

—Cal Sutliff.

ISS volunteer extends a greeting—"To provide a welcome to our country for more than 13,000 arriving students at two dozen ports of entry is no small undertaking."

AS NATIONS BECOME NEIGHBORS—5

UNOFFICIAL AMBASSADORS

The International Student Service (ISS) is a volunteer welcoming agency for foreign students arriving in this country. Over the past twenty years, it has grown from a small operation with a tiny staff and a handful of volunteers meeting 200 to 300 foreign students a year, to today's expanded and diversified operation handling programs for several thousand visitors.

ISS, whose corporate body is the National Board of YMCAs, is financed by contributions from the International Committee of YMCAs, church boards, and universities, among others. A portion of the World Day of Prayer offering is allocated to ISS, and foundations have financed the experimental stages of such programs as VISIT.

By CAL SUTLIFF, *Mass Media Director for the International Committee of YMCAs.*

THE YOUNG Indian student hesitated as he walked through the gate at Kennedy International Airport and into the sea of foreign-looking faces. This was his first trip out of India and the unfolding of a long awaited dream: to be a student in the United States. Taking a deep breath, he strode into the public health area and presented his vaccination certificate and X-ray.

An inspector mounted the X-ray in the illuminated frame, and glanced about. "Have you ever had tuberculosis?" the student was asked. "No, sir," he

replied, aware that the man's tone was severe.

Within an hour he found himself at the U.S. Public Health Service hospital on Staten Island in New York harbor. There was a suspicious shadow on his X-ray and a new picture had to be made. He would miss the connecting flight to his university, and had yet to hear a friendly word or meet anyone who was particularly interested in him or his problem.

When he was officially cleared, six hours later, he was even more apprehensive and lonely. He had no idea how to get to Manhattan, much less how to get to Chicago. His first impressions of the United States had been indelibly formed. He would eventually find his way to his university, but the memory of those first lonely hours in the U.S. would always linger.

For more than 60 per cent of the approximately 21,500 foreign students arriving in the U.S. last year from countries other than Canada and Mexico, these early impressions were quite dif-

ferent, however. Aporn Champatong of Thailand was typical:

When her letter of admission arrived from the University of Indiana, she found a small slip of paper attached, telling her that a representative of the International Student Service, wearing a "Foreign Student Adviser" armband, would meet and assist her when she arrived in the United States. All she need do was send the details of her itinerary.

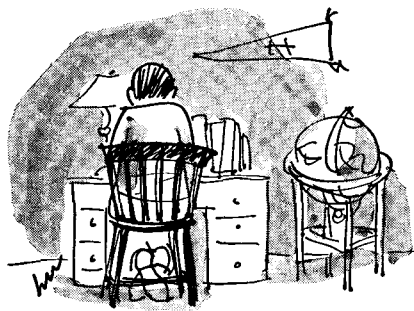
When Miss Champatong disembarked from her Pan American flight at San Francisco, "Foreign Student Adviser" Stephen Yost was waiting. In the minutes that followed she was accompanied through customs and immigration procedures, and was soon deep in conversation with her host.

Because she arrived during the airline strike, her connecting flight to the University of Indiana had been cancelled. Within the hour Yost arranged another flight which would leave the next day, reserved an inexpensive room for her for the night, and helped her board the bus to her hotel.

To provide a welcome to our country for more than 13,000 arriving students at two dozen ports of entry is no small undertaking. It is accomplished by an arrival staff of eleven, with the aid of 225 volunteers spread from Boston to Miami to Houston to Seattle.

Selby Fleming, a twenty-two-year-old Vassar graduate, is one of the paid staff members working with the arrival program in New York and coordinating the efforts of volunteers there. Staff and volunteers together welcome more than 9,000 students in New York each year. Miss Fleming personally meets students at all three airports plus Manhattan, Newark, and Brooklyn piers. She speaks French and "some German" and is an expert at calming nervous students, tracing lost suitcases, and finding decent rooms in New York hotels at \$3 (student rate) per night. Although on occasion she has to leave her East 55th Street apartment at 4 A.M. to meet an early flight and has spent more than one night sleeping in the ladies lounge at Kennedy airport, she says, "This job is so interesting it's almost like not working." The average tenure of people in her position, however, is about a year and a half.

