



Cross Cultural Relationships

Common differences encountered by newly arrived international students

- 1) In the U.S., students decide for themselves who to date, not their parents or community.
- 2) Women and men can have friendships that are not dating relationships. They can also informally go out on dates with more than one person.
- 3) Women or men may be the first to ask someone out on a date. Students should be prepared to pay for their own food, drink, movie tickets, etc. on these outings, unless the other person offers to pay.
- 4) Relationship terms can be tricky and confusing. For example, *dating*, *going out* and *seeing each other* can have the same or different meanings in different contexts. Ask American friends or someone you know is familiar with American culture if you are not sure what a term means. ISSS, the Women's Center and Counseling Services are a few examples of offices you can ask.
- 5) Depending on your culture, people may touch each other more or less than you would expect in public. Hugging and kissing others in public is common in the U.S., but you do not have to engage in these expressions of affection if you are uncomfortable with them. (Note: In many cultures, it is acceptable to hold hands in public with a friend of the same gender. In the U.S., men who hold hands with men or women who hold hands with women are assumed to be gay or lesbian.)
- 6) Depictions of U.S. and other countries' cultures can lead to false assumptions about others. **EXAMPLES:** Many American movies openly show sexual images, which might lead internationals to think U.S. women are quick to engage in sexual activity. Latin American men can be stereotyped as macho and aggressive on television and in the movies. These are generalizations and are not necessarily true. **Set your stereotypes aside and you will get to really know and enjoy our country and its people.**
- 7) Do not feel obligated to say "yes" to a date if you are uninterested in the person. It is acceptable to reject a date proposal without a detailed explanation of why.



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Safety Tips

- 1) Be clear with yourself about your values and boundaries. Making new friends and fitting in does not mean you have to give up who you are.
- 2) Communicate your values and preferences directly to your new friends.
- 3) Listen carefully to what your new friends are saying to you. If someone seems to be or is actually saying, “no”; listen. Going on a date is not an agreement to have sex. Forcing someone to engage in sexual activity when they have said, or even indicated “no”, is **a serious crime in the United States**. Being convicted of this crime can seriously jeopardize your visa status and, as a consequence, your studies.
- 4) Making sexual comments or unwelcomed remarks about another person’s attractiveness is considered sexual harassment. **This is a violation of another person’s civil rights**.
- 5) Have people earn your trust. Go out in groups until you get to know people.
- 6) When you go out, tell someone you already know and trust where you are going and when you expect to return.
- 7) Seek information from trusted American friends and mentors about healthy dating or sexual behavior in the US.
- 8) Trust your feelings and your instincts. If you feel uncomfortable, unsafe or scared, listen to your feelings and say “no, thank you”. Leave quickly.
- 9) Always have the number of a taxi company (757.855.4444 or 757.857.8888) in your cell phone and money to take a cab home in case you find yourself in a situation where you are not comfortable.