

Hosting Central American, Mexican and Caribbean Students

A unique partnership between the U.S. government, Central America, Mexico and Caribbean countries, community-based educational institutions like NTC and Georgetown University's Center for Intercultural Education and Development (CIED).

The purpose of CASS is to contribute to the development of the workforce of Mexico, Central American and Caribbean countries and to assist in meeting their social, economic, democratic and personal goals.

Thank you for your interest in the Cooperative Association of States for Scholarships (CASS)

CASS is an international scholarship program administered by Georgetown University's Center for Intercultural Education and Development (CIED) in Washington, DC, and sponsored by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Other essential partners include countries in Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean, community-based educational institutions throughout the United States, and families like your own who host participants as they begin their studies in this country.

CASS is much more than scholarships. Our focus is on development. The goal of CASS reaches beyond simply preparing socio-economically disadvantaged young people with academic, technical, and professional skills to enter the job market, although this is a major part of the CASS experience. It also prepares students as able and committed leaders who return to their home countries to aid in the development of their families, communities, and countries by sharing the benefits of their training with others. In order to be considered for a CASS scholarship applicants must demonstrate leadership qualities, a desire to serve others, and a strong commitment to return home. Today, as a testament to the success of the program we have over 4,500 CASS alumni (over 120 from NTC) who are working to affect change in their home communities.

An essential element to this success is the host family. The host family plays a vital role in educating CASS students about U.S. culture, values, beliefs and customs, and enabling them to build lasting links of friendship. Surveys of CASS alumni tell us that the opportunity to share in the daily life of a U.S. family is among their most significant experiences. We are grateful for your interest in CASS and we welcome your support!

Why are host families important?

Fostering lasting links among the peoples of the United States, Central America, Mexico and the Caribbean is a fundamental program goal. What better place to begin than in a home in Wausau WI? Students can best learn about our families and our communities by active participation in them. On a very practical level, we believe that all CASS students adjust more quickly to life in Wausau when they have the security of a family environment. The purpose of the Host Family is specifically to:

1. Assist the student in the process of learning about and adapting to U.S. culture;
2. Facilitate the Spanish and French speakers' process of learning English as a second language;
3. Provide the student with adequate room and board; and
4. Help the student keep focused on his or her studies and program goals while in the U.S.

How can my family apply to become host to a CASS student?

Contact the CASS Coordinator who provided you with this brochure. You will need to complete and submit to the College Coordinator a host family application form. Signing the form indicates that you agree to abide by the terms of the Host Family Agreement that outlines program expectations (found in the application form). You will also need to provide completed Host Family Reference forms from a minimum of two individuals who are not related to the family. The CASS Coordinator will then arrange to interview you and your family in your home. They will also arrange to conduct a criminal background check of all household members over the age of 16 (in those states where a juvenile may be charged as an adult).

Once selected, you will be expected to attend a host family orientation before the CASS student is placed in your home. The Program also expects you to attend periodic meetings with other host families and the CASS Coordinator and to maintain close communication with the CASS Coordinator throughout the student's stay with you.

What is the role of the College Coordinator?

CASS students are adults, and they are ultimately responsible for their own experiences. At the same time, because students are placed in groups, each college campus has designated a Coordinator who is responsible for assisting the students on campus and in the community. As the title implies, the College Coordinator is expected to coordinate a multitude of program activities and communication essential to the students' training experience. The Coordinator maintains close contact with the students and communicates regularly with CASS staff at Georgetown University. The Coordinator monitors the students' academic progress, facilitates opportunities for leadership development and community service, organizes field trips, social activities, and other events, and tracks student health problems. The Coordinator is the person to whom you should turn if you have any questions, and he or she must be informed immediately if there are any problems regarding the student.

How many students is a family asked to host?

This varies from family to family. We strongly recommend one student per family, but some families prefer that students be placed in pairs. We are opposed to the placement of more than two students in the same home. We also advise against the placement of two Spanish- or French-speaking students in the same home, as this can interfere with English language acquisition.

Do the students speak English?

Some do, but most do not. Haiti has two official languages, French and Creole. Spanish is the native language of the Dominican Republic, Mexico and participating countries in Central America, although some Central American and Mexican students speak indigenous languages in addition to Spanish. Since English is not a requirement for acceptance into the program, your first few weeks of being a host family are likely to be an adventure in creative communication!

