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Experts Suggest Ways to Help International Students Make Friends with American Students

This is the VOA Special English Education Report.

Last week, we told how some international students have few friends in their host country when they study overseas. One study in the United States found that thirty-eight percent of foreign students said they had no close American friends. Communications specialist Elisabeth Gareis studied more than four hundred fifty foreign students.

VOA Student Union blogger Jessica Stahl also investigated the issue. Her survey showed that seventy-five percent of foreign students said they have more than two American friends. But ten percent reported having no American friends.

Elisabeth Gareis teaches in the Department of Communication Studies at Baruch College in New York. She says efforts on how to improve relationships between the two groups of students have yet to be studied in detail. But she says these efforts should begin with the college or university, and that these institutions have been working harder.

ELISABETH GARIES: "Institutions should build an infrastructure that promotes contact. And they can do that by, for example, bonding activities at the beginning of the academic year."

She suggests taking walks, going on bicycle, field or camping trips, and attending parties, sporting events or film festivals. She says such activities should be held repeatedly to bring students together throughout the school term. Ms. Gareis also suggests that foreign students share housing with American students.

Michigan State University is known for its programs for international students. Last year, about five thousand nine hundred students from one hundred thirty three countries attended Michigan State. They made up perhaps twelve percent of the total university population. Peter Briggs directs the Office for International Students and Scholars at Michigan State. He says more foreign students are expected to register this week.

Many students and community members are trained and prepared to help foreign students. The volunteers assist new students as they complete government

requirements and find their academic advisors. Mr. Briggs says the volunteers also help answer the traditional questions of new people anywhere.

PETER BRIGGS: "Where do I get an ID (identification card)? Which is the best bank...What is my cell phone plan? How do I get a Social Security number or driver's license? That kind of information is shared both formally and informally as students advise other students. We're really supporting that network."

He says that if the new students make friends as they begin school, they will come to feel part of the life and traditions of the university.

And that's the VOA Special English Education Report, written by Jerilyn Watson. To read and listen to more stories for people learning English, go to voaspecialenglish.com. I'm Steve Ember.

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