

Foreign students make a smooth transition with help of Elon's International Relations Club

Keren Rivas
Reporter

College life is full of exciting experiences.

It is not only a time spent in classes and long nights of studying in the library but also a time where long-lasting friendships are made.

For students coming from another country, however, college life can mean something more.

It means being hundreds of miles away from home, away from family and friends, while trying to adapt to a new culture and life-style without losing self-identity.

At Elon, several resources help international students adjust smoothly to this new cultural setting. The Intercultural Relations Club, or IRC, is an example.

"IRC is a social-friendly gathering place for international students," said senior Krishna Manek, the club's vice president. "Here students not only share the

same problems but also try to find solutions."

Since Elon is the first experience in a foreign academic institution for most international students, they may be unaware of basic things about campus life.

Elon invites international students to move in a week earlier than the rest of students so they can get a better feel of the place and of the faculty.

Fifty-five students from diverse ethnic backgrounds are enrolled at Elon. These students represent 41 countries from around the world, including Ukraine, India, Botswana, Dominican Republic, Brazil and Mexico.

"One of IRC's main goals is to be a fall-in cushion for international students to slow down the cultural shock," said Alex Molina, treasurer of the club.

That is exactly what IRC has been for freshman Raquel Corona. She arrived on campus in the fall from Mexico.

"I felt like I was the different one," she said.

IRC changed that feeling. "I can be more myself," said Corona.

She added that even though students are from different places, they have one thing in common: everyone is trying to adjust to a different culture.

Former IRC president Doris Molina agreed.

"IRC is a good support groups for those students who are away from home," she said. "Here you find people willing to hear you talk about how it is to be away from home."

The club not only provides a home away from home for international students, but also gives them the tools to integrate in the mainstream culture.

"We want them to feel comfortable and allow them to integrate their cultures as part of their identity," Alex said. "But we also want them to know there is more out there."



Photos by Kathleen Frey / Photographer

Freshman Raquel Corona talks to her friend, Rachel Baines. Corona, a native of Mexico, said the International Relations Club has made her college transition more comfortable.

IRC not only helps international students adjust to American culture. It also gives American students an opportunity to experience the international diversity on campus.

"Students tend to think IRC is only for international students, but it is not," Doris said.

She added that some students who have interest in going abroad have decided where to go based on their experiences with members from the club.

Though the number of American students who belong to IRC has increased in the last couple of years, the executive officers welcome new members.

Knowing people from different cultures is not only fun but, Manek explained, it may also be an excellent tool for future careers and an important skill to have since the world is getting more global each day.

International and American students can learn from each other, because even though "students are ambassadors of their countries, they also need to learn about other countries and cultures," Alex said. "It is a give-and-take situation."

To promote this interaction

among international and American students, IRC—together with the Isabella Canon Centre, the International Pavilion and the Spanish Center—organizes several activities on campus, such as International Week, which started this Tuesday.

"We have a local global community at Elon and we want students to know that," Alex said.

For more information about IRC contact Krishna Manek at kmanek@elon.edu or Alex Molina at amolina@elon.edu.

Contact Keren Rivas at pendulum@elon.edu or 278-7247.

Check out
upcoming
International
Week events:

[www.elon.edu/
academics/cannon](http://www.elon.edu/academics/cannon)



Jonathan Tellez, a native of Coasta Rica, and sisters Carolina and Alexandra Molina from the Dominican Republic share music and laughter during Tuesday's College Coffee.