FIRST FRIENDS: Training Guide
As a prospective First Friend, you are required to review the information in this training guide. You will then submit a First Friend’s application through the Office of International Service’s (OIS) website at https://www.ois.uic.edu/programs/first_friends.

Once you have successfully completed these requirements you will be matched with a new international student(s) through e-mail. You can then begin to help your new First Friend with preparing for coming to UIC and Chicago!

Program Objective

A First Friend serves as a one-on-one supportive resource for a new international student coming to UIC!

As a First Friend you are a valuable resource for the new international student because you have already experienced that transition at UIC.

Students apply to the First Friends program via the online application.
- First Friends are matched based on the information provided in the application.

OIS introduces First Friend partners via e-mail
- After this initial introduction, it is the current international student’s responsibility to reach out to the new student.

Each First Friend match determines the depth and extent of their relationship
- The First Friends communicate based on the relationship with which they feel comfortable.

First Friends are encouraged to attend a Meet & Greet scheduled at the start of each regular term.

First Friends Wanted!

Below are the criteria to be eligible to be a First Friend to a new UIC student!

- Current UIC international student in J-1 or F-1 status
- Good academic standing
- Has been at UIC for at least 1 full academic term
- Interested in helping a new international student prepare to come to UIC
As a First Friend you agree to:

- Answer your First Friend’s questions about UIC, Chicago, and life in a new country
- Share your experiences and feelings you had as a new student at UIC
- Encourage new students to take advantage of OIS
- Assist new students in identifying many of the resources at UIC and in Chicago

Your Role as a First Friend

As a First Friend you will:

- Communicate regularly and clearly with your First Friend
- Be sensitive to cultural and/or religious practices
- Avoid using language in conversation which may be considered harmful or offensive
- Direct your First Friend to OIS staff when they have immigration or visa related questions
- Contact the program representative immediately if you feel uncomfortable with your chosen First Friend

Interested?! Read below to learn how to apply!

First Friend Application

- You must complete an online application at https://www.ois.uic.edu/programs/first_friends
- Make sure you complete the Current International Student Application
- You may indicate your matching preference on the application

Students are matched based on their application with consideration regarding their matching preferences.

First Friend matches will receive an email from the First Friend program coordinator which will introduce the match.

The current student is responsible for initiating the first contact!
Making Contact

After you are matched with your First Friend you, the current student, are responsible for sending the first email and introducing your new friend to the First Friend program.

Don’t forget to:

- Introduce yourself! Share your name, degree level, and program of study here at UIC
- Explain the First Friend program and discuss your experience as a new student at UIC and in the United States
- Set expectations for your First Friend relationship

Setting Expectations

It is important to set reasonable expectations with your First Friend so you both have a positive experience!

Share with your First Friend:

- How often you can email
- How quickly you can respond to an email
- Alternate ways of communicating if you prefer to use gchat, etc.
- What questions you can/can’t answer

Helpful Starting Tips

- Assure confidentiality
- Ask why your friend has chosen to attend UIC
- Ask what your friend hopes to get out of the First Friend program
- Be open and inviting!

Introductory Email

Your introductory email is your opportunity to introduce yourself to your new friend!

Think about what you want to share with your friend and what information was helpful for you to know before coming to UIC.

Ask your First Friend a question or two to encourage a follow up email.

Remember to keep your first email brief so as not to overwhelm your First Friend!

Hi! I'm Sparky Dragon and I'm your First Friend! I'm pursuing a master's in fire breathing here at UIC. I'm originally from Westeros and I moved to Chicago 2 years ago. I joined the First Friends program because I remember how many questions I had before I moved to Chicago!

I am happy to answer any question you have. If I don’t know the answer I’ll help you find someone who can. Any questions you have will be private between the two of us.

I chose UIC because it has a great fire breathing program! Why did you choose UIC? What questions do you have about UIC, Chicago and living in the USA?

