

International students mix learning, culture

BY SARA YAWN
STAFF WRITER

The International Center's Conversation Partners Program is a mix of learning, friendship and culture that helps international students make the most of their experience in the United States.

The program pairs an international student or a student's spouse with an English speaker. The partners meet at least once a week to help improve the international student's understanding and proficiency of English.

"(It is) more than just conversation partners, it's friendship as well," said Linda Litteer, volunteer coordinator for the program and a volunteer herself.

Hisashi Sawaki, a graduate student from Japan, also emphasized the friendship between partners.

"It is not just a teacher-student relationship, it's like a real friend. It's a really good system," he said.

Sawaki's English has improved through the program, and he has learned about many American customs, he said.

Michel Brousset, a graduate student from Peru, said he hoped the program would allow him to "interact with people from American culture and see the different approaches."

Erin Ajygin, a senior international studies major from Charlotte, has volunteered as a partner for the past two years. Her Japanese partner from last year gen-

erally socialized with other Japanese people and spoke mostly Japanese with them. She felt she helped her partner to experience American culture, Ajygin said. She said she and her partner often met more than the required number of times and attended cultural events together.

Volunteers also get the satisfaction of working with the international students and introducing them to American culture, Litteer said.

Volunteers are assigned partners based on gender, age, common academic interests, availability and the volunteer's interest in a particular country or culture, Litteer said.

The program has grown from 12 vol-

unteers and students in November 1983 to a height of 150 students in 1992. This year, the International Center has paired 115 international students and scholars. They represent 35 countries, with the largest representations from mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, Japan, Germany and Thailand, said Diana Levy, International Center program coordinator.

Student volunteers comprise about 80 percent of the volunteer force for the program, with community members and staff also contributing their time, Levy said. "I'm really delighted with the enthusiasm of the volunteers and their willingness to befriend the international students and, in many cases, their families."

Supreme Court deflects school prayer decision

■ The court ruled against student-led prayer in public school classrooms.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court, dodging a grenade in the battle over school prayer, rejected Mississippi's bid Monday to let students lead group prayers in public school classrooms, at assemblies and sports events.

But confusion still reigns over just what the Constitution allows, and school officials nationwide remain caught in the middle of what the National School Boards Association calls "religious warfare."

The justices, acting without comment, let stand rulings that declared the 1994 Mississippi law a violation of the constitutionally required separation of church and state.

Monday's action was not a ruling on the merits of the Mississippi law and set no national precedent. But it was a defeat for Mississippi officials who had hoped to revive the state law.

The action also could be a setback for those outside Mississippi who argue that student-initiated prayers are constitutional in various public school settings.

"I hope lower courts won't read into the court's action any disapproval of legitimate student-initiated prayer and

worship, such as prayer clubs," said Jay Sekulow of the American Center for Law and Justice. "The way the (Mississippi) statute was worded was problematic at the outset," Sekulow said. "Official sanction was all over it."

The invalidated Mississippi law would have allowed "invocations, benedictions or nonsectarian, nonproselytizing student-initiated voluntary prayer" at "school-related student events."

T. Hunt Cole Jr., the special assistant attorney general who had filed the state's spurned high court appeal, said, "Our arguments on constitutional issues are over. There's nothing more we can do."

Republican leaders in Congress have proposed amending the Constitution to allow more opportunities for prayer in public schools. President Bill Clinton says such an amendment is unnecessary, but Republican Bob Dole supports it.

Since a 1962 Supreme Court ruling, organized school prayers have been barred from public schools. But that landmark case involved prayer sessions sponsored and led by public school officials.

The court, of course, never has banned individual prayer from public schools. Students remain free to pray before lunch, before tests or even during class if they do so in an unobtrusive way. The justices in 1992 strengthened the ban on officially sponsored worship in public schools by prohibiting clergy-led prayers at public school graduation ceremonies.

Lakota elder discusses struggle to hold on to heritage

BY KELLY O'BRIEN
STAFF WRITER

Lakota elder Doris Leader Charge spoke about the importance of retaining the Native American culture in her lecture, "A Native American Experience, Education and Forced Acculturation."

"People have done everything to assimilate our culture," Leader Charge told a full house in the Great Hall on Monday night. "I made up my mind they would never take it away."

Although experiences threatened to take away her culture, Leader Charge

held on to it, and now, as a teacher, passes it on to the next generation.

"Be proud you have a beautiful history, a wonderful culture," she tells her students. "After all, the United States used to belong to us."

In her lecture, Leader Charge described life on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota, where she was raised.

"It is stupid of people to assume that because I come from a reservation, I am poor," she said. "We have so much more; we have each other and our relatives."

Reservations do not house orphans or homeless people, she said. Other adults

may act as mothers or fathers to children without parents.

Her own life illustrates this tradition. Along with raising six of her own children, Leader Charge is currently caring for four children whose mother left the reservation. "We are beautiful people," she said. "Anyone who comes to our reservation has a home."


After attending a boarding school that punished her for speaking a "dirty language," threatened her culture and forced manual labor upon her, Leader Charge vowed never to return to school. "They don't know how bad they hurt us," she

said. "I wonder how we ever survived it."

Yet her determination to pass on her culture led her to earn a bachelor's degree. She is currently working on her master's degree.

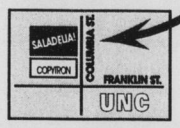
Leader Charge is an expert on Native American culture and taught at the Sinte Gleska University on her reservation. She currently holds the positions of chairwoman of the Lakota Studies Department and staff representative to the Board of Directors at the university.

The lecture was sponsored by the Carolina Union Activities Board and the Carolina Indian Circle.



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