Welcome! Thank you for becoming a part of Georgia Southern’s International Extended Families Program.

At times, the American culture, customs, traditions, and social structure can be strange, but by connecting with your extended family, you can gain a new perspective and understanding of the United States. Your extended family is there to support and encourage you as you walk through adjustments, culture shock, and homesickness. They are also there to celebrate with you throughout the different milestones of your college career. It is a chance for you to be able to really learn what an average American lifestyle looks like. You will also be able to share your culture with them and expose them to your background, language, and way of life. Through investing your time and effort, you will be rewarded with a wonderful and new friendship.

Most students are expected to meet with their extended families at least on a monthly basis for a meal or an activity. Your families recognize that you have other responsibilities, but they want to be available to you if you should need something. Often times they will call you at least once a week to see how you are doing. This provides you with someone other than your peers to connect with. Adjusting to a new culture presents many challenges and hurdles; it can be a time of great excitement and learning. Your host family is there as safe havens for you while you get use to your new home.
The number of contacts per semester and the kinds of activities done together vary greatly from one family to another. These matters are between the student and the extended family.

**Suggested Activities**

- Celebrate a birthday or holiday
- Concerts, musicals, plays
- Fishing
- Go out for coffee
- Go shopping
- Go to a movie
- Go to a park
- Have a picnic
- Hunting, camping
- Local/state festivals
- Play board games
- Restaurants/cafés
- Sports activities
- Visit a neighboring town
- Volunteer together
- Walking, hiking, biking
- Zoos, museums

We ask that at a minimum you plan an event, dinner, or outing with the student at least once each month. Most families have found they want to invite the student to do much more.

Students do not need to feel obligated to accept every invitation. If students have class work to prepare, or if they do not wish to attend religious activities, for example, they are free to politely turn down an invitation. However, they should accept enough invitations (or initiate them) to develop a good relationship.

**Please note**: If the families/students do not make contact, students/families should notify Stacey Stinner (stacey-stinner@georgiasouthern.edu) 912-478-1379 or Angie Threatte (athreatte@georgiasouthern.edu) at 912-478-0570. Also, if students are not responding to families, our office would like to know.

The Extended Families Program does not have to involve students actually spending nights at the families’ homes, but if both parties are comfortable with each other and agree on a short stay, you may both find it rewarding. All students have on or off-campus housing during the majority of their stay in the U.S. and have no need for additional housing while school is in session.
COMMON QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR HOST FAMILIES

What is the International Extended Families Program?

The International Extended Families Program at Georgia Southern helps to ease the transition for new students to college life, and offers international students the opportunity to learn more about the American culture, as well as sharing their own culture and customs.

Who can sign up to participate in the International Extended Families Program?

Individuals, students, married couples, and families are all encouraged to become International Extended Families.

Can families take students out of town, state, or country?

We don’t recommend families take students out of country. But you may invite them for a weekend out of town or state if they agree and feel comfortable doing so.
What about the security issues?

Because the International Extended Family Program is a volunteer program based totally on mutual agreement between families and students, you and your student are responsible for your own safety. If you don’t feel comfortable with the student or family, please let us know as soon as possible.

How do I pronounce their names? How do I address them?

Ask them. They understand that their names are unusual for us to say. Some will tell you their "American name," feeling that it will be easier for you. If you make an effort to learn their real name, they'll appreciate it.

What do they like to eat?

You should ask the students if they adhere to a particular diet, or if there are foods that they don't eat. Some international students don't eat meat, some will not eat pork. Usually chicken, fish or eggs are "safe" to serve. You may certainly serve American food; the international student will expect this. But don't be too surprised if the student isn't enthusiastic about your dish. It may take time to get used to American food.

What about praying before the meal?

Feel free to practice whatever family customs you have about prayer before or after the meal, explaining to the students that this is your custom. Say something simple such as, "It's our family custom to give thanks to God for the meal as we begin." Just be yourself. As you do this with tact and love, they'll respect your convictions, and it may lead to a good conversation about spiritual things.

What can we talk about?

International students miss their families. Most love children, and will be happy to share with you about their family life (brothers and sisters, parents, children, customs) and country. If you have a world atlas handy, they can point out where they live. You can ask them about their studies, hobbies, and religion, if they have one.
Who should initiate the contact?

You should. Many international students feel like "guests" here, and may feel it's too "forward" to call you. Make sure they have your telephone number and email, just in case they need to get in touch with you.

How often should we invite them?

That's up to you. Since they're studying, they will not expect to be invited every week, but if they are never invited, they'll feel badly, and wonder whether they've offended you in some way. Let the friendship develop and give you guidance on how often to invite them. If the students invite you to do something with them, please be ready to accept their invitation. It's their opportunity to express friendship and gratitude for your friendship.

