First Friends
First Friends Training Guide
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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 Friends application through the Office of International Services (OIS) website at ois.uic.edu/programs/first_friends. Once you have successfully completed these requirements you will be matched with a new international student(s) through email and will begin the process of becoming a First Friend to someone who is going through the same process you have already gone through!

Program Objective

To provide a one-on-one supportive resource for new international students coming to UIC by pairing them with a current international student who has already ‘walked in their shoes.’

Program Overview

- New students and current students fill out a questionnaire describing themselves.
- OIS will strive to match individuals on the basis of their preferences if possible, using the questionnaires.
- OIS will introduce the new and current students via email. After this initial introduction, it will be the current international student’s responsibility to reach out to the new student.
- Each First Friend pair should determine the depth and extent of their relationship, and OIS encourages the pair to be clear with each other about relationship expectations as well as individual time commitments up front.
- You are encouraged to attend the First Friends Meet and Greet in the fall. Date, time and location to be announced.
- Both new and current students will be asked to fill out a follow-up questionnaire in order to help OIS optimize the First Friends program.
Your role as a First Friend

- To help new international students answer their questions about UIC, Chicago, and a new country.
- To share your experiences and feelings when you were a new student.
- To encourage new students to take advantage of OIS services (orientation, trips) and information (how to maintain your status, employment) by using the OIS website.
- To assist new students in identifying more resources (listed in this manual).

Keep in mind

- You are not advising on immigration information. If students have immigration questions, refer them to OIS.
- You are not making decisions for them. You are providing new students with peer support.
Making Contact

- Be sure to review expectations with your First Friend and what type of a relationship the new student is looking for – just a one time friendly introduction or maybe a list of favorite things you do in Chicago (a list of museums, good restaurants you have been to).

- It is important to set reasonable expectations for both First Friends (you may want to explain your busy schedule and warn your First Friend of certain needs – needing 48 hours before responding to an email). The clearer you can be up front, the more likely the correspondence will be a positive experience for both of you.

- Conclude your first contact by asking whether he/she would appreciate a follow-up email.

Helpful Starting Tips

It may be intimidating to join a program such as First Friends for some participants. Some students may be nervous about asking questions or writing grammatically correct sentences. Here are some helpful starting tips to make the initial conversation easier.

- Assure confidentiality

- Tell your First Friend about UIC, First Friends and your role

- Begin discussing your experience as a new student at UIC or in the U.S., which may make your First Friend more comfortable

- Ask why he/she choose to attend UIC and why he/she choose to join First Friends

- Be open and inviting. Assure them that you will try your best to answer any questions they may have or you will direct them to someone who can.
When to Offer More Resources

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.

Be careful not to over-analyze

It can be quite normal for new international students to exhibit some of the following feelings or behaviors:

- Anxiety or fear of a new country, new language, new culture
- Sadness of leaving home, family, and/or friends

Contact OIS immediately if…

- You determine that a student requires assistance of OIS or other professionals. If an issue you are not qualified to offer support arises, be honest. Tell the student you are not able to address that concern, and offer to contact OIS so we can make additional arrangements if necessary.
- You feel the First Friend is becoming too dependent on you to provide support.
- You are not able to provide continued support to the First Friend.
Additional Resources

There are several resources that will be helpful for new international students to refer to before and after entering the U.S. and beginning at UIC.

**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 employment, how to maintain your status, program extensions, and more!
- [www.ois.uic.edu/resources/](http://www.ois.uic.edu/resources/)

**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 (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)
If you are interested in obtaining a Social Security Number once arriving in the U.S., you will need to apply with Social Security Administration. To find out more information

**Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV):** [www.cyberdriveillinois.com](http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com)
If you are interested in obtaining a Driver's License while you are in the U.S., you will need to apply with the DMV and pass the driver's test before you are issued a license.

**SEVIS Fee:** [www.ice.gov/sevis/i901](http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901)
A great website to learn more about the SEVIS fee - how and when to pay it, receive a refund if necessary, and contact information if you have questions about the process.

**U.S. Embassies and Consulates:** [www.usembassy.gov](http://www.usembassy.gov)
To find the embassy nearest to you, visit the Department of State (DOS) website and schedule your visa appointment. Individual embassies and consulates vary by wait times and documents needed for a visa interview, so research the particular location you plan on applying at to know what you should prepare.
Chicago Resources

Chicago Newspapers

Chicago Tribune: www.chicagotribune.com
Chicago Sun Times: www.suntimes.com
The Redeye: www.redeyechicago.com
The Reader: www.chireader.com

Chicago Transportation

Chicago Transit Authority (CTA): www.transitchicago.com
Metra: www.metrarail.com

Other useful sites

Choose Chicago www.choosechicago.com
A great Chicago guide! Learn about Chicago neighborhoods, transportation, and everything you could possibly want to do in Chicago!

Craigslist: http://chicago.craigslist.org
A great help in apartment hunting!

City of Chicago: www.cityofchicago.org/city/en.html
A great place to find out what is going on in the city!

Metromix: http://chicago.metromix.com
A great website to check out new restaurants in Chicago and the surrounding suburbs!