Making Friends with Americans

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Overview

- Workshop provides general information about U.S. culture and expectations for building friendship.
- Discuss cultural similarities and differences regarding how people make friends.
- We’ll be talking generally about worldwide expectations around friendship - may not apply to all Americans.
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

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 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)
Mobility

- Americans may move several 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 friends very quickly.

- On the other hand.....Many Midwesterners stay in the Midwest most of their lives.
  - May come to U-M with strong friendships already formed (high school, relatives, former undergraduate friends) and may seem clique-ish.
  - May seem intimidating, but don’t let that deter you from pursuing friendship.
Formality

- Compared to many other cultures, Americans are sometimes considered informal:
  - Use **first names** or **nicknames** quickly.
  - It is normal to make **eye contact** with people - even strangers - when talking to them.
  - It is 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 at a party.
In the U.S., informality sometimes extends to how people dress:

- Compared to many cultures, people in the U.S. 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. If you are unsure, ask!
In general, punctuality is valued in U.S. culture.

“If you’re early you’re on time, if you’re on time you’re late!”

Michigan Time: 10 minutes later than the scheduled time; this applies to classes and events on campus, NOT meetings with professors!

Be sure to communicate expectations of arrival time before scheduling or attending event/meetings. Tell people if you are running late.
Americans tend to place great importance on *personal accomplishments* rather than an individual’s family status.

Americans do not believe that social status means people should be treated differently than others (although not always the case).
America is a very diverse country, with many cultures represented (or misrepresented).

However, you will still notice that people make judgements based on preconceived notions. Stereotypes affect American culture too.
SKIT #1

▪ Actors:
  • Gail - American Student
  • Nina - International Student

▪ Setting:
  • Gail is sitting in his 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 U.S., 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.
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.”
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, physical appearance, and personal finances.

Other nationals will happily argue politics, religion or any other topic and not be offended.
Skit #2

▪ Actors:
  • Damilare- American Student
  • Kelly- International Student

▪ Setting:
  • Kelly & Damilare 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/wave to say hello. Only well formed acquaintances/friends hug when greeting each other.

- 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.

- 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.
Honesty

- Americans are generally very direct in their communication style.
- However, they also tend to avoid conflict with friends/social groups and may use ‘social niceties’ to maintain harmony.
- Some cultures prefer blunt honesty and are more indirect in conversation style.
MEETING PEOPLE & MAKING FRIENDS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN
Ways to Make Friends

- Welcome Week events:
  - [http://www.onsp.umich.edu/welcome-week/events](http://www.onsp.umich.edu/welcome-week/events)

- Mentorship!
  - [http://www.onsp.umich.edu/mentorship](http://www.onsp.umich.edu/mentorship)
  - GRIN Mentorship Programs
Ways to Make Friends

- By proximity:

  Observe Americans in your residence hall, apartment building, or classes. 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 anything in common. Ask them to watch TV, go have coffee, or go for a meal together.
Ways to Make Friends

- Participate in UM Recreational Sports’ programs: [http://www.recsports.umich.edu/](http://www.recsports.umich.edu/)
  - Club Sports: [http://www.recsports.umich.edu/clubs/](http://www.recsports.umich.edu/clubs/)
  - Intramural Sports: [http://www.recsports.umich.edu/intramurals/](http://www.recsports.umich.edu/intramurals/)
  - Adventure Leadership Trip: [https://recsports.umich.edu/trips/](https://recsports.umich.edu/trips/)
Ways to Make Friends

● Shared Activities:
  ○ Attending guest lectures
  ○ Cultural activities
  ○ Study groups
  ○ Spiritual/Religious organizations

● 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/
  ○ International Center/ECIR Service Projects - stay tuned to your email!
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. Cincinnati
    - Saturday, Sept 9
Ways to Make Friends

▪ **Join a Student Organization:**

   There’s a club at U-M to fit just about every interest!

   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** (Sept. 8, Diag) or **NorthFest** (Sept. 4), North Campus Diag) during which many of the student organizations will be recruiting new members!

▪ **Greek life!**
  - Rushing
  - Professional Greek Organizations
Ways to Make Friends

- Join an English Language Conversation Circles group from the English Language Institute:
  - [https://ttc.iss.lsa.umich.edu/eli/participant-information/](https://ttc.iss.lsa.umich.edu/eli/participant-information/)

- U-M Language Resource Center Conversation Partner Program:
  - [https://www.lrc.lsa.umich.edu/conversation-partners/](https://www.lrc.lsa.umich.edu/conversation-partners/)

- Chat Cafe:
  - Casual Conversation Groups by Sweetland Writing Center is another great opportunity to know people and practice English.

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

- Social networking websites:
  - Facebook - [UM International Students and Scholars](#)
  - Blog - [U-M International Student/Scholars](#)
  - Instagram - [@umicenter](#)
FRIENDLY TIPS
Conversation Tips

- 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?”
- Voice your concerns and explain why you have them.
  - Try to avoid “us” and “them” language
Friendly Tips

● Friendship is a two-way street; reciprocation is required.
● Step out of your comfort zone!
  ○ 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. Also- forgive yourself and don’t worry about it!
● Talk to international students who have been in the U.S. longer than you have.
● Look for U.S. students who have studied abroad in your country or in another country; they will have already had some cross-cultural friendship experience.
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!]. Don’t think that a “no” this time will be a “no” to future invitations.
It’s OK to Say “No”!

● While many American social gatherings may involve drinking alcohol, NEVER feel pressured to drink if you are not comfortable.

● Dating invitations: if you are not interested, let the other person know! If you get repeated pressure, contact Sexual Assault and Awareness Center: [https://sapac.umich.edu/](https://sapac.umich.edu/)

● Politely declining:
  ○ Let people know why you do not want the drink/food
  ○ If you aren’t interested in that type of gathering, let people know what you might want to do in the future.
QUESTIONS??
Please complete the workshop evaluation and help us to improve the experience of future participants.

Thank you!

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