Volume 21 Issue 35
Originally issued as F4



Global Journal of human-social science: F
Political Science
Volume 21 Issue 4 Version 1.0 Year 2021
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Evaluating Prospective Homestay Families in the U.S. and New Approaches to Further Enrich the Exchange Student's Opinion of America

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GJHSS-F Classification: *FOR Code: 160699p*



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Evaluating Prospective Homestay Families in the U.S. and New Approaches to Further Enrich the Exchange Student's Opinion of America

Martha Falencik

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> "The shape of the world, a generation from now, will be influenced far more by how well we communicate the values of our society to others than by our military or diplomatic superiority."
>
> *Senator William Fulbright, 1964*[1]

I. Evaluation Methodology

a) *Identifying the Objective and Hypothesis of the Evaluation*

This data-gathering tool seeks to explore ways to attract new homestay families to exchange programs. It also seeks to develop better strategies and practices in the homestay environment which will in turn, enhance the exchange college student's (age 18-24) opinion of American values. The short-term desired outcome of this evaluation is to uncover important gaps regarding how-to-prepare-before-you-host-an-exchange -student practices. The desired intermediate outcome is that, once such gaps are rectified, homestay hosts will be better informed about the important role they play as civilian diplomats in U.S. nation branding and global engagement. Such KPI's[2] as shared trust and dynamic people-to-people interactions with the exchange student would have to be measured, accordingly. Consequently, the long-term goal is that future comprehensive homestay evaluations stimulate better global relations through informed, purposeful, enriched experiences in youth exchange programs.

I predict that the "Possible Homestay Families" evaluation will expose a lack of knowledge on the respondent's part about the overarching purpose behind exchange programs. These families are mostly willing to host so that they can experience different cultures, foods, music, languages, faiths, even politics, but are unaware of their impact on the exchange students' ultimate opinion of American values, hence their long-term, global impact.

b) *Isolating the Target Audience*

Homestay families everywhere can range from two parents with kids to a widowed grandmother. According to Carleton College's website, "twenty-something couples, a single parent with grown children, large extended families, or a retired couple all constitute (prospective host) families."[3] While any of these might be the case, generally, females, being the more nurturing, detail-oriented gender,[4] are the ones making decisions such as hosting an exchange student. In that light, this survey will be sent to 75 randomly selected women homeowners. They live in different urban areas throughout the United States and are relatively close to colleges and universities. This target audience is ideal because women homeowners are more likely to set the tone in the homestay atmosphere.

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[1] "Evaluating and Measuring the Impact of Citizen Diplomacy: Current Status and Future Directions," IIE Briefing Paper, 2011. https://www.iie.org/Research-and-Insights/Publications/Evaluating-Measuring-Impact-of-Citizen-Diplomacy. Pp 3.

[2] What is a Key Performance Indicator (KPI)?

[3] Homestays | Off-Campus Studies | Carleton College

[4] Different Brains, Different Behaviors: Why Women Lead Differently Than Men | HuffPost

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c) Building questions

The questions will be divided into 5 categories:

I.	1-2 *Introductory information* (number of members in your household, distance to nearest university/college.)
II.	3-10 *Background information* (ethnicity, age, second language spoken at home, religious affiliation, income level, education level, study abroad, travel abroad.)
III.	11-16 *Preferences* (willingness to attend workshops to improve exchange practices, level of community engagement, enjoyment and attendance of cultural activities, conditions that would make it more likely to consider hosting an exchange student, level of family outdoor activities, likelihood of contact with exchange student once they are back in their country of origin.)
IV.	17-19 *Open-ended* (family description, benefits of hosting an exchange student, sacrifices made by hosting an exchange student.)
V.	20 *Direct global engagement statement* (homestay family's level of confidence; their impact on exchange student's opinion of America, hence their global influence.)

