

International Friendship Program

Information Handbook

for

Australian Hosts



Illawarra
Committee for
International
Students



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Welcome to the International Friendship Program

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the International Friendship Program (IFP). It is hoped that your association with the IFP will be a rewarding experience for you, your family and friends.

What is expected of me?

An essential quality of our volunteer hosts in the IFP is that they have a genuine interest in establishing contact with international students, openness to cultural differences and an appreciation of cultural diversity. Once you have made the commitment to offer friendship to an international student, we ask you to:

- contact your student as soon as possible after you receive their details
- attend IFP social gatherings organised by the Illawarra Committee for International Students
- try to see your student at least three times during the Session
- maintain regular contact by phone, email or SMS
- respect the student's culture, beliefs, religion, customs, etc
- inform the International Student Coordinator of any difficulties.

What is the length of my commitment?

It is anticipated that you will maintain contact with your student for at least one University Session (usually 14 weeks plus holiday breaks). If your student is a new arrival when you meet your friendship may help them during a difficult settling-in period. After their first Session they may have met more friends and feel more comfortable in their surroundings.

Your commitment extends no more than one Session, including the holiday period if your student stays in the local area. Anything else is up to you, although it is hoped that some genuine friendships will evolve through the program and additional contact will be possible if the student is still studying here. Friendships made often continue to grow, even after the student has returned to their home country.

What happens first?

You will have the opportunity to meet international students at a social function organised by ICIS. When you have exchanged contact details with a student please get in touch with them as soon as possible after the event. Don't feel guilty if you have not called right away - just call! Your student will be looking forward to hearing from you. Sometimes students are very anxious to talk with and meet their hosts but might feel awkward or uneasy about calling them first. That is why we ask you to take the initiative to call first. It would be a good idea to make arrangements to meet when you first contact your student but if this is not possible, the first phone call or email is a good start in your friendship and should help to 'break the ice'.

Ways to contact your student

- By phone - there should be a phone number with the student details given to you. It might be best to phone this number first; leave a message if your student is not there.
- By email - with the increasing use of email, some hosts have reported greater success when contacting students in this way. Email addresses, when available, will be noted in the student details provided.
- You could also try sending a note to the address given for your student.

First contact and organising to meet

When you contact your student, identify yourself clearly and state that you are participating in the International Friendship Program organised by the University. Confirm that your student knows your name, phone number and email address; these details will have been provided to your student by the IFP Coordinator. Later on you may decide to give your student your home address as well.

When arranging a meeting, be sure that you and your student are clear about the date, the time, the place and any details of the meeting. Suggest appropriate clothing (casual is usually preferred) or anything the student should bring along. Please be clear with your student if there will be any costs involved in the planned event ahead of time (see 'What you are not expected to do' below).

What if I can't contact my student?

Some hosts find students can be difficult to contact (getting messages to them and/or receiving replies from them). Please try to be patient and don't give up after your first unsuccessful attempt. If you are leaving a voice message, remember to speak slowly and clearly and leave a simple message asking the student to ring you back. Obviously you are not expected to devote an unreasonable amount of time trying to contact your student, so if you have been unsuccessful after about three attempts, please let the **International Student Coordinator** know promptly (phone 02 - 4221 3158 ; icis@uow.edu.au). Sometimes students move early in the session from University managed accommodation into private accommodation. The IFP Coordinator may be able to find the student's current location or assist in contacting the student if you are having difficulty yourself.

Please respond promptly to your student's communications to you.

The first meeting

You might like to organise something informal for your first activity with your student where you can get to know each other in a relaxed setting. A few suggested activities are given below. Make sure that you are comfortable by doing something that comes naturally to you. An effective follow-up activity is to invite your student home for a meal. However it is possible that some students may feel very uneasy if our customs or eating habits are very different from their own.

If you have two students you can ask them together. If you have one student you might like to ask them if they want to bring a friend. This does not usually involve any more work for you but can make conversation easier and more relaxed for everyone.

Try to organise transport for your student. If not possible, please make sure that they have clear directions/instructions on how to get there. If it is not convenient for you to invite your student home

for whatever reason, that is quite alright. If you are busy or have other commitments, one of the suggestions given below might be easier for you to arrange. At the conclusion of the first activity, make tentative arrangements for the next one, no matter how much further down the track you expect that to be. It is important that the student has realistic expectations.

