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Title: An investigation into how Korean American Freshmen chose CFC and what they gain from their church.
Course: AAS346 Section A(Asian American Youth) Fall 2007 -- Soo Ah Kwon

About the Author: I am a Junior at U of I, on a study abroad exchange year from UEA in England. I am an American Literature Major and a Creative Writing Minor. I chose this class because I have never taken any Asian studies classes during my education and welcomed the idea of broadening my knowledge about other races and their cultures and histories. I came up with the idea of my research topic because I noticed how important being part of a church was to some Korean American friends that I have made at U of I, and I was interested to discover how this close relationship with a church was formed and what it offered.

Keywords: church, religion, Asian American, Korean American, CFC, freshman, UIUC, youth

Abstract: Through the use of observation and interviews I investigated how Korean Americans at UIUC decided to join CFC and what they felt they gained from being part of that congregation. I found that family was key in influencing my interviewees to join CFC, along with friends. My participants reached similar conclusions about what they felt they gained, for the meantime, as freshman, the social side was important to aid them make and develop friendships in a new environment. The environment of being around good role models and learning from older college students was noted as a gain. However, essentially their growth in religious matters was what the church brought to them as a main attribute.

Question: An Early Question - Assignment #2 09/18/07

The topic that I would like to explore on the UIUC is campus related to Asian-American students and churches. I think it would be interesting to explore how many different Asian-American orientated churches, temples, college-church groups and/or prayer groups there are on campus. I would also like to find out how Asian-American students, in particular freshman, find these places a useful source to aid them socially and spiritually on campus. I would like to find out why they chose their particular group and what they would describe as the benefits from attending an Asian-American church or related group.

Question: How do Asian-American students at UIUC, with a particular reference to Freshman, chose a church or related religious group on Campus? What do they feel they gain from this chosen place?
Refined Question - Assignment #3 10/03/07

How do Korean-American Freshmen at UIUC choose which church or related religious group to attend on campus? What do they feel they gain from this chosen place? How do these opinions vary between students at a predominantly Korean-American church and students at a more pan-ethnic church?

Refined Question 10/19/07

Due to complications with IRB approval I am going to change my research from a comparison to an investigation. My question will now be:

Focusing on CFC at UIUC, how did Korean-American Freshmen choose which church or related religious group to attend on campus? What do they feel they gain from this chosen place? Why did the choose a more pan-ethnic church rather than a more predominatly Korean-American church?

Plan: Initial Plan - Assignment #3 10/03/07

For the first stage of my research into this project I will choose two churches that fit the criteria of my question.

I would then like to attend a service at both churches and conduct a participant observation. Although a large part of my question is focused on an individuals gain from their church, I think it would be beneficial to gain a sense of the atmosphere and view peoples interactions at the churches before I attempt to get more detailed research, as this may affect what questions I choose to ask.

When I do decide on the questions that I am going to answer I will circulate a questionnaire to 5 students from each church.

For the third stage of my research I would like to conduct more in depth interviews with a student from each church.

Updated Plan - 10/19/07

I have chosen to focus on CFC at UIUC.

I will attend a service at the church and conduct a participant observation. Although a large part of my question is focused on an individuals gain from their church, I think it would be beneficial to gain a sense of the atmosphere and view peoples interactions at the church before I attempt to get more detailed research, as this may affect what questions I choose to ask.
When I do decide on the questions that I am going to answer I will circulate a questionnaire to 5 students at the church.

For the third stage of my research I would like to conduct more in depth interview with two students from the church.

**Updated Plan - 10/25/07**

My plan has altered slightly. I have started the third stage, interviewing, before I completed the second stage. I have decided that interviewing is more useful as I can ask more openended questions and guide the interviewee to what I am interested in finding out, if needed. Therefore I have decided to conduct 3 interviews in total and discontinue the questionnaire to enable me to gain more useful and relevant information.

**Data (observation)**

For my observation I attended part of the CFC's annual revival. Tonight's revival was the second in a three part event. It was held at Follinger Auditorium on the quad and started at 7pm and was due to last until around 11pm. I arranged to meet a friend from class who attends this church. As I waited outside the building I watched the people arrive. Many of them were in groups of 3-6 and were all in high spirits and appeared excited. Only a few people arrived on their own in the period that I was watching.

