Making Friends with Americans

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Overview

- This workshop is intended to provide you with information about US culture and typical ways of making friends in this culture.

- We’ll be highlighting areas of similarity and difference in the ways people make friends and the general expectations people have about what a friend is.

- We’ll be talking *generally* about worldwide expectations around friendship.
Please note that people are not usually aware of their own culture’s friendship expectations or of their own individual expectations.

You begin to find these out when you leave home and find out through experience.

We wish to help you avoid some common misunderstandings and give you some tips about how individuals typically make new friends in the US.
Introductions

- Starting a conversation - uncontroversial topics, compliments, observations; “Hi, I’m ___.”

- Examples - practice with your partner. Break the ice and then introduce yourselves.

- How did it go? Share introductions with the group.
CULTURAL DIFFERENCES
Friendship Patterns: The Coconut and the Peach

The Coconut

- Hard, difficult-to-penetrate shell with much softer fruit inside

- Represents friendship patterns in many cultures in which a relationship stays at a formal level for a long time before growing into a close friendship
Friendship Patterns: The Coconut and the Peach

The Peach

• Soft fruit on the outside with a hard pit in the inside

• Represents a pattern common in the US culture

• It’s relatively easy to become ‘social friends’ or acquaintances with Americans (the soft fruit), but as with other cultures, forming a close friendship takes time (the hard shell of the pit)
- Americans may move many times.
  - It is not unusual to grow up in one location, attend university out-of-state and then begin a professional career elsewhere

- Due to this mobile lifestyle, Americans are used to making ‘survival friendships’
  - Not as cold-blooded as it sounds.
  - Make friends quickly
Compared to many other cultures, Americans are sometimes considered informal:

- Americans are comfortable using first or nicknames quickly.
- In the US, it is normal to make eye contact with people - even strangers - when talking to them.
- It is also common to acknowledge strangers on the street by smiling, or maybe even saying “hi”
- Potlucks are common, in which guests bring a drink, dessert or other dish to share to a party.
  - In some cultures, the host provides all of the refreshments. Some cultures prefer to take their friends out to dinner in a restaurant, while others prefer to invite their friends to their homes.
US informality sometimes extends to how people dress.

- Compared to many cultures, people in the US tend to dress up less frequently.
- Example: you may see people wearing exercise/yoga pants to class or out shopping!
- There are exceptions to this!
In general, **punctuality** is valued in U.S. culture.

**Michigan Time**: 10 minutes later than the scheduled time; this applies to classes and events on campus, NOT meetings with professors!
Americans tend to place great importance on accomplishments rather than where an individual is from or the status of his/her family.

However, you will still notice that people make judgments based on preconceived notions. Stereotypes are a fact of American culture as well.
Silence

- Some cultures are comfortable with periods of silence in a conversation.
- Americans are less so and may try to fill the silence with small talk.

“It's a good thing for the art of conversation that there's always weather of some sort to talk about.”
SKIT #1

- **Actors:**
  - Audrey - American Student
  - Qian - International Student

- **Setting:**
  - Audrey is sitting in her room studying for a difficult physics exam when she hears a knock on her apartment door. Let’s see what happens ...
Privacy

- Americans highly value their privacy.
- In many countries, you can visit your friends at any time and they will drop what they are doing and visit with you, offer refreshments, etc.
- In the US, it is important to call/text in advance if you wish to visit.
Many Americans need to spend time by themselves on a daily basis. This is ‘having their space’ or privacy and is highly valued.

In other countries people prefer being with other people all of the time and highly value social interaction and group closeness.
Skit #2

- **Actors:**
  - Goutham - International Student
  - Matt - American Student

- **Setting:**
  - Goutham & Matt see each other at a party. They had met the week before in their physics class. Let’s see what happens ...
Privacy/Taboo Topics

- American privacy extends to appropriate topics for conversation or discussion.

- Americans will change the topic if it appears that the other person does not agree with them or the topic is sensitive, especially if they are not very close. Taboo topics include politics, religion, ethnicity, and personal finances.

- Other nationals will happily argue politics, religion or any other topic and not be offended.
Skit #3

- **Actors:**
  - Qian - International Student
  - Audrey - American Student

- **Setting:**
  - Audrey & Qian are acquaintances who haven’t seen each other in two months. They see each other on the Diag. Let’s see what happens ...
Physical Contact

- Americans may shake your hand or just nod to say hello. Under 30 year olds are comfortable with hugging their male and female friends.

- Other cultures are more formal and always shake hands or give a formal greeting to everyone in the room before beginning a conversation. They will greet the oldest people first.

- It’s complicated!
Skit #4

- **Actors:**
  - Goutham - International Student
  - Qian - American Student

- **Setting:**
  - Goutham sees Qian in Angell Hall right after she got done taking her physics exam. Let’s see what happens ...
The “Personal Bubble”

Americans like to stand at arm’s length. In other cultures, it may be more appropriate to stand further away or closer.
Reciprocity and Obligation

- In many countries friends will go see a movie they don’t particularly want to see because their friend wants to go.

- American friends generally feel comfortable saying “no” to each other [but do not say “no” all of the time!]. No, means for that one time only.
Skit #5

- **Actors:**
  - Matt - American Student
  - Qian - American Student
  - Goutham - International Student

- **Setting:**
  - Matt, Qian, & Goutham are getting ready to go out and celebrate having done well on their recent physics exam. Matt & Goutham are ready to go; Qian is still getting ready ... let’s see what happens!
Honesty

- Americans tend to avoid conflict with friends and with social groups and often use ‘social niceties’ to maintain social harmony.

