



*Experience, Knowledge, and Friendship*

# **Friendship Family**

## Information Packet

# Friendship Family Program

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## What is the Friendship Family Program?

Friendship Family is a program that connects 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 the St. Thomas community a home away from home for international students.

This program matches international students (undergraduate or graduate) 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 OISS for cultural events and activities throughout that year. Friendship Families are expected to invite their student to family events and outings at least once a month. In addition, there are OISS and St. Thomas events that Friendship Families can attend with their student. The program does not require a lot of extra time and effort; rather Friendship Families welcome their student into normal family activities.

## About St. Thomas's International Students

the University of St. Thomas has more than 600 students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs. Our students come from all over the world and represent over 70 countries. While some students come to study for just one semester or academic year, most of our students come to complete an 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. Our students enjoy meeting a variety of family sizes and types. In fact, dispelling stereotypes about the "typical American" family is one of the goals of this program.

## Expectations & Guidelines

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Local Families participating in *Friendship Family* are expected to:

- maintain regular communication with their student throughout the year: return phone calls, emails and other forms of communication in a timely manner
- meet with their student at least once a month
- facilitate the student's adjustment to a new cultural and academic environment
- introduce the student to American and Minnesota culture
- participate in special events organized by OISS (if able)
- be excited and open to learning about a new culture
- respect religious and political beliefs of the student, as well as his/her cultural traditions
- complete participation surveys and evaluations

International students of *Friendship Family* are expected to:

- maintain regular communication with their friendship family: return phone calls, emails and other forms of communication in a timely manner
- meet with their family at least once a month
- respect the traditions, religious, and political beliefs of their friendship family
- facilitate a cultural exchange
- be open to experiencing another culture, recognizing that one's perceptions may grow and change over time
- complete participation surveys and 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 Together?

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Possible activities to engage in as partners:

- ❖ Invite your student over for a family dinner
- ❖ Invite your student to a family activity, such as attending a child's sporting event or school play
- ❖ Invite your student 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 the Landmark Center
- ❖ Visit Como Zoo (Japanese gardens, picnic areas, cross-country ski trails) and Como Conservatory
- ❖ Measure "the cherry" in Minneapolis Sculpture Garden
- ❖ Expand your mind by exploring Minneapolis Institute of Arts that houses more than 100,000 objects from various cultural traditions
- ❖ Observe the changing fall colors along the Mississippi river
- ❖ Chase waterfalls in Minnehaha Park
- ❖ Rent a bike, canoe or kayak at one of the local parks such as Lake Harriet
- ❖ Discuss a new book at the library
- ❖ 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

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## **Initial Matching**

You will receive an email with your student match from OISS. Please follow up by contacting your student(s) via email.

## **First Meeting/ Conversation Starters**

Meeting your student for the first time may be an anxiety inducing 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 English is not the first language for most students. Be patient as they listen and respond to your questions.

### *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?

### *Regarding their Studies*

- How is their education system back home? If different from the U.S. system, explain how their 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?

## First Steps

### *Arrival*

- Encourage your student to call or email home and/or contact family/friends in other places.
- Jet lag: For those who have traveled abroad, you know that jet lag can be difficult to overcome. Be flexible with your student and accommodate their 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 try not to 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 residence hall 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, Goodwill, other thrift stores, etc.
  - Dorm room or apartment furnishings (bedding, supplies, etc.)
  - Note that 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 in College

<p><b>September</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homesickness</li> <li>• Honeymoon Stage... Students find cultural differences intriguing. They are still protected by close memory of their home culture.</li> <li>• Value crisis... students are confronted with questions of conscience over values and social expectations. Conflicted about how to handle cultural differences.</li> <li>• 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.</li> <li>• Students may feel confused and vulnerable.</li> </ul>	<p><b>October</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freshmen begin to realize that life at college is not as perfect as they were led to believe by parents, teachers, and counselors.</li> <li>• Loneliness sets in because of inadequate skills for finding a group or not being selected by one.</li> <li>• Mid-term exam and class pressures lead to feelings of failure and loss of self-esteem.</li> <li>• 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.</li> </ul>	<p><b>November</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic pressure is beginning to mount because of procrastination, difficulty of work, and lack of ability.</li> <li>• Depression and anxiety increase because of feelings that one should be adjusted to the college environment by now.</li> <li>• Economic anxiety: funds from parents and summer earnings begin to run out.</li> <li>• Some students stop attempting to make new friends beyond two or three parasitic relationships.</li> </ul>
<p><b>December</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extracurricular time strain, seasonal parties, and service projects drain students' energies.</li> <li>• Anxiety, fear, and guilt increase as final examinations approach and papers are due.</li> <li>• Pre-Christmas depression, especially for those who have concerns about potential family conflicts.</li> <li>• Concern by students who do not celebrate Christmas.</li> <li>• Financial strain because of holiday gifts and travel costs.</li> </ul>	<p><b>January</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For many students, J-term signals the beginning of the home stretch.</li> <li>• Vocational choice causes anxiety and depression.</li> <li>• Depression increases for those students who have failed to establish social relationships or achieve a moderate amount of recognition.</li> </ul>	<p><b>February</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial pressures as they plan for spring break.</li> </ul>
<p><b>March</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic pressure increases.</li> <li>• Existential crisis for seniors – must I leave school? Is my education worth anything? Was my major a mistake? Why go on?</li> </ul>	<p><b>April</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic pressure begins to mount because of so many outside distractions.</li> <li>• Summer job pressures.</li> <li>• Seniors experience job panic.</li> <li>• Seniors become sad that they won't have the security of returning to school in the fall for the first time in their lives.</li> </ul>	

### *Reminder*

*OISS is here to help- always contact us if you have any concerns.*

# Culture Shock

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## Model of Culture Shock

Culture shock cannot fit in a calendar. It can happen suddenly or come on 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 inadequate. 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

Culture shock may impact a student’s health. Students may experience 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 Office of International Students & Scholars, 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.

Adapted from UKCOSA (2004). Guidance Notes for Students. As cited on [www.ukcosa.org.uk](http://www.ukcosa.org.uk)



For more information contact:

University of St. Thomas  
Office of International Students & Scholars  
Murray Herrick Center 212  
2115 Summit Avenue · Mail #5014 · Saint Paul, Minnesota 55105 · USA  
1-651-962-6650 · [oiss@stthomas.edu](mailto:oiss@stthomas.edu)

