

# Conversation Partners

## Program Handbook



UNIVERSITY of  
DENVER

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INTERNATIONALIZATION  
English Language Center

# Thank you for your participation in Conversation Partners!

This handbook will help you and your partner get started. The handbook gives information on the program and share useful guidelines that will make for a positive experience with the program.

My Partner's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

My Partner's Contact Information: \_\_\_\_\_

What days and times work best for my partner to meet?

Days of week: \_\_\_\_\_

Time of day: \_\_\_\_\_

## Conversation Partners Program Overview

The English Language Center (ELC) is a place where students from all over the world come to learn and improve their English. In order to successfully learn a second language, we encourage our students to get real-life practice with native speakers of the language. Our Conversation Partners program is available to all ELC students who wish to further develop their English listening, speaking and conversational skills, as well as gain more cultural awareness. DU community members not associated with the ELC who wish to improve their English are also welcome to participate.

For native English speakers, the Conversation Partner Program is a great way to learn about other cultures and begin networking internationally while gaining resume-building experience. It is also a great way to prepare before a study abroad experience or upon returning back to the US.

In this program, native English speakers are matched one-on-one (unless otherwise requested) with students wanting to improve their English. Specific requests regarding language and gender are accommodated as much as possible. Partners are expected to meet for 1-2 hours each week during each quarter. Participation in the program is voluntary but we request a one-quarter commitment at minimum.

### What are the expectations of a Conversation Partner?

- By applying to the Conversation Partner Program, **you are committing to meet with your conversation partner for at least one hour each week** for the duration of the quarter. If for any reason, you are unable to fulfill this commitment, you must contact the Program Manager as soon as possible so that your partner can be reassigned.
- You are expected to meet with your partner throughout the quarter for which you applied.
- You will meet with your partner at a time and location that is mutually convenient. If, for some reason, you must cancel or reschedule your meeting, it is your responsibility to contact your partner to inform them.
- You are expected to speak in English with your partner.
- Being a conversation partner is a give-and-take process. Both parties are responsible for facilitating and maintaining conversations during meetings.
- You are expected to follow the policies in the Student Code of Conduct.

Contact the Program Manager if any problems develop during your meetings:

Niko Kirby  
Program Manager of Student Engagement  
English Language Center  
[Niko.Kirby@du.edu](mailto:Niko.Kirby@du.edu)  
(303) 871-7513

### **What do I do at the first meeting?**

- For your first meeting, it may be preferable to meet on-campus so that both you and your partner can feel comfortable and familiar with your surroundings. Often, international students do not have their own vehicle, so discuss transportation before choosing a location. It is up to the two of you to decide where and when you are most comfortable meeting.
- Learn to pronounce one another's names. When you first meet your partner, you may find yourself having trouble pronouncing their name, and you may even find that they have difficulty pronouncing your name. Teach your partner how to say and spell your name and ask your partner to help you say and spell their name. Write it down. Practice saying the name several times. Do not be embarrassed to ask your partner to repeat it as many times as it takes. Your partner should not feel the need to shorten or change his or her name to make it easier for you to say.
- Discuss the best method for contacting one another (email, phone, text, social media, etc.) in the case that you must cancel your scheduled meeting. Bring your calendar and discuss your work and school schedules. Set up a regular day and time to meet (optional).
- Do what you normally do when getting to know someone. International students have come to school in the United States to learn more about American culture, so they expect you to act and behave according to your own customs. Keep in mind that they are in the process of learning English, so be patient and friendly and you will put your conversation partner at ease.

### **Helpful Hints for Successful Conversation Partnerships**

- As you learn to communicate across cultures, you may find yourself outside of your comfort zone at times. This is part of the learning process. You may find that your conversation partner has different expectations for how men and women should interact, for the amount of personal space between the two of you (Americans prefer more personal space than many other cultures), or for what topics are considered appropriate. This is an opportunity to open up discussion about the differences and similarities in norms and values of your respective cultures.
- If you are unsure if something is culturally appropriate to discuss; ask. A sincere interest is usually appreciated. You can begin by saying, "I hope it's okay if I ask you..."
- Speak at a natural pace. If you are a fast-talker, slow down a bit, otherwise, speak at your normal pace. If you are asked to repeat something, repeat your exact words. Rephrase if there is still a misunderstanding.
- Allow for pause time. Americans can become uncomfortable after a pause time of only a few seconds, but pause time varies across cultures. Be patient and give your partner ample time to collect their thoughts and respond.
- Limit your use of slang. International students love to learn new slang, but be sure to limit your use until you are confident that your partner understands what you are saying.
- Do not overcorrect your Conversation Partner when they make mistakes. Allow your partner to finish speaking and consider comprehension over perfection. Overcorrecting can hinder the development of fluency, so only correct errors that block communication.

- Avoid correcting homework. This will take away from time developing conversation skills. If you are willing to do this for your partner, try to do it before or after your allotted conversation time.
- Contact the Program Manager if you would like more tips or suggestions on how to best communicate with your conversation partner.

### **Be Respectful**

- If problems with your partnership develop and/or you are unwilling or unable to continue meeting with your partner, contact the Program Manager immediately so that your partner can be re-paired.
- Do not use your time with your Conversation Partner to promote a personal, political, or religious agenda.
- Do not use the Conversation Partner Program as a dating service.
- As you and your partner develop trust, you may find them confiding in you about serious problems (e.g. medical, legal, landlord, or family) which you may not be qualified to handle. If this occurs, you can express your compassion, but then refer your partner to proper university services (CAPE, Health and Counseling Center, etc.) or contact the Program Manager. Do not attempt to provide counseling services for your partner.
- Do not use sexually explicit and/or harassing behavior, language, or overtures. If you feel uncomfortable with a topic of conversation—for whatever reason—tell your partner that you'd rather discuss something else or simply discontinue the session. Contact the Program Manager right away. Of course, in an emergency situation, contact Denver police or call 911.