



Learning Abroad Center

Orientation Preparation for International Students

Thank you for volunteering to serve as a cultural informant at a Learning Abroad Center orientation! Your insight, tips, and advice are very valuable to students about to study in your home country. To help you prepare for the orientation, please review this information.

Now that you've been at a US university for several months or years, draw upon your observations and reflect on what cultural or systemic differences were most striking to you when you first came to study in Minnesota.

- The students you will be talking with will be participating in a variety of study abroad program models. Some will be taking university courses with students from your country and others will take courses just with international students. Some will be volunteering, working, or participating in internships with local organizations. Housing is also different for each student—some will be living with host families, others may live in on-campus dormitories or apartments. Please feel free to ask the students what their experience will be like.
- Please try to be generally positive and remember not to phrase your observations as judgments. Discuss what is “different” rather than what is better or worse.
- You may wish to bring pictures with you to orientation (optional).
- Be prepared to discuss many aspects of your culture including:

Academics: What classes are like in your culture, differences between teaching and assessment styles, tips on how to succeed in the classroom, appropriate interactions with professors and other university staff (how to greet/address professors, appropriate classroom attire and behavior)

Home Culture: What is it like compared to US culture? (Please frame this in terms of how it is different as opposed to what you like or dislike.) How does your home culture view US culture? What stereotypes does your home culture have about US Americans? How do you recommend reacting to those stereotypes? (Ignore them, is discussion welcomed?, etc.) What were your impressions of US culture during your first two weeks here and what are they now? What resources do you recommend to learn more about your customs and culture (books, magazines, websites, films, TV shows, radio stations, etc.)?

Communication: Personal distance, volume, interrupting during conversation, eye contact, direct vs. indirect, greetings, email/internet/SKYPE access, cell phone purchase/rental, etc.

Housing: What should a student living in a host family, dormitory, or apartment in your home country take into consideration (curfews, gender segregation, meals, sharing, personal vs. public space, access to keys)?

Packing: Provide tips on what to bring and what not to bring. What gifts would you recommend to give to host families, new friends, etc.?

Eating and Drinking: Typical food, meal times, habits/tendencies of host culture (please refrain from emphasizing pub/bar life)

Money: Forms of money (appropriate times to use cash or credit cards), money saving tips, tips on haggling (if appropriate), safe ways to carry cash, examples of what daily necessities cost (bus, laundry, student meal)

Travel: Travel tips, plane and train tickets, etc. (please avoid advising students to travel all of the time, because we encourage students to really get to know the city in which they are studying). Where have you gone with your family on vacation? What sites are important but are often overlooked by visitors to your country?

Health and Safety: Drinking water, street vendor food, neighborhoods/areas to be cautious of, dangers unique to host country

Culture Shock: Now that you've been in the US for some time, what do you think US students will have the most difficulty adapting to in your home culture? What might make their transition easier?

Miscellaneous: Please provide any other insights you have. If you wish, encourage the students you talk with to contact you when they return.

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