The survey contains 10 multiple-choice, demographically-driven questions. It asks 6 multiple-choice questions which delve into the prospective homestay family's level of participation in their community and travels abroad. The 3 open-ended questions are structured in such a way that the participants share their personalized, homestay family's dynamics, as well as their expectations of an exchange program experience. The 20th question is formatted as multiple choice with the desired outcome of extracting a swift and honest answer about the respondent's family dynamics and how they see themselves as a conduit to improve global public opinion about American values.

d) Attachments

Below, pages 17 & 20, please find (a): the "Possible Homestay Survey" and (b): the evaluation participation letter, disseminated to 75 women-homeowner participants.

II. Evaluation Results

The dissemination of 75 "Possible Homestay Survey" emails took place on March 1, 2021. Of the 75, 43 began and completed the survey, with a completion rate of 57%. Of the 43 completed surveys, 23 respondents answered the three open-ended questions. *Explanation of percentages with glance analysis (in bold & single-spaced)*

a) Questions 1-16

Q1: *How many people live in your home?* 60% of respondents live in a household of three to four family members. 31% of respondents live in a household of four or more. Only 9% of respondents live in a household of less than two family members. *I easily assumed that a family of four would be most ideal for people-to-people connections. I thought that the exchange student would by default, have more than one age group to find interests with. As it turned out, some of the open-ended responses debunked my prediction.*

Q2: *What is the approximate distance to the nearest university/college to your home?* 55% of respondents live within five miles of a university/college, 21% within 5-10 miles, and 23% of respondents live within 10-15 miles of said learning institutions. *Over half of these homes are within 5 miles to university/college, ideal for exchange students to ride a bicycle, bus, or walk to campus.*

Q3: *What is your racial identity?* 50% of respondents are Latino/Hispanic, 31% White, Caucasian, 7% Black, African American, 7% Asian, 2.5% Pacific Islander, and 2.5% American Indian, Alaskan Native. *Asked as a routine demographic question, the outlier (analyzed below), sparked an onslaught of unresolved issues.*

Q4: *What is your age bracket?* 50% of respondents are 40-50 years of age, 26% are 50-60 years of age, 14% are 60-70 years of age, and 10% are 30-40 years of age.

Q5: *Is there a second language spoken at home*? 50% of respondents answered yes, 50% answered no. *Although exchange students hope to sharpen their English language skills, a second language spoken at home can be a good source of cultural exchange. However, if English is not the homestay's primary language, it can be problematic for the exchange student's English immersion expectations.*

Q6: *Is religion important to you?* 55% of respondents said they gave religion a great deal of importance, 21% said a moderate amount, 15% said a lot, 7% said not at all, 2% said a little. *For clarity purposes, I should have specified how many religious events the participants attend per week or month. The question was asked with a three-fold intention. First, faith and religion can be a fascinating conversation base between different cultures. Second, religious settings can be a strategic people-to-people connection aside from academia. For instance, the exchange student can mingle with youth their age and find outlets to further their American experience. On the other hand, the homestay can become too persistent about church attendance and imposition of their own religious beliefs which can create negative tension between them and the exchange student.*

Q7: *What is your income level?* 29% of respondents have a $100,000-$150,000 annual income, 29% have a $50,000-$100,000 annual income, 26% have a

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$150,000-$200,000 annual income, 7% have a $200,000-$250,000 annual income, 7% have over a $250,000 annual income, and 3% have an annual income of less than $50,000.

