International Connection Program: Allie Flett '14 and Sam Kristen Can '17

Furman University

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Traveling away from home for the first time without your parents is daunting. Traveling 8,980 miles to a country where the nuances of the language and the culture escape you, is especially intimidating. So it was with trepidation that Sam Kristen Can '17 boarded a plane from Vietnam to Greenville, to spend four years at a school where there were at most 40 other students like her.

Enter Allie Flett '14, a Furman senior and an American from Knoxville, Tennessee, who was interested in participating in the newly created International Connection Program, whose sole purpose is to help incoming foreign exchange students acclimate to their new country and new university.

What drew you to this program?

Allie: I guess because I had traveled abroad and knew what it was like. So, when they sent the email asking people who'd studied abroad if they were interested, I applied and got matched with Sam.

Sam: We had both been to Australia. Allie to study and I to visit. We both loved Sydney.

What kind of hard times?

Sam: The most difficult thing to find here is friendship. Sometimes I don't know when to say "hi"—I want friends, not acquaintances. You have to make extra effort. But then, if you reach out too much, people might think you're clingy. It's tricky.

Are you two close?

Both girls: Yes.

Sam: There are many people in the program who are not as close as we are.

Allie: I help her with her school work.

What else do you help her with?

Sam: I have a list on my phone—things to ask Allie.

Allie: That's funny. I didn't know that.

Sam: I have things on my list like: 

What are your favorite snacks?
Tell me about pretzels and Doritos. Or pretzels with peanut butter. Is it ok to talk about myself all the time? When can I talk to people about myself and when do I listen? I don’t know many American customs, so Allie helps with that.

So I guess it’s hard to make friends.

Allie: I can see how it would be hard to make friends internationally. It’s hard to merge the two groups.

Sam: I have made friends. But it’s hard to break out of the international bubble. It just is. My closest friend came from the international students’ orientation. But I also met Allie. And I’m more confident because of it. I’m grateful for Allie.

Allie: I’m grateful for you, too.

#WhyFurmanMatters

Sam: It’s providing an excellent education for me. It also matters because of the relationships between professors and students. I also chose Furman because of the environment. It’s beautiful.

Allie: Furman provides international students with the opportunity to study abroad. By being at Furman, I’ve gotten to go abroad. And that experience has been invaluable.

38 international students attended Furman in 2009

108 international students currently attend Furman

53 nationalities represented in the student body

35 international students in the 2013 freshman class