

Coping with College Series

How Can International and U.S. Students Develop a Better Connection?
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About 500,000 international students (IS) come from continents around the world to pursue undergraduate or graduate education in the United States, including IS at ISU. For IS, coming to the US provides an excellent opportunity to expand their professional experience, learn about a new culture, and make friends. For US students, it is a wonderful opportunity to learn from individuals who possess different cultures (e.g., different languages, foods, religions, musical preferences), customs, perspectives, beliefs, and values. It is also important for both IS and US students to develop such connections given the cross-cultural milieu occurring worldwide.

Although a meaningful interaction between two worldviews can be a great opportunity for learning, it can be challenging for IS and US students to connect. The following suggestions can help both IS and US students develop and improve their cross-cultural relationships. For US students, it is important to increase your knowledge of the cultures, economics, politics of people outside of the U.S., which will help increase your understanding of global events. Since many IS experience “culture shock” when moving to the US, try to be empathic about their unique situation. If you have had a similar experience when you left the US and went to a foreign country, feel free to share it with them. If you have not had one, that’s o.k. too. Let them know that you can at least listen to their struggles, which is a great opportunity for them to open up and share their personal struggles. Be honest with each other, especially if conflict arises. When there is conflict, pledge to work to resolve it, which will help you develop mature relationships with IS.

For IS, many of these suggestions also apply, but there are other unique challenges. For IS, the possibility of attending international student organizations and seeking people from your own culture is helpful. Although becoming part of student organizations is an excellent way of looking for people with your similar experiences and backgrounds, it is also important to step out from the comfort zone and develop interest in people who have a different outlook than yours. Remember that part of the reason for moving to another country is to meet people with a different view and learn from them. Hence, be open to new experiences, take risks (positive ones), and get to know U.S. students, which will bring you insight about their academic and personal lifestyle. This could greatly help you develop your own academic or life skills.

For both US and IS, try to respect individual and cultural differences and “agree to disagree” at times. Both can try to find commonalities or look for common interests (e.g., engaging in sports, going to movies). Both can utilize appropriate

humor (since jokes can be offensive at times) to improve the relationship. Both can be honest with each other and provide each other feedback about the types of things that you like and dislike about each other. Both can take the initiative to reach out, communicate, and learn from each other. Overall, taking the time to develop a relationship with an individual from a different culture will provide an opportunity to increase your awareness of other cultures and how to better relate and connect with people who are different from you, which is an excellent asset to have in today's world.