

# I AM A BUDDY PROGRAM GUIDE

2023-2024



The **I am a Buddy program** has the primary purpose of welcoming newly admitted international students and assisting them upon arrival to the Rio Grande Valley. The assigned Buddies are already familiar with the student life and are looking forward to helping international students get comfortable and acquainted with our campus and the surrounding community. This program provides an excellent opportunity to meet, socialize, and create networks with students and future professionals from all over the world.

# Introduction

At International Admissions and Student Services, we work to provide students with diverse cultural experiences and recognize their role in creating an inclusive climate within the campus community. Therefore, this program encourages mutual interaction between students regardless of where they are from by providing a mutual connection. Many of these relationships have proven to be enriching and longstanding. The “I Am A Buddy Program” ultimately aspires to raise cultural awareness within the campus community and promote cultural competency beyond the college experience..

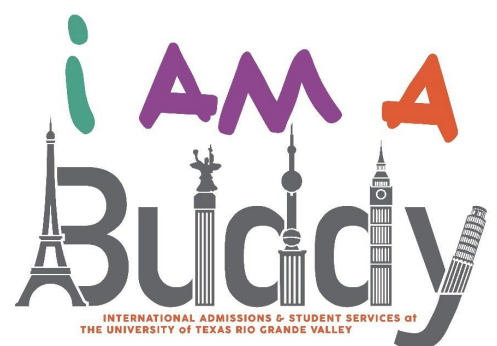
**Buddy** - is a returning UTRGV international or domestic student.

**Student** - is a new or transfer UTRGV international student.




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*Through the “I am Buddy” program, new international students are matched with current students during their first semester before starting their studies at UTRGV*



# Roles and Expectations

All current UTRGV international and domestic students are eligible to apply for this scholarship opportunity. As a Buddy, you will be assigned to a new/transfer international student to guide and mentor them as they integrate into the UTRGV community and life in the Rio Grande Valley. Buddies that meet the scholarship requirements and are selected by the committee will receive a scholarship as an award for participating in the program.



**Through the "I am Buddy" program, we expect the following from the Buddy and the Student:**

- Actively interact with other students from different cultural backgrounds by providing a safe and open space for cultural exchange.
- Build a supportive community for the transition of new international undergraduate students on campus.
- Provide initiatives that create a safer and more inclusive campus community changing campus climate and clearing out cultural barriers.
- Build cultural competency that is essential to be a global citizen.
- Challenge themselves to make a personal investment in supporting others regardless of cultural differences.
- Improve interpersonal, cross-cultural communication skills being exposed to a culturally diverse environment.
- Develop respect for one another from different cultural, resolving misunderstandings, and expanding social knowledge.

# I Am A Buddy Program: Do's and Don'ts for a Buddy



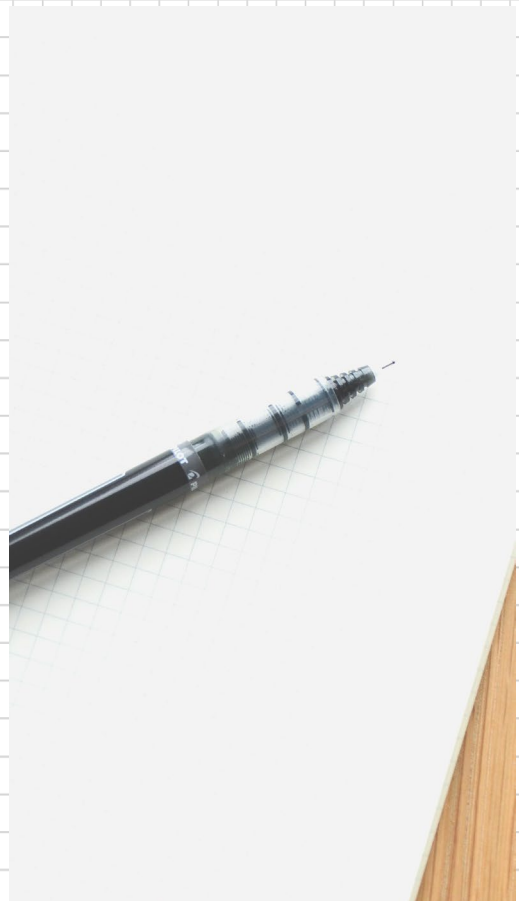
## DOs

- Take the lead in the Buddy-Student connection.
- Make an effort to build and maintain the Buddy-Student connection throughout the semester.
- Reach out to your assigned Student(s).
- Let your Student know if you feel uncomfortable talking about specific topics.
- Reply to your Student's email/text within three days.
- Reach out to the I Am A Buddy Program Coordinator if you have any questions or concerns.



