Table of Contents

Overview of the Program..............................................................page 3

Expectations and Requirements of Participants.......................page 4

Suggestions for Getting Together and Developing a Friendship.........................................................page 5

Conversation Starters.................................................................page 7

Notes about Culture Shock and Cultural Understanding.................................................................page 9

What participants have said about the program:

Community Participants:
“It’s going very well. We have become very good friends and are continuously helping each other with language and cultural issues”

“We went on a New Year’s trip to the Virginia Mountains together where our friend saw snow for the first time. We have had a fantastic time being involved in the program”

International Participants:
“I have a new American family and two little brothers. It has been the best part of my time in Durham” – Mexican participant

“We have a 20-year-old American boy from Durham in my family since last May. He is a son of our host family that Duke’s International House introduced to us. We still keep a very good relationship with each other, and this is the second time for him to stay in Japan with my family. He is very good at taking care of children, and it seems Baku and Shin love him more than their parents. After we introduced him in Baku and Shin’s school, he became a hero of kids, and our house becomes like a kindergarten on weekends. Moreover, even their parents started to gather to learn English from him. He is definitely the most famous and beloved boy in the neighborhood now. We are enjoying a very pleasant summer.” – Japanese participant
Overview of the Program

WELCOME to the International Friends Program! Below is some general information about the program, which may be of interest to you as you begin your international friendship.

The International Friendship Program is one of the oldest programs at International House, having existed for over 20 years. It remains one of our most popular programs, and has helped to establish thousands of rich cross-cultural friendships through the years, some of which are maintained far beyond the initial year of participation in the program. The sole purpose of the International Friends Program is to promote and facilitate friendship and cultural exchange. The cornerstone of any friendship is mutual respect, effort, and care so we ask both community and international participants to keep this in mind as we lay the foundation for meaningful and fulfilling relationships. Below are some common initial questions many have when considering the program:

Who participates in the International Friends Program?
Typically the program has attracted international students and scholars from Duke as well as domestic Durham community members and Duke staff. The program is open to any international or domestic person or family living in the Durham or immediate triangle community. Participants learn about the International Friends Program through International House website, word-of-mouth, places of worship, civic organizations, neighborhood associations and many other ways. Participants include a wide variety of ages, backgrounds and races.

Who are the international students and scholars at Duke?
There are over 100 countries represented at Duke! The 10 most represented countries are: China, India, Canada, Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Turkey, Germany, Brazil and Singapore. There are over 4000 international students and scholars at Duke University. International students, scholars and spouses may apply to participate. Internationals participating in the program are typically in their first year here at Duke. Like the community members, two students from the same country may represent a wide range in age, beliefs, travel experience, English ability, etc.
How do participants join the program and how are they matched?
Internationals and US American friends must go through the same application process, by completing an application online. Community members may make a special request for an international friend from a specific country; however, an important part of the program is open-mindedness and flexibility so a willingness to engage with folks from all over the world is beneficial. Also, keep in mind that matching depends on who decides to sign up for the program; and the more specific a request is, the more difficult it will be to find a match. Matching is done throughout the year and is based on hobbies, special interests and activities that participants have in common. Please note that a match isn’t necessarily final – on occasion, matches haven’t worked out and participants have been re-assigned.

EXPECTATIONS AND REQUIREMENTS

For the “Community Participant”
• Contact your international friend within the first week of being matched (In the future, contact does not need to be initiated by the community member, but as a member of the host culture it is important to take the initiative as the friendship begins.)
• Maintain contact with your international friend, and expect to get together at least 2 or 3 times per semester
• Attend the beginning of the year “International Friends Potluck” (unless you join later in the year)
• Commit to keeping an open mind about your international friend’s culture, language ability and time.
• Ask lots of questions
• Contact Paige Vinson, the IFP Coordinator, when you have questions, or if there is a problem with your match.

