

An Insight into the Welcome Buddy Program of the Faculty of Mathematics, Informatics and Natural Sciences (MIN) during the Pandemic



Proshonni from Bangladesh
Incoming Buddy of the MIN Faculty
MSc. Ocean and Climate Physics



Christine from Canada
Welcome Buddy of the MIN Faculty
MSc. Ocean and Climate Physics

MIN BUDDY TEAM: Could you introduce yourself to our MIN buddy students?

Christine: I am Christine and I was born in Ontario. I am studying MSc. Ocean and Climate Physics at the Faculty of Mathematics, Informatics and Natural Sciences (MIN) at Universität Hamburg. I have volunteered to be a Welcome Buddy in order to assist prospective and newly enrolled international MIN students to get a good start with their studies and everyday life in Hamburg.

From November 2020 to the present, I have provided support for Proshonni from Bangladesh.

Proshonni: I am Proshonni and I was born in Dhaka, Bangladesh. I am also studying MSc. Ocean and Climate Physics at the MIN faculty of Universität Hamburg. I had a request to

the Buddy Team of the MIN faculty. I was looking for a Welcome Buddy to get help and support in a new city and also in the study program.

From November 2020 to this day, Christine has been my Welcome Buddy and she has been so supportive and very helpful to me.

MIN BUDDY TEAM: Proshonni, Can you tell us something about the Welcome Buddy Program of the MIN faculty?

Proshonni: The Buddy team of the MIN faculty matches up an international student from abroad (Incoming Buddy) with a local MIN student (Welcome Buddy) who helps make the international student's arrival in Hamburg easier. The matches are generally based on the students' field of study and their similar interests.

MIN BUDDY TEAM: Christine, what is it like to be an international welcome buddy for an international student?

Christine: Most of the Welcome Buddy students who volunteer to help prospective and new international students of the MIN faculty are German students or German-speaking students. But I come from Canada and I don't speak German. The MIN Buddy team paired me up with an international student from Bangladesh who is also an English speaker.

MIN BUDDY TEAM: A Welcome Buddy from Canada was matched up with an Incoming Buddy from Bangladesh. Both are studying MSc. Ocean and Climate Physics in Hamburg! That's amazing! We must say that the Buddy Team did a good matching job there!

(laughter)

Christine, isn't it a bit of a challenge for you, as an English native student in Hamburg to assist another English speaking international student? You both speak English with no or little knowledge of German...

Christine: Helping students from abroad to settle in Hamburg includes loads of administrative procedures. Even if I don't speak German, I was able to give Proshonni advice about how I previously navigated being here and tried to point her to English speaking services.

I didn't have a Welcome Buddy upon arrival. But I know what new students from abroad before and upon arrival in Hamburg need, having gone through the whole process myself. I went through the procedures and know about the steps to be performed in the correct order in all matters concerning new international students from abroad arriving in Hamburg.

MIN BUDDY TEAM: Sounds great! And how has the pandemic affected your buddy activities?

Christine: Due to the current situation, buddy activities of the MIN Faculty were explicitly restricted to e-mail exchange and virtual meeting. We exchanged texts.

Proshonni: I planned to come to Hamburg for the winter semester (2020/21). But in November, I was still stuck in my home country, in Bangladesh because of the current situation. So the Buddy team of the MIN faculty sent me an e-mail to ask me for a short feedback how the buddy activities are going in view of the pandemic and the running winter semester. As I said, I was still stuck in my home country and there was nothing much to do till I arrive in Hamburg. But my Welcome Buddy has been super helpful about everything that mostly includes inquiries about the courses, the programs, the university and overall Hamburg.

While I was still in my Bangladesh, Christine briefed me from Germany on registration, residence permit, health insurance system and companies. She gave me advices on the most popular bank account options for international students. Christine also informed me about campus activities that consist of virtual activities, welcome events, German language courses offered by the University Language Center „Sprachenzentrum“ and explained the German language levels „Common European Reference Framework“ (GER). So I am taking some German (online) classes this semester and hope to improve my German language skills.

Christine: Furthermore, I ensured that Proshonni had all the necessary documents for administrative offices in Hamburg, as it was not possible to accompany her to the registration office, due to corona.

As for the accommodation, I helped Proshonni to complete the various forms like the „Wohnungsgeberbescheinigung“ required in Germany for renting an apartment. I filled Proshonni in on the funding opportunities international students may be eligible for at Universität Hamburg...

MIN BUDDY TEAM: What scholarships are available for international students enrolled at Universität Hamburg?

Christine: International students can apply for a merit scholarship during their studies or a degree completion grant during their final study phase.

BUDDY-TEAM: Awsome! Thank you so much for your strong commitment and voluntary activities within the framework of the Welcome Buddy Program of the MIN Faculty, Christine! It is certainly not easy to help and guide incoming students from abroad under the current circumstances but you did a fantastic job!

One last question, please: How did you find out about the MIN Buddy Program?

Christine: I volunteered for something like this when I was in Canada for our international students. (...) At some point I brought up to our Student Council in the IfM

(Institute of Oceanography, MIN/UHH) about having a mentoring program for the new students in the online semester. But then, they told me about how the Welcome Buddy Program already exists at the MIN Faculty!

Proshonni: I was looking through the university website and also what types of programs are available. Then I came across this Buddy Program which seemed like a really good program. So I applied for a Welcome Buddy and after a few days, I got a reply from the Buddy team. Thanks to the Buddy Program of the MIN faculty and my Welcome Buddy, Christine, I had an easier start in Hamburg.

MIN BUDDY TEAM: Many thanks to the two of you for sharing your experience! We wish you all the best and every success for the future.