

International Fellows program seeks sponsors

Pamella Gray, Army War College International Fellows Program

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International Fellows and sponsors meet at the Welcome Picnic. The event is held during the incoming IF class's orientation each year. Photo by Scott Finger.



May 6, 2009 -- The International Fellows Program at the United States Army War College adds another dimension to the USWAC experience which significantly broadens the academic environment for both students and faculty.

The association with senior international officers destined for high level leadership positions in their respective armies can do much to improve the mutual understanding of national security problems, operations, and preparedness.

The International Fellow's sponsorship program consists of three sponsors. Each IF is assigned a Carlisle Barracks Sponsor, a Community Sponsor and a Seminar Sponsor.

Sponsors, in cooperation with the IF Office, are responsible for the logistical and administrative arrangements necessary to make the Fellow's year in the United States professionally and personally rewarding.

"Sponsorship is a commitment to the Officer and when accompanied, their family, but the rewards (professional and personal) far outweigh the time and effort," said Todd Wheeler, associated with Sponsorship Program since 2004, a staff member of the Peacekeeping and Stability Operations Institute. "Remember you are part of a sponsorship team and do not have to do it all."



International Fellows, sponsors and their families are all an important part of the program. Photo by Scott Finger.

The IFP is currently recruiting for sponsors for the upcoming academic year. There is a 25% increase in the International Fellows attending the United States Army War College this year, so the need for sponsors is now greater than ever.

"Without sponsors, it would be very difficult to take care of all of the IFs and their family member's needs," said Kevin Bremer, Deputy Director for the International Fellows Program. "We are a small office with a small staff. Sponsors become an invaluable support mechanism for the IFs."

For nearly half of the International Fellows, this is their first trip to the United States; others will have already attended one or more U.S. service schools. Many of them have also attended a previous foreign staff college course.

Bremer continued that the most critical time in the sponsor program is when IF and his/her family arrives. It is important that they are greeted warmly and sincerely and offered quite a bit of support in their first few weeks.

"The biggest assistance is getting them settled with a place to live and transportation," noted Professor Bernard Griffard, USAWC faculty and sponsor since 1995. "After that you assist in familiarizing them with the community and where to shop for food and other items. If there is an ethnic food store you introduce them to it."

"My sponsor and his wife were a great influence on me, my wife, and children," said Maj. Gen. Laksiri Amaratunga, the International Fellow from Sri Lanka. "They helped us settle in very well."

However, assisting the International Fellow and their family is only the beginning. The goal of the program is about building relationships, fostering an understanding of one another's culture, and offering an opportunity for the International Fellow to experience the American lifestyle.

"The sponsor program reflects the traditions of the U.S. hospitality, and the nature of ethics of the American people," remarked Col. Alaa Alshaikhli the International Fellow from Iraq. "We learned from them how to open our hearts to others. They gave us a big help to feel that we are not strangers."

The experience of the program depends so much on the energy from the sponsor and their rapport with the IF.

"Be willing to engage with the sponsored IF and his family. Initially, there is a bit of a time requirement. Finding a place to live, a car to drive and all that goes with it simply takes time and effort," Bremer said

"I like to recommend to potential sponsors that monthly contact seems about right on average," he continued. "For some sponsor/IF relationships, it is almost daily contact - for others, it is 3-4 times during the academic year."

The IFP recruits sponsors on a volunteer basis, however not everyone possesses the time, interest and interaction required for this role.

"What we hope to avoid are sponsors who show up at the initial welcome event and are never heard from again until the farewell event," Bremer noted. "This kind of situation leaves a bad impression with the IF and his family and ultimately a potentially bad experience while at the USAWC."

Many sponsors find the experience valuable and rewarding as long as they enter into the responsibility with an open mind and willing attitude.

"Stay in contact...let them know you are available to help but don't try to take over their life," said Griffard. "Be helpful, and most of all listen."

"We have been what it is all about," said Col. Indrek Sirel, the IF from Estonia. "They were always there when we needed them; they were always welcomed in our home as friends and we in theirs."

Hints & Tips

Here are some hints and tips to better assist you in becoming a great sponsor. These are not requirements nor are they all inclusive.

Write your Fellow an early letter to introduce yourself. Tell him that you will meet him when he arrives and that you will help him get settled.

Help assure that your Fellow's arrival is a pleasant experience by:

- Meeting him and his family when he arrives at the Airport.
- Learn the proper pronunciation of the names of your Fellow and his family members right away.
- Assist in inprocessing him and his family.
- Assist him in becoming acquainted with post facilities and activities.
- Meet with the entire family and let them know you are there to help them during their stay in Carlisle.

Acquaint your Fellow and his family with our customs and way of life. They want to make friends and learn as much as possible.