As we entered the auditorium there were people at the doors to greet you and to guide to inside. They shook everyone's hands and said hello. I think the greeters were members of the church who help to organise. They were a mix of caucasian and asian men and women. There was music being played as you walked in and the atmosphere was very welcoming. As I waited for the evening to start I observed the people sitting and being seated. Although the majority of people were of Asian ethnicity there were also African Americans, caucasian people and also students who appeared to be international students. There wasn't any obvious separations in people according to their ethnicity. Everyone was mixed in amongst everyone else. The atmosphere was very friendly and many people seemed to know each other, I could see people talking, hugging, high fiving, joking and just generally having fun with their friends.

The revival started, but the Korean American pastor who asked the crowd if they were excited and if they were hungry (I think he meant for God, not for food). People responded with amen and cheers. Up on the stage were about 10 people with guitars, microphones, someone was on drums. The music then began, everyone was on their feet. Then started a succession of songs such as 'We are
hungry, 'You took the fall'. The crowd were all singing and swaying and at first I felt a little uncomfortable because I don't go to church and I am a very bad singer so I didn't sing. The songs had religious meanings but the melodies were so upbeat and catching that I realised I looked more out of place not singing so I joined in. The pastor encouraged people to pray for about a minute then carried on with the songs. I noticed that many people were singing with their eyes closed and reaching upwards and swaying. After about 5 songs a boy in front of me sat down and read the bible. I could not see anyone else doing this. It was a stark contrast to the boy next to him who was singing away enthusiastically and playing the air guitar. When we were finding our seats one of the boys I spoke to said he liked sitting at the front because it made him feel like he was at a concert. I could see what he meant, the form of communicating religion to the crowd was very much geared towards the college age crowd.

When I do my later stages of research I want to incorporate questions about the revival into my survey to see how they viewed the service and the people at it.

Data (interview): Interview - 10/25/07

The first interview that I conducted was with Mr A, a 2nd generation Korean-American. He is a freshman here at UIUC and attends CFC. Before I asked him more specific questions about CFC I wanted to gain a background idea about his church at home to use as a comparison to CFC and also find out how he knew about CFC.

Mr A attends a church at home. This church is predominantly frequented by Korean-Americans. Typically at this church the adults attend services in Korean and the children go to the EM (English Ministry) services.

Mr A knew of CFC because his brother is a Junior at UIUC and has attended CFC since he was a freshman. Through his brother he had heard that the services were very powerful in the prayers and that the pastor was a heartfelt speaker. Mr A also mentioned that the church he attends at home, a suburb north of Chicago, has links with CFC. He said that two churches were “interconnected through Koreans.” However, he also mentioned that neither were attended by only Koreans.

I asked Mr A about how CFC differed from his church at home, he explained that the main difference was the amount of people, pastors and resources. CFC has considerably more of all. Mr A’s reasons for joining CFC are mainly centred around the pastor he said, “I really enjoy sermons that are strong because you can learn a lot”, from what Mr A said it seems that CFC’s main pastor offers strong sermon that allows people to “grow in faith” but also incorporates an aspect of fun and encourages fellowship.
To enable me to discover how social networks are established at CFC I asked about the smaller bible study groups. Mr A is part of a group of 15 students who he now “hangs out with all the time”, they meet ¾ a week sometimes at their leaders house, sometimes of bible study and also of social reasons, like dinner. Mr A comments that he felt he had “defiantly developed a good friendship” with his group. Mr A attends 3 CFC services a week and it is the only church at UIUC that he goes to.

I asked Mr A some questions about the Revival, which I attended for my observation. He attended all 2 of the sessions. He described he favourite part of it as “seeing a whole room filled with kids all worshiping God - I think that’s pretty amazing”. At the Revival I noticed the presence of a welcoming committee and I knew about the leaders of the bible study groups, Mr A said he would consider taking on a more organisational role in the church at some time in his college years, “if he felt it was God’s calling and he had the time”.

I was intrigued as to how Mr A would describe the atmosphere at CFC, he though about this question for a bit and explained how it was very professional because all the sermons were very well researched and thought out, “perfectly formulated”. He told me that the Friday service was more modern and the Sunday service was more traditional and he “enjoys both, for different reasons”. Mr A was able to define his favourite parts of attending CFC as the pastor and the small bible group.

