



INTERNATIONAL
STUDIES
MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY BILLINGS

BFF

BILLINGS FRIENDSHIP FAMILIES

GUIDEBOOK



<https://www.msubillings.edu/internationalstudies/intl-comm/bff.htm>

WELCOME MESSAGE

DEAR BFF MEMBER,

First of all, on behalf of Montana State University Billings and the entire MSUB international student body, thank you for volunteering to be a part of the BFF program. Your support of our international students and diversification of the Billings community is greatly appreciated! The new and improved BFF program strives to offer more organic support for international students enrolled at MSUB through community networks and involvement.

Your BFF student is embarking on an exciting new chapter in his or her life and has left behind family, friends and general livelihood to study halfway around the world in Billings, MT. For some students, this is their first time in a foreign country or even away from their parents' home. The Office of International Studies, as well as other departments throughout MSUB, strive to help students acclimate, but in many cases, a student really just needs a family to turn to.

As a BFF member, you are playing an integral part in your student's development and general happiness in Billings. We request that you offer the minimal commitment of inviting your student to dinner once per month, as availability permits, as well as invitations to holiday dinners or events, such as Thanksgiving. However, you will find that as your relationship grows, you will likely want to see your student more often, and vice versa. We encourage greater engagement between BFF families and their students; we have tried to match students with families that share similar interests in hopes of building stronger relationships. Don't be surprised if your student starts to see you and your family as his or her own and in some cases, your student may even refer to you as "mom" or "dad" and your children as "brother" or "sister". It is not uncommon for students to maintain contact with their BFF families, even after they return home.

We hope this short guidebook will provide some useful information. If you ever wish to speak in greater detail about the BFF program, or if you have ideas about improving BFF or are just looking for ideas about what to do with your student, please don't hesitate to reach out to us. Thank you again for your commitment to our international students!

Best Regards,
The Office of International Studies



RESPONSIBILITIES & **EXPECTATIONS**

BFF members are encouraged to take the lead in establishing a relationship with the student. International students who are new to a country and culture often may initially feel hesitant to reach out. During the initial weeks to a month, families should proactively arrange activities and meet-ups with their students until they feel settled and comfortable in their new environment. Once students have acclimated, they will likely take the initiative to seek more contact and support from their BFFs.

It is important to note that families are not expected to provide financial support or regular transportation to their students. Additionally, hosting students in their homes for an extended period is not an obligation. If for any reason, a BFF is not longer able to participate in the program, please notify the OIS.

AIRPORT PICKUP

BFF members assigned new MSUB students are asked to pick their student up from the airport, if they are able. Receiving them when they first arrive in Billings is one of the most important things we can do to help them feel welcome. Upon their arrival, these students may have already traveled for over 24 hours, which can leave them feeling exhausted and disoriented. The Office of International Studies (OIS) will coordinate the pick-up times. You will receive an email from the OIS with detailed information regarding your student's flight, housing, contact information, and additional instructions. Please note that arrival times may be late at night or flights may be cancelled or delayed. If for whatever reason you are not able to pick up your student, please inform the OIS and alternate accommodations will be made.



How to do an Airport Pickup

Before Arrival

- The OIS will send you an email with your student's basic info, contact information, and flight schedule.
- Prior to the student's arrival, we suggest BFFs get in touch with their student and introduce themselves.
- BFFs can let their students know that they will be picking them up from the airport. It can be helpful to send a physical description or photo to your student so they know what to look for when they arrive in Billings.

At the Airport

- Check the student's flight status on the airline's website prior to pick-up, as schedules are prone to change.
- The OIS can provide BFFs with a sign with the student's name and MSUB logo.
- Arrive 10-15 minutes before the scheduled arrival and wait for the student at baggage claim (at the bottom of the escalator).
- After collecting the student and luggage, drive the student to either Petro Hall or Rimrock Hall (OIS will provide you with the student's residence hall and a campus map if you are not familiar with the MSUB campus).

At the MSUB Residence Hall

- When you arrive at the Residence Halls, there should be an RA (Residence Assistant) on duty at the front desk to get the student checked in.
- There will also be an international student there to greet them and help them get settled. They will have a care-package of some essential items for your student.
- Please note that your student may not have bedding for the first few nights unless they have purchased it from housing before their arrival.
- Schedule your next meeting time or outing with the student prior to leaving the Residence Hall. Many students arrive to Billings with the bare essentials and would jump on the opportunity of a next-day shopping trip to get some supplies. A suggested shopping list will be sent to BFFs as well.
- Ensure the student is situated, and then leave him or her in the hands of the RA and International Student.

