



# INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP PROGRAM

## Friendship Family Information Packet



*Making Connections...  
and Unlocking Opportunities*



*Sponsored by the Center for International Studies at St. Cloud State University*

# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

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*International Friendship Program*

## What is the International Friendship Program (IFP)?

Welcome to the International Friendship Program! You are about to begin a new friendship which promises to be a rich and rewarding experience. Organized by the SCSU Center for International Studies, the International Friendship Program (IFP) aims to build long lasting cross-cultural friendships between international students/scholars and members of the community.

The primary purpose of the IFP is to promote and facilitate cross-cultural friendship. These friendships provide participants with opportunities to explore cultural issues and gain a better understanding of the role they play in the larger world. The cornerstone of any friendship is respect, so we ask participants to please respect each other's religious, cultural and political beliefs and refrain from trying to change them. This is not a "host family program" and does not involve home stays.

## How does it work?

International students are paired with a local friend from the community (a family, couple or individual) for an academic year. "Friendship families" provide an informal introduction to life in the United States, while students help their American friends learn more about other cultures. A successful friendship family – student relationship is dependent on a shared effort between both sides.

Both friendship families and international students/scholars go through the same application process. All are encouraged to attend an orientation session prior to being matched. International students, scholars and their spouses may apply. Participants may make specific requests about matching preferences but an important part of the program is open-mindedness and flexibility. Thus, if requests cannot be fulfilled, participants are asked to be flexible.

Since the number of students interested in the program is always higher than the number of friendship families willing to participate, it's likely that not all international students will be able to be matched. The goal is to match as many new international students as possible. Matching is based on hobbies, special interests, etc. that students and families have in common based on their application forms. If the friendships don't work for any reason, the participants may need to be re-assigned.

## About SCSU's International Students and Scholars

There are currently more than 1,100 international students at St. Cloud State University representing more than 80 countries. While some come to study as short-term exchange students for one semester or academic year, the majority of students come to SCSU to complete their entire undergraduate or graduate degrees. SCSU also hosts visiting scholars for semester and academic year exchanges.

About two-thirds of SCSU's international students come from Asia, primarily Nepal, India, and China/its territories. Other countries with sizeable student representation include Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, and Kenya, among others. Whether you have a special interest in one particular country/region or are open to any possibility, we hope you will find this experience rewarding.

International students who sign up for this program are excited about being matched with a friendship family, and might be matched with someone who does not necessarily match their typical image of an "American." This is truly the heart of the program: shattering stereotypes and developing true friendships.

# RESPONSIBILITIES & EXPECTATIONS

*International Friendship Program*

## Guidelines for Participation

1. Carefully read orientation materials concerning the IFP. Attend an orientation session if you are able.
2. Contact the student/scholar within 1-2 weeks of receiving their name. Maintain regular contact. Suggested: plan to include student/scholar in at least one activity per month during the academic year.
3. Attend social events planned by the Center for International Studies & IFP as you are able.
4. Contact the IFP Coordinator if you have questions, are concerned about the student/scholar, or if you don't feel comfortable in your friendship.
5. Complete an evaluation at the end of the year. Notify the IFP Coordinator as to whether you want to keep the same student, be matched with a new student, or no longer want to participate in the program.
6. Respect international students' religion, beliefs, values and customs.
7. Be open to cultural differences, appreciate cultural diversity, and commit to developing a cross-cultural friendship.
8. Students are not expected to provide child care, language teaching, assistance in the home, etc. that is not entirely voluntary in nature.
9. This is not a dating service; therefore, be respectful of students by not expecting or engaging in behavior that might be perceived with this in mind.

## You are not expected to provide the following:

1. Housing for your international student/scholar
2. Immigration information
3. Financial resources
4. Employment information
5. Academic advising

You may refer student/scholar to the Center for International Studies for assistance with these issues.

# MEETING YOUR INTERNATIONAL STUDENT/SCHOLAR

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## Welcome Event

The Welcome Event gives friendship families and international students/scholars an opportunity to meet each other along with other students and families in the program. If you or the student cannot attend the Welcome Event, we suggest that you contact him/her within the first 1-2 weeks of being matched to arrange an initial meeting.