I asked what Mr A considered the ethnic make up of CFC to be, and whether it had influenced his decision to join. He noted that it was predominantly Asian and within than prominently Korean, also with some Caucasian and African American people. He told me how the small bible study groups are randomly selected and therefore encourage ethnic mixing. But he answered that no the ethnicity of the congregation did not alter of effect his decision to join CFC.

My final question was centred around individual gain from CFC. Mr A listed;

1, “it is a very powerful prayer church, you feel blessed.”

2, “listening to spiritually stronger people is a blessing experience.”

3, accountability, belief and fellowship, who he describes as people who could show an example of what a good Christian can be.

I think that this interview helped me to answer my question for this individual. I will interview another freshman who attends CFC to see how variation occurs in answering these questions.
The second interview that I conducted was with Mr B. He is somewhere between 1.5 and 2nd generation Korean-American, he came to America when he was a baby. He is a freshman here at UIUC and attends CFC. As with Mr A, I wanted to gain a background idea about his church at home to use as a comparison to CFC and also to find out how he knew about CFC.

Mr B attends a church at home. His father is the Pastor at his church at home, Mr B attends the youth services. Mr B knew of CFC because his sister is a Grad Student at UIUC and has attended CFC since she was a freshman. Also, Mr B’s father is friends with the senior Pastor at CFC, “he is considered a subordinate of my Dad”, so Mr B’s father had introduced his family to the idea of attending CFC before his children started college. Mr B told me how CFC holds an annual summer retreat in the Chicago area that kids from Chicago and its suburbs go to. This also introduces pre-college students to the idea of attending CFC at UIUC.

I asked Mr B about how CFC differed from his church at home, he stated that the main differences were size and organisation. His church at home is small and less organised. He said that CFC was more accommodating for the young, and as a result it is one large congregation. Whereas at his local church the congregation is broken up into small groups and is generally less organised than CFC. I asked Mr B what factors made him want to join CFC, he said that at the moment as a freshman it is mainly about “character development, develop who I am” and also that he feels he learns from the other students, “there are older people to look to as good role models, good examples.”

To enable me to discover how social networks are established at CFC I asked about the smaller bible study groups. Mr B is part of a group that he meets with 3-5 times a week including church. Mr B attends 3 CFC services a week and it is the only church at UIUC that he goes to.

I asked Mr B some questions about the Revival, which I attended for my observation. He attended all 3 of the sessions. His favourite part of it was one of the guest speakers, a Korean Pastor, whose message was “God still loves us no matter how many ways we sin”. CFC is the only church that Mr B attends on campus. He said that he would be interested in becoming a leader at CFC as he has experience from being a leader at his youth group at home, however he said that he didn’t know how good he would be at organising a group with college work to do as well.

I was interested as to how Mr B would describe the atmosphere at CFC. He said that he “sometimes I feel it’s a little distant because there are so many people”. However he did say that he also felt that people were “there for other people, to help and push”. Mr B noted that his favourite part of attending CFC is, “right
now, social reasons, as I am a freshman and clearly for religious reasons”.

I asked what Mr B what he considered the ethnic make up of CFC to be, and whether it had influenced his decision to join. He said that it was mainly Asian but this had not consciously, but probably makes a difference in choosing a place to worship. He said that he “didn’t know if he would feel as comfortable in a non Korean church”. He also stated that this was because people “prefer their own but still socialise with others, trying to break down barriers”, he mentioned the African American and White singers in stage at the Revival.

My final question was centred around individual gain from CFC. Mr B said, “Direction - where to go, how a Christian should be, learning to accept other people”.

Interview - 11/18/07

The third interview that I conducted was with Miss C. She 1.5 generation Korean-American, she came to America when she was 11. She is a freshman here at UIUC and attends CFC along with another church that is slightly off campus. As with the previous interviews, I wanted to gain a background idea about her church at home to use as a comparison to CFC and also to find out how she knew about CFC.

Miss C attends a church at home. She attends a service every Sunday with her father. Miss C knew of CFC from friends at her home church who had told her about it. Also, Miss C is friends at home with Mr A, who had told her that CFC was a “big Asian church in Champaign”.

