



## UC International Requirements for Homestays

*This document has been adapted from the University of Georgia's "Homestays and the Study Abroad Experience."*

Students consistently rate homestay experiences as a highlight of their study abroad experience. Homestays provide an unparalleled way to learn about the culture of the host nation or learn a new language. However, as is the case with study abroad in general, pre-planning is necessary to ensure that the homestays are positive and safe experiences for the students and their host families. Host families must meet certain requirements, and the expectations of students and host families must be clear from the onset.

This is both a requirements and a best practices document: the following requirements and recommendations serve to promote the best possible homestay experience for University of Cincinnati (UC) students.

### **The faculty director must ensure that the homestay coordinating organization meets the following criteria:**

- Falls under the category of Study Abroad Provider, University, or Language Institute.
- Has a vetting process for selecting homestay families that includes interviewing families and visiting the families' homes.
- Has a crisis response plan in place that includes, but is not limited to, the following:
  - A process in place for emergencies and have the means/support to respond quickly.
  - Multiple points of contact with 24 hour access to these emergency contacts, and ensure families/students/faculty have each other's relevant contact information.
  - Pre-arrangements for additional homestays (or space within existing homestays) in the event a student requests or needs to be moved to another arrangement.



- Does not place female students to households with male family members of the same age group as students if the household also lacks a homestay sister, or vice versa.
- Must be able to provide students with their own bed. Students should only share rooms with other UC students who are of the same gender.
- Ideally, students would have their own room if feasible.
- Be willing to provide each student with house keys.
- Provides names, contact information, level of language ability in English (can be none as appropriate for program/student fit), and demographic for homestay families to students in advance so students have an opportunity to assess the arrangement based on their comfort level.
- Arranges families who will not negotiate with student regarding money or payment for homestay, offer to sell them any additional service or product, or become involved with students in any commercial transaction.

**Additionally, when vetting homestay providers, preference should be given to providers who also meet the below criteria:**

- Are responsive/proactive in their communication prior to the experience.
- Provide an opportunity for faculty to visit each homestay and/or meet the homestay families prior to student placement.
- Have a session/process to prepare families for hosting (cultural norms and general expectations).
- Have a process for student feedback and demonstrated change when needed.
- Have a process for matching homestay families with students



## UC International Best Practices for Homestays

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### What the program should expect from the provider:

Homestay families must be vetted by the provider and/or director well before the study abroad. The provider should explain how the families were selected—e.g., based on prior experience, references, background checks, etc. All homestay families should have been visited by the provider ahead of time. During longer stays, the provider should visit the family during the student's stay.

### The provider must ensure that homestay families meet the following criteria:

- Must be a healthy household environment, clean and sanitary, established and stable, and free of sexual harassment.
- Must have telephone access for emergencies (even if the phone is in a neighboring home). The provider or program should provide cell phones if available.
- Be willing to accommodate medically necessary dietary needs. Wherever possible, find families that are willing to accommodate dietary choices, such as vegetarian.
- There must be someone (parent or older child) at home during mealtimes and preferably at all times that the student is in the house.
- Upon student request, there should be at least one person in the household who can understand some English if the student does not speak the local language at all.
- If the student does not have a private room, the family must be able to provide facilities conducive to studying- e.g., desk or table with lamp, in an area where the student can study without disturbing the family or being disturbed.



**Furthermore, it is expected that the provider must instruct the homestay family in:**

- Emergency procedures - what to do, whom to contact.
- Expectations of them in terms of food, privacy, and a non-threatening environment.
- Cultural attitudes towards LGBTQ peoples, ethnic background and gender identity.
- Any particularly health need or medically necessary diet (e.g., account for food allergies).
- Assure the homestay family they can contact the program director in case of any concern.
- Ensure the homestay family has information necessary to contact the project director.

**What the program should expect from the host families:**

- Understand they are providing a cultural experience, not serving as a bed-and-breakfast service.
- Share time and interact with student, include student in family and/or community events.
- All students must have their own bed. They may share a room with another student of the same gender and general age, but must always have their own bed.
- Provide adequate, healthy food. If the homestay is in a developing country, students do not eat salads or uncooked fruit and vegetables that cannot be peeled first. Cooked food should be served very hot, or be kept in a pot with a lid after cooking.
- Provide clean, sanitary living conditions.
- Wash clothes: If the homestay family will be responsible for laundry, ensure the frequency and amount of laundry is specified.



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- Provide students with keys to the house.
- Speak/practice the native language with student. If the student is trying to learn the local language and there is an English speaker in the house, avoid speaking English unless (1) absolutely necessary, or (2) during specified times to help that person learn English.
- Provide a place to study (desk or table, adequate light, with minimal distractions).
- Provide advice for the student and his/her homestay siblings regarding entertainment, going out at night, etc. Students in general and women in particular, should be discouraged from going off alone or with men from the community.
- Although the directors are to have counseled students on safety and proper behavior, the head of the homestay family should let the director know if the student engages in reckless or inappropriate behavior, or has any type of concern about the student.
- Homestay families should not receive students or volunteers from other institutions/organizations while hosting a UC student who were not placed by the same provider/vetting organization used to place students participating in the UC program.