Suggested activities

Activities are limited only by imagination and interests, but here are some suggestions:

- If you're on campus, meet your student for lunch or a coffee; cards or games and a chat
- Movies – something to talk about on the way home
- A drive to do some local sightseeing
- Shopping - point out the bargains, go to a supermarket, etc
- Picnic or barbecue with family or friends
- Visit the beach or a short bush walk
- Local sporting event - or go to your child's sports game
- Local festivals, special events or holiday activities
- Visit to a museum, art gallery, the zoo
- Trip to Sydney by train to see any of the sights
- Recital, concert, theatre, local band
- A simple home-cooked meal. Don't forget to ask in advance about dietary requirements. You could ask your student to bring some photos of home and family to show you.
- Watch an Australian film and discuss it afterward e.g. *They're a Weird Mob*, *The Man from Snowy River*, *Strictly Ballroom*, *The Castle*, *Walkabout*, *The Fringe Dwellers*, *Gallipoli*

What you are NOT expected to do

You are not expected to pay for the student on excursions or activities. However, if you plan to do something which will involve a cost for the student (e.g. admission charge), please tell the student in advance what it will cost. Most students will be budget-conscious, so costly activities may be unaffordable.

You are not responsible for the welfare of the student and you are not expected to provide accommodation. You may be prepared to have the student contact you for help with simple matters (e.g. where to buy certain products, travel tips, talk about feeling homesick) but you are not required to be a student counsellor. If a student appears to have a major problem of some kind (academic, financial, medical or personal, especially related to accommodation or immigration) you should advise him/her to contact an appropriate person immediately – start with a Student Liaison Officer (SEDLO) – contact details on page 9.

Making conversation

Conversation is both entertainment for your guest and one of the valuable elements of your interaction with your friendship partner. Be prepared to talk about yourself and this may make it easier for your student to tell you about him/herself. Take an interest in the student whilst being careful not to appear to be too inquisitive about their personal life. Keep an open mind and respect your student's views. Some conversation starters:

- national festivals, foods, customs, holidays (compare with Australia)
- family life
- life in Australia; weather/climate
- academic interests
- sports and hobbies
- current affairs and news

Timing of activities & the academic year

Weekends are usually best for activities. The student may at times have to decline an invitation if other activities intervene, especially those related to their studies, so you should bear this in mind. The academic calendar listed below will inform you of their likely University commitments. For some students strict adherence to prayer times may be a consideration. Don't be discouraged if your student declines an offer, but try to organise a more convenient time.

Once your student receives their course information and timetables, he/she may feel overwhelmed with the work they have to do. It would be best to organise a meeting before they get too bogged down with study, assignments and exams. There are mid-session breaks and holidays after the exams when your student may be available if they have not organised to tour or travel at that time. Some students return home during the long Summer vacation. Mid-year and mid-session breaks usually coincide with school holidays.

UOW Important Dates

AUTUMN SESSION 2009	
23 February – 27 February	Orientation Week
2 March – 9 April	Lectures Commence (6 weeks)
10 April – 19 April	Mid-Session Recess (1 week)
20 April – 5 June	Lectures Recommence (7 weeks)
8 June – 12 June	Study Recess (1 week)
13 June – 26 June	Examinations (2 weeks)
29 June – 26 July	Mid-Year Recess (4 weeks)
9 July	Release of Results
SPRING SESSION 2009	
20 July – 24 July	Orientation Week
27 July – 27 September	Lectures Commence (9 weeks)
28 September – 5 October	Mid-Session Recess (1 week)
6 October* - 1 November	Lectures Recommence (4 weeks)
2 November – 6 November	Study Recess (1 week)
7 November – TBA	Examinations (1½ weeks)
2 December	Release of Results
SUMMER SESSION 2009/2010	
7 December – 23 December	Lectures Commence (3 weeks)
24 December – 1 January	Mid-Session Recess (1 week)
2 January – 31 January	Lectures Recommence (4 weeks)
1 February – 5 February	Study Recess (1 week)
8 February – 12 February	Examinations (1 week)
NSW SCHOOL HOLIDAYS	AVCC COMMON VACATION WEEKS
10 April – 24 April	13 April – 17 April
13 July – 24 July	6 July – 10 July
5 October – 16 October	28 September – 2 October
21 December – 26 January	
GRADUATION	
Winter: 22 – 24 July	Summer: 14 – 18 December

* The 1st Monday of October is a public holiday. Lectures recommence on the Tuesday.

NB: Students enrolled at Wollongong College Australia have a different academic calendar.

Ethical considerations

It is important to respect the rights and beliefs of your student. It is fine to discuss political, religious or other sensitive matters but only if the student so wishes. There must never be any attempt to change the student's beliefs, nor to attempt to exert any religious or political pressure. An invitation to an event sponsored by a religious or political group should include a clear explanation of the nature of the event and its sponsorship before the student attends.