- Assist him in buying or leasing a car, obtaining insurance, Pennsylvania license plates, Pennsylvania Driver's License (if necessary) and post decal. (Please consult the IF Office before proceeding with these.)
- Attend, if possible, those functions sponsored during the year for sponsors by the Army War College. You will be notified in advance of these activities.

- Show your interest by demonstrating some knowledge of the Fellow and his country.

You should be knowledgeable of:

- Routine and Emergency Sick Call and Dental Procedures.
- Letort View Community Center rules and facilities.
- Bus and taxi service.
- Post recreational facilities.
- Banking, car registration, etc.
- Shopping areas.
- House and car rental procedures.
- PX and Commissary procedures.
- Child Day Care Center.
- School, pre-kindergarten and local college registration.
- Army Community Services lending closet.
- Obtaining services for home repairs.
- Procedures for securing utilities to include telephone, trash pickup and recycling policies.

Country Information

Some knowledge of the native land of your Fellow is important. The knowledge will provide an easy conversation basis and will impress the Fellow that you have taken the time and effort to learn about his country.

You will find it most useful, for example, to become familiar with:

Location and size of country, particularly in relation to other nations:

- Capital and major cities
- Form of government
- Main products
- Ethnic characteristics
- Religion
- History
- Political situation
- Dietary customs

You should know the same facts about your own country, state and local community, so these can be shared with the Fellow and his family. You will often find that they have done their homework.

Culturegrams on your Fellow's country are provided by the IFP Office. Other materials are readily available in the USAWC library.

Customs Considerations

Most Fellows (there are exceptions) do not voluntarily discuss their private lives as openly as Americans. They are often more formal in their relationships with each other. In many countries even people who have been acquainted for years still address each other as "Mr." or "Mrs." This reflects custom, not anti-social attitudes.

People from various parts of the world sometimes have a different "comfort distance." That is, some tend to stand much closer to each other when they converse than we do. Indeed, some of them cannot talk comfortably unless they are very close to their conversational partners. If we back off when they stand close to us, they wonder whether we are being cold and distant. For others, the "comfort distance" is even greater than ours.

Dinner to many Fellows means an evening meal (and to some very late) and not, as we sometimes use it, a meal in the middle of the day. Be sure that if you invite him to "dinner," you inform him of the time of day you want him to arrive. Punctuality is not as important in many societies as it is in the United States; therefore, do not be discouraged or offended if a Fellow arrives 15-30 minutes later than the prescribed time.

Community Activities

Some of the sports and activities that we take for granted may prove quite new and interesting to our visitors. The following local attractions are also possible new experiences for them:

Public Library, Special Discussion Groups, Supermarket, Adult Education Classes, Drive-in Bank, Shopping Centers, Drive-in Movie, Museums, Drive-in Restaurant, Sports Places, P.T.A. Meetings, Historical Sites, Flea Markets (Silver Springs).

A steady flow of conversation in English may tire your guests. Allow them some silent intervals for observing, absorbing and resting. It is helpful to reserve time after touring to review what you have seen and answer any questions that remain, or urge your guests to tell you of similar activities in their country.

Considerations in Conversation

The Fellows' capabilities with English will vary considerably from one individual to the next. One of the most difficult but important things to remember when there is a language problem is to speak clearly at a moderate pace and in a normal tone. Many of us tend to raise our voices in the effort to conquer a language problem, knowing all the time it does not help a bit.

Your importance as an ambassador of goodwill for the United States cannot be overstated. Good diplomatic relations on any level require tact, patience, and understanding.

Your guest should know that your attitudes and expressions of opinion may not necessarily agree with those of other Americans. Fellows should be left in no doubt that the thoughts you express are your own.

While being a host family seeking to convey an accurate impression of Americans, you are not a sales agent for the United States. Propagandizing is all too easily spotted and therefore self-defeating.

While our form of government is cherished by us, we have to acknowledge, it may not be most suitable for our

visitors' homelands.

You will also be dealing with the fact that while the material accomplishments of the United States are well known, our cultural and social values are equally or more significant and often not as well known.

There is nothing wrong with relaxing and reflecting if there is a lull in the conversation. Silence is a universal language that can convey respect and understanding that many words might fail to convey.

Rest assured that our visitors are probably informed, at least in some manner, about our national and local problems. You need not avoid discussing them. You can explain many events and customs in terms of our cultural background and history. But it is not necessary to attempt to justify all that happens in the United States.

The opinions and reactions of your Fellow may not coincide with your own. This is where mutual understanding and respect are a "must".

Conversation starters:

- National dishes
- Festivals
- Sports
- Future Plans of Visitor
- Newspaper Items
- Role of Women/Men
- Educational Systems
- Family Life
- Travel in the United States or your Fellow's country

You will foster respect and learn a great deal by encouraging your Fellow and his family to talk about themselves, their country and ideas.