CASA Program
Community Ambassadors for Students from Abroad
Handbook
For Community Ambassadors

International Student and Scholar Services
University of Wisconsin-Platteville
Royce Hall 111B
1 University Plaza
Platteville, WI 53818
(608) 342-1726
issss@uwplatt.edu
# Table of Contents

## Contents

WELCOME TO UW-PLATTEVILLE’S CASA PROGRAM! .......................................................... 3
HOSPITALITY HINTS ........................................................................................................... 3
KNOWING YOUR LIMITS .................................................................................................... 3
ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS ................................................................................................... 3
COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR FAQ .................................................................................. 4
BEING SENSITIVE TO CULTURAL DIFFERENCES ......................................................... 5
LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES ............................................................................................ 5
  Social Relationships ........................................................................................................ 5
  Food & Drink .................................................................................................................... 6
  Religious Affiliation ......................................................................................................... 6
  Achievement ..................................................................................................................... 6
  Informality ....................................................................................................................... 6
  Individualism .................................................................................................................... 6
  Privacy ............................................................................................................................... 6
  Time .................................................................................................................................. 6
  Equality ............................................................................................................................ 7
  Status ................................................................................................................................. 7
CULTURE SHOCK ............................................................................................................... 7
  What Is Culture Shock? ..................................................................................................... 7
  Symptoms ......................................................................................................................... 7
  Coping With Culture Shock ............................................................................................. 7
Understanding the Model of Cultural Adjustment ............................................................. 9
HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH, AND HYGIENE ................................................................. 10
TRANSPORTATION ............................................................................................................ 11
  Platteville Shared Ride Taxi ............................................................................................. 11
  Platteville Cab Service .................................................................................................... 11
  Campus Shuttle & Shopping Shuttle .............................................................................. 11
  Regional Public Transportation Resources ................................................................... 12
KEEPING IN TOUCH ........................................................................................................... 12
REFER A FAMILY ............................................................................................................. 12
WELCOME TO UW-PLATTEVILLE’S CASA PROGRAM!
This is the start of what could be a lifelong relationship where you and your student(s) will learn from each other and grow together. Many people choose to serve as community ambassadors in the CASA Program because of their own experiences overseas while others do so simply because they are interested in learning about other cultures. We hope this experience will encourage you to break down stereotypes, discover your own community in a new way, learn more about a different culture, and/or continue your international experience once your student returns to his or her home country. Serving as a community ambassador in the CASA Program is a small, but significant step in contributing to world peace, tolerance, and understanding – it happens one relationship at a time.

HOSPITALITY HINTS
- Become familiar with some basic facts about your student’s home country.
- Make sure when you plan an activity with the student that time, place, dress, transportation and duration of activity are understood.
- Show real interest in your student. Get him or her to talk about themselves, their family, education, home life, culture, customs, cuisine, likes and dislikes, aspirations, activities and plans.
- Encourage your student to try new things and have new experiences.
- Introduce the student to your community and friends.
- Familiarize the student with U.S. American social customs and manners.
- Holidays can be a lonesome time for students. Help them prepare for these times and include them in your family celebrations when possible.
- Invite your student along when you do the things your family normally does, like sharing birthday parties and attending school sporting events.
- Your student may not be used to pets, especially large dogs. Introduce pets slowly to your international student.
- Stay in contact with your student throughout the duration of their stay at UW-Platteville and beyond!

KNOWING YOUR LIMITS
You will quickly become an important part of your student’s life and it may be easy for the lines of responsibility to blur. Community ambassadors are not responsible for financial support. It is recommended that community ambassadors never cosign for loans or subscriptions to services such as cell phones. There are other areas of a student’s lives which the community ambassador is not expected to handle. The International Student and Scholar Services (ISSS) Advisor is knowledgeable about immigration regulations and consequently responsible for assisting the student in the following areas:
- Employment regulations
- Immigration and visa issues
- Academic concerns
- Financial problems

ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS
We encourage you to include your student on activities that you and/or your family has already planned on doing (family dinner, movie night, sporting events). Sometimes ordinary activities are often the best! We have also generated a list of other ideas if you wanted to take your exchange student on other adventures while they are here:
BBQs with friends and family
Making a scrapbook of memories
Fishing
Horseback riding
Mini-golf
Baking
Ice skating
Volunteering
Making a snowman
Sledding
Sports Games
Apple orchard/pumpkin patch
Cheese Factory
Local farms
Visiting a zoo
Visiting a museum
Attending plays and concerts
Visit Dubuque or Galena
Devil’s Lake
Mineral Point or Swiss Valley in Dubuque
Tubing, canoeing, or kayaking down local rivers
Hiking in a state park

COMMUNITY AMBASSADOR FAQ

Can I be paired with more than one student at a time?
Yes, you may be paired with more than one student at a time; in fact, it is highly likely that you will be paired with more than one student. In many cases, hosting a second student takes pressure off of both the family and the students. The international students feel more comfortable and will open up more quickly in some cases.