Q8: *What is your highest level of education?* 33% of respondents have a 4-year degree, 26% have a professional degree, 17% have a two-year degree, 12% have done some college, 10% have a doctorate, and 2% have at least a high school diploma. *National percentage comparison shows 35% of Americans have a four-year college education level, quite close to this survey's findings.*[5]

Q 9: *Have you studied abroad?* 78% of respondents have not, 22% have studied abroad. *The national comparison is 10%,*[6] *giving away the more selective nature of this pool of respondents.*

Q10: *How much have you traveled abroad?* 38% of respondents have traveled a moderate amount, 28% have traveled a little, 17% not at all, 14% a lot, 3% a great deal. *This question should have been more specific about quantifying the amount of travel.*

Q11: *What is your level of community engagement?* 45% average, 19% somewhat above average, 19% somewhat below average, 12% far above average, 5% far below average. *A high level of community engagement can create interesting conversations about domestic and international topics around the dinner table.*

Q12: *How often do you attend cultural events?* 62% of respondents never do, 23% do quite often, 5% never do, and 5% of respondents attend cultural events very often. *I expected a higher number since these families live in culturally rich and accessible urban areas.*

Q13: *Which factor would more likely compel you to consider hosting an exchange student?* 60% of respondents said family enrichment would be the factor that would compel them to consider hosting an exchange student, 23% said financial compensation, and 17% said geography of student would be the leading factor. *This response was a relief at first. As the analysis evolved, it became obvious that the family enrichment, for lack of training, is quite one-sided. The families are not taking into consideration the grave importance of their influence abroad through what they teach the exchange student about America.*

Q14: *How effective would it be for you to attend workshops to improve exchange practices?* 26% of respondents said it would be moderately effective, 26% said it would be very effective, 22% said it would be extremely effective, 19% said it would be somewhat effective, and 7% said it would not be effective at all. *It is quite good to see the willingness in this very needed portion of exchange program planning. However, a more viable solution would probably be an online, 30 minute required course before hosting an exchange student.*

Q15: *How much do you and/or your family enjoy family activities?* 52% of respondents said their family enjoys family activities at an average level, 43% said above average level, and 5% showed a below average level of enjoyment when it comes to family activities. *A good counter balance to the low cultural outings rating.*

Q16: *How likely are you to keep in contact with the exchange student once they are back in their country of origin?* 67% of respondents said they would somewhat likely stay in contact with the exchange student once back in their (the student's) country of origin, 24% said extremely likely, 9% neither likely nor unlikely. *This is an easy gateway of long-term engagement in each other's cultures and current binational sentiments.*

b) *Questions 17-19: Open-ended statements (abbreviated)*

Q17: *Describe your family*

1. We are a fun, loving family of 4, very involved with baseball.
2. We are loving, respectful, and good members of the community. Faith is an integral part of our lives.
3. My family is loving and hard working.
4. We enjoy other cultures, family, friends, and the outdoors.
5. We love experiencing new cultures through food and traveling to different countries.
6. My family is busy, but happy.
7. Loving, generous, and kind.
8. We are a family of 5. We enjoy local adventures, like hiking, camping, and trying new things. We are involved in the community through Boy Scouts of America and various sports teams.
9. My family consists of my husband, two adult daughters, and me. I really enjoy their company, energy, enthusiasm, and conversations.
10. Fun, friendly, active and God Centered. We love food and music.
11. Our family consists of two loving moms and one 13-year-old daughter. We are fun-loving, open-minded people, and we love new experiences.
12. Fun, kind, giving, outgoing, and loving.
13. Active, busy, noisy, multigenerational household. We enjoy sports. We love animals so we have a house full. Saxophone playing, random singing, video games, computer playing, and working out teenagers.
14. My family is kind, generous, and open-minded.
15. Our family is diverse not only in ethnicity but age span of kids. We are warm and inviting to people and love to share experiences together and with the people we love. We are loud, passionate, and

[5] Educational attainment in the United States - Wikipedia
[6] 55 Study Abroad Statistics [2021 Updated] (ivypanda.com)

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adventurous. We are committed and hardworking. We love people!
16. Adventurous, hungry for new experiences, curious.
17. I would consider our family to be steadfast, loving, caring and supportive. I would also consider our family to be somewhat personality eclectic. Everyone is so different and we definitely have differing views. Our approaches to communication and conflict resolutions can vary.
18. We are a typical hard-working blue-collar family.
19. My family consists of my husband, two teenage kids, and myself. We are a close family with similar interests. We enjoy day trips to the beach, taking hikes, and playing sports together. We value education, family, friends, and faith.
20. My family is very small, we are very close.
21. I'm married with 3 sons.