For the “International Participant”
• Respond to email and phone messages from your friend in a timely manner
• Feel free to share only as much about yourself and your culture as you are comfortable sharing
• Keep an open mind when it comes to activities that you do with your friend
• Don’t expect your friend to pay for activities and meals unless they explicitly offer. Even an invitation to go out doesn’t necessarily mean that you will be treated.
• Feel free to invite your friends to activities on and off campus
Duke International Friends Program

Participant Handbook

Updated 2013

• Attend the beginning of the year “International Friends Potluck” (unless you join later in the year)
• Expect to meet with your international friend at least 2 or 3 times per semester
• If you are no longer able to participate, you must contact Paige Vinson, IFP Coordinator

For Everyone:
• The IFP Program is not a dating service, if it appears this is your matches’ intention, however harmless, please contact Paige Vinson, the IFP Coordinator.
• The program is not a tutoring service. Please do not expect your friend to give language lessons, unless they clearly enjoy doing so, and it is explicitly agreed upon. There are other IHouse programs for language exchange.
• Please respect your friend’s beliefs, especially when it comes to religion. While it is okay to share your cultural and spiritual beliefs, there should be no proselytizing with intention to convert.
• While cultural misunderstandings are all part of the learning process, prejudice of any kind will lead to immediate dismissal from the program. Please contact Paige Vinson, the IFP Coordinator, if you feel you are being discriminated against.

Suggestions for Getting Together

Below are just a few suggestions for activities to do with your friend. Of course, try to find something that both of you like to do, but also don’t be afraid to introduce your friend to something that is really important to you – everyone will be very curious about you and your culture!

• Home Cooked Meal
• Visit the North Carolina State Fair
• Afternoon Tea or Coffee (either at home or out)
• Watch a Favorite TV Show
• Hike at the Eno River State Park
• Take one of Durham’s Many Walking Tours
• Go to a Movie
• Volunteer somewhere together
• Take a walk with a pet
• Go for Ice Cream or Loco Pops!
• Durham Bulls Baseball
• Get some NC BBQ
• Go To Durham or Raleigh Farmers Market
• Visit a local museum

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• Watch sports on television and share about sports in your country
• Go to a child’s function (sports, recitals, etc.)
• Golf
• Go Shopping!

Suggestions for Forming a Strong Relationship

1. Be sure your friend knows your full name, address and telephone number.
2. Become familiar with the cultural background of your friend, the geography of the home country, and a few facts about the country. Ask questions, but also do some of your own research.
3. Ask your friend about dietary restrictions based on religious or cultural preferences and practices.
4. Be flexible about when you can get together. Students/scholars are more likely to be available on weekends.
5. Make sure that when you invite your friend over that he/she understands the date and time he/she will be expected to visit you and for how long. Provide transportation whenever possible if the student/scholar does not have a car.
6. Include the student/scholar in whatever you are doing: cookouts, service clubs, community festivals, fairs and holidays, political meetings or activities. Your student/scholar will probably be more comfortable with informal activities than with formal activities planned specifically for him/her.
7. Invite the student/scholar to include a US American or other international friend on occasion if he/she wishes to do so.
8. Remember that some students/scholars 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! Humor is one of the final components of language acquisition. However, don’t be afraid to laugh together about misunderstandings.
10. Be open; be yourself; feel free to ask questions and most of all enjoy the experience of getting to know someone from another culture.

*Provided from the NC State International Friendship Handbook
Conversation Starters

Conversation habits can vary widely depending on one’s culture, personality, age and many other factors. The following suggestions are given as possible conversation topics to help you be intentional during your time with your friend.

Complete the statements:
• To me, friendship means...
• One interesting or beautiful place I’ve visited is...
• One of the happiest experiences of my childhood was when...
• What I like best about life in the United States is...
• What I want to accomplish most of all with my life is...
• The best thing I could ever do for anybody would be...