How will the students find our home?

If they are coming by car (if they have one), email them directions to your home. The best thing would be for you to pick them up. Be clear about where you will meet them and the time.

How long should they stay?

That's up to you. Remember, they are students, and need to study. It's helpful to give them an idea of how long the visit will be. Some international students may feel uncomfortable if they don't know how long is polite to stay. You might say, for example, "We'll pick you up at your room at noon and after we've had dinner together, we can show you around a bit. We'll bring you back to your room by 4:00 p.m."

What should we do together?

Enjoy time together. Have a meal, BBQ, or potluck. You might look at photos or slides together, go to a concert, take a drive out to the countryside or simply go for a walk (most international students are used to walking) and look around your neighborhood.
The students will be interested in getting to know the city better. Although they may have been in your city for a few weeks, or even may have lived here for a couple of years, there may be things they would love seeing, such as beaches, museums, parks, botanical gardens, etc.

**What about helping out with things?**

The students will want to feel more "at home" than feel like a "guest." If they offer to bring a dish, help set the table or help clear and wash up, let them join you. They'll want to get first-hand knowledge of the way we do things.

**What if something "weird" happens?**

Don't be surprised if your guests do something "strange." Our culture and customs here in the U.S. aren't necessarily "right," but they are different. In Japan, for example, one removes their shoes before coming into the house (to keep it clean). In Nigeria, the guest will not tell you when he wants to go home, but will wait until the host gives permission to leave. In some African countries it's fine to show up as a guest with one or two extra people - without telling the host beforehand! It might even happen that your guests don't show up, and don't call first to let you know. In some cultures it's polite to ask other people how old they are. Don't be upset by such events.

**What about inviting them to church?**

If the international student is a Christian, invite him or her to join you for worship. If your guests are not Christians, they may be open to attending a worship service with you if they are asked gently. This can be a new "cultural" experience for them. Be willing to accept "No, thank you," for an answer.

**Why should I participate?**

Some of the rewards and benefits include:

- You/your family will meet people from other parts of the world and learn about their culture
• Teach others about life and culture in the United States/your country. See their country through different eyes
• Gain a new friend

What are my responsibilities?

• **BE YOURSELF.** Informality makes everyone feel more at ease. Do, however, speak more slowly and try to avoid slang. You may have to ask your new friend to repeat things several times, but do not be embarrassed, everybody's learning.
• **LEARN ABOUT YOUR STUDENT’S COUNTRY.** Respect his/her religious faith, national customs, and dietary preferences. Do not try to “Americanize” your friend.
• **GREET AND KEEP IN TOUCH WITH YOUR STUDENT.** At first a note or email might work better than a phone call to open lines of communication. Please remember that punctuality may be less important in the culture where your friend has been living.
• **INCLUDE YOUR STUDENTS FRIENDS IN SOME ACTIVITIES.** Your hospitality will be appreciated and your horizons expanded.

What is NOT your responsibility – What families need to know?

Your responsibilities do not including housing, legal matters, serious health and emotional problems (should any arise), immigration, and other governmental obligations.

Students have their own housing, so it is not necessary to supply overnight accommodations. However, if you have the available space, an invitation to spend a weekend or a holiday break may be mutually enjoyable.

How do I get started?

You can become a part of the International Extended Family Program by filling out the [online application](#) to become a family.

Once we receive your application, the matching process will begin. Please contact Angie Threatte at 912-478-0570 or email athreatte@georgiasouthern.edu if, after you have received your placement(s), you encounter problems contacting your student or if you feel like the
match is not working. Once we are notified, we will take the proper steps to help alleviate the situation.

Main points:

- **Home-away-from-home**
  You are invited to share in the home of an American family. They will provide you with a secure place to relax and un-wind. All the benefits of a home are open to you with the Extended Families Program.

- **Meaningful relationships**
  Friendships are a vital part of belonging to a community. Your extended family is there to understand, encourage, and accept who you are. They will be able to provide valuable insight into the culture that you are joining.

- **Positive experiences**
  Many extended families take their students to local activities or church. They want you to be able to enjoy America and to take advantage of the opportunities and experiences that are available to you. When it comes time for you to return to your country, they want to have made sure that you had an overall positive experience.

- **“Open door attitude”**
  Your extended family is excited about you and spending time with you. They want you to feel comfortable with calling them should you need anything. While they recognize that you still have a family back home, they want you to feel as comfortable around them as you would with your own family.

- **Inter-cultural exposure**
  When you come to Georgia Southern University you bring with you a special gift; your culture, heritage, and who you are. While some of the extended families have had international experience, most may not have and they are anticipating learning from
you. Their home is a good place for you to also be able to learn about the American culture.