## DON'Ts

- Assume your Student knows everything.
- Provide immigration advice to your Student.
- Think your Student does not need your support and help; you should care for each other in this program.
- End the Buddy-Student relationship without letting the I Am A Buddy Program Coordinator know.





# Definition of a Good Buddy - Student Connection



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*What does a successful  
Buddy - Student  
Connection look like?*

- Buddy is willing to offer helpful advice/suggestions and share experiences with Students.
- Both, Buddy-Student, feel comfortable sharing ideas.
- Buddy-Student is responsive to communication.
- Buddy-Student attends on-campus/community events or other social events together.
- Both the Buddy-Student think this connection relationship fulfills their needs and expectations.

# What Can a Student Expect from their Buddy?



## *Obtain guidance*

- ◆ Answer questions about campus life (e.g., Campus connector, building location, campus open hours, etc.).
- ◆ Answer some of the basic academic-related questions like how to check the registration date, etc.
- ◆ Answer some of the basic on campus job-seeking questions.
- ◆ Learn more about campus and community resources available to you as a UTRGV student.



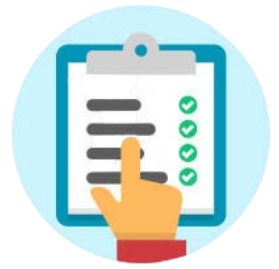
## *Engage in cross-cultural learning opportunities*

- ◆ Create a friendly and respectful relationship with their Buddy.
- ◆ Connect with the international and domestic student community.
- ◆ Engage in cross-cultural learning opportunities:
  - Learning new cultures
  - Gaining new language experiences
  - Attend on campus events

## *Learn about fun events from IASS throughout the whole academic year*

- ◆ International Meet & Eat
- ◆ International Education Week
- ◆ Thanksgiving
- ◆ Breakfast of Champions
- ◆ Workshops

# Requirements for Buddies



## **CHECK-IN FROM I AM A BUDDY PROGRAM COORDINATOR**

- ◆ Being able to reach to the I Am A Buddy Program Coordinator and give feedback about the program
- ◆ Having conversations about the relationship with

## **CHECK-IN WITH I AM A BUDDY PROGRAM COORDINATOR DURING ORIENTATION**

- ◆ To get the best out of the program and to fulfill your expectation, Buddies should also put an effort to interact with Students and being responsive

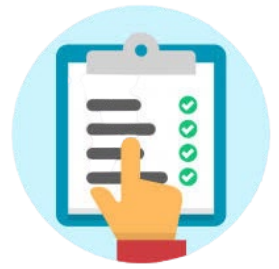
## **CONTACT YOUR ASSIGNED STUDENT**

- ◆ As a Buddy, you must establish contact with the new/transfer International Student at least twice before they arrive at UTRGV (i.e., contact student in July for the fall, contact student in December for the spring semester). You can reach out to the new/transfer international Student by email, social media, Skype, Facetime, or any platform that works best for you and the Student.

## **CHECK-IN DURING THE SEMESTER**

- ◆ You should contact your Student at least four times during the semester, except for the summer sessions, where you will be required to contact the Student twice per summer session. The first check-in with the Student should be to see how they are acclimating to campus life. The follow-up communication should be an invitation to attend a university-sponsored or community event to expose the Student to culture and entertainment. Events should be selected based on the information provided to you in the Student's Interest Survey to match the Student preferences

# Requirements for Buddies



## **COMPLETE MEETING FORMS SENT BY THE I AM A BUDDY PROGRAM COORDINATOR**

- ◆ Each month, you should report your communication/meetings with your Student on the form provided by IASS to follow the program and scholarship requirements. The form is created to make sure our students get the help they need from their Buddies and the program is being effective.
- ◆ Please use the form provided to share their experience during the meeting. This way, the I Am A Buddy Program Coordinator can help you whenever you may need additional help, guidance or if you encounter problems. If an issue arises with your Student, please contact IASS immediately at [international@utrgv.edu](mailto:international@utrgv.edu) for guidance or intervention.

## **COMPLETE POST PROGRAM SURVEY SENT OUT BY I AM A BUDDY PROGRAM COORDINATOR**

- ◆ We highly recommend buddies complete the post-program survey sent out by I Am A Buddy Program Coordinator. Your feedback and suggestions will help us improve to provide a satisfactory experience to our students and maintain this program effectively and actively.



