a friendship, not an obligation."

Students are matched on the basis of common interests, Connors said.

Sometimes if a student makes an inflexible request, such as asking specifically for a Spanish-speaking friend, it becomes more difficult to accommodate them, Connors said.

Margo Ramsing, a foreign student adviser, said a lot of international students are interested in the Global Friends program because they want "to make friends and learn what it's like to be an American."

Connors said international students tend to associate mostly with people from their native countries. Although this can be a good thing, students who want to meet Americans may find the task easier through Global Friends.

"It can be intimidating for students to meet in group settings like the International Coffee Hour," Connors said. "It's hard to strike up conversations with other people who may seem to already know other people. Global Friends is a chance for students to meet one-on-one."

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