I was surprised at the level of detail from these responses. Reoccurring themes are fun, loving, outdoor activities, and conversations. All these are great qualities for homestay hosts.

Q18: *What benefits do you think you would extract from hosting an exchange student?*

1. Gaining insight to other cultures and meeting new people.
2. Friendship and cultural exchange with someone from another culture.
3. It would teach us about other cultures.
4. Cultural enrichment for us, and for the students we would be hosting.
5. When I was young, my parents hosted exchange students. It was an amazing experience to meet new people and learn about different cultures. In high school, I was fortunate enough to become an exchange student in Japan. I had an awesome experience and met so many people! I would recommend it to all.
6. To learn about another culture, to provide a safe place for a potentially vulnerable person to stay in a country foreign to him/her/them, and to be ambassadors for our country and culture.
7. Teaching them our American life.
8. In my case, I would get someone from France so I could practice my French.
9. Sharing with an international community.
10. My family would love to learn about new cultures.
11. The benefits I see are two-fold: To be able to learn about other cultures in a very personal way and to be able to offer the opportunity for students from abroad to know the beauty and diversity of our beloved city/state.
12. Learn a new culture, a new language and explore new foods.
13. Cultural understanding and appreciation.
14. Learning about another culture and different traditions.
15. Sharing our American culture from our mixed family's perspective.
16. I have hosted homestay students from China. I really loved doing it. The students were always great. I enjoyed cooking for them, taking them shopping and site-seeing.
17. Who knows perhaps you can make a lifelong connection with this person and by doing so, that would definitely be a benefit.
18. To learn more about another person and their culture.
19. I learned about the Chinese, Korean, and Middle Eastern cultures. The students taught me about their spiritual beliefs and their foods.
20. We have hosted before. We introduced them to the things around our community that we love so much.
21. The host family can learn about the exchange student's country and customs and can share their customs with the student.

Out of 21 responses to this question, 10 vaguely touch on the cultural effect the host family might have on the exchange student. For example, cultural enrichment for the exchange student (4), being ambassadors of sorts (6), teaching them our American life (7), sharing with the international community (9), granting them an opportunity to see the beauty of our state (11), cultural understanding and appreciation of both parties (13), or fostering a life-long connection (17).

Q19: *What sacrifices do you think you would have to make when hosting an exchange student?*

1. Privacy.
2. The biggest sacrifice would be privacy.
3. Time and finances would also be a factor.
4. Maybe time.
5. Moving things out of one of our rooms to make space.
6. Space.
7. Space and time.
8. Getting to know them and helping them feel comfortable in their new environment.
9. Space and open-mindedness.
10. Changing our schedule would be a sacrifice.
11. Privacy.
12. Sacrifice privacy and time.
13. Comfort.
14. Space could be an issue.
15. Privacy and personal space would be the biggest sacrifice.
16. Space.
17. Time.
18. Privacy and comfort.
19. Privacy, space, time, parenting.
20. Space
21. Privacy.

Recurring themes of question 19 responses are privacy, time, and space.

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c) Question 20

Q20: *Exchange experiences can improve U.S. public opinion in the student's country of origin.* 50% of respondents strongly agreed with this statement, 35% somewhat agreed, 15% neither agree nor disagreed, somewhat disagree and strongly disagree showed a 0% response.

I strategically asked this question last so I could quantify the respondents' reaction to the realization that homestay interactions are important in U.S. endeavors to improve global opinion.

d) The outspoken outlier

Box 1

I am a single mom who has raised three children. We identify as a black/African American family deeply rooted in California. Coming into my house you will see family photos, lots of books, artwork on the walls from black artists that depict black people, and pets. We live by equity and inclusion of ALL people. Humanity is the core of how the children were raised and how we all live. I work as a corporate executive.