I have 18 credit hours this semester and am the lead dancer in our dance troupe so give me a couple of days to respond to your emails. I'm excited to help you prepare to come to UIC!

- Sparky Dragon
Points to Keep in Mind!

You may encounter students who need more support than what a First Friend is able to provide. This may include students, who need immigration related advice or who need more serious support. The First Friends program is intended to support new international students regarding their questions about a new program, school, and country; nothing more extensive!

Refer your First Friend to OIS if the student has any immigration related questions.
You do not advise on immigration matters.
You are providing new students with peer support.
You do not make decisions for your First Friend.

When to Contact OIS

You should contact OIS if you determine that your First Friend requires assistance from the Office of International Services or other professionals.

- If an issue for which you are not qualified to offer support arises. Tell your First Friend you are not able to address that concern, and offer to contact OIS so they can make additional arrangements if necessary.
- If you feel your First Friend is becoming too dependent on you to provide support
- If you are not able to provide continued support to your First Friend

Ready to Get Started?

Visit the First Friends page at www.ois.uic.edu/programs/first_friends to submit your application today!
Resources

There are several resources which may be helpful for a new international student to refer to before and after entering the United States and while at UIC.

Please share these resources below with your First Friend!

- **Office of International Services (OIS):** [www.ois.uic.edu](http://www.ois.uic.edu)
  The Office of International Services (OIS) is your go-to resource at UIC regarding how to maintain your status, employment, program extensions and more!

- **Department of Homeland Security (DHS):** [www.ice.gov/sevis/students/index.htm](http://www.ice.gov/sevis/students/index.htm)
  The Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) website is a great resource to learn about your responsibilities as an international student, SEVIS, and what you can expect at a U.S. Port of Entry (POE).

- **Social Security Administration (SSA):** [www.ssa.gov](http://www.ssa.gov)
  Student’s who are eligible for a Social Security Number (SSN) must apply for one through the Social Security Administration after they have arrived in the United States. Please note students must obtain documentation from OIS before they can apply for a SSN.

- **Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV):** [www.cyberdriveillinois.com](http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com)
  If you are interested in obtaining a driver’s license while in the U.S. you will need to apply for one through the DMV. Visit their website for more information on how to obtain a driver’s license in the State of Illinois.

- **SEVIS FEE (I-901):** [www.ice.gov/sevis/i901](http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901)
  This website provides more information on the SEVIS fee including when and how to pay it, and how to receive a refund if necessary. It also includes contact information if you have questions about the process.

- **U.S. Embassies and Consulates:** [www.usembassy.gov](http://www.usembassy.gov)
  Visit the Department of States (DOS) website to find the embassy or consulate closest to you and schedule your visa appointment. Individual embassies and consulates have variable wait times and document requirements for visa interview so it is important to research the specific location at which you plan on applying.

Chicago Resources

**Chicago Newspapers**
Chicago Tribune: [www.chicagotribune.com](http://www.chicagotribune.com)
Chicago Sun Times: [www.suntimes.com](http://www.suntimes.com)
The Redeye: [www.redeyechicago.com](http://www.redeyechicago.com)
The Reader: [www.chireader.com](http://www.chireader.com)

**Chicago Transportation**
Chicago Transit Authority (CTA): [www.transitchicago.com](http://www.transitchicago.com)
Metra: [www.metrarail.com](http://www.metrarail.com)

**Other Useful Sites**
- Choose Chicago: [www.choosechicago.com](http://www.choosechicago.com)
  A great Chicago guide! Learn about Chicago neighborhoods, transportation, restaurants and more!
- Craigslist: [http://chicago.craigslist.org](http://chicago.craigslist.org)
  This helpful site lists apartments for rent throughout the city
  Visit this website to find out what is going on in the city!
- Metromix: [http://chicago.metromix.com](http://chicago.metromix.com)
  Check out this site for information on restaurants and events in Chicago and the surrounding suburbs