Experience, Knowledge and Friendship

Friendship Family

Information Packet

2015-2016
Friendship Family Program

What is the Friendship Family Program?

Friendship Family is a successful program run by International Student Services (ISS) that links international students with local St. Thomas families. Founded on the conviction that we should learn from each other, the program provides cultural experiences for community members and helps international students experience true Minnesota culture in American families. Our goal is to make St. Thomas community a home away from home for international students.

This program involves matching an international student, both undergraduate and graduate students, studying at the University of St. Thomas with a local friend (a family, couple or individual). Participants can make special requests about matching preferences, but keep in mind our main goal is to have all students who have applied matched with a family. Friendship Families applying for the fall are matched for one academic year and are invited to join ISS for cultural events and activities throughout that year. Beyond attending ISS events (optional) friendship families are expected to invite their student to family events and outings at least once a month. The program does not require a lot of extra time and effort; rather you just welcome your student into your normal family life.

About UST’s International Students

The University of St. Thomas currently has 436 international students enrolled in their undergraduate and graduate programs. Our students come from all over the world with Saudi Arabia, India, and China being the top three countries of origin. While some students come to study for just a semester or academic year, most of our students come to complete their entire degree.

International students that apply for this program are excited to learn more about Minnesota and American culture. We realize that not everyone has a “typical American” family and enjoy the variety of family sizes/ types that we are able to match with our students. Dispelling stereotypes about the “typical American” family is one of the main goals of this family.
Expectations & Guidelines

Local Families participating in *Friendship Family* are expected:

- to attend *Friendship Family* orientation at the end of the summer
- to maintain regular communication with their student throughout the year- returning phone calls, emails and other forms of communication in a timely manner
- to meet with their partner at least once a month
- to facilitate the student’s adjustment to a new cultural and academic environment
- to introduce the student to an American culture
- to participate in special events organized by ISS (if able)
- to be excited and open to learning about a new culture
- to respect religious and political beliefs of the student, as well as his/her cultural traditions
- to complete participation surveys/ evaluations

International participants of *Friendship Family* are expected:

- to maintain regular communication with their friendship family- returning phone calls, emails and other forms of communication in a timely manner
- to meet with their family at least once a month
- to respect traditions, religious and political beliefs of their friendship family
- to facilitate a cultural exchange
- to be flexible in perception of another culture
- to complete participation surveys/ evaluations

As a Friendship Family you will not be:

- asked to serve as an ATM for your student
- required to have your student stay with you
What Should we Do?

Activities to engage in as partners:

- Invite your partner over for a family dinner or summer BBQ.
- Invite your partner to a family activity, such as attending a child’s sporting event or school play.
- Invite your partner over to watch a movie or big game on TV.
- Enjoy Harriet Island Regional Park; an’ Island getaway’ right in the heart of downtown Saint Paul.
- Visit the St. Paul Cathedral.
- Tour the Minnesota State Capitol building.
- Discover Landmark Center (within a walking distance from the Minnesota State Capitol).
- Visit Como Zoo (Japanese gardens, picnic areas, cross-country ski trails).
- Measure “the cherry” in Minneapolis Sculpture Garden.
- Expand your mind exploring Minneapolis Institute of Arts that houses more than 100,000 objects from various cultural traditions.
- Observe the changes of colors along the Mississippi river.
- Locate waterfalls in Minnehaha Park.
- Discuss a new book at Barnes & Noble.
- Take a walk along Grand Avenue.
- Window shop at Mall of America.

Keep in mind your meetings do not have to be formal or involve spending a lot of money. Our students want to learn more about what a typical American family does for fun, so act as you normally would and invite them to join you.
Program Details

Initial Matching

You will be receiving your student information a few weeks prior to the start of the semester. Once you have received your student information, write an introductory email to your student. **Discuss their arrival and first few days with your student and let ISS know of their plans.** Will you be picking them up from the airport? Do they know where they will be living when they arrive?

First Meeting/ Conversation Starters

Meeting your student for the first time may be an anxiety producing moment. Some students may be extremely friendly and open, while others may be more reserved during your first meeting. Here are some suggested conversation starters to help you as you get to know your student. Remember that for most students, English is not their first language, so be patient as they listen and respond to your questions.

**Regarding their Studies**

- How is their education system back home?
  - If different than here, explain how our education system works.
- Have they declared a major? If so, what would they look to do in the future?
- What did their parents or siblings study?

**Regarding relationships**

- Ask them about marriage practices in their home country- do people get married at a young age? How did their parents meet?
- What do they expect from you as a Friendship Family?
- What are the typical gender roles in their home country?

**Social Activities**

- What do they like to do for fun?
- Do they play sports? Do they like to watch sports?
- Are there any things they really want to do/ visit while in the US?