I asked Miss C how CFC differed from her church at home, she stated similar comments as Mr A and Mr B. She said that her home church was much smaller and that CFC was “much more student focused that adults”. I asked Miss C what factors made her want to join CFC, she said that the main reasons were religious based, once she has attended she realised that the pastor was a really good speaker which aided her religious interest in CFC.

To enable me to discover how social networks are established at CFC I asked about the smaller bible study groups. Miss C is part of a group that she meets with a 2 times a week, including church. Miss C attends CFC on Sundays and her other Champaign church twice on Fridays and has a bible study group from that church that she is very active with. She is more involved with her other church than CFC. Miss C said that she wouldn’t want be become a leader for either of her smaller groups because they have a lot of work to do and also responsibilities she doesn’t think that she will be able to “handle it all”.

I was interested as to how Miss C would describe the atmosphere at CFC. She
said that “it is really friendly and loud.” she also commented that “even if you don’t know anyone there you get to stay around at the end after services and talk to people”. Miss C noted that her favourite part of attending CFC is the pastor, “whatever he talks about really touches so I learn a lot”.

I asked what Miss C what she considered the ethnic make up of CFC to be, and whether it had influenced her decision to join. She said that it was “Korean dominated but a lot of Chinese and a large mix of Asians”. She said that the Asian dominance defiantly influenced the appeal of the church to her.

My final question was centred around individual gain from CFC. Miss C said, “Probably a lot of friends and stronger belief”.

**Analysis: Analysis - 10/31/07**

Before I started to conduct my interviews I was intrigued to gather more information about how my research participant would view their reasons for being a part of CFC and how they might differ. From the research that I have collected to date I am noticing a few trends. The most prominent are the desire to learn from older college Christians what it is to be a ‘good Christian’, the respect of the pastor and also to make friends. Before I interviewed Mr A and Mr B I had thought that the desire to make friends would be stronger, both Mr’s mentioned it but it was not the main pull of being part of CFC for either.

From the readings that we have done for our class I can make links between my EUI project and the articles:

- “FOB” and “Whitewashed”: Identity and Internalized Racism among Second Generation Asian Americans.
- Second Generation Korean American Evangelicals: Ethnic, Multiethnic or White Campus Ministries?
- “‘I Really Do Feel I’m 1.5”: The Construction of Self And Community by Young Korean Americans.’

As CFC is a predominantly Asian church with services conducted in English I was interested in finding out about my interviewees generational backgrounds and how they viewed CFC in comparison to churches with services in other languages, that cater of Asian people. Pyke and Dang address this difference between 1st and 2nd generation Asian Americans in their article, ‘We examine the negative identity terms “FOB” and “whitewashed” that our young adult respondents most commonly deployed in their narratives to socially catagorize and describe coethnice peers on different acculturative trajectories.’
Nazli Kibria piece incorporates the views and patterns of 2nd generation Korean Americans, which is the generation and ethnicity of both of my research participant so far. This idea of negotiations of identity can be linked to my research through the statements that both Mr A and Mr B made about forming their identities and being ‘good Christians through the Church.’

I think that Rebecca Y. Kim’s 2004 article ‘Second Generation Korean American Evangelicals: Ethnic, Multiethnic or White Campus Ministries?’ is very relatable to my research. From my research so far I am picking up on the power and influence of Christianity in the lives of both Mr A and Mr B. Although both attend church at home, their on campus church CFC is succeeding in influencing their religious and social development at college. However, Although CFC is predominantly Asian, neither Mr A nor Mr B saw this as the reason that they were drawn to the church, which goes against Kim’s findings.

Finally I feel that Kyeyoung Park’s article “I Really Do Feel I’m 1.5”: The Construction of Self And Community by Young Korean Americans’ can also be linked to my study. Although they people at CFC are mainly 2nd generation I feel that the church itself is a metaphor for the main message in Park’s piece. CFC does have a multi ethnic congregation but the Asian presence, shown most obviously in the Korean Pastor, who is looked up to and respected very much by Mr’s A and B, is key to the attraction of CFC to many of the goers. The community that CFC offers to its congregation creates a subculture that welcomes students who used to experiencing different ethnic practices.

