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Conversation Partner Program Student Handbook

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Welcome to the Conversation Partner Program!

Program description

The Conversation Partner Program (CPP) is a peer program that promotes intercultural competence through virtual conversations on Zoom. The CPP pairs upper-level domestic students with incoming international students. Each pair schedules conversations via Zoom or another video-type social media, 1 hour per week, for 6 weeks in the summer. Participants are encouraged to practice language-learning activities provided by the English for Academic Purpose Center and reinforce topics included in the bi-weekly summer e-newsletter sent to all incoming international students through the Office of International Student Advising. Pairs will interact during the International Orientation and several times during the fall semester. For instance, the CPs will offer monthly group discussions on various topics of interest to first-year students, and these will be open to anyone wanting to engage in conversation practice. Dates for these events are provided below.

Program objectives and the goals

As a result of participation in the program, international students will:

- Improve speaking skills in terms of fluency and speech comprehensibility
- Improve listening comprehension skills
- Gain confidence in communicating in English
- Develop intercultural competence in their ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people of other cultures
- Gain a better understanding of college academic life, U.S. culture and Lafayette College

In order to make the most of the time available and to ensure we meet our goals and objectives to the best of our ability, please be aware of the deadline for submitting the Conversation Partner Program Application included in the following table. Applicants will be matched with a Conversation Partner within a week of the submission deadline.

Program Timeline

Time	Activity
6/7/24	Applications due
6/14/24	Conversation Partner assignment released
6/24~8/2/24	Summer one-on-one sessions*
8/14~8/21/24	International Orientation
Fall: September	Follow-up in-person one-on-one sessions*
Fall: September & October	Group Chat
Fall: November	Program closing dinner celebration

*Denotes mandatory participation

Expectations

Students who self-select into the program are committing to the weekly sessions outlined above, as well as the follow-up sessions in the fall. While attendance at the International Orientation and closing dinner are not mandatory, it is strongly encouraged. The International Orientation, besides being a super fun and fantastic way for new students to get acclimated to life in the U.S. and Lafayette that shouldn't be missed, also affords participants their first opportunity to finally meet their Conversation Partner face-to-face.

Conversation Tool—Zoom

You will be using a program called Zoom for your weekly online conversations. Here are the instructions on how to use Zoom:

1. Use one of the options listed in the email invitation (e.g., link or phone number)
 2. If joining from a computer, you will be prompted to download the Zoom application
Note: you do not need to create a Zoom account to join a meeting, just the Meeting ID found in your email
 3. Open the Zoom application and choose [Join]
 4. You may be prompted for the Meeting ID which can be found in the email invitation
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Program FAQs

What if I miss a week due to travel, illness or a personal commitment I cannot rearrange?

If possible, notify your partner in advance. During the following week you should find a second time to Skype so you will be able to stay on track. If missing becomes a pattern, you may be asked to withdraw from the program.

Are there any topics we are not permitted to discuss?

The Conversation Partners were hired to be a resource for you and are willing to answer most questions you might have on both sensitive and non-sensitive issues. Please use discretion and keep in mind that your Zoom conversations are being recorded so we can assess your improvement over the course of the summer. Topics you don't want recorded you can ask to take "off-line" after the session or you may direct those to your International Peer Advisors, who may be more equipped to handle questions pertaining to the experiences of international students living on a U.S. campus.

What is the difference between a Conversation Partner and an International Peer Advisor?

Conversation Partners work only with a select number of incoming students in a more academic capacity. The International Peer Advisor Team works with all first-year and transfer international students to help make the transition to living in the U.S. and Lafayette as easy as possible. They are also committed to supporting this group throughout the entire academic year.

What if I am uncomfortable with my Conversation Partner?

First determine if there is something culturally you have encountered for the first time and see if you are able to address it in your next conversation. If you are unable to resolve it on your own, please contact one of the Program Coordinators for assistance.