I have traveled all over the US and internationally. There is tremendous value in traveling to different countries, so I see the benefit of exchange. It allows for families to learn about other cultures as well as the student to learn about not only American culture, but also black American culture if they were to stay with a family like ours. In some instances, as a black family, our dinner conversation may be a little different than non-black families because our day-to-day experiences and exposures are going to be different. Other than that, we are a regular family that agrees, disagrees, laughs, plays, studies, and many other things that families do. They get to be immersed in the language and culture of an urban American family.

I see very little sacrifice in having an exchange student.

Personal Feedback on Student Exchange Program: We had an exchange student from Germany who was welcomed into the family with open arms. The young lady really struggled in getting comfortable. She didn't want to socialize with us in the evening and spent most of her time in the room. I had a conversation with my daughter to try to get more insight. It became evident to me that the lady was uncomfortable because she was with a black family. I know that Germany is not a diverse country and different ethnicities are not prevalent in the country. Understandably, the program contact would not disclose the race or ethnicity to an exchange student, but maybe they should have. The young lady requested to leave our home. I know my daughter may have had certain feelings about that, but I am certain she never knew why. I did not share my thoughts with my daughter.

I am not sure if a black family as a host for exchange students is popular, but I would suspect not. I would suspect that most exchange students come from families with money and I would also suspect that most exchange students are from European countries or Asian countries. There are many assumptions that I have made based on our personal experience and I would love to see data that eliminates my assumptions. It would be great to see more black families in the exchange student program that can host non-black students who feel comfortable enough to stay with such a family in order to dispel some of the racist beliefs that non-Americans have about black American families.

III. Final Evaluation analysis and Recommendations

Taking every response into consideration, be it multiple choice, open-ended, or the outlier, the pressing observation gathered from this survey was the general prospective homestay host's lack of knowledge regarding their integral participation in citizen diplomacy. The central recommendation concluded from the survey's results would be the implementation of prospective homestay host training by a team of experts *by whom?* and longitudinal study types of measuring success in the homestay piece of the exchange student's experience in the United States. A recent study on homestay training, "Homework before hosting: the importance of host-training for sustainable tourism development," found the biggest challenge to be that "hosts do not have the skills and knowledge for the purpose of the homestay concept ... this challenge could be overcome by host-training to a large extent."[7]

When it comes to comprehensive prospective homestay evaluations, public diplomacy practitioners walk in unchartered waters. Nevertheless, these types of evaluations are crucial in order for exchanges to have successful short-term, intermediate, and long-term outcomes. I came across a very straightforward theory of change illustration in an article for the Council of American Ambassadors website, a Spectrum of PD objectives with realistic timescale:[8]

[7] Homework before homestay: The importance of host-training for sustainable tourism development (diva-portal.org)

[8] Council of American Ambassadors

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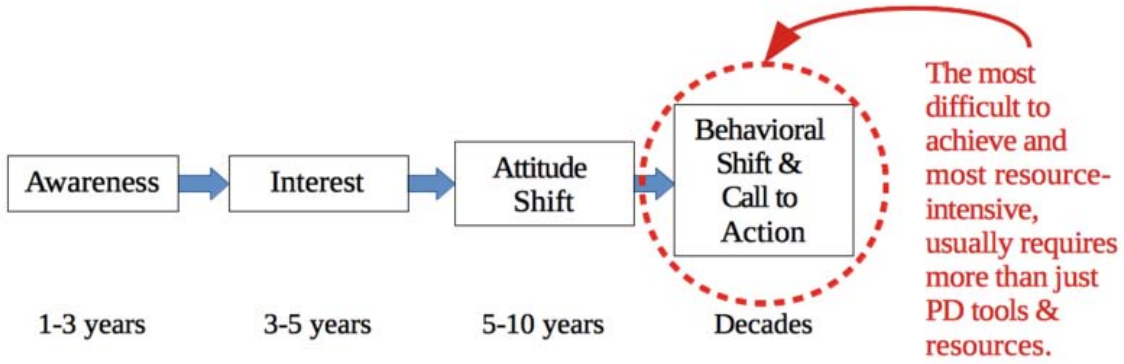


