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## Illinois Wesleyan First-Years Engage in Community-Building

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## Illinois Wesleyan First-Years Engage in Community-Building

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Though the Class of 2012 is officially welcomed to campus on Tuesday, Aug. 19, some Illinois Wesleyan University first-years have already begun the process of immersing themselves in the IWU and Bloomington-Normal communities. 35 incoming international students from 12 countries met in the “global lounge” Friday, Aug. 15. The following day, 36 ALANA (African-American, Latino American, Asian American, and Native American) students arrived on campus. The **International Student Orientation** and the **ALANA Student Orientation** are voluntary programs designed to enhance the six-day “**Turning Titan: New Student Orientation**” program for all incoming students.

The International Student Orientation is meant to help incoming first-years adjust to the practicalities of living in the United States. Participants were offered language tutors, information technology sessions and faculty panels explaining Illinois Wesleyan academic expectations. Students also spent time socializing through activities such as shopping and bowling. “The most important part of what this orientation does is to give these students a chance to create their own community before joining 500 or more students,” said Stacey Shimizu, director of the international office.

According to International Student Advisor Reenie Bradley, the orientation program would not be the same without the help of returning international students, particularly the Office’s three student assistants. “My assistants want to give back to the next group, and that is what I find most rewarding – to see the older students pay it forward to the next group. We truly have a global village, with all our international students helping each other, no matter what their culture,” said Bradley. Members of the Bloomington-Normal community, along with the University’s faculty and staff, also joined the global village this year, inviting groups of two to eight students over for home-cooked meals. “The dinners were a really special way to welcome the students into the community, and we hope that involvement continues to grow next year,” said Bradley.

The ALANA Student Orientation also relied upon help from the community to make their program successful. Through “mentoring mixers,” participating students were individually paired with Bloomington-Normal minority professionals. Mentors committed to making meaningful contact with their students once a month, through exchanging e-mails or inviting them to events within the community that speak to shared cultures. Participants also met with a panel of minority faculty and returning students.

“It’s affirming for students to see themselves reflected in campus and community members,” Director of Multicultural Student Affairs Nicole Brown-Davis said. “That’s why our ALANA Leaders are so valuable. They bring credibility of experience. After participating in the Multicultural Office’s Summer Enrichment Program, they are well-trained to offer support to students.” Seven ALANA Leaders facilitated the orientation program this year.

“The ALANA orientation is not about ‘playing catch-up,’” said Brown-Davis. “Instead, the goal is to help students make sense of campus resources and to empower them to ask the sophisticated questions when it comes to getting the most out of their Illinois Wesleyan educations.”

For additional information about ALANA Student Orientation, contact Brown-Davis at (309) 556-3412. For more about International Student Orientation, contact Shimizu at (309) 556-3190.

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