



INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP PROGRAM

Student Information Packet



*Making Connections...
and Unlocking Opportunities*



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

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

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.

As an international student interested in this program, you are probably excited about being matched with a friendship family. You may be matched with someone who does not necessarily match your 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.
2. Communicate regularly with your friendship family. Return phone calls, emails, etc. and make sure to fit time in your schedule. It is suggested that you do one activity per month during the academic year.
3. Any activities which involve admission fees, costs, etc. are usually at one's own expense unless otherwise discussed.
4. Attend social events planned by CIS/IFP as you are able.
5. Contact the IFP Coordinator and your friendship family about changes in address, phone or email.
6. Respect your friendship family's religion, beliefs, values and customs.
7. Be open to cultural differences, appreciate cultural diversity, and commit to developing a cross-cultural friendship.
8. Contact the IFP Coordinator if you have questions, encounter difficulties in your friendship, or cannot fulfill your responsibilities in the program.
9. Complete an evaluation at the end of the year. Notify the IFP Coordinator as to whether you want to keep the same family, be matched with a new family, or no longer want to participate in the program.

Limitations of the IFP

This program is **not** intended for international students/scholars to address housing, academic, immigration, employment, or financial issues. Help with such matters is available through the Center for International Studies. Similarly, international students are not expected to provide child care, language teaching, assistance in the home, etc. that is not entirely voluntary in nature. Finally, this is not a dating service and should not be treated as such.

MEETING YOUR FRIENDSHIP FAMILY

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Welcome Event

The Welcome Event gives friendship families and international students an opportunity to meet with each other along with other students and families in the program. If you or your friendship family cannot attend the Welcome Event, we suggest that you contact each other within 1-2 weeks to make other arrangements to meet.

Generally, it is suggested that the first meeting take place in a public place near campus. If you are not clear on directions or time please contact your friendship family to make sure you understand the arrangements. If you feel uncomfortable meeting your friendship family alone for the first time consider inviting a friend to come with you, but make sure to ask the friendship family first. As a common courtesy, please refrain from inviting friends to every activity or meeting.

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 friendship family right on campus! Of course we encourage you to get together in activities and venues off campus as well, as there is much to see and do in the St. Cloud community and beyond.

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 friendship family 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, please contact the IFP Coordinator at CIS.

Ideas for Getting Together

Whether you recently arrived in the US, have transferred to Minnesota from another state/city, or have been in St. Cloud for a long time and are just now choosing to participate in the IFP, you are probably excited about the opportunity of being matched with a friendship family. You will undoubtedly learn a lot about the US "through the eyes of a local." Be creative: do something you both enjoy, or try something new together! Your friendship family will likely have ideas about things to do together, but you may wish to make suggestions as well. For example:

Have a picnic	Concerts, musicals, plays	Go shopping
Walking, hiking, biking	Zoos, museums	Visit a neighboring town
Go to a park	Hunting, fishing, camping	Go out for coffee
Play board games	Local/state festivals	Zoos, museums
Go to a movie	Sports activities	Volunteer together
Ice-skating, ice-fishing	Restaurants/café's	Celebrate a birthday or holiday

* It is important to talk about expectations of the program with your friendship family. Discuss what kinds of activities you like to do and how often you would like to get together, as this will help to limit misunderstanding and frustration. The following section, "American Values and Assumptions," introduces other potential causes for misunderstanding.

AMERICAN VALUES AND ASSUMPTIONS

International Friendship Program

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, they are just different. Additionally, these are just generalizations about American culture; you will find many individuals within the US who do not hold the same beliefs.

For the most part cultural values and assumptions are invisible, underlying the way in which people think and act. Though it is difficult to separate yourself from your own cultural values, having some knowledge about the foundational values of the country in which you now live may prepare you for some of the frustrations you may face.

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 perceive 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 their 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)*

International Friendship Program

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 very casual. 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. However, every misunderstanding is an opportunity to learn something new. An experience that begins with frustration or discomfort can turn into a valuable learning experience, and sometimes even seems funny as you think back to it. It is important to 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!**



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