



# NORTHWESTERN STATE

*Making new friends...*



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We are thrilled for your decision to participate in the Student Friendship Program at NSU. We are grateful for your enthusiasm to share your life, culture and personal experiences with someone from another country and appreciate your generosity of spirit. Students like you make the Northwestern State University family proud!

Before committing to the Student Friendship Program as a student host or an international student, read the information included in this guidebook and let us know if you have any questions. This guidebook will explain what is expected of you and requirements for all participants. It also offers creative ways of making your future friendship with an international student or student host both gratifying and fun.

Please call the Office of International Student Resource Center at (318) 357-5939 with any questions or concerns you may have, or e-mail us at [international@nsula.edu](mailto:international@nsula.edu) for more information.

**Note:** The content of this Guidebook is greatly based on “international Friendship Program Handbook” from Florida Institute of Technology, and it has been tailored to the needs and expectations at Northwestern State University.

# ESSENTIALS

## **What is the Student Friendship Program?**

The goal of the SFP is to promote and facilitate cross-cultural friendship by pairing an international student (Student) with a volunteer from the university (Student Host) for a semester or an academic year. The Student Host provides an informal introduction to life in the United States via conversation and activities. International Students can help their American host learn more about other cultures, languages, etc.

## **About Our International Students**

There are approximately 100 international students at Northwestern State University representing over 20 countries. Most of these students come from Colombia and Honduras with growing numbers hailing from France and Eastern Europe. All international students interested in this program are excited about being placed with a host.

## **About Our American Student Hosts**

Community participants learn about the program through word-of-mouth, newspaper and website announcements, civic organizations, neighborhood associations and NSU publications. Student Hosts represent a wide variety of backgrounds, races, and interests.

## **How to join the Program?**

If you would like to participate in the SFP, whether as a Host or Student, please complete an application and submit it to the ISRC for processing. The spouses of international students are welcome to participate. Hosts may make specific requests regarding who they would like to have as their Student, but are encouraged to be open-minded and flexible.

# WHAT I NEED TO KNOW AS A HOST

## What is expected of an NSU Student Host?

It is very important to always maintain a friendly and respectful attitude. We are looking for students who enjoy learning about other cultures and building new relationships. But that's not all it takes to become a Student Host. We also ask that you, as a volunteer participant, agree to the following responsibilities:

1. Commit to at least one semester **or** one academic year of participation.
2. Contact your assigned Student within the first week after being provided his or her information.
3. Maintain regular face to face contact (at least once a week) with your Student or via phone/e-mail/social media.
4. Include your Student in at least two activities per month during your participation in the program.
5. Contact the ISRC if:
  - You have questions or concerns relating to your Student.
  - If you lose touch with your Student or are no longer able to fulfill your responsibilities (regardless of the reason).
6. Complete a survey of the Student Friendship Program at the end of your participation.
7. Be ethical in one's actions and help out your Student within your possibilities. Under no circumstances will you be their Academic, Financial or Immigration Advisor.

## Drugs, Alcohol, Political and Religious Difference

8. While it is healthy to discuss religious and political differences, arguing about them is unacceptable. Respect their religious practices and political views.
9. Never offer nor encourage your Student to indulge in any form of legal (medications) or illegal drug use, i.e. smoking marijuana, nor should you use any type of illegal drugs in their presence.
10. Also, you should not offer alcohol to a student under 21 years of age. If your student is over 21, you should not allow him or her to drink excessively in your home and then drive a car.

If your Student requests any of these things, please direct them to the ISRC.

## What Can I Expect?

You can expect to build a friendship with someone who is a lot like you but from another country. International Students tend to be easy to get along with, are eager to learn and adapt to their new life as a college student in the US. Of course, like you, they're unique individuals with particular interests. Discovering the richness and diversities within a different culture can be surprising!

In addition, you can expect that the International Student will:

- Want to be treated with respect.
- Require time to adjust.
- Have questions that you may not be able to answer.
- Have already their own friends that you will get to know.
- They take care of their own expenses, housing situation, academic obligations, immigration responsibilities, etc.



# MAKE THE MOST OUT OF YOUR NEW FRIENDSHIP

Once your application to participate in the Student Friendship Program is accepted, the ISRC will match you with a Student and supply you with his or her name and contact information.