Remember that your student is an individual. Allow the student to be him/herself rather than a representative of a particular country; they are not responsible for everything that happens in their country. Naturally this is also true for Australians. In any country, individual differences may play as much a part in cross-cultural communication as the more noticeable cultural differences do.

Some international students do not drink alcohol because of religious beliefs and some come from countries where alcohol does not have the same acceptance in social life as it does in Australia. As a host, please be sensitive to this issue and offer a choice of a non-alcoholic drink if you wish to include the use of alcohol in your entertaining.

Be aware that students may be unfamiliar with many Australian laws: in particular you should attempt to ensure that your student will not run foul of laws relating to alcohol usage, particularly drink-driving limits. Remember that the legal drinking age is higher in some countries (e.g. 21 in the USA). Also the alcohol content of standard drinks varies from country to country and students may not be familiar with the strength of Australian beverages.

Culture Shock

Most international students will experience **culture shock** to varying degrees and, while some overcome it within the first six months, for others the adjustment process may take longer. Research indicates that international students cope better when they have had prior foreign experience and when they experience satisfying social contact with local people in the host culture.

Culture shock refers to the distress or anxiety experienced by international visitors as a result of losing familiar signs and symbols of social interaction such as customs, gestures, facial expression, or words. During this time students may feel confusion, disorientation, frustration, depression or even anger. Not all students will experience these feelings but if you do recognise them in your student you may be able to offer support or refer them to a Student Liaison Officer (SEDLO) further assistance - contact details below.

Student Equity and Diversity Liaison Officers (SEDLOs)

The Student Equity and Diversity Liaison Officers (SEDLOs) provide liaison, information, support and referral to University of Wollongong students as well as provision of programs supporting student equity and diversity both within faculties and across campus. They are available to help in a number of areas including:

- Student Welfare for international and domestic students
- Transition programs for international students
- Provision of equity information
- Liaison for the University's Disability Program
- Liaison for other areas of Student Services and referral to services such as Counselling, Learning Development, Careers, etc.
- Liaison with the Academic Registrar's Division and other areas of the University
- Liaison with external agencies
- As an emergency point of contact for students at risk and students involved in critical incidents
- Any non-academic issue impacting on a student's studies

Faculty	SEDLO	Location	Phone No.	Email@uow
Arts	Viv Mcllroy	Bld 19 Rm 1075 - Wed - Fri In Law office other days	4221 3635	vmcilroy@uow.edu.au
Commerce	Ann-Maree Smith	Bld 40 Rm 133	4221 4714	ams@uow.edu.au
Creative Arts	Kerry Banks	Bld 23 Rm G17	4221 4529	kerryb@uow.edu.au
Education	Kerry Banks	Bld 23 Rm G17	4221 4529	kerryb@uow.edu.au
Engineering	Virginie Schmelitschek	Bld 4 Rm G12 Engineering Enquires Centre Mon – Wed (am)	4221 5670 - Use informatics contact ph no. other days	virginie@uow.edu.au
Health & Behavioural Sciences	Jenny Walsh	Bld 41 Rm 152 (HBS Central)	4221 5332	jenwalsh@uow.edu.au
Informatics	Virginie Schmelitschek	Bld 3 Rm 111 - Wed (pm) – Fri	4221 3833 - use engineering contact ph no. other days	virginie@uow.edu.au
Law	Viv Mcllroy	Bld 67 Rm 207 - Mon & Tue In Arts office other days	4221 5017	vmcilroy@uow.edu.au
Science	Jenny Walsh	Bld 41 Rm 152 (HBS Central)	4221 5332	jenwalsh@uow.edu.au
Graduate School of Business	Ann-Maree Smith	Bld 40 Rm 133	4221 4714	ams@uow.edu.au
	Michelle Collis	Bld 40 Rm 247	4221 5297	michelle_collis@uow.edu.au

Cultural differences - an overview

Time - Consciousness of time and associated behaviour is culturally determined. Australia operates on a monochronic time which is the system of paying attention to and doing only one thing at a time. Time is scheduled and involves promptness, deadlines, rigidity and is task oriented. Many other cultures are polychronic which is the time system which involves many things at once. It is flexible, people orientated and will affect attitudes to punctuality, deadlines and lateness.

Women - Traditionally, many societies have perpetuated male gender preference and predominance and although this is changing in many countries throughout the world, in a lot of places this attitude prevails.

