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KANA HASHIZUME'S DRASTIC IMPROVEMENT IN ENGLISH COMMUNICATION THROUGH ISF

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By Bianca Sa

People often ask me what the best part about being an international student is, and I never have one specific answer: the freedom and independence to live by myself, being immersed in a culture other than my own, and living the dream of studying abroad all make my experience as an international student so unique. But perhaps the part I love the most is meeting people from all over the world. And with approximately 750 international students from over 70 different countries on their campus, Lindenwood could not be a better place to experience such diversity in student body and learning.

Language barrier is often the biggest stumbling block international students face when starting their college experience. Kana Hashizume, a Japanese freshman at Lindenwood, is one of several students who experienced difficulties in speaking English upon arrival in America. From the very first time I met her to now, a year and a half later, she has improved her language skills greatly. I feel honored and beyond excited to share Hashizume's success story and highlight an amazing student organization that brought us closer together and successfully helped her improve her English communication skills.

Her first semester at the university was the most challenging: "I struggled with English, especially speaking the most. I didn't have a lot of vocabulary, and I was not used to speaking English.... I had a roommate, and it was difficult to communicate with her," Hashizume says. Wanting to describe her feelings and not being able to do so was an obstacle that not only impacted her ability to make friends, but also affected her academic success. Nonetheless, Hashizume didn't let discouragement conquer her: she made sure she made friends who didn't speak her native language and always sat in the front row in class, answering her professor's questions as much as possible. Hashizume also credits ISF's positive impact in helping her to overcome language difficulties.

ISF, or International Student Fellowship, celebrates and supports the unique diversity of Lindenwood's student body. The core of this group is the international student population, but it draws its vitality and energy from everyone open to growing with them,

including local community members. Ava Schaeffer, who has volunteered with ISF since 2006, was able to give me insightful information about the organization's mission and drive to serve international students and help them be academically successful:

“College years are the perfect time to research and consider new ideas both inside and outside the classroom, resulting in informed life decisions. At the same time ISF encourages its members to engage in multi-generational and multi-cultural dialogue to sharpen their worldviews in several different ways, it also helps students to improve their English skills through several exciting and fun activities. Games, guided dialogues, dinner conversation at home groups, sightseeing trips, and one-on-one conversations with English language learners who want to improve comprehension, pronunciation, and vocabulary are some of them.”

Hashizume reflects on how valuable ISF encounters were for her speaking improvement: “Before the pandemic, I had a discussion time at every ISF dinner. Every topic was difficult for me, but I tried to say something all the time.” Fighting against discomfort and frustration has allowed Hashizume to come a long way. Her drive and commitment to become a better English speaker never ceases to amaze me. It is incredible to talk about Hashizume, for I still remember that when we first met, the only way we could understand each other was through mimics. Hashizume's story is a constant reminder for me to not give up on the things I want to achieve. The amazing support system that ISF provides not only enables genuine friendships to be established; it also