# HOW TO KICK-OFF THE STUDENT CONNECTION

## *The first interaction with you Student:*

- ◆ Send the first email to your Student.
  - An email template is provided at the end of this guide.
- ◆ Read through the I Am A Buddy Program Buddy Guide and clearly understand the guidelines, commitments, and responsibilities.
  - Please do not hesitate to email us if you have questions or concerns
- ◆ Respond to your students' emails or texts within 72 hours.
- ◆ Keep being responsive to communications.

## *During your first meeting with your Student:*

- ◆ Clearly define the relationship to meet the expectation of both Buddies and Student.
  - Please feel free to use the Buddy Agreement Contract as a mutual agreement to manage the connection.
- ◆ Complete the Action Plan together.
  - Take time to discuss each other's needs, goals, and time commitment to the program.
- ◆ Take a photo with your assigned student(s) for the I Am A Buddy Program website! You can take a photo in person but currently due to COVID-19 safety measures, you can take a screenshot of your facetime via your cell phone or zoom meeting.

# HAVE ISSUES WITH YOUR ASSIGNED STUDENT?

Troubles with  
contacting your  
students?

Troubles with  
obtaining a response  
from your student  
within 3 business  
days?

Troubles with  
not establishing  
communication due  
to specific barriers?

Troubles with feeling  
uncomfortable with  
your assigned  
Student(s)?

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IF YOU HAVE ANY TROUBLE WITH YOUR STUDENT(S), PLEASE CONTACT US  
IMMEDIATELY AT [IINTERNATIONAL@UTRGV.EDU](mailto:IINTERNATIONAL@UTRGV.EDU) TO  
ADDRESS THE ISSUES.

YOU MAY USE THE EMAIL TEMPLATES PROVIDED AT THE END OF THIS  
GUIDE. THE I AM A BUDDY PROGRAM COORDINATOR WILL ASSIST YOU  
WITH TIPS ON HOW TO ESTABLISH AN EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION WITH  
YOUR STUDENT(S).

# Email Schedule



The following schedule will detail the emails that you will be required to send out to your Students and the dates they will be sending them according to the semester that you have been selected for:

<b>Emails</b>	<b>Spring</b>	<b>Summer 1</b>	<b>Summer 2</b>	<b>Fall</b>
- Introduction	December	May	June	July
- Follow-up 1	January	June	July	August
- Follow-up 2	February	July	August	September
- Follow-up 3	March	N/A	N/A	October
- Follow-up 4	April	N/A	N/A	November
- Follow-up 5	May	N/A	N/A	December

# Email Template

Things to write in your email:

- Introduce yourself (major, minor, hobbies, fun fact, favorite food, country, or language).
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- Talk about why you joined I Am A Buddy Program, what your expectations are, and what makes you excited about this program.
- Talk about the method of communication that would work the best for you.
- Ending sentence

