

## American Family Program: Volunteer Guide

### Program Contacts:

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Thank you for your interest in working as a volunteer for the AFPs program at Office of International Relations (OIR) at University of Arkansas Fort Smith. This Guide is designed to help answer some of your questions about the program. If any additional questions arise, please do not hesitate to contact us.

### 1. WHY American Family Program (AFP)?

The primary goal behind the AFP is to provide a supplemental conversation assistance program for our international students. Our students work very intensively, but many are afraid to use their newly acquired language skills outside of the safe environment of the classroom. AFP can give these students an opportunity to talk with "real" people on a regular basis.

In addition to acquiring conversation skills, our students are looking to connect with local people and learn more about American life. AFPs is an opportunity for our students to increase their understanding of American culture and to share aspects their own cultures with a thoughtful, interested individual.

### 2. WHO CAN BE AFP?

This program is open to all kind, caring individuals who are willing to commit one hour per week to help students with their conversational skills in an informal, one-to-one manner. A background in education or ESL is not necessary -- just an open mind and a willingness to try something new and potentially rewarding.

### 3. HOW CAN BE AFP

If you are interested in becoming a AFP, please contact Takeo or Linda at International Office.

### 4. HOW OFTEN SHOULD WE MEET?

Students and volunteers participating in the AFPs program should plan on meeting for one hour each week. UA Fort Smith International students have various class schedules. Volunteers and students should work together to arrange a meeting time that is convenient for both parties.

### 5. WHERE SHOULD WE MEET?

#### Meeting on Campus

There are a few locations on campus where AFPs can enjoy meeting. The cafeteria in Campus Center is pleasant and convenient.

#### UAFS Campus Parking

Parking is most difficult in the morning, when students arrive for day classes, and after 4:30 p.m., when student arrive for evening classes.

#### Meeting Off-Campus

Once a connection has been established between the student and volunteer, many prefer to meet in an off-campus location. Suggested meeting places include parks, coffee shops and bookstores. While some international students have cars, many do not, so it is best to choose a location that is convenient for both parties.

#### **6. WHAT IF MY STUDENT DOES NOT SHOW UP?**

In most cases, students do not skip their appointments unless there is a misunderstanding about when and where to meet. Establishing a regular weekly meeting time and place can help to avoid miscommunications. Emergencies can arise, but students are usually good about letting their AFPs know when they are not able to attend, either by phoning them directly or having the OIR staff pass the message on.

Unfortunately, there may be the occasional student who behaves in an inconsiderate fashion. If a student casually skips a meeting without attempting to inform you ahead of time, please let us know as soon as possible. Having an AFP is a privilege, and any students who are not committed to meeting regularly will be replaced.

#### **7. WHAT IF I CAN'T MAKE MY APPOINTMENT?**

You will be given the name, address and telephone number of your AFP. If you are unable to make your appointment, please call the student directly and let him/her know of the change of plans. The OIR staff is in contact with the students throughout the day, and we will happily deliver messages on your behalf.

#### **8. WHAT SHOULD WE TALK ABOUT?**

Students who choose to participate in AFPs are hungry for real conversations with real people. You can bring an English/English dictionary to help when you are struggling with certain words, but you may find that you use it less and less as time goes by. Just about any topic that is of interest to both parties could be appropriate, but here are some suggestions for getting started:

1. **The student's native culture:** Students are usually eager to share information about their native countries with Americans who are sincerely interested in learning something new. Consequently, discussing the student's native country can be an excellent place to begin. Ask the student to bring maps, photos, travel brochures, printed web site information, etc. The student can "teach" you about his/her native country, hometown, language, and customs.

2. **Family life:** Because pictures always help to ease communication, both you and the student can bring family photos, draw a family tree, and discuss the importance of family relationships.

3. **Food:** Students feel most homesick when they think about the food that they left behind. Discussing food, eating habits, meal times, portion sizes, and even exchanging recipes can be an excellent way to make a connection. If the partnership blossoms, you may even wish to share a meal together.

4. **Stereotypes:** Most international students are exposed to American television in their native countries, and there is no question that TV impacts the way that the rest of the world views American culture. You could discuss what expectations/ stereotypes the student had about Americans before arriving, and discuss how their perception may or may not have changed as a result of living here.

5. **Performing and Visual Arts:** Not all students are interested in the arts, but they can be a rich source of conversation. Because it is an abstract concept, you may want to discuss the definition of the word

art with the student. You can bring the entertainment section from the local newspaper to give you ideas for your discussion. You might even plan a mock evening of entertainment together using the newspaper as a resource.

6. **Sports:** Bring the sports page and discuss which teams/players you enjoy. Talk about what sports are popular in the student's native country, etc.

7. **OTHER TOPICS:**

- Pets
- Holidays
- Jobs/Professions
- Kissing/greeting habits and customs
- Local history, economy, tourist sites, current events
- Lottery
- Movies
- Newspapers
- Older adults
- Pace of life---fast food, quick-service, drive-thru, etc.
- Police
- Restaurants
- Supermarkets
- Universities
- Volunteers
- War/Peace

These are just a few possible topics to help you get started. Once your partner is comfortable with you, he or she will probably ask you all sorts of questions.

9. **DIFFICULT TOPICS:**

Your partner may want to discuss potentially controversial topics such as race, sex, class, etc. Most of our students come from countries that are far less diverse than the United States, and they are looking for answers that can be difficult to find.

1. If a student asks you a personal question that you do not wish to answer, tell him/her that you are not comfortable discussing that topic. In fact, if a student asks overly personal questions about your age, weight, income, etc., gently tell the student that such questions are considered inappropriate in American culture. Most students do not wish to offend and would be grateful for your suggestions. In fact, you could even turn the tables by asking the student what behaviors he/she has observed in America that would be considered inappropriate in his/her native country.

2. Students may ask you difficult questions about race, religion, and moral issues. Again, do not feel the need to discuss anything that upsets or disturbs you. On the other hand, it is perfectly appropriate to share your opinion with the student. You may not be an expert, but you are a thoughtful, concerned citizen. The student will value your point of view, and most students will go out of their way to avoid offending you.

3. Have fun! Chances are that your partner will recognize in you much of what is best about the people of this country--friendliness, open-mindedness, generosity, and volunteerism. Do not be afraid of making a "mistake" by saying the wrong thing. Your partner will be extremely grateful for your help, no matter what you say or do!

10. **WHEN DOES IT END?**

Ideally, all AFPs will continue to meet through the end of the semester or/and the session. If volunteers are still interested, partnerships can continue, or the volunteer can begin working with a new student.

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### **Office of International Relations**

The Office of International Relations (OIR) is a centralized division for international education, developing and managing quality international initiatives, programs, support services, and international partnerships for UAFS. We integrate international education, global perspectives, and cross-cultural knowledge into the University's academic programs and the community at large. In addition, we facilitate the comprehensive internationalization of the University and connect the campus to the world, enabling UAFS students to graduate as globally competent citizens.

The OIR provides support and assistance to international students from application to arrival, and beyond. Our team acts as the first point of contact for international students who need guidance, but perhaps do not know who, or where to go for help. We work closely with our Admissions office, academic departments and support services across our campuses to ensure that our students are provided with an outstanding educational experience.

### **International Students at UAFS**

UAFS enrolls students from around the world. UAFS international student needs to provide a proof of English proficiency as one of the admission requirements. Although majority of UAFS International Students understand very good English, they always want to study and learn more. The majority of international students hold a 3.0 or higher GPA.