What if I don’t speak a second language?
Part of being an international student is immersing one’s self in our culture. Each student can speak English. A benefit of having a host family is they are able to practice speaking English with someone outside of the classroom.

What if our International Student is not the same religion as us?
If similar religious backgrounds are something that is important to you as a community ambassador, we will do our best to accommodate your request.

How long will our International Student be in Platteville?
The duration of the international students' stay in Platteville varies. Some come for a semester or a year, while others are here for several years. We hope that the connections you make will continue throughout their college career and lifetime.

How often should we see our student?
In the first couple months of serving as a community ambassador, we ask that you see your student at least once a month. Life can get busy for both you and the student. You and your student(s) should keep in contact regularly and try to arrange a time to meet that is accommodating to you both.
What happens in case of an emergency with our International Student?
Each student has a health insurance card and coverage – it is mandatory for all international students at UW-Platteville. Feel free to contact us in case of an emergency if you have any questions:

Liz Kruse
Advisor, International Student and Scholar Services
Tel: 608.342.1852
E-mail: krusee@uwplatt.edu

Kristin Dalby
English Language Program (ELP) Coordinator
Tel: 608.342.7366
E-mail: dalbyk@uwplatt.edu

Donna Anderson
Director, International Programs
Tel: 608.342.1726
E-mail: anderon@uwplatt.edu

University Police
Tel: 608-342-1584

What if I have a question or concern about my International Student?
For many of you, this is a new experience. We are always available to answer any questions you may have about our program or the international students. If a problem arises, we are also available to help work out a solution so that you and the student can continue to have a rewarding experience. Please feel free to call or email the ISSS Office anytime with questions or concerns.

For a more complete list of FAQs for community ambassadors, please see https://www3.uwplatt.edu/iss/faq-hosts-casa-program.

BEING SENSITIVE TO CULTURAL DIFFERENCES
It is important to remember that different countries have different cultural and political background from the U.S. As a result, students may have a completely different set of values from you. It’s important to involve your student in as many activities with you as possible so that he or she has a good balance of academic and social life. Keep in mind that your perception of good manners may differ from your student’s. While in some countries silence may be rude, in others it is a sign of respect. Your student may readily use thank-you and please, or it may take a period of adjustment. Your student’s level of modesty may also differ from your own.

LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES
Discovering features of other cultures is exciting. Some aspects of American culture that you can introduce to your host student are:

Social Relationships
While U.S. Americans may be open and friendly, it can take time to develop actual friendships. International students are often discouraged that making friends isn’t as easy as they thought it would be. Some international students have commented that they feel that U.S. Americans are insincere. Mistaking U.S. American friendliness for friendship, they are disappointed when relationships do not take on deeper meaning. In many other cultures, friendship is reserved for
very few people, is based on mutual love and respect, and involves unlimited obligation. In the U.S., close friendships certainly exist, but U.S. Americans also have many “friends,” among whom the international student may only be one. Talking about how friendships develop in the U.S. may help the student achieve a realistic view of what can be expected of his or her U.S. American friends.

Food & Drink
While some students may be excited to try U.S. American cuisine, there may be some dietary restrictions some students may need to adhere to. Please ask what food restrictions the student might observe. As a general rule, Muslim students avoid pork products, Hindu students avoid beef products (or are vegetarian) and Buddhist students may be vegetarian. Many Asian students also consider rice to be an essential element of every meal. Some students may be vegetarian or vegan. However, as each student is unique in food preferences, it is best to ask each individual about their specific food preferences rather than to make any assumptions.

Religious Affiliation
It is important that we demonstrate respect for all religions and belief systems, and we hope that this will enhance greater understanding of diversity for the group as a whole. Making, accepting, and declining invitations is closely tied to a person’s culture. Some students come from societies where to decline a host’s invitation would be very uncomfortable and disrespectful. If you would like to invite a student to a religious event, be sure it is clear that he or she has the option to decline in a way that allows him or her to “save face” (i.e. not tell you “no” directly but rather tell you “no” indirectly). For example, you can say, “if you would like to go to [this religious event] with me, you can let me know later.” Also, please make it clear if the focus of an invitation is primarily religious.