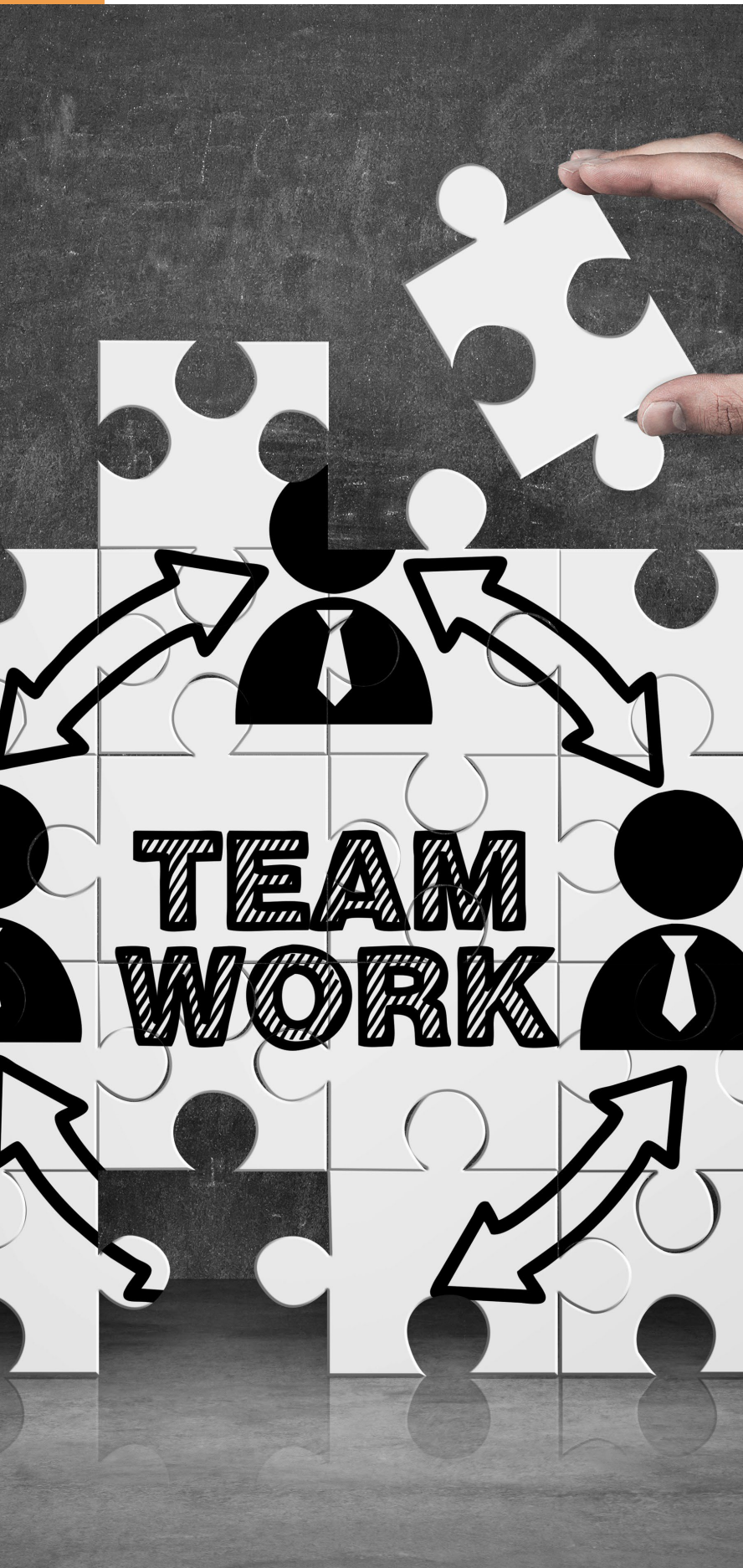
## Example

Hello Yan,

My name is Yvonne, and I am very excited to be your Buddy for this year! I am pursuing my Master's in Business Administration. Some of my hobbies are watching movies and traveling. I joined the I Am A Buddy Program because I wanted to find a community on campus and learn more about cultures. And I am excited to talk about what to do on campus, which events we can go to, and answering questions that you may have.

Let me know what form of communication you would prefer for us to be in contact with. I am looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Best,  
Yvonne



## ISSUE REPORT TO I AM A BUDDY PROGRAM COORDINATOR

### *Things to write in your email:*

- Your name
- What troubles you are having with your Student(s)
- Any questions you have for the I Am A Buddy Program Coordinator

Hi, I Am A Buddy Program Coordinator,

My name is Pear, and my Student has not responded to my email in the past week. Could you check up on my Student and tell me what I could do in the future? Thank you for your hard work.

Best wishes,  
Pear



# Required Forms



**Student Interest Survey -  
Completed by the new  
Student**

**Student Satisfaction  
Survey - Completed by the  
new Student**

**Post-Program Survey -  
Completed by the Buddy**

**Meeting Forms -  
Completed by the Buddy**

## I AM A BUDDY AGREEMENT FORM

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I have read and understood the expectations outlined in this guide. I will do my best to contribute to the effectiveness of the I am A Buddy Program. I am aware that it is my responsibility to sustain communication with my assigned students, set up meeting times, and record these interactions in the provided log. As a qualified buddy, I need to fulfill all the required responsibilities listed in this guide.

I will participate in activities, programs, and workshops related to this program to the best of my ability. I will refrain from behavior that endangers the safety and wellbeing of my assigned students or fellow buddies. If I am unable or unwilling to adhere to the policy therein, I understand that I will be asked to leave the program. I will uphold and fulfill the mission of the I am A Buddy Program, and abide by the expectations of me held by the I Am A Buddy Program board and the people involved in the program as a whole.

I will not use any offensive language or content with on my Student(s) interactions. Also, I will show complete respect towards other people-s cultures, traditions, and or customs by appreciating and understanding.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Buddy Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Buddy Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Please list any concerns related to the program below.