TOPICS OF CONVERSATION

Starting a conversation with someone from a different country whose native language may not be English can be overwhelming!

Here are some conversation starters to help you get to know your student.

Family

- What is your role in your family?
- Do you have any siblings?
- Do you have a boyfriend or girlfriend?

Goals & Aspirations

- What would you like to accomplish while in America?
- What are your educational goals?
- What are your career goals?
- What is your motivation to accomplish your goals?

Education

- What is your major?
- What is your favorite subject?
- How does the education system in the US compare to your home country?

Interests & Hobbies

- What do you like to do in your spare time?
- What types of music, books, movies or sports do you enjoy?
- Are you interested in joining any campus clubs or organizations?

Food

- What kinds of foods do you like to eat?
- What kinds of foods like you not like?
- Do you like to cook?
- What foods do you miss from home?
- Is food an important part of your culture?

Experience

- How do you feel about being away from home?
- What do you miss the most from your home country?
- What has been the biggest challenge adapting to life in the US/Montana?
- What things would you like to experience while studying in the US?

ACTIVITIES TO DO WITH YOUR STUDENT

Aside from the minimum commitment of inviting your student to your home to share in a homemade dinner once and a while, there are many activities that you already do which you could extend an invitation to your student. If your family is going camping or hiking, invite your student. If your family is going bowling, invite your student. If you are attending your child's recital or sporting event, invite your student. There is so much that Billings and Montana have to offer, and this is your chance to introduce our home.



HERE ARE SOME OTHER EXAMPLES

- Attend the annual BFF BBQ – this event is typically held during the fall semester International Student Orientation
- Invite your student to just hang out with the family at your home
- Attend a Mustang's game or an MSUB sporting event
- If your student is an MSUB athlete, offer to attend his/her match(es)
- Take the student camping, hiking, fishing, skiing, horseback riding, etc.
- Take a family trip to Yellowstone or Red Lodge and invite your student
- Meet for coffee or ice cream and a movie
- Take advantage of Billings' free events, like Symphony in the Park or the Harvest Festival
- Carve pumpkins or get lost in a corn maze
- Go to the Farmer's Market
- Build a snowman or go sledding (great if you have young kids)

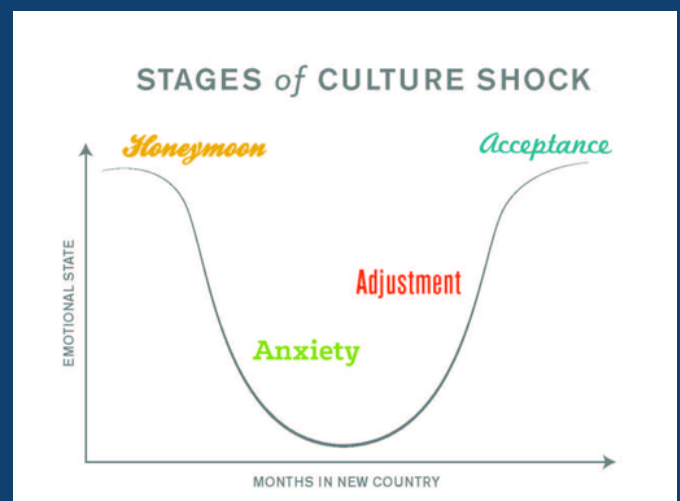


CULTURE SHOCK ROLLER COASTER

A QUICK GUIDE TO CULTURE SHOCK FOR FAMILIES BE-FRIENDING FIRST YEAR STUDENTS

BFF members should understand that a visiting international student – like any young person entering a new environment – will experience homesickness and “culture shock” and that there may be some bumps in the road!

As you and your visiting student go through this new adventure and get to know each other, understanding the signs and phases of culture shock will help make the experience a happy memory for your whole family.



4 MAJOR STAGES OF CULTURE SHOCK

STAGE 1:

HONEYMOON PHASE

When your student arrives, s/he will be excited and want to try everything new. The student will be appreciative of new experiences, and new experiences will stimulate and excite them. Typically, there are fewer problems during the first few weeks of the student's arrival, because this period is full of observations and new discoveries.

STAGE 2:

CRISIS AND/OR ISOLATION PHASE

After the first few wonderful weeks of experimenting and exploring are over, your student may feel isolated, lonely and – most definitely – homesick. If you sense that your student is experiencing symptoms of the second stage of culture shock, try to approach your student about the reasons why he or she might be feeling isolated or in crisis. It's important that you are compassionate about your student's potentially unstable temperament and over-sensitivity. This is a time to try to incorporate some of his/her culture into your home in the form of food or observances, like Chinese New Year (typically in late January/early February).