Achievement
In the U.S., status is primarily based on what individuals have achieved on their own, including education and the level of success in their employment. Many students’ cultures dictate that respect is given based on other qualifiers such as age or title. Additionally, some international students may not be used to the high level of competition in the U.S.

Informality
The U.S. lifestyle is generally quite casual and this can be shocking to some international students who are accustomed to a more formal structure. Some students may find it unusual in the beginning to use first names of their elders and/or professors and to dress casually.

Individualism
U.S. Americans are encouraged at an early age to develop and pursue their own goals. As a result, in the U.S., there tends to be a higher value placed on self-reliance than you might find in many other countries where parents or families regularly help with decision-making. In many countries, being part of a group is more important than focusing on one individual.

Privacy
On the outside, the U.S. appears to be open and transparent, with open homes and office doors. However, U.S. Americans tend to enjoy time alone, value private space, and be guarded with what they consider personal information. International students may have difficulty adjusting to this, especially if they live in residence halls and share a room with a U.S. American student.

Time
U.S. Americans take pride in using their time wisely, which is why they tend to plan events in advance. Punctuality is valued in the U.S. and this can be a major cultural adjustment to many. U.S. Americans may “live by the clock” but this is
not true in many other cultures. In some places, for example, the time noted on a social invitation implies one should arrive an hour or more later. In others, an invitation is to be extended several times before it is accepted.

Equality
International students are often used to a hierarchical system or one in which genders are treated differently. It is important for international students to know that in the United States everyone is to have equal opportunities and have the same rights as everyone else.

Status
Different societies attach different importance to roles or positions; for example, in many countries, the role of “university student” or “professor” is accorded more respect or status than it is in the United States. It can be difficult to adjust to having a lower social status than you are accustomed to. It helps to recognize that your student is not personally being downgraded, but that you happen to be in a society where respect is expressed differently than is the case at home.

CULTURE SHOCK
Living in a culture different from their own is an exciting but often challenging experience for international students. Besides finding housing, registering for courses, and getting to know a new city, they will probably go through “cultural adjustment,” the transition to a new culture. Most people will experience some “culture shock” as part of this transitional process.

What Is Culture Shock?
“Culture shock” is the name given to a feeling of disorientation or confusion that often occurs when a person leaves a familiar place and moves to an unfamiliar one. Coming to Platteville from another country, your student(s) will encounter a multitude of new things—buildings, stores, and even the trees may look different. Food may not be the same, and people may look, speak, and act differently from people at home. Even the smells may be different. Their English might not serve them as well as they expected it would. They might not be able to convey their full personality in English, with the result that they think other people are seeing them as a child. Additionally, they are separated from the family members and friends with whom they feel comfortable and well understood. As a result of all this, they may feel confused, unsure of themselves, and may have some doubts about the wisdom of their decision to come here.

Symptoms
Some people are more affected by culture shock than others. People experiencing culture shock tend to become nervous and unusually tired. They may want to sleep a lot or may have difficulty sleeping. They may write many letters home. They may feel frustrated and hostile toward the local people. They may get excessively angry about minor irritations. It is not unusual to become very dependent on fellow nationals. All these feelings may make it difficult to deal with residents of the host country and to use their language.

Coping With Culture Shock
Different people react differently to culture shock. Some become depressed, or even physically ill. Others are stimulated by the new experiences. Here are a few suggestions to share with your student if he or she is experiencing the loneliness or distress of culture shock:

- Find people to interact with. Ask them questions. As you take an interest in them, your feelings will have a focal point outside of yourself.
- Surround yourself with familiar things—a favorite jacket, a photo, a CD. Make your environment pleasant and reinforcing.
• Slow down. Simplify your daily tasks. Relax. Let your emotions catch up with the newness all around you.
• Develop patterns. Follow the same routine each day so that you get a sense of returning to the familiar.
• Revise your goals to accommodate detours instead of scolding yourself for failures.
• Keep working on language skills. Practice the American idiom, “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.”
• Confide to friends, and even your host family, that you are sad. Their support will warm you.
• Make a few small decisions and carry them out. Your resolve in small things will increase your confidence. Be assured that, however stressful, culture shock passes if you are willing to let the process of cross-cultural adaptation take its course.

Be patient
Adjustment is a gradual, day-by-day process. It normally takes some time—a few weeks, a few months, and maybe longer—for people to become comfortable in a new country. If your student is struggling reassure them that with time, they will become more comfortable in their new environment.

Take care
It is particularly important in times of stress to eat a balanced diet, get enough rest, and get regular physical exercise. Encourage your student to take breaks for recreation or socializing. Studying or working constantly, without taking care of themselves, may make them sick, and worsen the situation.

