

Basic Guidelines for Communicating with Internationals



- Greet the students warmly. Work on learning to say their names correctly. Bring pen and pad: try to spell their name phonetically.
- Remember to talk slowly, in simple sentences. To turn up your volume does not improve your communication. Watch their faces to see if they really understand. If they don't, just smile and say it in different, simpler words.
- Ask them about their field of study and how long they plan to be here. Ask about their family, their hometown, where they are living while here, etc.
- Remember that some students have been soaked in atheism since childhood. Many struggle with God's existence. Hosts should be sensitive to their background. Do not presume they believe in God. Hindu students may believe in gods and demi-gods. Do not be shocked by anything! Avoid using the words "missionary" or "mission field."
- Many internationals have no prior knowledge or understanding of the Bible, Christ, or church. They don't know your Christian jargon or what you believe. Don't assume or judge. Don't promise them something unless you plan to do it. Do not pressure them to attend church or Christian activities.
- If THEY ask about your story of faith, you can share freely. But your most important goal is to embody Jesus' love and caring for them. Begin a trusting friendship that God can use. If they want to talk about spiritual matters, meet with them another time. AFTER you have earned their respect and friendship, THEN you can give a reason for your hope (1 Peter 3:15).
- Make sure each student has an opportunity to speak and that no one, especially an American host, dominates the conversation. Promote conversation. Ask questions you would ask of any new friend: where they are from, who are their family, how long have they been here, what are they studying, etc.
- Download a map of their nation. (The largest groups of international scholars at Georgia Tech are from India, China, Korea, and Turkey) Ask them to locate their home city on a map.
- What brought them to the U.S.? How long have they been here? What do they study? How long do they hope or plan to stay? What are their goals? What do their family members think about them coming to study here?
- What do they find most different about life here? What is the hardest thing about life here? What is the most exciting thing? Were Americans what they expected? What surprised them?
- Some students have arrived recently. Their English varies from good to minimal. Offer them an opportunity to speak among themselves in their native language if they prefer.
- Avoid ALL political discussions or negative comments about the People's Republic of China. Avoid the "3 T's" (Taiwan, Tibet, Tienamen). Remember: Hong Kong is no longer a British colony! Avoid partisan discussions about Islam, American international policies, or politics.
- Remember: your highest calling is to be an ambassador of God's kingdom – and not American culture! Remember that your ultimate citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20).
- Many students are married and must leave family members behind. Do not show shock or disbelief if they say they left spouses or children for a year or more. This is part of a culture different from ours. Be careful of a superior attitude: Asian grandparents often provide child care for their grandchildren. This is a more family-values approach than day care!
- Avoid jokes, slang or idioms that internationals may not understand or may take literally.
- Asians are more reserved than westerners. Turkish and Hispanics are more expressive!

Adapted from Intown, WIF, FAN, and other international ministry friends and partners