00:00:03 Announcer

The Missouri State Journal, a weekly program keeping you in touch with Missouri State University.

00:00:10 Emily Yeap

Each year, hundreds of international students from around the world come to Missouri State University to pursue higher education.

One of the ways the university’s [International Programs](https://international.missouristate.edu/) office helps the students to engage in cultural exchange and build meaningful connections with the local community is through the [International Friends](https://international.missouristate.edu/Friends/default.htm) program. I’m Emily Yeap.

Joining me today to share more about the program and how it connects international students with people in our community are [Daezia Smith](https://search.missouristate.edu/people/daeziasmith), leadership programs specialist, International Programs, and Lucca Barreto, an international graduate student from Brazil. Smith.

00:00:48 Daezia Smith

The International Friends program was all about creating an opportunity for our Springfield community to help connect to international students. In the program, we welcome our families to be matched with international students who are new to the MSU and Springfield community, so they can learn a bit more about our local culture, what it is to be in Springfield, in the Midwest, and really have a more enriching environment and study abroad experience while they're here studying at Missouri State University.

00:01:14 Emily Yeap

Smith explains the matching process.

00:01:17 Daezia Smith

For host families, if they're interested, it's a very simple process. E-mail us at InternationalFriends@MissouriState.edu and we're able to walk you through what it might look like, and then we direct you to fill out a particular form.

And that form has details like, What are your hobbies? Do you have family? Do you have kids? What things are you looking to do? How many students are you open to hosting? Things like that that helps us better match you to what our students are also looking for as well.

So once you fill that out, then we can start introducing you to the whole orientation process, which is really where you get to meet and interact with our incoming students.

00:01:52 Emily Yeap

Barreto, who works as a graduate assistant for International Programs, helps to coordinate the International Friends program.

00:01:59 Lucca Barreto

As an international student myself, I know our struggles and it makes me really happy to know that I can help international students somehow here on campus and what I do is basically reaching out to students, offering them this program and see how we can connect them to the community.

Reaching out to families, to individuals, it doesn't need to be a family specifically like a husband and a wife. It can be just a single person also, that's a part of my job. My role is to find those people, reach out to them, explain the benefits of the program, and how can they help the international community here on campus.

We don't expect much from the family. But what we want is just to make the student to feel comfortable around Springfield and doing things. I think that sometimes international students feel lonely. I know from my own experience and having some comfort like having a family somewhere you can be invited to have a dinner or go to the park and I think that's one of my favorite things, just help international students, making them feel like they’re home.

00:02:59 Emily Yeap

In terms of what hosts can do with their students, Smith shares some examples.

00:03:04 Daezia Smith

It's a wide range of what folks do. Some are, like, really engaged. They want to go out to Branson, out to the Ozarks, go out to do all these different activities or doing things like going to Cider Days or those really special niche things that we have here in Springfield. Or we’ve even heard of some stories from hosts who actually were able to go to their students home countries because they made such an amazing bond and good connection that they actually welcome them back as well when they were traveling.

00:03:30 Emily Yeap

She believes this program enriches international students’ overall experience.

00:03:35 Speaker 3

Especially when we're talking about like holiday seasons. A lot of our students, they have to just stay here in town or they don't have anybody else around because most people leave. Having that family connection there helps them feel less alone, more connected to what's going on here and it really enriches everything.

Of course, you know, your studies are very important and there's so much that MSU can do, but there's so much more that’s added to it when those in the community share their experiences and what they do and how they live and how they operate that I think really enriches the whole international experience to make it more real for our students and that's what we hear back from them is that it really helps them feel that they belong to Springfield and to MSU.

00:04:13 Emily Yeap

For area families and individuals interested in becoming an International Friends host, Barreto has this advice.

00:04:21 Lucca Barreto

Just come with your open heart. You're dealing with international students. It's not the same culture. Everything is different. They’re out of their place. They’re out of their comfort zone. Just love them.

Just make them feel welcome and also the best part, not only for the student but for the families, the culture exchange – learning from different cultures, getting to know different perspectives. It's not only beneficial for the student, but also for the family that they're learning a lot from something completely different from them.

00:04:50 Emily Yeap

To get more details or to participate, send an e-mail to InternationalFriends@MissouriState.edu. I'm Emily Yeap for the Missouri State Journal.

00:05:00 Announcer

For more information, contact the Office of Strategic Communication at 417-836-6397. The Missouri State Journal is available online at ksmu.org.