

Potential Conversation Topics for Campus Conversation Partners

These conversation topics were generated for the English and international conversation partners to provide mutually beneficial learning experiences and lesson ideas. The topics below may be adapted for each casual meeting. Conversation ideas can also be modified according to both of your interests. Other topics may be generated spontaneously during the session. To make the most of this experience, find out more about your partner's cultural background, be sensitive to political situations and religious beliefs, meet regularly, keep an open mind, and think positively. The important point is that you both have fun while learning!

1. Topic: Holidays

Objective

Learn about special days throughout the year and how they are celebrated by law or custom.

Preparation

Bring a current 12-month calendar to the meeting.
Make a list of holidays celebrated in your country.

Conversation Ideas

- Compare and contrast common holiday observations (New Year's Day, Valentine's Day, etc.).
- Discuss other special days, such as independence days and legal holidays, religious celebrations, etc.

2. Topic: Travel and Transportation

Objective

Learn about geography and tourist attractions

Preparation

Bring an atlas or maps of the world, USA, Iowa, and partner's country to the session.
Optional: Share travel photos or brochures.

Conversation Ideas

- Ask your partner to show on the world map which routes he/she traveled to get to the U.S. and explain his/her preparation for entry to the U.S. and admission to the UI.
- On the map of Iowa, point out the location of the UI and popular places to visit in the state and in neighboring states.
- Tell each other which places (countries and/or states) you have toured and visited.

- Make suggestions for spring break travel or plans for vacations during other school breaks.

3. Topic: Food

Objective

Learn about daily meals and special menus for celebrations and possibly try new foods and exchange recipes.

Preparation

Optional: Eat at the campus café or dining hall together.

Optional: Exchange a favorite recipe or home cooked dish from each other's country.

Optional: Go to a cultural festival sponsored by a UI international student club or the community.

Conversation Ideas

- Discuss what food is served during a typical/traditional breakfast, lunch, and dinner.
- Find out what special foods are prepared on holidays, birthdays, weddings, etc.
- Talk about rituals, etiquette/manners, eating utensils, etc. associated with food.

4. Topic: Family

Objective

Learn about family structures (nuclear or extended), values, and domestic lifestyles.

Preparation

Bring a family photograph, album, or family tree to the session.

Conversation Ideas

- Share favorite memories about your family, relatives, etc.
- Talk about parents' professions, your home, your family vacations, your upbringing, etc.
- Tell each other about any pets (dog, cat, fish, bird, etc.) you or your family own(ed).

5. Topic: Rites of Passage

Objective

Learn about customs that commemorate important milestones people reach in their lives.

Preparation

Optional: Share photographs of occasions that you each have celebrated or attended.

Conversation Ideas

- Compare and contrast birthday traditions, coming of age celebrations, marriage and wedding customs, death and funeral rites, etc.
- Inquire about special food, clothing, rituals, beliefs, superstitions, etc. associated with each occasion.

6. Topic: Customs

Objective

Learn about interesting cultural behaviors, etiquettes, beliefs, proverbs, etc.

Preparation

Do some online research about your partner's country.

Optional: Read the profile about your partner's country from the reference book, *CultureGrams* (it is available in the Curriculum Lab in N140 Lindquist or can be purchased individually from www.culturegrams.com).

Conversation Ideas

- Discuss and/or demonstrate your vs. your partner's cultural behaviors for greeting, visiting, tipping, dating, etc.
- Ask whether your partner is experiencing culture shock and how he/she is adapting to life in the U.S.
- Answer questions your partner may have about American values and behaviors.
- Find out about the various stereotypes and enlighten each other about realities.

7. Topic: Education

Objective

Learn about educational systems, teaching methods, and transmission of knowledge in each of your cultures.

Preparation

Do some online research about education in your partner's country.

Optional: Bring old report cards, assignments, reports, or textbooks to the session.

Conversation Ideas

- Find out what each other is studying/doing at the UI, why he/she chose his/her academic major or career field, etc.
- Talk about primary and secondary schooling, the ages when children begin their education, the length of the school day and year, teaching methods and important lessons, and preparations for college.
- Inquire how your partner learned English and about the U.S.

