

# Volunteers help foreign students adjust to UNL

From staff reports

Che-Yong Ting, an international student from Malaysia, clearly remembers arriving at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln a year ago. Overwhelmed with fear and confu-

sion, he walked into the annual international student orientation wondering if he would make it through the mass of people and paperwork that confronted him.

After making it through the orientation with the help of many volunteers, Ting, a junior international business

major, is back.

This time, instead of facing an intimidating mob, he is on the other side, taking students such as Krishnamurti Murniadi through the orientation.

Ting joins other volunteers, some of whom are international students like

himself and others who are American.

Some of the volunteers spend the first day of the weeklong international student orientation on the welcome team, greeting the some 250 foreign students who arrive throughout the week, as well as helping them with such tasks as obtaining student IDs, opening their e-mail accounts and getting bus passes. He also escorts students around campus.

Other volunteers have the important job of being peer advisers. These volunteers get to know the students better and help them adapt to their new environment through continuous contact during their first weeks at UNL.

Murniadi, an accounting major from Malaysia, had contact with both groups on Monday, as the volunteers paraded him from one station to the next, making sure all the necessary paperwork was filled out or accounted for.

That included making copies of passports and other important travel papers and filling out personal identification forms for the university.

"It's quite overwhelming, but it's necessary," Murniadi said.

Like Ting, many of the volunteers at the orientation were once in the same shoes as Murniadi, confused about where to go and what to do.

"When we came here last year, we suffered many difficulties," said Abhilash Singhai, a graduate student in computer science and a member of the welcome team.

Many volunteers remember the helpful advice or sympathy they received at the orientation and decided they wanted to give that back, said Shama Ali, coordinator for international student orientation.

"Most of them say when they came here they were helped," Ali said. "They want to help back."

But the new students are not the only ones on the receiving end of the

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SHAMA ALI  
coordinator for international student orientation

relationship. The volunteers meet students from around the world and learn about different cultures, Ting said.

They also have learned a skill that is essential for being in a place where languages from nearly 100 different countries collide.

"We're learning communication skills," said Pooja Khatri, a sophomore computer science major and member of the welcome team.

Ting said he has been successful in talking to most students. Some do present a challenge, though.

"So far, I haven't had much problem with language," he said. "If worse comes to worse, we talk really slow. If that doesn't work, we need to draw."

The skill of communicating is something that the volunteers have had to pick up themselves. However, they did go through one day of training to familiarize themselves with the stations each student had to go through and the tasks that each student had to complete.

The training emphasized a need for understanding and sensitivity to the students coming into a completely new situation. This was one of the goals of orientation the training emphasized, Ali said.

Ting thought that goal was partially reached by the time he was done talking to a few of his students on Monday. After being confronted with lost looks on each student's face at the beginning of each meeting, Ting soon helped the students relax. He also became one of the first friends and connections the students had at their new home.

"After everything settled down they talked, laughed and joked," Ting said.

The help and friendship the peer advisers provide will not end at the conclusion of orientation, but will continue throughout the semester as the advisers make themselves available for academic and personal counseling.

Activities throughout the year at International Affairs, such as weekly coffee, also will help the new students make contact with the network available to them. There they will be able to talk to other international students and peer advisers, who can answer questions or help students with problems.

But the contact the students have with the volunteers and peer advisers at the beginning of orientation is perhaps what is most appreciated by the students, who are searching for someone to ease their fears and make some sense out of all the confusion, Ali said.

"It's so wonderful to have someone to help you out."

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