## Getting in Touch

The ISRC will facilitate the first introduction. After that, your first responsibility as a Host is to maintain contact with the International Student. Phone, e-mail, texts and social media are great ways to stay in touch and make plans to meet and get acquainted. If you are unable to get a hold of the International Student, let the ISRC know and we will help facilitate the communication.

## The First Meetings

It is suggested that the first meetings take place in a public place on or near campus, such as the student union building, cafeterias, library or local coffee shop. Keep it casual and friendly. If you get the impression that your Student is apprehensive or nervous, encourage him or her to bring a friend. When scheduling the meet-up, be sure to give detailed directions and a specific time.

## Suggestions for Getting Together

After your first meeting, you can continue getting together for casual on-campus chats, or you can go out and do something different. There are countless activities you can share with your Student. Here are just a few suggestions:

1. Family Dinner – Invite your Student to a meal with your family or friends. Ask him or her to bring pictures of home and family to share.
2. Movie – Go to a movie. Talk about it on the way home, or over an ice cream.
3. Shopping – Try a supermarket or mall. Explain the ins and outs of American retail (i.e. discount cards, store credit cards, weighing produce, where to find the best bargains, etc.)
4. Firsts – Accompany your Student to his or her first visit to the doctor or dentist in the U.S.
5. TV Night – Watch your favorite television show, sports event or news program and discuss it afterwards.
6. Purple Pride – Invite your Student to a Demon's home game and explain the rules if he or she is not familiar with the sport. Or you can both join an intramural team and play together.
7. BBQ – Have a barbeque, picnic or potluck. Ask your Student to bring a homemade dish.
8. Exercise – If you and your Student are into fitness, you can work out together at the WRAC, or take an evening jog once in a while.
9. Explore Natchitoches – Some favorites include:
  - Front Street & River Bank.
  - Local Museums.
  - Plantations.
  - State & National Parks. (Kisatchie National Forest, Toledo Bend Reserve, Briarwood, Hodges Gardens)
  - Road Trips.

# MAKING A GREAT FRIENDSHIP

## Become a better Friend

We often think of friendship as something that just happens, but there are a variety of things you can do in order to maximize your ability to build and maintain a positive, mutually rewarding relationship with your Student.

1. Make sure your Student knows your full name, address and telephone number.
2. Familiarize yourself with the country and cultural background of your Student.
3. Learn your Student's dietary restrictions and preferences.
4. Try not to make assumptions about your Student, including that he or she needs help; most international students are quite capable of getting by on their own in the U.S.
5. Let your Student know if you will be away or unusually busy for a long period of time; a loss of contact can cause misunderstandings.
6. Make sure when you invite your Student to your residence that he or she understands the day and time of the visit, and for how long. Provide transportation whenever possible if he or she does not have a means of transportation.
7. Encourage your Student to invite another friend on occasion if he or she wishes to do so.
8. Remember that some International students are shy and quiet; some are not as proficient as others in the English language; some like to listen more than talk about themselves.
9. Be careful about jokes; what you find humorous may be offensive to someone from another culture.
10. Understand that your Student's academic schedule may at times prevent acceptance of your invitation; be aware international students tend to be very dedicated and generally do not socialize during exam week or the time prior to a major test or paper.
11. Be aware of your Student's non-verbal gestures and cultural moves; if you have questions, contact the ISRC.
12. Remember that the purpose of the program is for cross-cultural friendship and exchange; your friendship should be a two-way street.
13. Be open, be yourself, feel free to ask questions, and most of all enjoy the experience of getting to know someone from another culture.

## Getting the Conversation Going

It can be hard to start a conversation with a complete stranger, particularly one whose cultural experience may be extremely different than your own. To help you get started, here are some topics you can use to break the ice and get to know your Student and his or her culture better.

- How different types of relationships are in the other culture.
- Family Life
- Food
- Daily Life
- Education
- Leisure activities

# INFORMATION FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

## What is expected of me?

As an International Student, you will be expected to show the same enthusiasm for cross-cultural learning and friendship as your Host, though in a different way. You should also plan for activities to get together. Include her/him in your own groups of friends, campus and off-campus activities. We also ask that you commit to:

1. Answer your Host's e-mail and/or phone messages within 24 hours of receiving them.
2. Notify both the ISRC and your Host of any changes on your contact information or living arrangements.
3. Contact the ISRC:
  - When you have questions or concerns related to your Host.
  - If you lose touch with your Host or no longer wish to participate in the program (regardless of the reason).
4. Do not expect your Host to solve your academic, financial or immigration concerns.