- Tell how Americans typically learn about the world and other languages.
- Share success tips on studying.

8. Topic: Jobs

Objective

Learn about the types of jobs available and most common in each other's countries. Learn about employment opportunities on campus, in the area, and abroad. (Keep in mind that a student visa restricts the bearer to a part-time job on campus.)

Preparation

Optional: Bring a classified ads page from the newspaper.

Conversation Ideas

- Share financial tips for college (part-time jobs, money management strategies, etc.). Realize the tuition differences for in- and out-of-state students and international students.
- Talk about your part-time job/internship/assistantship/fellowship experiences.
- Discuss how your partner is preparing for his/her occupation.
- Compare and contrast what information may be included in a resume in each other's cultures (and whether personal data, photographs, etc. are necessary).
- Discuss what it would be like to work in each other's countries.

9. Topic: Communication

Objective

Learn about language, expressions, gestures, and communication styles.

Preparation

E-mail each other and note the language (conversational tone, mechanics, etc.) use via this communication medium.

Optional: Bring a current newspaper/magazine to the session.

Conversation Ideas

- Share/demonstrate greeting and departure behaviors and rituals.
- Discuss language and translation challenges, alphabets and writing (script or characters), pronunciation, vocabulary-building, etc.
- Talk about how various emotions are expressed and which of them are culturally and socially acceptable/permitted.
- Compare nonverbal communication (movements of the hands and body, symbolism of clothing and accessories, etc.).
- Look at newspapers, magazines, or other media (such as websites) to observe what each culture may value.

10. Topic: Numeric Systems

Objective

Learn about different currencies, weather temperatures, shoe and clothing sizes, and other measurements.

Preparation

Optional: Read the profile about your partner's country from the reference book, *CultureGrams* (it is available in the Curriculum Lab in N140 Lindquist or can be purchased individually from www.culturegrams.com).

Optional: Ask your partner to bring coins and bills from his/her country and explain the exchange rates and monetary values.

Conversation Ideas

- Talk about the weather, climate extremes, and seasons.
- Discuss metric vs. U.S. measures

11. Topic: Sports and Recreation

Objective

Learn about national pastimes and each other's interests and hobbies.

Preparation

Optional: Bring a deck of cards or favorite board game to the session and play together.

Optional: Bring supplies needed to do a craft project.

Optional: Attend a campus sporting event together.

Conversation Ideas

- Discuss what people enjoy doing as a pastime when not working or studying.
- Introduce each other to favorite hobbies and crafts (stamp or coin collecting, sewing, etc.)
- Explain the basics of popular national sports (for example, baseball vs. cricket).

12. Topic: Arts and Entertainment

Objective

Learn about fun activities and gain insights to cultural values.

Preparation

Optional: Go to a Bijou movie, or a campus play, concert, reading, or museum together.

Optional: Go to a cultural festival sponsored by a UI international student club.

Optional: Listen to music from your partner's country.

Optional: Teach each other the basic steps of dances that are popular in your cultures.

Conversation Ideas

- Discuss stereotypes portrayed in the movies and television shows, storylines and characters, cultural values/themes, popular actors and actresses, etc.
- Compare and contrast music and dance styles in America and in your partner's country.
- Ask about popular singers, bands, and other entertainers.
- Discuss popular literature and writers.
- Talk about the symbolism of artistic designs and other creative expressions.

13. Topic: Issues

Objective

Learn about various social, economic, religious, and political issues.

Preparation

Keep an open mind, since this topic may be considered controversial and sensitive. If you do not feel comfortable discussing politics or gender issues, focus on other topics. Stay current; read about international news.

Conversation Ideas

- Compare and contrast the social roles of and relationships between men and women in each other's countries, intermarriage, alternative lifestyles, impact of divorce, etc.
- Learn about each other's opinions on taxation, trade/commerce, imports/exports, resources, industry, business practices, work ethics, etc.
- Share about each other's religious traditions and rituals, symbolism, doctrines, celebrations and special days, etc.
- Discuss national history, political ideology, government structure, leadership, domestic and foreign policies, laws, etc.
- Talk about other issues such as civil rights, ethnic relations, environment/animal protection, humanitarian aid, war, medical research, etc.