

English program lets worlds collide

■ The conversation program pairs foreign and American students to trade cultures.

BY MARGARET BEHM

University of Nebraska-Lincoln students have the opportunity to learn all about another country without leaving campus.

The English Conversation Program is for foreign students who want to practice their English with American students.

Helen Chunping Xu is spending her first semester in the United States after leaving her homeland of China.

Chunping Xu said she joined the program to improve her speaking skills and learn about people in the United States.

"The language is a big problem," said Chunping Xu, a graduate student. "Sometimes it causes a big inconvenience. Sometimes it can be very embarrassing if I don't know how to express my ideas."

Two hundred-sixty students signed up for the program, said Piotrek Juskiewicz, a coordinator of the program. Every international student who wanted a partner got one.

Thursday night the participants gathered in the Nebraska Union to meet each other.

Brian Wandzilak said he was excited to participate in the program.

"I think I'll have a good time," said Wandzilak, a social science major. "If you want to learn about another culture, it's a good opportunity to do it."

American students are lucky to attend school with international students, Juskiewicz said.

"When I was going to college in Poland, all of us were Polish," said Juskiewicz, a graduate student in education. "You are really blessed here because you have access to students from other countries."

The partners spend only an hour a week together. But what they do during that hour is up to

them. The one hour a week shouldn't be a problem, Wandzilak said.

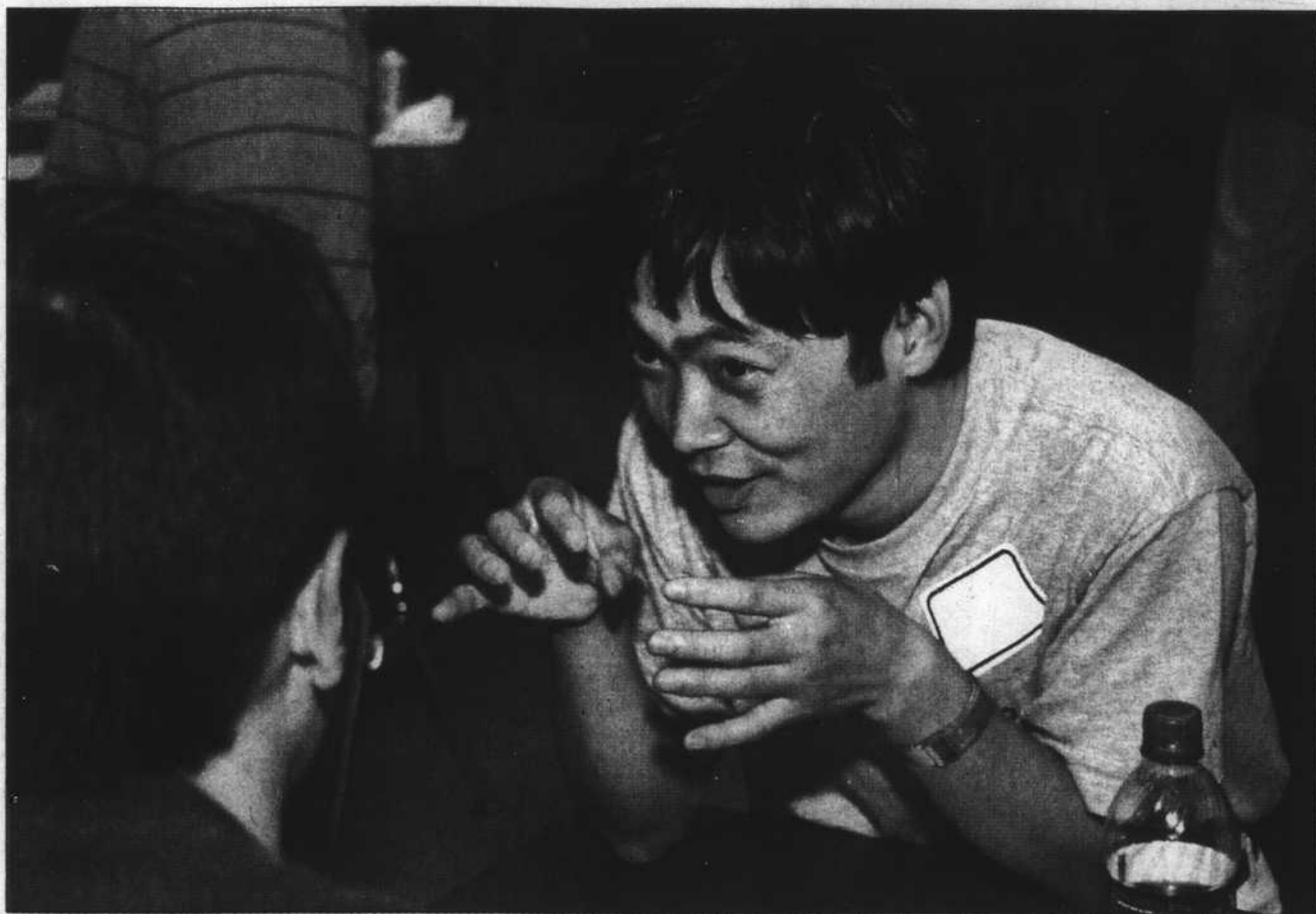
"It's easy; it's not a big commitment," he said. "You're basically just helping a person adjust to life here."

Chunping Xu said she was excited to participate in activities such as shopping with her partner.

"From this program, I can enrich my life," she said. "We can do many things together."

Juskiewicz said students should enjoy the program, if they participate for appropriate reasons. For example, he said the program is not a dating service.

"On the whole, students have had the right expectations," he said. "When people have the right expectations, it works out great."



Derek Lippincott/DN

Chinese international student Shengqiang Xu gets acquainted Thursday night with his new English conversation partner Matt Tritt, a senior biology major. English conversation partners will serve as mentors for the international students and will meet with them once a week.

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