This experience is vital for the students since there is no better way to learn a language than to plunge in. Because learning English is initially the top priority of Spanish and French speaking students, the colleges do not seek out households where these languages are spoken. Learning English is a major part of the students' training and often English fluency is central to job placement once they return home. Your support of the student's English acquisition is extremely important.

How are the students selected?

CASS scholars are chosen among recent high school graduates with excellent grades who are economically disadvantaged. Eighty percent of students are from rural areas and at least fifty percent of the total number of scholarships are awarded to women. In-country interview committees evaluate scholarship candidates on the basis of their academic background, enthusiasm for cross-cultural sharing, eagerness to participate in Wausau's community life, leadership potential, and above all, their commitment to returning home to serve their communities. NTC makes the final selection of scholars.

Do the students have much free time?

Not usually. They are studying full time and most are doing so in a second language. In addition, students are encouraged to become actively involved at NTC, as well as in community activities and organizations. They also serve as "Friendship Ambassadors" in their communities. The students are encouraged to participate actively in the daily life and activities of their host families, and they are expected to help with household chores. However, it is important to remember that there are many demands on their time.

What kind of orientation do the students receive?

During the months prior to coming to the U.S., all students participate in an intensive three-phase orientation in which they review program policies and procedures, and clarify their own goals and reasons for accepting the scholarship. Host-family living and the cultural adjustment process are major points of discussion. All students sign a "Code of Commitment", an explicit agreement in which they commit themselves to observe U.S. laws and customs, CASS program rules, and, most importantly, to return home at the end of their training so that they can make positive contributions to the development of their countries. You will need to know the content of this agreement and must be fully supportive of it as a requirement for serving as a host family. This information will be provided to you as part of an orientation session for host families before the students arrive. Students experience another thorough orientation to the local community and college campus immediately upon their arrival in the U.S.

What do host families need to know about cultural differences and culture shock?

Every CASS student will experience some degree of culture shock, even though it may manifest itself in very different ways. Culture shock is a normal, healthy response to the loss of familiar people, customs, and ways of interacting. Typically, culture shock results in feelings of confusion, anxiety and depression, which come and go. In some cases the effects are subtle; in other cases they are more severe. Many people go through a period of joy and excitement when they first arrive in a foreign culture. This "honeymoon", period invariably ends, however, and is often followed by a period of disillusionment and frustration. The student may feel out of control

and go through considerable self-doubt until he or she gradually develops new coping strategies. Being aware that these feelings are normal, and maintaining open communication with the student, is the best way to handle culture shock.

The process of adjustment is often described as a “U-curve” reflecting the fact that most people come out of the “shock” and successfully adapt to the new environment after several months. This is sometimes extremely difficult, however, and NTC is prepared to provide counseling to the students in such circumstances.

How long do the students stay with families?

The program requires that all students live with host families for nine to twelve months. After this time CASS expects students to leave the host family setting and move into apartments or houses. The program believes that it is important for CASS students to have the experience of typical U.S. college students. The skills gained from living on their own will be very important for the students when they return to their countries.

Must students have private bedrooms?

Not necessarily. The most important thing is that both the family and the student be comfortable with the arrangements. One factor to consider, however, is that the student frequently needs to stay up late to study. He or she will need space and quiet time to meet the demands of a rigorous academic and technical program. Lack of privacy can be a source of problems.

Will the students have overnight guests?

No. The students understand that while they are staying with a host family, they are to have no overnight guests (including relatives).

Can students travel during their vacations?

Yes, but only with prior approval from the CASS Coordinator. Most CASS students remain in their host communities throughout the scholarship period. However, provided they do not leave the fifty United States, students are free to travel during academic breaks, assuming travel plans do not conflict with scheduled program activities. If families plan trips during college vacations, students are certainly free to go along, but they must keep the Coordinator informed of their whereabouts and how they can be reached in an emergency.

What if there is a problem?