**Regarding Food**

- Do they have any food restrictions?
- What is their favorite meal?
- Do they like to cook?
First Steps

Arrival
- Encourage your student to call or email home and/or contact family/friends in other places. There is a phone card in your student’s arrival bag that our office provides.
- Jet Lag: For those who have traveled abroad, you know that jet lag can be difficult to overcome. Be flexible with your student to accommodate their overcoming jet lag during their first week here.
- English fatigue: some students may get tired of listening and speaking English all the time. Be understanding and don’t overwhelm them on arrival.
- Diet changes: ask the student about food preferences and dietary restrictions before preparing food for them.
- Relationships take time to build. Be patient in getting to know your student and always let our office know if you have any issues.

Establishing a Sense of Place
- For those who are matched with a student who is brand new to the area, it’s nice to provide the following when they arrive:
  - The “Tour” of the neighborhood and city where you live.
  - Discuss transportation options: bus, bike, rides.
  - Campus life concerns: ask your student about his/her concerns, anxieties, expectations and questions. Talk about how it might be for him/her to live in an on-campus dormitory or apartment in the USA.
  - What else… Listen to your student to find out about other concerns or questions.

First Few Outings
- Grocery stores, big box stores (Costco/Sams), Target / Wal-Mart, Thrift stores, Goodwill, etc.
  - Dorm room or apartment furnishing (bedding, supplies, etc.), all on-campus beds are twin size extra-long.
- Local restaurants
- City landmarks
- Family favorites locations
- Family dinner or sporting event
### Stress Periods of International Students at College

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| • Homesickness  
  • Honeymoon Stage... Students find cultural differences intriguing. They are still protected by close memory of their home culture.  
  • Value crisis... students are confronted with questions of conscience over values and social expectations. Conflicted about how to handle culture differences.  
  • Feelings of inadequacy and inferiority develop because of the discrepancy between high school status and grades or between home country’s education vs. US system.  
  • Students may feel confusion and vulnerability | • Freshmen begin to realize that life at college is not as perfect as they were led to believe by parents, teachers and counselors.  
  • Loneliness sets in because of inadequate skills for finding a group or not being selected by one.  
  • Mid-term load pressures are followed by feelings of failure and loss of self-esteem.  
  • Lack of English language proficiency may limit a student’s desire to seek out social interactions and thus create negative feelings about their ability to be successful in their new environment. | • Academic pressure is beginning to mount because of procrastination, difficulty of work, and lack of ability.  
  • Depression and anxiety increase because of feelings that one should be adjusted to the college environment by now.  
  • Economic anxiety: funds from parents and summers earnings begin to run out.  
  • Some students have ceased to make attempts at establishing new friends beyond two or three parasitic relationships. |

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| • Extracurricular time strain, seasonal parties and service projects drain students’ energies.  
  • Anxiety, fear and guilt increase as final examinations approach and papers are due.  
  • Pre-Christmas depression especially for those who have concerns for family conflicts.  
  • Concern by students who do not celebrate Christmas.  
  • Financial strain because of holiday gifts and travel costs. | • The Diversity and uniqueness of J-term is perceived as entering the home stretch.  
  • Vocational choice causes anxiety and depression.  
  • Depression increases for those students who have failed to establish social relationship or achieve a moderate amount of recognition. | • Financial pressures as they plan for spring break. |

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| • Academic pressure increases.  
  • Existential crisis for seniors – must I leave school? Is my education worth anything? Was my major a mistake? Why go on? | • Academic pressure begins to mount because of so many outside distractions.  
  • Summer job pressures  
  • Seniors begin to panic at the thought of getting a job and not having the security of returning in the fall for the first time in their lives. |

**Reminder**

*ISS is here to help – always contact us if you have any concerns.*
Culture Shock

Model of Culture Shock

Culture shock cannot fit in a calendar. It can happen quickly or slowly for a student. Some students may go through different phases of the process several times. Other students may feel fine and then become very distressed during an important holiday or family event.

1. The “honeymoon” stage.
   Students find the new culture exciting.

2. The “distress” stage.
   Differences create an impact as students start to feel isolated or in adequate. Familiar support is not there.

3. “Re-integration” stage
   Students reject their host country. Students realize how much they like their home country and dislike this new culture. It is a way for them to reconnect with what they value about themselves and their own culture.

4. “Autonomy” stage
   Differences and similarities are accepted. Students may feel relaxed, confident, and more like an old hand as they are familiar with more situations.

5. “Independence” stage
   Differences and similarities are valued and important. Students may feel full of potential and able to trust themselves in all kinds of situations.

Effects of Culture Shock

A student’s health may be affected by culture shock and they may get headaches or stomach aches. Other people find they become more irritable, tearful and generally more emotional.

How to Help Students who May Experience Culture Shock

Encourage students to…

- keep in touch with home.
- read online news or watch satellite TV from home country.
- have familiar things around with personal meaning.
- eat a healthy and balanced diet. Find a supplier of familiar foods.
- talk with professionals in International Student Services, Personal Counseling, Health Services or other trusted staff members.
- link with a faith community. For some students being in touch with a familiar setting, whether this is a church, mosque, synagogue or temple will be helpful.
- talk. Be a listening ear and provide understanding to a student.

For more information contact:

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