Stereotypes
On many occasions, international students will be seen as “a foreign student” or “a student from country X.” Whether the stereotype is positive or negative depends on the person’s experience, not on anything about your student personally. Try not to let this discourage you. Try to start some interesting conversations about the subject of stereotypes—what peoples’ stereotypes are, where they came from, and so on. And remember that you probably have your own stereotypes about U.S. Americans.

Talk with others
Encourage your student to talk to other, more experienced international students. Ask them what things they have found most bothersome, most interesting, most perplexing. Ask them what sources of information and support have been most helpful.

Learn from the experience
Moving into a new culture can be the most fascinating and educational experience of your student’s life. It gives them the opportunity to explore an entirely new way of living and compare it to their own. Here are some questions that your student might try to answer as they encounter people in Platteville and the surrounding communities:

• How do they make friends?
• How do friends treat each other?
• Who respects whom, and how is respect shown?
• What attitudes do they have about their families?
• What is the relationship between males and females?
• How do people spend their time? Why?
• How do they deal with conflicts or disagreements?
• What do they talk about?
• What kind of evidence do they seek or use when evaluating an idea or trying to win an argument?
Understanding the Model of Cultural Adjustment

Pre-departure anxiety
There’s a lot to do before going to another country. Students often become overwhelmed with details and are nervous about leaving family and friends for so long. Boarding the plane can bring enthusiasm back.

“The Honeymoon”
Just like with many new relationships, the first reaction to a new culture is often euphoric. Your student has finally arrived after months, maybe years, of planning. The differences in scenery, food, language, or customs can be exhilarating!

Initial culture shock
This is where the excitement of differences can often quickly turn to frustration. For many, the shock can come at the first meal when familiar foods are nowhere to be found. For others, it is the realization that speaking a second language all day is not only exhausting; it’s frustrating to feel limited in your communication. For others, the initial shock is an accumulation of many factors, including the lack of familiar faces and cultural cues.

Surface adjustment
This can occur when your student has settled into a new routine. Maybe they successfully registered and made it to their classes. Perhaps your student has met some people in their classes that seem like they will become friends.

Culture shock
This is a state of mind your student may reach when the deeper differences between cultures are experienced and the novelty of the difference decreases. There may be unresolved cultural conflicts in the classroom, with friends, or with the society in general.

Places of true culture learning
Moving out of culture shock and into adaptation and adjustment is not simply a matter of feeling better. Rather, it requires understanding the reasons behind culture shock and developing personal strategies for dealing with cultural differences. Most sojourners cannot do this process alone; you could suggest that your student get help from others with international experience or the ISSS staff to understand U.S. culture and appropriate coping strategies.

Adaptation and adjustment
It takes time for your student to adapt and adjust to their new environment. Skills they developed in previous transitions will help them when they encounter future intercultural challenges. Adjusting and adapting to a new culture requires the ability to know themselves well and to know the ways of the culture and its expectations of them.

Reentry shock or adjustment
Your student will face a number of challenges when he or she returns home- the most significant can be that your student did not expect it to be difficult to go home. But it can be hard, no matter how excited your student is to see family and friends. It can be challenging to make sense of their experience in the U.S., especially if they have to immediately find a job or return to their studies. With re-entry, the goal is not to jump right back into everything. Students want to put their new found skills to good use: seeing things from another point of view, speaking another language, and learning of another area of the world. Staying connected with the friends they meet while at UWP is one strategy that can lessen the shock of reentry.
HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH, AND HYGIENE
Occasionally, students experience difficult times during their stay in the United States. Some of these difficulties are common aspects of life and living in another culture. However, some of these can become serious threats to a student’s wellbeing. While we understand the desire to assist them, it is important that the ISSS staff be aware of any potential problems in the student’s lives. It is much easier to deal with a potential problem than to deal with a crisis. This handbook provides contact information for ISSS staff. Please contact us if you feel there is something we should know about. We would rather err on the side of caution. In an emergency situation, please contact us.