Family - The extended family unit, as opposed to the nuclear family unit in Australia, is still dominant in many cultures. Family ties are strong, the family is an individual's main support and members are responsible for each other's welfare. International students studying in Australia may find independence difficult and tend to be very reliant on members of their own group.

Social status - In some cultures status (related to age, education, wealth or position) governs relationships and behaviour to a much greater degree than in Australia. It affects forms of address, politeness, apologies, greeting behaviour, eye contact, etc.

Animals - Attitudes to animals often vary between cultures. Many cultures do not afford them a special position as Australians do and they will not have animals as pets.

Expression of emotion - Australians tend to be direct in their communication and will readily display emotions such as anger, frustration and happiness. Some cultures may interpret any open display of emotion as a lack of self discipline and poor taste. Any open disharmony, especially shouting, would result in loss of face for all parties.

Eating habits - Some other cultural groups may find dairy products indigestible and normally eat less fatty foods. The smell of lamb can be offensive to some. Religion often governs acceptable food in many countries, e.g. Hindus avoid beef (or all meat and eggs if they are strict), Muslims avoid alcohol, pork, bacon, sausages and some foods containing animal fats. Bread may have a religious significance. Meat may have to be slaughtered in a special way (halal). Many students from America are vegetarians. It is best to ask your student about this before preparing food.

Greetings and small talk - Australians tend to ask 'how are you?' and make comments on the weather. Other cultural groups may ask 'have you eaten already?' or 'where have you been?' The touching involved in greeting behaviour also varies from culture to culture, e.g. handshakes, hugging, cheek kissing and bowing, etc. Australians say 'please' 'thank you' and 'sorry' more often than people from some other cultures and can be offended by the omission of these phrases. However this does not mean that one culture is more polite than the other. Each culture has its outward signs of politeness which are culturally determined.

Names - Personal names are significant to our sense of identity. It is imperative that we try hard to get student names and terms of address correct. Some names are taboo for strangers to use. A general safety rule is to ask the students how to address them.

Program Benefits

The rewards from your involvement can be varied, from the personal satisfaction of discovering a new friend to the knowledge that friendship between individuals from different countries can contribute to world peace and understanding. You will find you gain a new level of understanding about yourself and Australia.

Other benefits could include gaining knowledge of other cultures, learning a foreign language, travelling to visit your new friend in his/her own country and the rewards of friendship throughout the years. However sometimes things don't always go as well as planned.

Some friendships flourish right from the beginning and some never really seem to get off the ground, through no fault of either party. It helps to have realistic expectations of what is possible in the circumstances.

Some comments from IFP hosts...

We loved being in the program. We met our student on several occasions - coffee, dinner at home and a picnic day down the South Coast.

We had lots of fun together.

Glowing letters I get from students I have hosted, really lift me up.

Sometimes it's frustrating but it's balanced by the good experiences.

It's very useful for finding out about each other's culture.

The genuine appreciation of students is sufficient reward.

I enjoyed sharing my love of bushwalking with my students.

I visited students and their families in Hong Kong, France, Washington, North Carolina and Tennessee. I never thought our humble hospitality to our students could result in such a warm acceptance.

We have become life-long friends.

Our two students this time were a delight and we enjoyed their company very much.

The Illawarra Committee for International Students

ICIS provides services that contribute to the wellbeing of international students and their families during their stay in Australia. We organise activities in which international students and the local community can interact and become aware of each other's cultures.

ICIS is a voluntary organisation in which all members generously give their time and energy because they support the aims and activities of ICIS.

ICIS activities include:

- regular meetings where international students, community members, University staff and the ICIS Coordinator plan and review programs and activities
- a range of low cost sightseeing day trips to places of interest such as the Minnamurra Rainforest, Jervis Bay, Blue Mountains and Canberra
- orientation week activities
- free English conversation groups for students and their family member
- programs and events that facilitate interaction with the local community
- the International Friendship Program

ICIS is a non-profit community organisation funded by the University of Wollongong.

International Student Programs

ISP is a collection of initiatives (Including the Illawarra Committee for International Students and the Momentum student mentor program) that provide programs, activities and events that contribute to the wellbeing of international students and their families.

Some of these programs include:

- English conversation groups
- The International Friendship Program
- International Student Mentors
- Information Seminars
- Low-cost sightseeing trips
- The Cultural Ambassador Program

Contacting the International Student Coordinator

Enquiries:

Please contact:

Dan Morgan
International Student Coordinator – Support Programs & Activities
University of Wollongong NSW 2522

International Student Programs
Lower Ground Floor
Building 11 (UniCentre)

Office Hours:

Weekdays in session
1pm – 4.30 pm

Tel: (02) 4221 3158

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