4 MAJOR STAGES OF CULTURE SHOCK

STAGE 3:

RECOVERY & UNDERSTANDING PHASE

Eventually, your student will adjust to his/her new environment and accept the differences between home and the U.S. and Montana. This can happen as soon as just several weeks after arrival, or after six to twelve months after arrival.

The Recovery and Understanding Phase is marked by an improved self-esteem and generally more positive outlook on life. This is when your student will be more open and confident to learn American lifestyles and perhaps share his/hers with you. The student also may start to become more integrated into the fabric of the school community, and in many cases, this seems to correspond with a significant improvement in English proficiency.

STAGE 4:

ADJUSTMENT, ACCLIMATIZATION PHASE

Reaching the adjustment/acclimation phase is the ultimate goal for any international student. Students who successfully reach this stage will display an increased flexibility in dealing with day-to-day difficulties, and will become more adept at navigating their surroundings. Your student will have started to feel completely comfortable in America, and may even begin to feel that they are a part of American culture.

This may coincide with your student returning home for summer break. However, having gone through their first year in America and through the four stages of culture with a supportive host family, your student will return for year two and beyond prepared to succeed.



DIFFERENCES TO BE AWARE OF

WEATHER


Your student may be arriving from a significantly different climate, which means they might need time to adapt to the dry air and cooler temperatures. They may even be experiencing snow for the very first time! To assist them, it could be beneficial to provide suggestions regarding appropriate clothing and ways to stay warm.

LANGUAGE

International student's whose first language is not English may experience hesitancy or nervousness when it comes to speaking. You may also encounter language barriers and difficulties in communication. As a BFF, it is crucial to recognize that the student may be facing challenges and to exhibit patience as they adapt to using English on a regular basis.

RELIGION

Religion holds significance in the culture of certain American families. It is acceptable to extend an invitation to your student for religious activities as a means to expose them to American culture. However, it is important to be transparent and explicit about the nature of the event, giving your student the autonomy to decide whether they would like to participate. Additionally, it is crucial to respect and honor your students own religious values and traditions.





PAYING

If you wish to cover the expenses for your student's meal or ticket, that is wonderful. However, it is important to note that there is no obligation on your part to do so. The general expectation is that students will take care of their own expenses. If you invite your student to an activity that requires them to make a payment, it is considerate to inform them of the cost in advance.

PETS

Some international students may not be comfortable or used to having pets. Be sure to introduce your pets slowly, and give students tips on how to handle your pet.

TIME

Different cultures have varying perspectives of time and punctuality, which may differ from the norms in the United States. It is important to bear this in mind when meeting with your student. If they happen to be late, it should not be interpreted as a sign of disrespect. To avoid any confusion and establish clear expectations, initiating a conversation about timeliness early on can be beneficial to address any misunderstanding and ensure you are on the same page regarding punctuality.



BFF TESTIMONIALS



"Our experience as a BFF to international students has been very positive. We now have lifelong friendships with some amazing people. Our child has also been given an opportunity to build lasting relationships with some amazing people as well. We are grateful for the BFF program!"

Advice:

- Get to know your international student's friends as well and include them in activities.
- Reach out to your international student weekly to just check in on what they need or just to say hello.
- Cook meals with your international student (both American and recipes from their country).
- Help your international student navigate things like cell phone purchases, transportation and help them get the service they need at these places as it might be an unfamiliar environment for them.



Phil & Elizabeth Hanson

BFF TESTIMONIALS



"When connecting with BFF international students you will often have to take the initiative. They usually don't know what to expect and won't likely take the steps to get together. Their schedules can fill up quickly- if they can't accept an invitation, they might genuinely be pretty busy, but they'll be thankful for a break to get off campus when they can! When making plans, be flexible. They often love sharing about their cultures, and are eager to make some good memories, so think of some interesting questions to ask them, and offer a variety of possible activities, and see if there is anything particular they'd like to experience".

Seth & Brittany Bevans



OIS CONTACT INFO

Alisa Batchelor

International Student Services Coordinator

Office: (406) 657-1762

Email: alisa.batchelor@msubillings.edu

Abby Cook

Assistant Director

Office: (406) 657-1761

Email: abby.cook@msubillings.edu

Dr. Paul Foster

Executive Director

Office: (406) 247-5785

Email: paul.foster4@msubillings.edu



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