Light the Way!

International Friendship Family Program

Local Individual/Family Information Packet

2016-2017
International Friendship Family Program

What is the International Friendship Family Program?
The International Friendship Family Program is a new program run by International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS), which seeks to link international students with local Cincinnati/Highland Heights area families. Based on the belief that proximity, inclusion and friendship are key to successful cultural exchange, the program provides unique cultural experiences for community members and helps international students experience true Ohio/Kentucky culture, with guidance from American families. The goal is to make the Cincinnati/Highland Heights community a home away from home for international students.

The program involves matching an international student, both undergraduate and graduate students studying at Northern Kentucky University (NKU), with a local friend (a family, couple or individual). Participants can make special requests about matching preferences, but please keep in mind that the main goal is to have all students who have applied matched with a family. International Friendship Families applying during the fall are matched with a student for one academic year and are invited to join ISSS for cultural events and activities throughout that year. Beyond attending ISSS events (optional), International 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 it mainly involves families welcoming students into their normal, day-to-day family life.

About NKU’s International Students

NKU currently has international students from over 50 countries enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programs. The students come from all over the world, with Saudi Arabia, China and India being the top three countries of origin. While some students come to study for just one semester or academic year, the majority of them come to complete their entire degree.

International students who apply for this program are excited to learn more about local American culture. Knowing that there is no “typical” American family, families of all sizes and types we are able to match our students with, are welcomed. In fact, dispelling stereotypes and myths concerning what a “typical American” family is, remains one of the main goals of this program.
Local Families participating in the International Friendship Family Program are expected:

- To attend the International Friendship Family Program 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 student at least once a month.
- To facilitate the student’s adjustment to a new cultural and academic environment.
- To introduce the student to American culture.
- To participate in special events organized by ISSS (if able).
- To be excited and open to learning about a new culture.
- To respect the religious and political beliefs of the student, as well as his/her cultural traditions.
- To complete participation surveys/evaluations.

International Participants of the International Friendship Family Program are expected:

- To maintain regular communication with their International Friendship Family Program 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 International Friendship Family Program.
- To facilitate a cultural exchange.
- To be flexible, open and excited to learn about American culture.
- To complete participation surveys/evaluations.

As an International 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 student over for a family dinner or summer BBQ.
- 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 the great view while watching the Cincinnati Reds play baseball at the Great American Ballpark.
- Visit the Spring Grove Cemetery and Arbotarium.
- Learn something new at the Omnimax (featuring a 5-story domed screen with surround-sound) of the Cincinnati Museum Center at Union Terminal.
- Visit the Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens.
- Check out Bonsai trees at the Krohn Conservatory.
- Expand your mind exploring the Cincinnati Art Museum which houses more than 100,000 works of art from various cultural traditions.
- Discuss a new book at Barnes & Noble.
- Take a walk along the Riverwalk, a trail that stretches 4 miles, from Cincinnati into Kentucky, and offers a spectacular view of the Cincinnati skyline.

Please keep in mind that your meetings do not have to be formal or involve spending a lot of money. 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 and let ISSS 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 inducing experience. Some students may be extremely friendly and open, while others may be more reserved. Here are some suggested conversation starters to help 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 International Friendship Family Program?
• 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.
- Jet Lag: for those of you 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:
  - A “tour” of the neighborhood and city where you live.
  - Discuss transportation options: public transportation, biking, 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 US.
  - What else…? Listen to your student to find out about other concerns or questions.

First Few Outings

- Grocery stores, big box stores (Costco, Sam’s Club, etc.), 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

Reminder

ISSS is here to help - always contact us if you have any concerns
## Stress Periods of International Students in College

### September
- 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

### October
- 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.

### November
- 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.

### December
- 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.

### January
- 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.

### February
- Financial pressures as they plan for spring break.

### March
- Academic pressure increases.
- Existential crisis for seniors – must I leave school? Is my education worth anything? Was my major a mistake? Why go on?

### April
- 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.
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 at International Student and Scholar 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:

Northern Kentucky University
International Student and Scholar Services
University Center, 305
100 Nunn Drive, Highland Heights, KY 41099
1-859-572-6517 – isss@nku.edu