

# Inter-link: foreign students learn "The American Way"

By Julie Seaman

When many of us think of going to a foreign country, we think of seeing historical sites, tasting new food and investigating the pace of life of the people who live there, including talking with them as much as possible. But we don't enroll in a French or German school and devote at least 8 or 9 hours a day to studying the language. Essentially, we think of touring the country, and then returning home.

idealism lingers from those years. He speaks with some feeling about how the world's

nations have become too inter-dependent to act independently. Inter-Link is a profit-making organization ("But so far we have no profits," says Mr. Shabaz), and they pay Guilford for use of the facilities here.

The assumption that Inter-Link students are all wealthy is not true. About one-third are "upper class," and the rest either have government scholarships or parents who are scraping and struggling to send them to an American school. Some of the

to become friends with American students. That should go without saying, but there is a tendency in all of us to avoid people who are different. It's easy to think, "Well, they wouldn't want to talk to me", as one passes by a group or even a lone foreign student. On the contrary, most Inter-Link students are enthusiastic about interacting with American students.

What are the Inter-Link students like? How do they feel about Guilford? What is so in-

teresting about them? Fabienne Dautricourt has some very flattering things to say about

now, Fabienne has mostly made friends with other Inter-Link students. "I really like the Inter-Link program because you have the opportunity to not only meet new people, but people from all over the world." Fabienne is just starting college, but she thinks about working with deaf children, or studying art at an academy.

Gesturing with a stuffed "snoopy" in one hand and a stuffed penguin in the other, Anibal Rodriguez spoke in a relaxed manner. Rodriguez is from Venezuela, where he's already been to college, and he studied there to prepare for

friends and not have them pay." To the surprised pleasure of his friends in America, Anibal occasionally carries on the custom of his country through treating them out to a disco.

It also seems that in Venezuela the men are more polite towards the women. "Sometimes in the cafeteria, a girl will go to open the door, and the guy won't care about opening it for her," he said.

Watanabe missed passing the TOEFL exam by only 4 points in Japan, so he came to the Inter-Link program at Guilford and plans to enroll at another Friends school, Earlham, for his last semester. Then he'll go into the banking business with his



photo by Randy Rosenthal

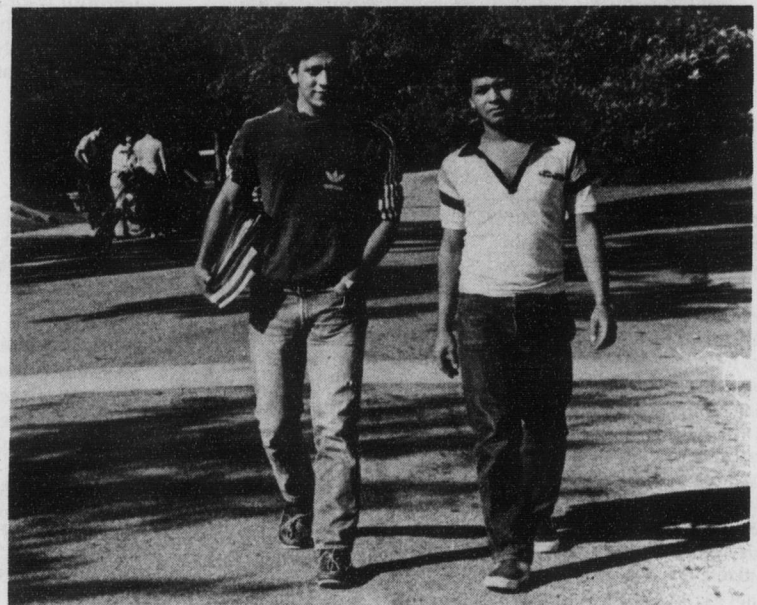


photo by Randy Rosenthal

There are 56 foreign students here on campus, however, who have committed themselves to not only exploring our society, but to joining it. The students in the Inter-Link program came to Guilford to get to know Americans and to become skilled enough in English to enroll in a regular curriculum program at an American college. In a sense, they are "starting over" with a whole new culture and language. The Inter-Link students are not "just looking."

Inter-Link Associates has programs to help business become established overseas as well as educational programs like the one at Guilford. When they decided to open a language and training center, they searched the southeast and Guilford stood out.

Mr. Ahad Shabaz, Inter-Link program director, explained that Guilford and Inter-Link had a shared philosophy of tolerance and attempting to understand other cultures and religions. "We call ourselves peace loving but we're not Quakers," said Mr. Shabaz, who worked for the Peace Corps for seven years before joining Inter-Link. His

students have already been to one or more years of college in their native country, and are preparing to be accepted at a U.S. graduate school. The others are fresh out of high school.

A typical day in the life of an Inter-Link student includes English classes for five hours. Along with the regular writing and conversation practice, they also learn survival skills which we take for granted, such as how to order a phone, act in a dorm, or find a college. The English ability levels vary among students; some foreign students come to the program knowing only half a dozen words, and others know English fairly well.

Passing the TOEFL is the main goal for all the students. "They really sweat over that," said Sue Siler, administrative assistant to the Inter-Link program on campus. The Toefle is an English proficiency standardized test that foreign students are required to pass in order to be admitted to a U.S. college.

Naturally, the students in the Inter-Link program here have a strong common bond with each other so they tend to move in groups from class to cafeteria to library. But the foreign students seem to be very willing and eager

Americans. She's from the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, and she says, "I could have gone to England to learn English, but I don't like England because of the people there. They are not close and friendly, they want to stay in their own groups; they won't share their experiences with other people. I think Americans are completely different."

Fabienne unabashedly said that people matter most to her, and when asked what she likes to do in her free time, she thought a moment and said, with certainty: "I like everything that's in relation to seeing people!" As of


aeronautical engineering. He mentioned that political problems often cause the schools to be closed at irregular times, and a lot of class is missed during the semester. When asked if there was anything about Guilford that had annoyed him, he said, "Ah...no, nothing", as if the subject wasn't even worth discussing. But he doesn't like the idea of having to pay when you go to a party. He talked about the kind of hospitality he was used to at the University of Venezuela; "I would buy the food, all kinds of drinks--gin, rum, beer--and invite all my

grandfather (Why aren't Americans close with their grandparents?" he asked, and explained that he lived in a large apartment in Tokyo with his grandparents, parents, and uncle.)

Most of us at Guilford are similar to each other in background, social class, and outlook. Talking with the Inter-Link students is a reminder that the way we do things isn't the only way there is. Having them here is also a compliment. They have left their native countries and rearranged their lives to link with us.

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