- **Expanding worldview**
  Each country has different ways of viewing things. Learning from each other is valuable and necessary. You will be able to be open and honest with your family and share your opinions and ideas within a safe environment. During your time at Georgia Southern, you will be able to evaluate the ideas and beliefs of others and come to a more concrete conclusion of what you believe.

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### Getting to Know Each Other

Here are some ideas that we’ve found will help launch your match...

- Every student has a birthday. Find out when it is and celebrate their day.
- Is your student involved in any extra-circular activities? I’m willing to bet they would love to have someone in their audience.
- Grocery shopping together
- Going to school activities together
- Invite them to your home to help with preparing a holiday meal
- Visits to local attractions/sightseeing around the area
- An occasional outing, coffee, dinner or a movie
- Cooking meals together
- Watching video/movie at home together
- Preparing a box of goodies for them during exam time
Being a Successful Family Host

Serving as a family host is neither difficult nor time consuming. It is not the amount of time spent together, but the quality of that time that counts.

- Have an open mind about the host/student relationship.
- Suggest to the student what name he or she might call you; for example, "Feel free to call me Fred, if that's comfortable for you. What name do you prefer to be called?"
- Take time to learn to pronounce the student's entire name and nickname.
- Be friendly.
- Express genuine interest in your student's country and family. Learn more about your student's country and culture.
- Encourage your student to explain his/her customs, country, food, etc. to you. It may be that the student would enjoy preparing some traditional food for you in your kitchen if they do not have facilities.
- Be a good listener. Encourage your student to ask questions and talk freely, thus exercising his or her "English language muscles." In this way, you will not need to carry the conversation.
- Be patient about your student's rate of communication. Some new students may speak English better than they understand English accents, slang, and so forth. At first, you may need to speak a little more slowly, try to explain slang and colloquial expressions, and allow the student time to think in his or her own language before responding in English.
- Be willing to take the lead in initiating conversations and organizing activities. A successful relationship depends on a shared effort between host and student, but the host usually sets the tone.
• If convenient for you, ask your student to include a friend or roommate on a specific visit to your home or other activity.
• Let your student know that you are always available if he or she needs to talk with someone regarding anything that he or she may have questions about or be concerned about.
• If possible, meet your student on campus or in town for a quick snack, especially during busy academic times, or leave some goodies at his or her door.
• Reassure the student that the time spent together is as valuable to you as it is to him or her.

Communication and Developing a Relationship

Your commitment to developing and maintaining a long-term relationship with your student is essential. The relationship begins and continues to grow through open and mutually respectful communication. Several communication-related suggestions were offered in the section on becoming a successful international host. Continuing communication between you and your student is the single-most important contributor to a successful relationship.

Additional Ideas:

• On the first or second visit to your home, offer to give a brief tour. Explain that you know he or she has not been in an American home before and might like to see yours, and also that you want him or her to feel at home.
• Use a variety of communication modes: phone, e-mail, voicemail, postal mail, and face-to-face discussion; each has its own strengths and limitations.
• Initiate activities and meetings with your student.
• Treat your student as one of your family.
• Explain what "make yourself at home" and "we'd like for you to feel like one of the family" means.
• Students are often initially reserved. Open the door for them to feel comfortable to ask questions about your background, family, hobbies, traditions, beliefs, etc.
• Include your student in family celebrations when possible.
• State the date by which you need a reply to an invitation.
• If you issue an invitation verbally, it is best to also send an e-mail with the details and ask the student if he or she will be able to join you.
• Advise your student of appropriate dress for an occasion, if it will require something more than everyday attire.
• Remember your student's birthday with dinner, a cake, a card, and/or a phone call.
• Write (only with the student’s approval) a brief letter or e-mail to his or her parents and/or spouse, and include a photo, simply to say it is nice to get to know his or her daughter, son, spouse, etc.
• Try calling students in the morning or evening.
• Encourage your student to contact you, either just for a quick chat or to ask for help.
• Call your student when you are going somewhere (e.g., shopping, to kids' events) and ask if he or she would like to go along.
• Respond to messages from your student in a timely manner; this will reassure the student that he or she is not being a bother and that you have time for him or her.
• Check in with your student periodically by e-mail or voicemail to let him or her know you are interested in how he or she is doing (academics, health, activities, friends, etc.). This will also reassure the student that he or she is important to you and that you want to make time for him or her.
• Be understanding when your student’s academic schedule prevents him or her from spending time with you. Ask when he or she will be finished with a project, test, etc., so that you could ask again.
• Don’t forget to keep in touch with your student.

If you have any questions or concerns, contact us! We are happy to assist you!

Stacey Stinner at 912-478-1379 or email (stacey-stinner@georgiasouthern.edu)

Angie Threatte at 912-478-0570 or email athreatte@georgiasouthern.edu