Research Proposal:

My research topic this semester has prompted me to consider the influence and aid that a church can give to a student at UIUC. As an extension of the work that I have begun to do, I think it would be interesting to conduct research into a wider range of churches on campus and investigate whether the views of Asian American college student church goers. I focused on Korean American freshman, to extend the research the ethnographer could consider looking into other nationalities of Asian Americans, and perhaps also students of different ages. What the students feel they gain from their church could be compared between the different churches, ages and ethnic backgrounds. The research question would be: What do churches on the UIUC campus offer of Asian American students, and how does this differ between churches, the age of the students and the ethnicity of the student?

I think that this would be an interesting question to explore because through my research I have noticed that my interviewees all identified differences between CFC and their home churches. They also mentioned that what they hope to gain from their church might change as they enter further into their college educations. Ms C also commented on the differences between CFC and another church that
she attends on campus, which relates back to the earlier question that I planned to research, but unfortunately had to change. In a later project if the researcher was more careful about the boundaries of EUI approval they could successfully look into this question. The research would involve a plan of: 1) Observations at all the churches.

2) Interviews with Asian Americans who attend each of the churches, who are variants in terms of age and Asian background. If possible, it would be ideal if the researcher could find students who attended more than more church to hear about their own interpretations of the differences and see if this differed from an outside interpretation.

I think that two of the readings from this semester work in conjunction with this research proposal. I think it will be telling to look into how Asian Americans' opinions differ in terms of how their church helps them form an identity, Pyke and Dang address this in their article, ““FOB” and “Whitewashed”: Identity and Internalized Racism among Second Generation Asian Americans.” These notions of ‘FOB’ and ‘Whitewashed’ might also vary between the interviewees.

Nazli Kibria’s ‘Race, Ethnic Options, and Ethnic Bonds: Identity Negotiations of Second-Generation Chinese and Korean Americans’ is directly link to this research proposal. I have observed the role that churches on campus at UIUC play in creating a subculture in which students negotiate their own identities. The articles explores the difference between races and ethnicities in how these identities are formed. The research proposal will be exploring the thesis of this article, using campus churches at the catalyst for this identity negotiation.

Previous EUI projects, on IDEALS, on Asian Americans focus mainly on Korean Americans. It appears that Koreans, Chinese, Japanese, Filipino and other nationalities that fall under the subsection Asian American are not often compared to each other, rather they are ‘lumped’ together. It is possible to question whether non-Korean Asian Americans are assumed as having the same options and answers as Korean Americans. However the reason for the overwhelming research into Korean Americans on this campus could be explained by Korean Americans making up the largest percentage of Asian Americans on this campus.

As this research proposal is a continuation of the research that I have been conducting I feel that the two previous EUI projects, that I linked to my research, are also relatable to this proposal. Eric Hovey’s 2007 project entitled ‘Korean American Catholicism’ focus upon Korean Americans interactions at churches on campus. However this project proposal has a more complicated investigation as it involves a less selective target audience to investigate. project is more focused with the interaction between the church and the people I do also include questions that address more similar issues to that of Hovey’s project. Hovey’s research
could still be linked to this proposed topic, as background research. Hovey concludes that ‘The Korean American population is a small but increasingly influential group among the U.S catholic minority and should not be relegated to marginal status within the U of I Catholic at large.’ I think it would be interesting to find out how other Asians are viewed in the Catholic community.

Jokob Dedig’s 2005 project entitled, ‘The importance of Christianity and Christian registered student organisations at Illinois State University’ can be related to this proposal because the main thesis is the same, what do the students gain from their church? Dedig is also focusing on Asians, rather than a particular group. He found that ‘While people join a Christian RSO in need for guidance, they usually stay for the social network’ his is not what I have found in my research into Korean Americans at CFC, it would be interesting if once other Asians were interviewed, as Dedig conducted, my findings at UIUC would stay the same or if the added variables or more churches, different ages, and other Asians changes this.

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The researchers were particularly interested in examining two dorms, PAR/FAR and the ‘six pack’ in juxtaposition to each other. They had both noticed that PAR/FAR had a very high proportion of students of ethnic minorities and that the ‘six pack’ was mainly white residents. They wanted to see if other people agreed with this and if so, why did this racial divide occur.

In undergoing this research they conducted interviews. The used a system to ensure that their questioning methods gave them an non-biased and random selection of data. All the student interviewees were 1st semester undergraduates. In each location they interviewed 10 students, the locations were PAR, FAR, Peabody Drive and Gregory Drive. The conducted the interviews in the dining hall, at various times and used a random selection mode. They also interviews the RD’S in each of the dorms. The questions they asked were:

1.) When applying, did you have a dorm preference?