Figure 1

This TOC depicts exactly what my argument lays out. The results of the "Possible Homestay Survey" indicate favorable levels of people-to-people contact within their family units and communities. These ground-zero practices are often more trustworthy than the PD central offices, according to the council of American Ambassadors.[9] They can be easily emulated in an exchange, once the homestay host is properly trained and becomes 'aware' of the civilian diplomacy task ahead. With ongoing training, PD practitioners would implement longitudinal measures to ensure that 'interest' in the homestay to stay engaged with the global community through exchanges is active, alive, and well. The "Possible Homestay Families" survey also shows that they would likely keep contact with the prospective exchange student, another great bit of raw material to train, measure, and gain successful global dividends. In addition, new exchanges and ongoing evaluations will aid in long-term attitude shifts, behavioral shifts, and the all-desired call to action in which homestays are completely immersed in civilian diplomacy. These factors further strengthen my argument that with proper training, the homestay family will add to their civilian diplomacy tool box and enhance global opinion about American values. *Are you saying that there usually is no training?*

A very high percentage of respondents in this survey thought that attendance in to workshops would indeed, improve exchange practices. This leads me to think that online training would even be more of a viable practicum to propose to homestay families. In fact, I should have formatted the question as online training instead of workshops being that "today, three quarters of Americans have broadband internet service at home,[10] and that the current pandemic has allowed for digital engagement to be that much more evolved.

Financial compensation seemed to be the least compelling factor when considering becoming a homestay family. However, an article about Australian homestays, "International education: homestay theory versus practice," posits that in essence, running a homestay is running a business and as such, "it is their (the homestay's) responsibility to ensure that they are adequately trained in areas of cross-cultural communication and conflict management."[11] Looking back at my survey questions, I should have considered asking how the homestay would manage uncomfortable conversations and/or cultural differences with an exchange student. This could have shed some light on, not only how to diffuse these scenarios but, how to elevate tense conversations that can potentially turn into insightful moments that mark the exchange student's perceptions of American values. On that note, training homestay families about this business transaction can be a relevant motivator to join future training and longitudinal measuring in order to tackle these kinds of complex, cross-cultural issues and turn them into successful cultural diplomacy.

I would be remiss not to touch on the survey's outspoken outlier. This homestay would have served well from pre-hosting training unclear. By the open-ended responses, I can tell this which? is a competent, inclusive, engaging, charismatic, enthusiastic, and curious family. The fact that it is a black-American family should have added to the German exchange student's American experience. Lack of training on both sides is likely to blame for the debacle. What a missed opportunity! It would be interesting to, in the near future, train a small focus group, two or three black-American homestays, and measure their success pre and post hosting an exchange. Long-term success would be much harder to measure but worth while exploring.

Contrasting the results against my initial hypothesis, I stand by my belief that training prospective homestays should not be neglected because it benefits not only the homestay family and the exchange student in question, but also the civilian diplomacy practices

[9] Council of American Ambassadors

[10] Demographics of Internet and Home Broadband Usage in the United States | Pew Research Center

[11] RIC03173.doc (psu.edu)

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whose ripple effects improve global opinion about American values. In retrospect, I should have first requested the opinion of homestay practitioners and U.S. homestay companies as a way to gain further insight to help broaden my perspective before formatting the survey questions but, overall, my predictions ring true and my recommendations should be considered. *Agree*

IV. Attachments

a) "Possible Homestay Families Survey"

USC University of Southern California

How many people live in your home?