Volunteers usually have a less demanding schedule, although a few give their services full time during their summer vacation. More typical of the arrival program volunteers is Burton Goldstein, a thirty-one-year-old insurance executive in Chicago. He coordinates a group of fifteen men who meet foreign visitors at O'Hare airport and assist them through the maze of health documents, baggage checks, currency exchange, ground transportation arrangements, etc. The volunteers include a lawyer, a chemical research analyst, a printer, an



investment counselor and others who became involved in the program when their Y's Men's Club took on the ISS project. "Since we meet about six students a week it's not too much for any one man," Goldstein says.

How important is it to meet a student, sometimes for only a few minutes be-

tween planes? The U.S. State Department seems to think it is very important, for it supplies its consulates all over the world with information about ISS services to be given to students departing for the States. But the words of a lonely Japanese student who was met in San Francisco by ISS volunteers, though far from eloquent, perhaps communicate the importance of the program even more clearly: "A shock and an impression which I got at the ship station were so large, because I had only thought that America is one of business and competition. By your kind action, I felt I was at another country. And your action was enough to let my prejudice to America improve. I think I was very happy to see an American people's good will as soon as arriving America. Thank you very much."

Other ISS Programs

● **VISIT**—In more than 138 communities in forty-six states and the District of Columbia, American families stand ready to open their homes to foreign students who wish to see more of the United States and get to know Americans across their dining-room tables.

The student maps out a travel schedule through communities where there are host families and submits it to ISS headquarters at 291 Broadway in New York City. Once the application has been approved, the student receives an identification card and the names of community chairmen in the places he will visit. He sends exact travel information to the chairmen who then line up host families for him to stay with. It is suggested that he stay in each community about three days. Information provided on his application is forwarded to the community chairmen so that hosts know in advance what the students' field of study and special interests are, as well as any dietary restrictions.

Local hosts have been recruited by a wide variety of community organizations, including United Church Women, YMCAs, YWCAs, and the International Hospitality Centers. There are more than 10,000 volunteer families presently participating in the VISIT program, and 844 foreign students have scheduled VISITs for this summer. In a typical tour a student stays in the homes of a dozen different families in six different communities.

● **EDUCATIONAL TRAVEL PROGRAMS**—A variety of special interest groups are brought to this country by the State Department and private organizations here and abroad. To give them a closer look at American life these agencies arrange with ISS to give them tours which include homestays, professional contacts, seminars, and short-term courses.

For instance, a group of ten Syrian students of engineering, brought to America by the State Department, just concluded a thirty-four-day tour on which they visited six universities, met with groups of American engineers, visited numerous points of interest in their field—such as the power plant at Niagara Falls and harbor facilities in Milwaukee, and stayed with American families along the way.

Industrial relations students from Mexico, secondary-school student leaders from Martinique, journalism students from Venezuela, and many similar groups have been programed by ISS—forty-one in the last twelve months.

● **INTERNATIONAL CAMP COUNSELOR PROGRAMS**—Qualified young adults from abroad become counselors in American summer camps. This summer 349 such counselors are serving in 252 camps in the United States. At the close of the camping season, a tour is provided for the counselors, giving them the opportunity to live for two and a half weeks with American families.

AN EXPERIMENT THAT WORKED

By BONNIE STRETCH

AS THE WORLD grows smaller, the necessity for better understanding of other peoples and cultures becomes more widely accepted. As a result, increasing numbers of American students, teachers, and scholars are spending time abroad, and even larger numbers of foreign students and scholars are coming to the U.S. But experience has shown that study and travel abroad are not automatically successful. Without adequate preparation, the experience of living in an alien culture may, at best, have limited benefits, and at worst, prove a personal disaster.

Fortunately, a number of agencies have for many years been refining the techniques of making foreign study a positive experience for individuals and for groups. One of these, the Experiment in International Living in Putney, Vermont, has, since 1932, been sponsoring a summer-abroad program for college

students, in an effort to encourage international understanding and goodwill.