Generally, it is suggested that the first meeting take place in a public place near campus. Be sure to give the student explicit directions and a clear time. If you feel that the student might be uncomfortable meeting you for the first time, encourage him/her to bring a friend.

## Keeping Your Connection

With nearly 17,000 students St. Cloud State University is able to provide hundreds of activities and events throughout the year, many of which are open to the public. Whether it's an athletic event, a musical performance, a guest speaker, or one of the many cultural nights put on by international student organizations, there are many possibilities to get together with your international student right on campus!

Of course we also encourage you to get together with your international student in activities and venues off campus, as there is much to see and do in the St. Cloud community and beyond. To the international student, this is one of the perks of having a friendship family: being able to experience American culture "through the eyes of a local." We have provided a list of ideas for you to consider when planning a get-together with your international student/scholar, and you may have ideas of your own. We have also provided a list of ethical considerations to keep in mind.

Throughout the year, organizers of the International Friendship Program plan activities specifically intended for IFP students and families. We encourage you to attend these events. These are simple, stress-free ways to get together with your student/scholar and also meet other people who share an interest in learning about different cultures! If you have ideas for IFP meetings or activities or wish to be involved in planning IFP events and/or recruiting new families, please contact the IFP Coordinator at the Center for International Studies.

# SUGGESTIONS FOR GETTING TOGETHER

## *International Friendship Program*

- Invite your student/scholar to dinner with your family. Ask him/her to bring pictures of home and family.
- Take your student/scholar to visit your grandparents or extended family, if possible. Talk about family relationships in the US. Ask how the elderly are regarded in his/her country.
- Watch a favorite TV show and discuss it. During an election year, consider watching the election results together.
- Go shopping! Try a supermarket. Point out bargains and generic brands, explain unit pricing, how to weigh produce, how to get a check-cashing card or discount card, etc.
- Watch a big game on TV and explain what is happening if the student/scholar is not familiar with the sport. Also do the reverse: watch a game that is popular in the student/scholar's country and ask him/her to explain it to you.
- Visit your children's or neighbor's school. Explain the system of education in the US and compare this to the system of education in your student/scholar's home country.
- Stop by the local police station or courthouse. Explain the difference between town, city, county and state governments. Discuss the roll of law enforcement and public servants in the US and compare to that of your student/scholar's home country.
- Visit the library or a bookstore. Choose a book you'd both like to read and discuss over coffee.
- Go to an amusement park or a mini-golf course. Especially fun with kids!
- Think about events that may be "uniquely American" in which you could include your student/scholar (pumpkin carving, 4<sup>th</sup> of July parade, dying Easter eggs, weddings and graduations, Super Bowl party, etc.)

### Other Activities

Picnics & potlucks

Farm visits

Walking, hiking, biking

Visit a relative's home

Sailing, canoeing, boating

Flea market, garage sales

Backyard barbecue

Mall of America

State parks

Visit a neighboring town

Social/civic groups

Board games

Movie theatre

Horseback riding

Ice-skating, ice-fishing

Concerts, musicals, plays

Zoos, museums

Hunting, fishing, camping

Local/state festivals

### Foods to Share

Lemonade

Mac & Cheese

Peanut Butter

Steak (if beef is in diet)

Tuna Hot Dish

Mashed Potatoes

Goulash

Jello Salad

Caramel Apples

Bars / Brownies

Corn on the Cob

Root Beer Floats

Wild Rice

S'mores



# CONVERSATION STARTERS

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## Relationships

1. How do you define friend and what do you generally expect from a friend?
2. At what age do couples typically marry? How do people meet their spouses?
3. Are workplace relationships formal or informal?

## Family

1. What responsibilities do different family members have at home?
2. How common is it for women to work outside the home?
3. How does your family celebrate special holidays? What does the holiday represent?
4. How often do you see your extended family? Do they live nearby or far away?

