

International Friendship Program

Vincennes University

International & Multicultural Student Affairs



PROGRAM SUMMARY

What is the International Friendship Program?

This program gives an opportunity for people in the community to become friends with a Vincennes University international student, and in the same token, it gives the opportunity for an international student to become friends with someone (individual, couple or family) from the community.

How often does one meet with a student?

Please invite the student to your home and/or meet up with them *at least twice per semester*. This is the basic expectation. Of course, we encourage you to meet as often as you like, or as often as you and the student feel comfortable.

Some basic ideas:

- ◆ Invite the student to your home for dinner.
- ◆ Invite them to a restaurant.
- ◆ Take the student to a typical activity, such as school events, sporting events, shopping, or other outings.
- ◆ Invite the student to a special event in the area, such as a fair, concert, etc.
- ◆ Other activities of mutual interest
- ◆ Take them to a place such as Walmart so they can get food/supplies, or take them along on a shopping trip to Evansville!

You do not need to...

- ◆ You do not need to provide financial help to the student.
- ◆ You do not need to (and should not) give legal and/or immigration advice.
- ◆ You do not need to help with serious emotional or health problems.

Other tips

Students who stay on campus during school breaks, such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and Spring Break, have a difficult time getting food as the school's dining center will close down for this period. This is an ideal time to have them over for a meal and/or take them shopping for food.

Student Information Sheet

Once you are matched with a student, you will receive (by postal mail or email) a copy of the student's basic information form which includes some preliminary information about the student as well as their contact information. If you need assistance, you can contact the International Student Affairs office at any time.

International & Multicultural Student Affairs

Phone: (812)888-4204

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Helpful Hints*

What is an international student like?

- ◆ *Most of them know a lot about the United States.* Yes and no (they most likely know more about the U.S. than you know about their home country). It will depend greatly on the topic at hand.
- ◆ *Most of them have been inside an American home.* Most international students will never step inside an American home. Having an American host family can significantly enhance a student's experience in the U.S.
- ◆ *Most speak English well.* Yes and no. Some students have studied English previously and can speak quite well, and some come from English-speaking countries. Other students who come to the university start off in ESL (English as a Second Language) classes. They might have difficulty making American friends and lack the chance to practice English. You're giving them a great opportunity!
- ◆ *Most come from country-side areas.* Some might come from smaller rural areas, however many come from large urban cities.
- ◆ *Most of them spend a lot of time studying.* True! International students tend to be very concerned about their academic performance. And considering that they are studying in English, many must keep a dictionary at their side to find many unknown words.



What should we do for our first visit?

- ◆ Invite the student to your home for dinner with your family and/or friends. Find out beforehand what the student cannot eat (allergies, and/or religious beliefs).
- ◆ Please arrange when and where you will pick the student up. Exchange phone numbers and email addresses and ask the student to call you if they have any problems.
- ◆ If you cannot invite the student to your home, consider meeting them at a local restaurant. You might want to ask them what type of food they like.
- ◆ Clarify your meeting time by email, which helps clear up any oral miscommunication.
- ◆ Write down your name, address, phone number, email address and family members' names to give to the student. Decide on how best to

communicate. Most students have email. Only a few have cell-phones. Ask the student to update you if they move dorm rooms or apartments.

- ◆ Clarify how a student wants to be addressed, and how his/her name is pronounced (be prepared to practice). You should suggest how the student can address you. Some may not be comfortable using an older adult's first name.
- ◆ You might want to ask them to bring photos to share as well as share your own photos with them (not the whole collection please).
- ◆ Be prepared to e-n-u-n-c-i-a-t-e as you talk and sloooowww down. Try to be aware of slang phrases and idioms as you converse. Be prepared to explain jokes, as humor is difficult to translate.

What do we do next?

- ◆ Make arrangements to connect again by phone, email, or set a date for the next get together. Try to work around the student's busy times, such as exam week.
- ◆ Some students might not mind a last minute call to attend an event. However, since most do not have cell phones, try to plan in advance if possible.
- ◆ Consider including your student's friends in your invitation to events or shopping if you can handle additional guests. This is only a suggestion.
- ◆ When you want the visit to end, feel free to make it clear because different cultures have different ways of indicating that the time for a visit is over.
- ◆ Remember to communicate clearly and confirm meeting dates and times.

What can we talk about?

- ◆ "Tell me about your family. How many brothers and sisters do you have?"
- ◆ "Tell me about the kind of food that you typically eat."
- ◆ "I'd like to see pictures of your family, home, and country."

It is quite typical of the U.S. press to report only negative events taking place in other countries. Please do not embarrass your student by highlighting their country's problems unless you are willing to first talk openly about your own country's problems.

What are some simple ways that we can show our student that we care?

- ◆ Bring your student some cookies, bread, or other homemade food during exams or illness.
- ◆ Take photos when your student visits and make copies for them to send keep and/or send home.
- ◆ Encourage your student to email you to tell you how they are doing with school.
- ◆ Ask your student to join in a special gathering (birthday, holiday, or special occasions).

What if an event costs money?

It is advisable to invite your student to free events or be prepared to pay for the student (if you are going to something that costs money). Even if a student comes from a wealthy family, they might have difficulty accessing cash from home. If you take your student to an event that costs money, please be sure to let the student know ahead of time if there is a fee involved and if you are paying or not.

How should we deal with discussions on religion?

International students may be quite willing to discuss religious ideas and practices, however if they are hesitant, please do not press them. A student might be curious about your own religion, and might be happy to tell you about their own. This should be a natural and enlightening conversation.

We need to recognize that religious and cultural heritage is treasured by all, regardless of where we come from. A student will be best served when their religious background and customs are respected and valued, the same as we would want if we were visiting a foreign country.

An invitation given to a student to an event sponsored by a church, religious group, or its members should clearly indicate the nature of the event and its sponsorship.

How do we deal with political discussions?

Anyone paying attention to politics in the USA will notice the deep divisions and differing opinions that people in our country hold. Students from other countries will have grown up with a different worldview, and this will be reflected in their political views which could be similar to yours, or completely different. Arabs come from many nations and often

hold views that are quite different. A Chinese person from the People's Republic of China (Mainland China) will have differing views than that of a Chinese from Hong Kong or Taiwan.

When discussing politics or religion, be exceptionally slow to criticize, regardless of what you hear in the news. We often hear only of negative news from around the world, and you might find that students may not have a complete picture of our country either. In any case, it is important to value the student as a person, value their opinion, and give a listening ear. This will set an excellent example for your student to follow.

Will there be an end?

Since VU specializes in its transfer program, most international students will be here at VU for one to two years. Each friendship that is established during that time will be different. Some will last only for that time, while others will go on to last a lifetime. We hope that you will thoroughly enjoy your role as a host family and that you will participate as long as you are able to. Your time and efforts befriending a VU international student are greatly appreciated and will bring about as many benefits to you as they will for your student.

Where can I find more information about our student's home country?

Here are some excellent resources:

- ◆ BBC News:
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/>
Find "Country Profiles" on the left-hand side menu.
- ◆ Wikipedia Online Encyclopedia
<http://en.wikipedia.org>

What if we have more questions or need help?

Just contact the international student advisor:

Daniel Whitmer
Director, International & Multicultural Student Affairs
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