## What Can I Expect?

You can expect to build a friendship with someone who is probably a lot like you. Hosts tend to be friendly, generous and interested in learning. Like you, they are unique and have their own interests and personalities.

Additionally, you can expect that your Host will:

- Want to be treated with respect.
- Know about your home country, but have many questions as well.
- Involve you in numerous activities throughout the year.
- Want to help you in whatever ways possible but also be aware of certain boundaries and limitations.

# CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

Being new to American culture and values, you may be presented with attitudes and customs that you find challenging or confusing, or you may not. Either way, you should be aware that misunderstandings are common between new friends from different countries, and that's just part of the learning process. To better understand your Host and American culture in general, consider the following.

## Culture Shock

Most people who travel to another country to work or study for a significant period of time go through an adjustment period. The amount of disorientation one feels in the new situation depends on one's own background and experiences, so not everyone will experience "culture shock," but you should know what it is and what you can do about it. Culture shock is the abrupt loss of familiarity, which leads to a sense of isolation and diminished self-importance. Culture shock is brought on by the anxiety that results from losing all familiar signs and symbols of social interaction. These signs or cues include the thousands of ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life, so when they disappear or change, we react not only emotionally, but also physically and psychologically. When you first arrive in a new culture, you may feel a sense of excitement and anticipation. Later, you may feel that the differences between your home country and the country you are visiting are overwhelming and frustrating. You may experience sleep loss, loss of appetite, anxiety, and even depression. It is important to remember that this is a normal reaction to sudden changes and is something

that passes as you spend more time in the second culture. If you experience any of these symptoms for an extended period of time, it is important to talk to someone about it—friends, family, your advisor, or someone you trust or with whom you feel comfortable. The staff at the ISRC is always available to talk with you about your experiences as you adjust to life in the U.S.

### **Friendliness Vs. Friendship**

It is important for international visitors to understand the difference between “friendliness” and the concept of “friendship” in the United States. Often, international visitors are excited and gladdened by the overall friendliness of Americans, only to later find themselves hurt or disappointed when a friendship doesn’t blossom beyond the initial politeness. Although many Americans are warm and approachable at first, it may be difficult to get beyond the surface and establish a close personal friendship with some of them.

### **The Meanings of “Friend”**

In the United States, the single term “friend” may be used to introduce a classmate, an acquaintance, a love interest or a true close friend. Americans have different types of friends: casual friends with whom they share an interest (classmate, teammate, someone from a club), close friends, and best friends. In the U.S., friends are not expected to do everything together, exclusively. In some countries, people reserve the word “friend” for a few people with whom they are very close. Hence, your understanding of what “friend” means may be different from the way your Host defines it.

### **Independence and Self-reliance**

Two important U.S. values are independence and self-reliance. Thus, people in the U.S. may prefer to do something themselves rather than ask for help, as they do not want to impose on another person. They may also expect others to do the same. This can create a misunderstanding with people from societies with more interdependent relationships, as they may expect more from friends. Also, Americans might feel uncomfortable if someone seems too needy, calls too often, or wants to get together every day. It is important to let your Host have his or her space; he or she will likely assume you want your independence too.

## **SOMETHING ELSE TO THINK ABOUT**

### **Seven Lessons towards Cross-Cultural Understanding**

1. Don’t assume everyone is the same.
2. What you think of as normal behavior may only be cultural.
3. Familiar behaviors may have different meanings. Just because you’ve recognized a given behavior, don’t assume that you have understood it.
4. Don’t assume that what you meant is what was understood. Check for signs that the other person did or did not understand you. When in doubt, ask.
5. Don’t assume that what you understood is what was meant. You hear what others say through the medium of your own experience. You know what those words mean to you, but what do they mean to the person speaking?
6. You don’t have to like or accept “different” behavior, but understanding where it comes from may help you not react too strongly.
7. Most people do not behave rationally; it is up to you to discover the rationale.



# SFP STUDENT & HOST HANDBOOK AGREEMENT FORM

I have read and completely understand the Student Friendship Program Participant Handbook.

## HOST

Print First and Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## STUDENT

Print First and Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## ISRC ADVISOR

Print First and Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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