## Food

1. What dietary restrictions do you have?
2. What is the main meal of the day? Is the meal time a time when your family is together?
3. Can you explain how to make one of your favorite meals?
4. What do you like/dislike about food in the US? What do you miss the most?

## Daily Routine

1. What is an average workday like?
2. What is transportation like? How do people travel to work? How do children travel to school?
3. How often do people go to a shopping market or grocery store?

## Education

1. What is the education system like in your country? Describe a typical day at school.
2. What languages are you required to study, if any?
3. What are the educational backgrounds of your family members?

## Leisure Activities

1. What is the most popular sport in your home country? What sports do you like?
2. What activities do families enjoy in their leisure time?
3. Does your family like to take vacations? If so, where?
4. How do you spend your time in the US compared to when you are in your home country? Have you developed new hobbies/interests since coming to the US?

# ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

International Friendship Program

## Respect

The International Friendship Program aims to increase friendship and cultural exchange between international students/scholars and community members. We who work with international students are committed to the policies set forth by NAFSA: Association of International Educators, our professional organization. Those who become volunteer friends in the IFP are bound by the same politics. The following is excerpted from NAFSA's Standards and Responsibilities in International Educational Interchange for your information: *"Community workers related to religious and political groups must recognize that the religious and political beliefs of any foreign people in the United States are important parts of their culture and merit the respect of Americans and the effort by Americans to learn about and understand them. Religious and political groups can perform a service by providing opportunities for foreign students and scholars to observe and join in mutual inquiry into beliefs and practices. However, there must never be any attempt to proselytize, and any invitation to a foreign student or scholar to an event sponsored by a religious or political group should clearly indicate the nature of the event and its sponsorship." While it is acceptable to discuss religious concepts if you are both comfortable doing so, arguing or proselytizing is absolutely not acceptable.*

## Drugs & Alcohol

The use of non-medical drugs is illegal in US, although such use may be legal in certain foreign countries. You should not offer or encourage student(s) to indulge in any form of illegal drug use, nor should you use any type of illegal drugs in the presence of your international friend.

Many international students/scholars do not use alcohol because of cultural and religious beliefs. As a friend, you should respect and honor these beliefs by not offering alcoholic drinks to your students when you entertain him/her. Refer to the student/scholar IFP application which makes a provision for listing dietary restrictions. Also, you should not offer alcohol to a student under the age of 21 in any circumstance. If your student is over the age of 21, you should not allow him/her to drink excessively and then drive a car.

## Gender

The IFP includes single individuals as well as couples and families with children. When an application is received from a single female/male, it is the policy of the IFP to match that individual with a student of the same sex. This policy has been established as a consideration of different cultural beliefs concerning gender issues. As a friend, you should be sensitive to differences in values and beliefs regarding this topic. Finally, this is not a dating service and should not be used as such.

## Cultural Values & Assumptions

Culture is the lens through which an individual views the world. The values and assumptions that one holds are highly influenced by one's culture. Often the differences are deep-seeded and invisible, and difficulties can arise when one does not see and/or understand these differences. We encourage you to research and read about your student's home country/culture, as this will help facilitate a successful and rewarding relationship. See the following pages for more information on dominant American values.

# AMERICAN VALUES AND ASSUMPTIONS

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Below is some information about dominant values in the US. As you read and reflect on these values, remember that they are not necessarily right or wrong. Additionally, these are just generalizations about American culture; you will find many individuals within the US who do not hold the same beliefs.

Be aware that your student/scholar may come from a culture with very different norms, values, and beliefs. Having knowledge and awareness about the foundational values of the US may help you minimize misunderstandings in your cross-cultural relationships.

## **Individualism, Independence, & Privacy**

Americans see themselves as individuals who are responsible for their own situations in life. Personal needs and desires often take precedence over the needs and desires of families and society. There is an emphasis on self-fulfillment and self-discovery. Parents give many choices to their children and instill personal responsibility, even at a young age. It is uncommon to see children beyond the age of 20 living with their parents. If they do, they often pay rent. Americans allow their children to have their own possessions and their own rooms, if they can afford it. There are rules/laws about confidentiality which are seen as “protecting” the right to privacy.