Hospitalization in the United States is very expensive. Therefore, UW-Platteville requires all international students to purchase health insurance (unless the student is sponsored by his/her home government). The insurance premium will be billed to each student on his or her tuition bill. Students are billed for insurance during fall and spring semesters while in attendance. Continuing students will be billed for summer terms regardless of enrollment status. Students should always carry their insurance card with them. For more information about International Student Health Insurance, please go to http://www3.uwplatt.edu/iss, click on “Current Students” and then click on “Health Insurance” on the bottom right-hand side of screen. If at any time you have questions on the UW-Platteville international student health insurance policy, please contact one of the following resources:

**UW-Platteville Student Health Services**
Royce Hall—2nd Floor  
(608) 342-1891  

**International Student and Scholar Services**
Royce Hall—1st Floor  
(608) 342-1852  

The Student Health Services at UW-Platteville provides a broad range of health care services to the campus community. These include diagnosis and treatment of illness, injury and some emergencies, referrals for specialist care, counseling services for psychological and emotional well-being, weight control, stress reduction, drug and alcohol use and abuse, HIV/STD screening, immunizations, basic laboratory services, contraceptive supplies, and many other preventative health concerns. All medical records and patient visits are completely confidential. No one can have access to students’ medical records without their written permission.

Below are some additional health resources in the community:

**Southwest Health Center Emergency and Admitting**
1400 East Side Road  
Platteville, WI 53818  
(608) 348-2331  

**Urgent Care Hours:**
- Mon-Fri - 5pm to 10pm  
- Saturday - Noon to 10pm  
- Sunday - 8am to 10pm  

Weekends and Holidays 8 am-10 pm - Lab work (besides a monospot, throat culture or urine sample), x-rays, Injections, and IV’s will elevate your visit to an emergency visit. Staff will always do their utmost to communicate with you about a change in status.
If your student is sick or injured they should:
- Call ahead for an appointment during office hours at Student Health Services.
- Call a friend or a taxi if they need a ride to an appointment at a doctor’s office off campus
- Bring their student ID and health insurance card

Emergency Care
Hospital Emergency Rooms are used when your student needs immediate care and the clinic is closed or they are so sick or injured that they need an ambulance for transportation. Emergency rooms are very expensive and should be utilized for emergencies only. In very serious cases they may need to call 911 for an ambulance.

Counseling Services
Counseling Services at UW-Platteville assists individuals in overcoming obstacles that may otherwise prevent them from attaining academic, personal, and professional goals. Examples of issues that are addressed in counseling include: academic concerns, stress, anxiety, depression, anger management, relationship building, homesickness, and self-esteem. Individual counseling is provided by on-campus counselors located in Career, Counseling and Student Health Services. Students may call or stop in to schedule an appointment. Services are confidential, free, and provided by licensed professional staff.

TRANSPORTATION

Platteville Shared Ride Taxi
*Only operates within Platteville.

Hours of Operation as of January 1, 2011:

6 AM to 8 PM Monday - Saturday and 7 AM to 1 PM on Sunday
Fares: $2.00 for first rider - within City Limits
Call 608-348-6767

Platteville Cab Service
175 N Water St, Platteville, WI 53818
Call (608) 348-5678

Campus Shuttle & Shopping Shuttle
Schedules and maps for the university shuttle can be found at http://www3.uwplatt.edu/transportation/pioneer-transit-campus-shuttle.
Regional Public Transportation Resources
For quick links to purchase bus tickets to major regional cities (Madison, Chicago, Rockford, Minneapolis, etc.), please visit the University’s transportation webpage at: http://www3.uwplatt.edu/transportation/regional-travel

For more information on campus services provided and after hour or emergency care options, please visit the UWP Student Health Services webpage at: http://www.uwplatt.edu/studenthealth/

KEEPING IN TOUCH
The return home for your student is an exciting experience. Not only does the student get to see family and friends again, but the student will also see his or her country with a new perspective. As a host, it is fun to see how a student changes and what the student says about life back home. We hope that a mutual lifelong friendship will be created. Students are often open to hosting YOU in their home and returning some of what you have given them. So stay in touch. Email, Skype, and Facebook are great ways to continue to connect with your student long after he or she has returned home!

REFER A FAMILY
Let’s face it, being a community ambassador in the CASA Program is a great opportunity. Extend the experience to your friends and family by referring them to ISSS. Individuals or families interested in becoming a community ambassador(s) can learn more about the program on our website at http://www3.uwplatt.edu/isss/casa-program. CASA Program applications can be found at https://www3.uwplatt.edu/isss/casa-application-community-ambassadors?wssl=1. To request a paper copy of the application, please email isss@uwplatt.edu. Share your experience and encourage your friends and family to participate. The more community ambassadors the better!!

Thank you for offering to serve as a community ambassador for an international student! We hope it will be a fulfilling and rewarding experience for all involved!

[This handbook was adapted with permission from the UW-River Falls Host Family Handbook. Information was also adapted from NAFSA’s Friendship with a Foreign Student: A Guide for Host Families and Friends of Foreign Students (2006).]