Do one of the following:
• Compare and contrast social customs
• Look for similarities in the different cultures
• Tell a traditional or folk story that is popular in your country
• Describe the skills or special knowledge needed for your hobbies
• Describe something you have built, painted, photographed, written or some other accomplishment

Look backwards…complete the following:
• The best thing that happened to me in the last year...
• The worst thing that happened to me in the last year...
• A goal I achieved or a problem solved is...
• A new friend I made...
• A completely new experience I had...

A Look Forward…Complete the following statements:
• A goal I hope to accomplish this year...
• A place I plan to visit, and why I want to go there...
• My summer plans include...
• What do you plan to do after finishing academic work at Duke...
• What I’d choose to be doing 10 years from now if I could choose...

Relationships
• How do you define friend?
• What are your expectations for a friendship?
• How do young men and women meet and choose husbands and wives?
• At what age do couples typically marry?

Family
• What responsibilities do different family members have in the home?
• How common is it for married women to work outside the home?
• How does your family celebrate special holidays? What does the holiday represent?
• Describe your extended family?

Food
• What dietary restrictions do you have?
• What is the main meal of the day?
• Is mealtime a time when your family is typically together?
• Can you explain how to make one of your favorite meals?

Daily Routine
• What I’d choose to be doing 10 years from now if I could choose...
• What is an average workday like?
• How do you travel to work?
• How often do people go to the shopping market or grocery? (daily, weekly?)
• How do your children get to school?

Education
• What is the educational system like in your country?
• What languages are you required for students to study in school?
• Describe a typical day at school?
• What are the educational backgrounds of your family members?

Leisure Activities
• What is the most popular sport in your home country? What sports do you like?
• What activities do families enjoy in their leisure?
• What hobbies do you enjoy?

*Provided from the NC State International Friendship Handbook*
Culture Shock

“Somewhere along the way, I succeeded in reconciling my past and present, instead of forsaking one for the other. I now have a much broader perspective, as I need not accept or reject either Bulgaria or America, but can embrace only the positive from both.” – Stephen Kobourov, Bulgaria

What is Culture Shock?

Most experts in the field of intercultural communication agree that culture shock is the abrupt loss of the familiar, 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 thousand and one ways in which we orient ourselves to the situations of daily life. 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 too great and thus overwhelming and frustrating. You may suffer from sleep loss, loss of appetite, anxiety, and even depression. It is important to remember that this is a normal response to sudden changes, and is something that will pass as you spend more time in the new 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 International House is always available to talk with you about your good and bad experiences as you adjust to life in the U.S.

Most people who travel to another country to work or study for a significant period of time go through a period of adjustment to the new culture. The amount of disorientation one feels in the new situation depends on one’s own background and experiences. Although there are some common symptoms of culture shock, no two people will experience it in exactly the same or go through what are called the Stages of Cultural Adjustment in the same order or with the same intensity. Sometimes the transition to a new culture has an immediate impact, and sometimes culture shock is a delayed reaction. The effects of culture shock have a range of symptoms, including:

- uneasiness
- homesickness
- unhappiness
- irritability
- psychological panic
- hyper-sensitivity
- loss of perspective
- loss of appetite or digestive problems
- lethargy
- depression
- insomnia
- headaches

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Seven Lessons Geared Towards Enhancing Cross-Cultural Understanding


1. Don’t assume everyone is the same.

2. What you think of as normal behavior may only cultural – a lot of behavior is universal, but certainly not all. Before you project your norms on the human race consider that there may be more than one way to do something.

3. Familiar behavior may have different meanings – Smiling, for example, exists in al culture, but does not always mean the same thing. Just because you recognize a given behavior, don’t assume that you have understood what it means.

4. Don’t assume that what you meant is what was understood – you cannot always be sure of how others are interpreting your behavior.

5. Don’t assume that what you understood is what was meant – all communication is filtered through our on cultural lens which is not the same lens used by people from another culture.

6. You don’t have to like or accept or adopt a behavior that is different from yours; however, understanding where that behavior comes from and what values underlie it can help you to be respectful of any differences.

7. Most people do behave rationally; you just have to discover the rationale.