Gaining a Family: Homestay Issues and Advising

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Introduction
- Why do some students have positive experiences living with families while others have negative experiences?
- Is it possible to prepare students to have a positive experience in a homestay?
- If it is possible, how can we prepare students effectively?

Overview of Session
- Defining a Homestay
- What We Already Know
- Overview of Interview Study
- Discussion of Themes
- Guidelines

Definition of Homestay
- A home stay is typically defined as a period of time in which a person resides with a family in a home located outside his or her country of residence (Gutel, 174).

What do we know about homestays?
- Our own experiences
- What students tell us
- Very little research exists on homestays
  - Resources:

Why are homestays important?
- Opportunity for cultural understanding
- Language development
- Creating a social network
- Sharing of ideas and beliefs
- Interaction with locals
- Home away from home

Interview Study
In order to identify issues, we went to the source and initiated a group interview of past participants in homestays.
- Interview Information
  - Four Students
    - 3 Female, 1 Male
  - Location of Study
    - 1 studied in Chile
    - 2 studied in Mexico
    - 1 studied in Great Britain
  - Interviewers asked a series of 6 open-ended questions in an informal setting
Group Interview Questions

- Describe your living situation while you were abroad.
- Describe your relationship with your host family. Did you have different relationships with various members of the family?
- How could the Center for International Education have better prepared you to live with a host family, if at all?
- How could you have better prepared yourself, if at all?
- Were you surprised by anything about the experience?
- Do you feel differently now than you did during the homestay, or right after the experience?

Advantages and Limitations of the Study

- Advantages
  - Participants can report on past experiences
  - Researcher has control over the questions
  - Students can learn from other students' experiences
  - Outlet for students to talk about experiences abroad
- Limitations
  - Participants may experience bias on the part of the researcher and/or other participants
  - Individuals are not equally "articulate and perceptive" (Creswell, 186).
  - Perspective of the experience may change over time

Identifying Issues

What issues can you identify in the participant responses?

In a group of two or three, please review the responses and discuss what issues you identify.

Participant Responses

- Some families are in it for the money.
- It was a Bed and Breakfast-type mentality. There was no bonding.
- My family was my real family. They treated me like a daughter. I miss them a lot.
- They really were like my family. They took me to family parties and weddings. They even had a party on the first day I arrived from the States. I was not expecting to have a celebration after a long day of traveling.

Participant Responses

- We were given false information at first. We were told there would be a man, woman, and their daughter, but we got there and there was no man. It was very awkward.
- It was awkward at first, but then I realized I just had to be myself and it clicked.
- It will be uncomfortable.

Participant Responses

- I was definitely self-conscious and nervous. I know it was my fault that I didn’t make more of an effort to get to know my family. I hated not being able to speak Spanish and not being able to express myself. I felt like I couldn’t be myself.
- My friend never tried to befriend our host mom. She never put forth the effort.
- Some families are just different. You have to go out of your way to make an effort.
- You should go into it with an open mind and have the attitude that you just want to take it all in.
- Take advantage of your time there. Throw yourself out of your bubble.
- I don’t think the language had anything to do with it. You just have to be willing to make mistakes.
- You have to be open to learn. I think so much of it is up to individual personality.
Participant Responses

- I wish I’d gone by myself instead of with my best friend. I wish I’d been able to do things myself and do what I wanted to do. It was definitely cliquey among the Americans. They always did everything together and without locals.
- I felt tied down by my friend. I had to hold his hand, so I eventually had to sit down with him and talk to him about it. I don’t think he was prepared mentally or emotionally.
- It would have been a better experience if I didn’t live with English speakers.
- Think twice about living with a friend.
- My host cousin was my best friend. I just needed the one ‘in’ to make a Chilean friend group.
- It helps to create a tie in the country.

Themes

- Families are different.
- The experience may be awkward or uncomfortable at first.
- Advisors should make every attempt to provide accurate information.
- The personality of the student affects the experience.
- Living with friends or other Americans tends to affect the experience in a negative way.

Given the issues, how can we prepare students?

1. Advise Students to Create Ties in the Host Country
   - Volunteering
   - Religious Organizations
   - Participate in holiday celebrations
   - Join a Student clubs/networks

2. Provide Realistic Information
   - It is OK to say, “Some families are in it for the money.”
   - Provide accurate information when possible

3. Facilitate Opportunities for Self-Awareness
   - Cultural Awareness/Value Chart*
   - Clear Goals*
   - Willingness to Reduce Expectations*
   - Understanding of your own culture*
   - Eagerness to Learn*
   *(Paige, 59-73.)

4. Discourage Students to Live with Friends
   - Ask students to think about how their friendships might change.
   - Should a policy be made on discouraging this practice?

Conclusion

- It is a challenge to prepare students for particular issues they may or may not face.
- Understanding what issues can arise is an important part of preparing students effectively.
- We can facilitate opportunities for students to be aware of the issues they may face and address those issues themselves.