Conversation Content

Meeting Time Guidance

- While it is not mandatory that your meetings be held exactly at the same time each week, it is preferred since it's easier for both parties to keep your meetings if they are part of a routine. In the unlikely event that your partner doesn't "show up," please contact your partner to reschedule the session. If you are not able to contact him/her, inform the CPP directors as soon as possible (see front page for contact information).
- Since your meetings will be done using Zoom, you will need to have good internet connection. You don't need to set up a Zoom account for this program.
- During your meeting times, your partner will not be focusing on English errors or pronunciation unless these interfere with understanding. The goal is to allow your conversation to flow. While the English language can be the topic of conversations sometimes, it shouldn't be the only topic.
- **Don't be afraid to make mistakes or be embarrassed by your English pronunciation!** This will take time and patience to overcome. Take as much time as needed to ask or formulate an answer to a question.

Your first online meeting

During the first online meeting, you will:

- Take a pre-test
- Schedule your weekly meeting time
- Teach your partner how to say and spell your name and learn his/hers. Write it down. Practice saying the name several times. Don't be embarrassed to ask your partner to repeat as many times as it takes.
- Exchange contact information
- Discuss your expectations and any specific goals you have for your meetings (e.g., learning about local culture, pronunciation, vocabulary development)

Your last online meeting

During the last online meeting, you will:

- Take a post-test
- Ask last minute questions about International Orientation arrival day procedures

Follow-up in-person one-on-one meeting

During this meeting, you will:

- Describe your experiences thus far (e.g., areas of cultural differences, language challenges, unfamiliar phrases and expressions, etc.)
- Take a selfie together

Group chats

During these sessions, CPs will lead informal discussions on topics of interest to the student participants. All students interested in improving their speaking skills are welcome to attend.

Tips for Effective Communication

Requesting Clarification

Your partner will sometimes be using slang, idioms, acronyms, Lafayette lingo and phrasal verbs to help prepare you for having conversations on campus. Write down difficult expressions and talk about them with your partner.

- Ask for full repetition (e.g., “I’m sorry. Could you repeat that, please?”).
- Ask for partial repetition (e.g., “Could you repeat the part about X?” or “I didn’t get the last word.”).
- Ask for a paraphrase (e.g., “Could you say that again using different words?”).
- Ask for clarification (e.g., “Could you give an example?” or “Could you explain X?”)
- Ask for verification that you understood correctly (e.g., “In other words, do you mean X is...?”)

Giving Clarification

The opposite may occur and your partner might not understand what you are trying to communicate. In those cases:

- Listen closely and fulfill the request exactly (e.g., repeat if asked for repetition, etc.).
- If asked to repeat utterances, do so with slower and more careful enunciation.
- Be prepared to simplify, paraphrase, explain, visualize, and give examples.
- Ask whether your clarification was satisfactory.

Being Culturally Sensitive

- **Show interest** in your partner by giving your full attention to the conversation (e.g., don’t answer your cell phone or be otherwise distracted).
- **Participate and share the time.** Ask questions and give your point of view. If you tend to be a quiet person, push yourself to share your ideas and opinions.
- **Ask open-ended questions** (e.g., “Where did you grow up?” rather than “Did you grow up with giraffes and lions in the backyard?”). If you’re not sure whether a question is culturally appropriate, begin it by saying, “I hope it’s okay if I ask you ...” A sincere desire to know is almost always welcome.
- **Be sensitive of cultural difference.** Verbal and nonverbal communication styles differ between cultures (e.g., people express themselves directly or indirectly, make direct eye contact or don’t, use many gestures or few, consider different topics acceptable, etc.). Don’t draw conclusions about your partner’s personality based on cultural difference. Instead, make learning about cultural difference a regular part of your practice.

Language Learning Resources

English for Academic Purpose Center

The English for Academic Purposes (EAP) center at the Lafayette College aims to equip English learners with the reading, writing, and oral communication skills and the knowledge of US culture necessary to succeed in an English-speaking college setting. The EAP center is located on the 3rd floor of Scott Hall. There are many language learning resources available at this site:

<https://advising.lafayette.edu/eap/>