2.) If so, why did you choose that dorm?

3.) Are you happy with the dorm in which you were placed?

4.) Knowing what you have learned about the dorms, where would you prefer living

now?

5.) What are some of the differences that you have noticed between the dorms?

6.) Some say that FAR/PAR has the largest concentration of minority and international students, whereas the ‘Six-Pack’ is predominantly white. What are your opinions on this statement?

7.) Do you believe that the dorms are segregated institutionally? By the choice of students? Both? Or neither? Briefly explain.

The findings concluded that all of the interviewees that had been to both dorms agreed that racially they were very different.

The researchers briefly examine the reasons behind these findings. The dorms are allocated on a first come first served basis. However the students who need to wait for financial aid to clear are often sorting their dorms after students who have access to the money when the applications become available. PAR/FAR is often viewed as the least desirable dorm, so there for the students who need
financial aid, in this case it implied largely minorities, are placed there.

This topic struck me as interesting because I know a girl in England who spent her exchange year at UIUC, two years ago. She worked in the dining halls and I remember her commenting that FAR/PAR was mainly Asian-American and African-American students.

EUI LINKS - 11/08/07

This research project hopes to discover what Korean American Freshman feel that they gain from CFC. Eric Hovey’s 2007 project entitled ‘Korean American Catholicism’ can be linked to my project. Both projects focus upon Korean Americans interactions at churches on campus. Although my project is more focused with the interaction between the church and the people I do also include questions that address more similar issues to that of Hovey’s project. As CFC has a multi ethnic congregation I have been seeking to find out more about how people interact with other church goers outside of their own ethnicity. I think that my project would be placed chronologically before Hoveys in order of which would be useful as a pre-project to the other. My project is seeking to find out about personal gain, it is logical that personal gain would be a contributing fact or identity formation, which is closely related to Hovey’s focus. Hovey concludes that ‘The Korean American population is a small but increasingly influential group among the U.S catholic minority and should not be relegated to marginal status within the U of I Catholic at large.’ As I had always observed the predominantly Asian American community at CFC I had not thought to look in to this issue, I now realise that it would be relevant in a later stage of my project.

Jokob Dedig’s 2005 project entitled, ‘The importance of Christianity and Christian registered student organisations at Illinois State University’ can be compared to my project in a different way to the comparison with Hovey’s. The questions that Dedig in asking are very similar to mine, ‘Why is being involved in a Christian Registered Student Organization (RSO’s) important and even necessary for some students at ISU? What makes a student desire to join such RSO’s?’ These are the same questions that I have been asking my interviewees. The main obvious difference in my project and Dedig’s is that I am concentrating on Korean Americans oat U of I and he is focusing on college students in general at ISU. However his finding that ‘While people join a Christian RSO in need for guidance, they usually stay for the social network’ is what I was expecting to find from my interviewees, and in some cases I am - but to a much lesser extent that I originally anticipated.

Both projects have utilised the same research techniques as I have, participant observations and interviews. I think that both of these projects have aspects in common with my topic, but they are very different topics compared to each other.
Reflect: The experience of researching and writing an EUI project was a new academic requirement for me. I enjoyed the challenge and found the continuous assignments, rather than one long one, refreshing. I think that I put a lot of thought into my project throughout the process, which meant that I changed details a few times along the course of my project. I think this was constructive as it meant that I was constantly considering of IRB requirements and also how best to obtain the data for my topic.

I think that moodle is a great resource and an excellent way for all the class members to take an active interest in each others work and be able to browse each others work as it develops. The comment groups meant that some people were able to benefit from constructive criticism as well.

I enjoyed my topic and felt that the obervation and interviews enabled me to learn about a topic that otherwise I probably would not have known much in depth detail about. I feel that my personal ability to reflect on UIUC as a campus has been deepened as a result of this EUI project.

Recommendations: I would recommend that the University makes information about churchs on campus, including CFC, very visable to incoming freshman, exchange students and transfer students. All my participants were aided through their first semester as a freshman by attending a church. Also, the use of older students as valuable role models is an idea that the University could impliment into other organisations to help freshman and involve other students actively in the incoming population at U of I.