

## Conversation Partner Program: Guidelines for American Students

### **WHAT IS THE POINT OF CONVERSATION PARTNERS?**

Our IEP students need one-on-one practice with conversational English with students approximately their age. They may have cultural questions, want to learn slang, swear words (haha!), have questions about social options, etc. that are not addressed in the IEP classroom. Other international students are most likely going to be interested in the same. Your partner may or may not be in the Intensive English Program.

### **DO I GET PAID?**

No, this is a volunteer thing. Please do not sign up if you do not have an hour a week to spare and can be somewhat flexible with times you have available. No one will be checking up on you unless we hear that there are problems.

### **DO I HAVE TO TUTOR MY STUDENT IN GRAMMAR?**

No! The point is to practice conversational skills. You should not help them with homework. Just talk!

### **HOW DO I SIGN UP?**

This is a first-sign-up, first-served program. You may sign up online at <https://uwm.edu/intensive-english-program/current-students/conversation-partner-program/>.

### **WHO IS ELIGIBLE TO SIGN UP?**

Priority is given to students taking classes at UWM. Some semesters, we have enough IEP/international students for most Americans to get a partner, but if not, you will be put on a waiting list. We get new students every four weeks, so if you are on a waiting list, you may get a student later in the semester.

### **WHAT IF I HAVE A SPECIFIC PREFERENCE?**

You may get a male or a female; please try to be open to whatever you get. If you sign up for “any” nationality, please do not dump your student if he/she is not what you had hoped. We have VERY FEW Spanish-speaking IEP/international students. Also, this is not a dating service!

### **HOW DO I KNOW IF I WILL GET A PARTNER?**

You will receive an email the second or third week of classes with an invitation to the orientation pizza party. NOTE: if you don't receive one, that means we don't have a partner for you at this time and you will be on the waiting list.

### **WHAT DO I DO AFTER I FIND OUT I HAVE A PARTNER?**

1. **FIRST**, you should attend the pizza party to meet your partner. If one of you cannot attend, you will receive an email with your partner's information after the orientation. You should email the international student and suggest some times you are free to meet, starting the week after you get your partner's contact information. (It should be when the international student does not have classes, or weekends.)  
**NOTE: EMAIL YOUR PARTNER DIRECTLY. Do not go through the ELA office to contact your partner.**
2. **NEXT**, you suggest a place to meet. Be specific. (E.g. The Grind Coffee Shop in the Union.)
3. **FINALLY**, if you have not met at the orientation, describe yourself and/or email a picture. (E.g. “I have silver glasses, a green jacket, a shaved head, a tattoo of a dragon on my cheek,” etc.)
4. **THEN**, the IEP student emails you back and chooses a good time to meet for him/her. The IEP student should describe him/herself and maybe send a picture. You can Facebook friend each other if you want.
5. **AND THEN YOU MEET!**



## **PLEASE, BE PATIENT!**

We tell our students that it is considered rude in American culture to agree to meet someone and then not go there. Initially, sometimes connections are missed; the IEP/international student confuses Tuesday and Thursday, doesn't know your gender, thinks you don't look like what he/she imagined, is late, forgets, etc. Please be patient! It will be worth the initial frustration.

## **WHY CAN'T I JUST CALL MY PARTNER?**

Your partner may have trouble understanding spoken English on the phone in the beginning.

## **WHAT IF I DON'T HEAR FROM MY PARTNER?**

1. Check your SPAM or JUNK folder. Sometimes IEP students' emails don't make it past the SPAM filter.
2. Then, try to email your partner three different times.
3. If that doesn't work, try the phone number, if given.
4. If nothing works and you have tried for a week, email the English Language Academy at [el-academy@uwm.edu](mailto:el-academy@uwm.edu) and explain the issue. They'll try to help!

## **HOW OFTEN SHOULD I MEET MY PARTNER?**

You should meet once a week for an hour. You will probably stop meeting about two or three weeks before the end of the semester.

## **WHAT IF MY PARTNER WANTS TO SPEND A LOT MORE TIME WITH ME THAN I HAVE AVAILABLE?**

It is up to you to make boundaries. Some IEP/international students are lonely, homesick, and looking for a friend. Your obligation is to help them practice speaking English an hour a week. It is up to you to figure out if both of you have time for more than this, but do not feel pressured.

## **HOW DO I COMMUNICATE WITH MY PARTNER?**

If you are learning the international student's language, you may choose to spend half the time speaking English and half the time speaking the international student's language.

If you are not learning the international student's language, you will spend the whole time speaking English. Half the time, you might talk about the international student's culture, and half the time you could talk about American culture.

## **WHAT SHOULD I TALK ABOUT?**

You could ask your partner questions about his/her family, the weather, his/her major, his/her friends, university, culture, language, favorite music and movies, etc.

**If you cannot continue for any reason, please let your partner and the English Language Academy know.**

Please contact the English Language Academy right away if there are any problems. [el-academy@uwm.edu](mailto:el-academy@uwm.edu)

**Thank you for your participation in this program. We hope you will enjoy the experience.**