

From: [Leah D Nixon](#)
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Included below is a press release regarding Ferris Family Links, a program designed to connect international students with the Big Rapids community and American culture. Further information is available by contacting Leah Nixon, assistant director of News Services.

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Ferris Finds a Link between Community and Culture with Host Family Program

BIG RAPIDS – Leaving the world they know, international students take a leap out of their comfort zone to take advantage of educational opportunities at Ferris State University. However, like any new experience, they might not know what to expect upon arriving in Big Rapids.

This is why beginning this fall, Ferris Family Links (Links) will fill in that gap by providing a link between new international students on campus and the Big Rapids community.

An informational orientation session for those interested in becoming a host family to a new international student will be held at 5:30 p.m. on Aug. 12 in FLITE Room 404.

The purpose of a program such as Links is to connect international students with faculty and families in the Big Rapids community. Once entered into the Links program, one international student will be matched up with one host family. Although it is encouraged, host families need not have a traditional family structure, and can even consist of just one member.

“The program is intended to create a bond, a connection, a ‘link’ between students and families. The word and the image of links give the idea that this connection will be strong and lasting, which is what we hope to achieve,” said Luzia Tartari, coordinator of International Recruitment and Admissions at Ferris.

However, Links is not a typical host family program. The student lives independently while attending school, not with the host family. Instead, the host family provides a firsthand learning experience about American culture and becomes the student’s personal tour guide to life in Big Rapids.

“This program is important for our international students at Ferris because it’s at the heart of international education: the exchanging of ideas, customs and cultures. This is part of that,” said Janel Lockwood, an international student advisor at Ferris. “This is a way for international students to get an American experience and for American families to get an international experience. They can learn from each other.”

Through the Links program, international students who are new to Ferris and Big Rapids can use the host family as a resource for information about American customs and practices. Host families can also provide a family environment and additional emotional support outside of Ferris' International Center and the campus sphere.

Just as host families teach their international student about American culture, international students teach their host family about their culture. Links provides a way for both the student and the family to get beyond stereotypes and develop a lifelong bond.

“We want international students to have a connection with a family, with Ferris, with Big Rapids and the U.S. and keep this link throughout their lives, once they get back to their countries. Not only will these family links will become a student's support group, but they will also be an important part of the student's education,” Tartari added. “That's the purpose of international education and Ferris Family Links is just one step to help accomplish that.”

During the Links program, participation is purely on a voluntary basis. However, the host family is expected to meet with their student at least once per month and keep in regular communication via phone, e-mail or by other means of communication. All other activities and interaction is left up to the discretion of the host family.

Some activities suggested by the International Center include introducing American customs such as holiday celebrations, sporting events or a family dinner. Host families can also provide practical assistance such as offering a place to stay or visit during school breaks, aiding in means of transportation or providing students with general supplies and household items.

Currently, applications are open to members of the Big Rapids community. Many Ferris faculty have already committed to the program.

“I volunteered to be a host family because I was an International student myself. I know how hard it is to live in a new country and adjust to a new culture. I think it would be a good opportunity to make new friends and to show them around, so they see that there are also other nationalities on campus,” said Shohreh Ferdowsi, a host family applicant for Links and Web developer at Ferris.

Throughout the decades, a mission on campus has been to stress diversity and provide an open environment to those with other worldviews. This program will maintain that link between the Big Rapids community and American culture to different cultures on campus.

“As Chief Diversity Officer at Ferris, I am working with many members of the Ferris community to build a university that is diverse and inclusive; this means, in part, creating a university where all students feel welcomed. The Ferris Family Links Program is a tangible way that I can help students feel that Ferris belongs to them as much as it belongs to anyone,” said David Pilgrim, a volunteer for Links.

Host families are required to go through an application process including a paper application asking the applicant's purpose and goals during participation, a security check and an informational orientation session.

Orientation will include topics such as communicating with your international student, what it means to be an international student, helpful tips on being a host family and program

expectations.

For more information on becoming a host family to an International Student, contact Shana Beisiegel at (231) 591-2824 or send an e-mail to beisies@ferris.edu.

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