IT'S HARD TO TALK ABOUT MONEY

Let alone with strangers in your second (or third) language. At Penn State Harrisburg, 15% of the student population is international. Campus International Student Support Services (ISSS) surveys this student population about their top concerns each year.

In 2016, one of the top reported concerns was financial management - international students are not eligible for need-based aid, and some may not be able to work due to visa requirements.

To help international students make friends and build English language skills, ISSS holds weekly Fun English Conversations that bring together students: international and domestic, graduate and undergraduate, as well as faculty, staff, and community members for a facilitated conversation on a theme.

To address international student concerns of personal financial management, a financial literacy theme was proposed. To spark conversation, sitcom clips featuring a financial literacy topic kicked off each discussion question. Participants could discuss their own experience, or what happened in the clip, and what they would do differently from the character in that situation.

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Many sitcoms delve into issues of personal finance - credit cards, shopping addiction, struggling to pay bills. The often humorous manner can help start a conversation in a low-stakes way by discussing what you would do in the character’s situation.

Additionally, international students often watch American sitcoms to observe informal English conversational styles.