- Some cultures prefer direct honesty even with spouses and friends.
The use of sarcasm in US culture

- “Yeah, right” & “Nice work” - what do they REALLY mean?

“Hey, what’s up?” & “How are you?”

- In most cases, these greetings are just another way of saying “hi.” You can simply answer with “Not much!” or “Fine, and you?”
MEETING PEOPLE & MAKING FRIENDS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
Ways to Make Friends

Welcome Week events (geared mostly towards undergrads):

- **Escapade & Artscapade**
  - 9/5; 7:00 PM - 10:00 PM
- **Meijer “Back to College”**
  - 9/6; 9:00 PM-1:00 AM
- Many more - see complete schedule here: [http://www.onsp.umich.edu/welcome-week/events](http://www.onsp.umich.edu/welcome-week/events)
Ways to Make Friends

- By proximity:

Observe Americans in your residence hall, apartment building or class. Strike up a conversation with someone who interests you. Say hello to that person when you see them; talk to them in the hall and see if you have any activities in common with them. Ask them if they want to watch a program on the shared TV or go have a coffee, go for a meal together etc.
Ways to Make Friends

- Join a Michigan Learning Community: http://www.lsa.umich.edu/mlc/

- Mostly geared towards undergraduates
  - Examples: Residential College, the Honors Program, Women in Science and Engineering
Ways to Make Friends

- Join the Inter-cooperative Council (ICC)
  - Great way to join a live-in community
  - Provides a home for students committed to furthering one’s education by building life skills, a strong community, and personal relationships.
  - [http://www.icc.coop/](http://www.icc.coop/)
Ways to Make Friends

- Participate in UM Recreational Sports’ programs: http://www.recsports.umich.edu/

  Club Sports - http://www.recsports.umich.edu/clubs/

  Intramural Sports - http://www.recsports.umich.edu/intramurals/

  Outdoor Adventures Program - http://www.recsports.umich.edu/OutdoorAdv/
Ways to Make Friends

Football games

- Join pre-game or post-game activities!
- Even if you don’t have tickets, you can meet up with people to watch the games on TV together at local restaurants and pubs or in the dorms.
- First home game:
  - Michigan vs. Oregon State
  - Saturday, Sept 12th, 12 PM, Big House
Ways to Make Friends

- Shared Activities, for example:
  - Attending guest lectures and cultural activities on campus
  - Study groups
  - Spiritual/Religious organizations
Ways to Make Friends

- **Join a Student Organization:**

  There’s a club at U-M to fit just about every interest!
  
  - Excellent way to get to know people who have similar interests!

  For a list of U-M student clubs/groups you can join go to the Maize Pages: [http://maizepages.umich.edu/Organizations](http://maizepages.umich.edu/Organizations)

- **Attend Festifall (9/10, Diag) or NorthFest (9/7, North Campus Diag) during which many of the student organizations will be recruiting new members!**
Ways to Make Friends

- By doing community service projects or joining a service club or organization:
  - Similar to joining a club or activity. The Ginsberg Center is a good place to start with this: [http://ginsberg.umich.edu/](http://ginsberg.umich.edu/)
  - International Center/ECIR Service Projects - stay tuned to your email!
Ways to Make Friends

- **Department-sponsored activities**

  Often announced on the website or over email

  For example: the COE Solar Car Team: [http://solarcar.engin.umich.edu/](http://solarcar.engin.umich.edu/)

  UROP, the Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program: [http://www.lsa.umich.edu/urop/](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/urop/)

  Intramural sports teams, informal social events (mostly graduate programs)
Ways to Make Friends

- Join an English Language Conversation Circles group from the English Language Institute:
  - 555 South Forest Avenue, Ann Arbor, MI
  - [http://sitemaker.umich.edu/conversation/home](http://sitemaker.umich.edu/conversation/home)

- U-M Language Resource Center Conversation Partner Program:

- Find other local special-interest groups through [Meetup.com](https://www.meetup.com)
Ways to Make Friends

- Social networking websites:
  - Facebook - University of Michigan International Students and Scholars
  - Blog - U-M International Student/Scholars
  - Instagram
Ways to Communicate
“FRIENDLY” TIPS
Friendly Tips

- Don’t worry too much about your English. Just force yourself to keep talking and you will become more fluent.

- Expect to make intercultural mistakes and find ways to apologize for them in a humorous fashion and then, forgive yourself and don’t worry about it.
Friendly Tips

- Voice your concerns and explain why you have them.
  - Try to avoid “us” and “them” language
- Friendship is a two-way street; reciprocation is required.
- Step out of your comfort zone!
Friendly Tips

• Talk to international students who have been in the US longer than you have.

• Look for US students who have studied abroad in your country or in another country; they will have already had some cross-cultural friendship experience.
Friendly Tips

- While many American social gatherings have alcohol and may center around drinking, NEVER feel pressured to drink if you are not comfortable.

- Just because an event will have alcohol and you don’t want to consume any, it doesn’t mean that you still can’t go and enjoy yourself without drinking!
Thank you! Please complete your session evaluation.