1-2 ☐ 3-4 ☐ 4+ ☐

What is the approximate distance to the nearest university/college to your home?

5 miles or less ☐ 5-10 miles ☐ 10-15 miles ☐

What is your racial identity?

- ☐ White, Caucasian,
- ☐ Black, African American
- ☐ American Indian, Alaska Native
- ☐ Latino, Hispanic
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Pacific Islander

What is your age bracket?

- ☐ 30-40
- ☐ 41-50
- ☐ 51-60
- ☐ 61-70
- ☐ 71-80

Is there a second language spoken at home?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Is religion important to you?

- ☐ A great deal
- ☐ A lot
- ☐ A moderate amount
- ☐ A little
- ☐ None at all

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What is your income level?

- ☐ Less than $49,999
- ☐ $50,000 - $99,999
- ☐ $100,000 - $149,999
- ☐ $150,000 - $199,999
- ☐ $200,000 - $249,000
- ☐ $250,000 or above

What is your highest level of education?

- ☐ Less than high school
- ☐ High school graduate
- ☐ Some college
- ☐ 2-year degree
- ☐ 4-year degree
- ☐ Professional degree
- Doctorate

Have you studied abroad?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

How much have you traveled abroad?

- ☐ A great deal
- ☐ A lot
- ☐ A moderate amount
- ☐ A little
- ☐ None at all

What is your level of community engagement?

- ☐ Far above average
- ☐ Somewhat above average
- ☐ Average
- ☐ Somewhat below average
- ☐ Far below average

How often do you attend cultural events?

- ☐ Very often
- ☐ Quite often
- ☐ Rarely
- ☐ Never

Which factor would more likely compel you to consider hosting an exchange student?

Family enrichment	Geography of student	Financial compensation
☐	☐	☐

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How effective would it be for you to attend workshops to improve exchange practices?

- ☐ Extremely effective
- ☐ Very effective
- ☐ Moderately effective
- ☐ Slightly effective
- ☐ Not effective at all

How much do you and/or your family enjoy outdoor activities?

Above average	Average	Below average
☐	☐	☐

How likely are you to keep in contact with the exchange student once they are back in their country of origin?

- ☐ Extremely likely
- ☐ Somewhat likely
- ☐ Neither likely nor unlikely
- ☐ Somewhat unlikely
- ☐ Extremely unlikely

How do you describe your family?

What benefits do you think you would extract from hosting an exchange student?

What sacrifices do you think you would have to make when hosting an exchange student?

Exchange experiences can improve U.S. public opinion in the student's country of origin.

- ☐ Strongly agree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Strongly disagree

Survey Powered By Qualtrics

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b) Evaluation letter to participants

Dear Fellow Women, *March 1, 2021*

My name is Martha Falencik. I am a Masters of Public Diplomacy student at the University of Southern California, Annenberg School of Communication and Journalism. I covet your participation in an evaluation I am currently conducting for a required course on "Public Diplomacy and Evaluation." Due to my experience as host to many foreign exchange students over the years, as well as my own opportunity to study abroad, I have developed a keen interest in educational and cultural exchange programs. Through this survey, I hope to gain a deeper understanding of the conditions that would make it more likely for families to consider hosting exchange students, as well as better practices that would enhance the exchange students' experience in this country, hence their opinion about American values. This ONLINE survey will take less than 10 minutes of your day. Below, please find the link where you will answer 17 multiple choice questions and 3 open-ended ones. Please, keep in mind that this survey will not reach further than my professor and that any of the information given is strictly confidential.

Thank you so kindly for your willing participation. I look forward to your prompt responses. In fact, *I would request that you complete this evaluation by March 5, 2021.*_Please, feel free to contact me with any concerns or questions at falencik@usc.edu or (562) 252-5890.

Best regards,

Martha Falencik

Master of Public Diplomacy Candidate I 2021

University of Southern California

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