

# Intercultural Life



*MONMOUTH COLLEGE*

*Inspiring a culture of excellence*

## **OBJECTIVES OF OUR HOST FAMILY PROGRAM**

- 1) To provide a comfortable home environment for international students in which they can experience the warmth and caring of a family circle.
- 2) To introduce international students to a broad spectrum of American life and culture.
- 3) To foster international students' interest in and appreciation for the distinctiveness of the Midwest.
- 4) To give international students the opportunity to share in American holiday traditions such as Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter.
- 5) To offer the Monmouth community an opportunity for cultural enrichment through sharing in the lives of international students.

\*\*\*\* The student does not live with the Host Family. However, the student is open to visiting your home at your invitation.

## **INTERNATIONAL STUDENT PROBLEMS**

When we consider what an international student faces in coming to the United States, we marvel that any of them ever succeed. They pack themselves up and leave home, perhaps for the first time. They travel often thousands of miles with considerable physical discomfort. They arrive in a bewildering American city with keen anticipation, only to be confronted with confusing and frustrating entry procedures. They are shaken to discover that they can neither understand nor be understood, in spite of what they thought was an excellent command of English. They may find that there are humiliating questions about the quality of their previous study at home, and confusion about whether they should really be classified at the level they expected. They probably have to go through yet another English examination and registration process that seems chaotic. The academic system may be completely different from anything they have ever experienced, with much less freedoms in many respects, and much more taken for granted in others. At one possible extreme, the specter of failure in their courses may haunt them, or at the other end, they may find them disappointingly elementary. They may either be ignored or feel that they are on exhibit as an exotic curiosity. They are shocked to find how expensive or cheap things are in the U.S. They may find themselves short of money, and that the reputation of the United States for wealth and generosity have led them into unrealistic expectations. The food may not agree with them, the people may seem indifferent or downright unfriendly, and the social customs strange and illogical. They are likely to go through one or more periods of acute homesickness.

We can only admire their courage and marvel that their study abroad is successful.

❖ Adapted from the National Association for Foreign Student Affairs Guidelines.

## **IDEAS FOR HOST FAMILY INVOLVEMENT**

- 1) Invite students for meals.
- 2) Ask student to accompany you on special excursions.
- 3) Invite student to cook for you.
- 4) Show an interest in their special kinds of groceries. Help them out by taking them to specialty grocery stores.
- 5) Introduce them to different aspects of community life and to your friends. Yard sales, school fairs and other community or church events can be fun for them.
- 6) Share your holiday traditions with them.
- 7) Find out about their birthday and put it on your calendar. When it rolls around, remember them in some special way.
- 8) Learn about their parents and siblings. Ask to see pictures of their family, and share your family pictures with them.
- 9) Get their home address and write to their family and let them know you have met their son or daughter and are helping them to enjoy their time in Monmouth, Illinois.
- 10) Learn about the customs and culture of their country. It is very interesting to compare lifestyles and discuss the uniqueness of cultures.
- 11) Find out about their hobbies and interests, and share your own with them.

- 12) Show an interest in activities that they may be involved in on campus-plays, sports, teams, musical groups, etc.

### **HINTS FOR HOST FAMILIES**

- 1) Learn your student's name and how to pronounce it. (the sweetest language on earth to a person is their own name)
- 2) Speak slowly and carefully (but not loudly), and explain the idioms of our language.
- 3) Be alert for non-verbal communication-facial expressions, posture, silence, gestures, etc.
- 4) Students who are still having some difficulty with English may say "yes" to be polite when they really don't understand you. On important matters, make sure-slowly and gently-that they understand you.
- 5) It is considered rude in some cultures to say "no" when asked for an expression of interest, or an agreement to participate in some activity. Double check arrangements with your student and invite them to occasionally bring a friend along. Tentatively discuss your next opportunity to get together before bringing the student back to campus.
- 6) Maintain your family customs, but explain them.
- 7) Serve food to the student after the first family member so that s/he can observe what and how much to take from the bewildering selection in front of them. Serve small portions.
- 8) Offer second helpings of food more than once. In many countries it is polite to decline a second helping the first or even second or third times.
- 9) Since food restrictions exist in many cultures and religions, you should ask your guest if there are foods and beverages you should not serve.
- 10) In addition to alcoholic beverages being unacceptable to many guests, milk is not a common beverage in most countries. Fruit juice, soft drinks, tea or water are often welcome offerings.
- 11) Rich desserts for which many Americans have a special fondness are often unknown in other countries. Your guest may prefer a fresh piece of fruit or a cup of tea at the end of the meal.
- 12) People of other cultures often have a different sense of time and space. **Punctuality is not a revered quality everywhere, so don't be surprised if your guest is late.** The physical distance and contact demonstrated between conversant and friends may be different.

## **HELPFUL SKILLS FOR CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING**

Tolerance for ambiguity	Low goal/task orientation
Open-mindedness	Non-judgmental personality
Empathy	Communicativeness
Flexibility/Adaptability	Curiosity
Sense of humor	Warmth in relationships
Motivation	Self-reliance
Strong sense of self	Tolerance for difference
Perceptiveness	Ability to accept failure
Respect for others	Realistic expectations

## **STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

1. Be patient.
2. Speak distinctly and slowly if it is clear that the student does not understand you.
3. State information/ask questions in several different ways to be sure the student hears and understands what you are saying.
4. If important, provide the information to the student in printed form.
5. Remember that the student has lived “x amount of years” in a culture different from yours and their habits and practices are well developed; it is not easy to learn new habits when so much is already ingrained.

6. Ask for more background information to help you understand the situation, the request, etc.
7. Look forward with enjoyment to the reaching of a common understanding.