We hope there aren't any problems, but it would be unrealistic to expect that no misunderstandings will arise. The important thing in dealing with misunderstandings is open communication and clarification of each other's expectations as soon as an issue comes up. Discuss the situation with the student. It is also recommended that host families and CASS students discuss expectations and rules up front to prevent any potential conflict. Remember, too, that you have other resources. Get together with other host families to share information and experiences. You may find that you are not alone in your experience. The CASS staff at NTC is also available to assist and advise you. Remember that the College Coordinator must be informed immediately of any potentially serious problems. If necessary, the College Coordinator can move the student to another housing situation.

How do the finances work?

Georgetown University cooperates with the U.S. Agency for International Development to administer the CASS program. There exists a subcontract between Georgetown University and Northcentral Technical College. A \$200 monthly stipend is paid to the host family to offset the costs of hosting a CASS student. Arrangements between NTC and host families are such that the students in no way become financial burdens on the families. But to be perfectly clear, the host family stipend is intended only to help defray the basic cost of food and other expenses. Anyone looking to host a student for financial reasons should not become involved.

Will the students have money of their own?

All CASS students receive a monthly allowance for personal expenses, as well as periodic stipends for the purchase of clothing. This means, for example, that it is fair for host families to expect students to pay their own way at the movies. The students may not be very experienced at budgeting money, especially in a new currency. However, aside from occasional advice on such things as paying their phone bills (for which they are solely responsible) and shopping sensibly, you should not become involved in financial matters with the students, particularly by lending them money.

What if a student gets sick or is injured?

Inform the Coordinator immediately. All students have health and accident coverage (HAC). The terms of the policy as well as the insurer are determined by USAID; limitations are quite strict. They will orient you regarding details of the policy and procedures for handling health care matters at the college.

Can the students drive?

No. The students may not drive while in the United States nor may they apply for a state driver's license. However, students enrolled in agricultural training may operate tractors under supervision while they are working in fields as part of their training.

Can the students work?

No. Visa and program regulations prohibit the students from working for wages while in the U.S. The students are expected to do volunteer work in the community, and all programs require an internship related to their field of study, but money must not change hands. Similarly, it is not appropriate for the student to work for the host family beyond helping with the routine chores reasonably expected of any family member, again, without pay.

Are some students ever sent home before the end of the program?

Yes. In cases of unacceptable behavior a student's scholarship may be terminated and he or she will be sent home at once. Georgetown University reserves the right and sole responsibility to cancel a scholarship and send a student home.

Can the students stay in this country beyond the end of their program?

No. For CASS, the ultimate measure of success lies in the students going home to make positive contributions to their families, communities, and countries. This is the essence of the CASS scholarship. In accepting the scholarship, students sign a contract committing them to return home. Any student who attempts to remain in the U.S. is not only breaking that confidence but also undermining the very existence of programs such as this. CASS would be pointless if students stayed in the U.S. In addition to this moral obligation to return home, CASS students enter the U.S. under special (J-1) visas that require them to reside in their home countries for at least two years after the scholarship ends. Those visas expire at the end of the program and any student who remains in the U.S. beyond that point is here illegally.

Your understanding and support of the goals of the program and the regulations under which it operates is expected as a condition of serving as a host family. Likewise, you are expected to encourage the students to return home

What can we expect after the students return to their countries?

We hope that you stay in touch with the students. After all, that is one of the goals of the program. We would also like you to know that the program's involvement with the students continues long after they return home. CASS has Country Coordinators in each country who conduct reentry seminars to assist the students in their re-adaptation process. In addition, there are CASS alumni associations and support networks in each country which assist returning students in their search for employment and their continuing personal and professional development. The program has been very successful in this regard; over 90% of CASS alumni are employed. Finally, CASS has many agreements with universities in Central America and the Caribbean to facilitate transfer of college credits earned in the U.S. so that the students can continue their studies back home. In a recent survey of CASS alumni, over 50% indicated that they have continued their education in their home countries.

**Cooperative Association of States
for Scholarships (CASS)
Center for Intercultural Education
And Development
Georgetown University
Box 579400
Washington, DC 20057-9400
Tel - (202) 687-1400
Fax - (202) 687-2532**

<http://www.georgetown.edu/CIED/>

**Office of International Education
Northcentral Technical College
1000 W. Campus Drive
Wausau, WI 54401-1899
Tel - (715) 675-3331**

Fax - (715) 675-9776

<http://www.ntc.edu>