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Global Friends Program Makes International Transition Easier

Winthrop University

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Global Friends Program Makes International Transition Easier

Quick Facts

- The program began specifically to enhance engagement among cultures, a goal of the Global Learning Initiative (GLI).
- This fall, 146 students registered with the Global Friends program.

ROCK HILL, SOUTH CAROLINA — Moving to a new country without many friends or family can be a daunting task. But Winthrop's [University College](#), the home of the [Global Learning Initiative](#), the [International Center](#) and the [Department of World Languages and Cultures](#) makes the transition easier for the university's nearly 200 international students with the new **Global Friends Conversation Partner Program**.

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In spring 2014, **LeAnn Lowrey**, international student tutor in University College, spearheaded a collaboration between the Global Learning Initiative and the campus departments on a program that would give international students a chance to both meet a new American friend and practice intercultural communication skills.

"Some other schools have conversation partner programs that merely match Americans with international students," she said. "However, the program at Winthrop is more complex because we also try to match Americans who are taking language courses—French, Spanish, German, Italian or Chinese—with students who speak those languages. Many students participating have made lifelong friendships which will continue after leaving Winthrop. Although the program has been successful, the Global Friends planning committee is working on targeting more students whose native language is Spanish in order to meet the requests of American students who desire more conversation practice in this language."

Dr. Scott Shinabargar, chair of the World Languages and Cultures department, said he also recognizes the way in which this new program has enriched the educational experience of Winthrop's students.

"Having witnessed the effect of communication with native speakers on the development of my students', and my own, language skills during the Study Abroad experience," he said, "I see this as an invaluable opportunity for our students to practice their language of choice in a personally motivated, real-life context, key to any significant level of language acquisition, as anyone in the field knows. Even without the language element, this program provides such a fantastic avenue for our American and international students alike for coming into contact with other cultures—a unique form of experiential learning that fulfills Winthrop's goal of graduating students who have truly acquired a world view, and are knowledgeable about and able to recognize the value of customs and ideas other than their own."

More than 90 students participated in the program's first semester. After registering for the program, the students met on a weekly basis.

Lowrey shared some feedback from these students:

- “I learned a lot of Chinese! I got to learn about Chinese culture, and I made a friend.”
- “For international students, it was really helpful in order to meet students and start a conversation easily. Moreover, we discover new tradition, culture and so on.”
- “I liked learning about a whole different culture that was not the same as mine, and overall making a new friend and sharing interesting things about ourselves.”

For more information on the program, please email conversationpartners@winthrop.edu.

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