Americans assume that most people need time to themselves. In some cultures one rarely spends time alone, and translations of the word ‘privacy’ have a negative connotation of being outcast or isolated. In contrast, some Americans have difficulty understanding people who always like to be with others and may judge them to be “clingy” or “dependent” – words which have somewhat negative connotations. Americans may be perceived as friendly upon first meeting, but difficult to open up and get to know personally.

## **Egalitarianism**

Even though there are inequalities and prejudice in our society, most firmly believe that “we all are created equal” and that every person deserves some measure of respect. It follows that all people should have access to the same opportunities regardless of race, religion, gender, age, marital status, sexual orientation, national origin, socio-economic status, mental or physical disabilities. This is a foundational belief in the US and is the basis for many laws and workplace policies.

The US functions less hierarchically than some countries. Americans may be uncomfortable with obvious displays that indicate social status, such as honorific titles or being bowed to or deferred to. Americans show respect and make distinctions in more subtle ways, such as by tone of voice, order of speaking, or seating arrangements.

Children are often allowed to “discuss” their parents’ decisions. Questioning one’s professor is acceptable, and bosses often go out of their way to seem approachable by helping with some of the less desirable work or joking during business hours. Americans chitchat with cab drivers, restaurant servers, store clerks, doctors, or anyone else they meet in daily interactions.

## **Achievement & Action-Oriented**

Americans value hard work and continually want to improve the situation. We feel that we never achieve enough and should always keep bettering ourselves. Some Americans are seen as very competitive. We are always doing something, and feel bored just sitting and “doing nothing.” Individuals are admired who “work their way up from the bottom”, who “stand out from the crowd”, who do something first, the longest, or the best. Ultimately people are defined by what they do in life, not by the family or economic situation into which they are born.

# AMERICAN VALUES AND ASSUMPTIONS (CONTINUED)

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## Informality

Americans use first names quite often, even with people who are older or those whose social position is higher. Most people, regardless of their social position, are at times very informal in the way they speak, behave, and dress (even the President!). Relationships between students, teachers, and coworkers are often much more casual than in other countries. Informality is often valued as it creates an image of egalitarianism.

## Time Orientation

Americans speak of “using” time well, of not “wasting time” and of “saving time,” while in many cultures time is just something that happens. We value organization and punctuality. We make lists of things to do, carry calendars and schedules, and feel best knowing that time is used constructively. Even leisure time is planned. Efficiency is highly valued; hence many popular magazines are full of suggestions on how to be more efficient in cooking, cleaning, maintenance, raising children, etc.

Americans are generally less concerned with history and traditions than people from countries whose history goes back several centuries. While the US tends to be very future-oriented, other cultures have more of a reverence for the past. We value new things and ideas more than the old, and products are often advertised as “new and improved”. We believe that we can and should improve our situation, as in the phrase “don’t just stand there, do something!”

## Directness

“Let’s get to the point” and “Let’s lay our cards on the table” are examples of American directness. Assertiveness and honesty are highly valued, and we often tell the truth about our situation even though it may put us in an unfavorable light. Other cultures are more concerned with “saving face”, and may say something indirectly or state it more positively in order to avoid shame and embarrassment.

Source: Althen, Gary. *American Ways: A guide for foreigners in the United States*. Intercultural Press, 1998, 2003

When cultures come together, misunderstandings can sometimes be difficult to avoid. You can take steps to limit these misunderstandings. Communicate clearly and honestly, and have an open conversation about each others’ expectations. Take the time to research the country your student/scholar comes from. Know your boundaries and communicate them, if necessary. Seek information about cross-cultural communication. Ask questions. Most importantly, be open to learning from successes and mistakes and sharing with others. After all, this is what the program is all about!

**Thank you for your interest in the International Friendship Program.  
We wish you the best as you begin your relationship!**



## Contact Information

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