The traditional Experiment program sends American college students abroad, and brings foreign students to the United States, for an eight-week summer period. The heart of the experience is a four-week visit in a private home—the “homestay”—where the young person lives as a member of the family. This homestay is designed to immerse the student wholly in another culture, deepening his understanding not only of the foreign country and its people, but also of himself as a person and of his relations with others. After the homestay, a member of each host family joins the whole group of Experimenters for four weeks of informal travel and sight-seeing around the host country.

But those who are familiar only with the Experiment's traditional summer program may be shocked by the variety of activities that engage the organization today. In 1961, Sargent Shriver



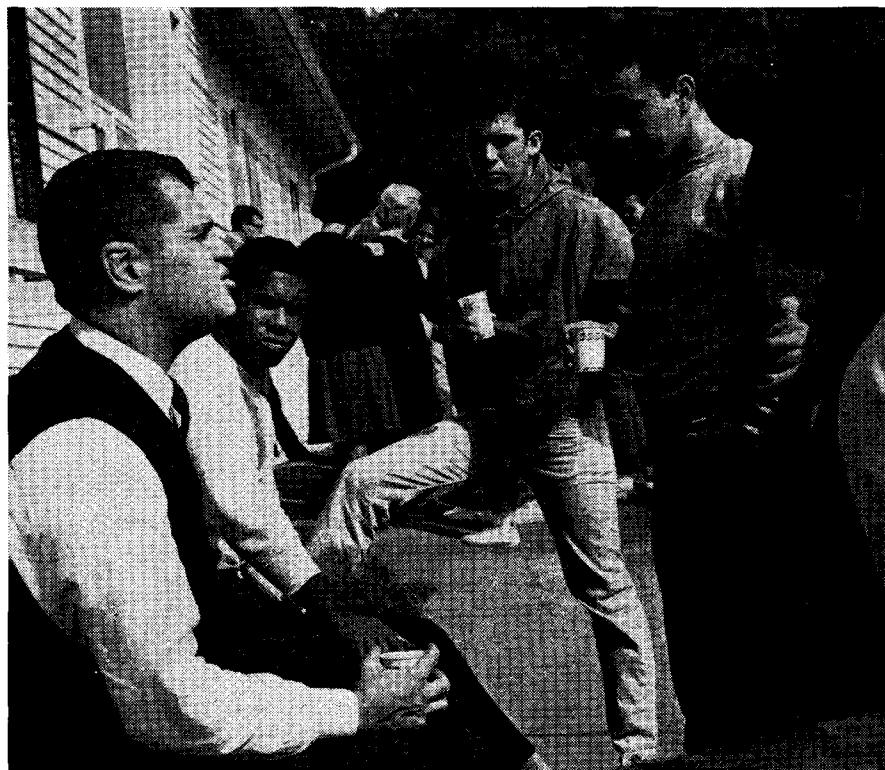
—David Plowden.

“For more than 1,200 foreign students headed for American campuses each year, S.I.T. serves as a cultural and academic point of entry.”

contracted with the Experiment to train the first Peace Corps volunteers. (Since then it has trained more Peace Corps groups than any other organization.) In the last five years more than two dozen colleges and universities have sought the Experiment's services in preparing their students for study abroad, and in providing orientation for foreign students coming to American campuses. In addition, the Experiment provides courses of intensive language study, sponsors work-study programs abroad in cooperation with professional groups and universities, and administers special programs for a variety of private and public agencies.

The key to the success of the Experiment's programs, and the consequent requests for help from other agencies, lies in a unique process of orientation. This is based on the seemingly obvious, but often ignored, premise that there is a profoundly important personal dimension to international exchange. When a person steps into a new and strange culture, he inevitably suffers a degree of “culture shock” as he struggles to adapt to a pattern of manners and mores foreign to him. And the success with which he adapts depends in large degree on the preparation he has received.

Most institutions sponsoring exchange programs prepare students by telling them something about the history and customs of the host country, and often by insisting on some facility with the native language. The Experiment does this, too, but its main emphasis is on developing attitudes that will sustain the individual in an alien environment.



—Clemens Kalischer.

“The key to the success of the Experiment's programs is a unique process of orientation.”