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# **Pre-departure Orientation Manual**

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**Information Resource Center  
Public Affairs Section  
U.S. Consulate General Shanghai**

**1376 Nanjing Road, Shanghai Center, Suite 532  
Shanghai, 200040  
86-21-6279-7662  
86-21-6279-7603  
[shanghai.usembassy-china.org.cn](http://shanghai.usembassy-china.org.cn)**

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Special thanks to *World Learning* for providing some orientation materials.

## **I. Pre-departure Information**

### **❖ Health Insurance**

Medical care in the United States is more expensive than in China. The average cost of a visit to an urgent care clinic is less than \$200, whereas a hospital emergency room visit usually costs at least \$500, often much more.

The U.S. Department of State requires students on J-1 exchange visitor visas to have insurance that covers health and accidents, medical evacuation, and repatriation of remains. The U.S. government has no specific health insurance requirements for students on F-1 nonimmigrant visas. However, most educational institutions require international students to prove they have a certain amount of health insurance (determined by the university) before they are allowed to enroll in classes.

The type of insurance international students need to buy depends on the school. Most schools in the U.S. require students to buy health insurance and pay it as part of their tuition. These types of insurance plans vary from school to school and the student should check with their respective schools. Students can also purchase private insurance plans other than the ones provided by the school, but they are usually more expensive.

Regardless of what type of insurance one buys, it is important for one to carry their health insurance information with them at all time, which includes the policy number and contact information related to billing and questions. Even if one purchases private insurance, it is a good idea to be familiar with your university's health care services, locations, and phone numbers. Ask your school's international student office for more information.

Besides the health insurance, below is a list of the insurance you should have while in the United States. Your international student advisor can help you find more information about each type.

- Travel insurance: covers you during your journey from your home country to the United States.
- Life insurance: insures your life. If you should die, benefits are paid to the person you name as your beneficiary.
- Personal property insurance: insures items you bring to the United States against loss, theft, or damage. It is not advisable to bring expensive jewelry or other valuable personal belongings with you to the United States.
- Automobile insurance: covers your automobile and injuries to persons in the event of an accident. If you buy an automobile in the United States, most states require that you carry automobile and liability insurance. If you rent a car, you can pay a supplemental fee for insurance coverage, or your personal car insurance/credit card company may cover your use of the rental.

## ❖ **Housing Information**

It is important to be familiar with your housing arrangements as much as possible before you arrive. Most university students in the U.S. live on or near campus. Students who live off-campus generally find a place less than a mile or two away. Not only is this convenient for getting to and from campus, but much of one's social life occurs on campus. The U.S. educational experience is not confined to the classroom, and you will find yourself learning as much from your fellow students as from the faculty. In the U.S., the terms "on-campus" and "off-campus" are usually used to refer to the ownership of the house. "On-campus" means that the house or building is owned by the school or university. "Off Campus" housing means that it is owned by a private company and not by the school or university.

### • **On-campus housing**

Most universities provide student housing for a period of time; the length varies among campuses. The student housing will usually include meal options, which is included in your housing fee. Your housing will be billed along with your tuition. If the school offers on-campus accommodations for international students, you should seriously consider living on-campus, at least for the first year. Since this is probably your first trip to the United States and your first time living alone, on-campus housing will help cushion the transition to life in the United States. Later, when you are more familiar with the neighborhood, you can consider moving off-campus.

### • **Off-campus housing**

Students also have the option of looking for off-campus housing. Most universities will provide assistance in looking for housing through their housing department. Other options include looking on campus announcement boards, campus sponsored websites; or public websites. For off-campus housing, each occupant will need to sign a lease or renter's agreement and monthly rent should be paid to the landlord. You may consider renting a house or an apartment. You will certainly get more for your money if you rent a house. But most communities have limits on the number of unrelated people who can live together, with most cities having a limit ranging from 3 to 5. The cost of renting an apartment varies considerably depending on the part of the country and the local supply and demand. The school's housing office or financial aid office can provide you with an estimate of the annual cost of renting an off-campus apartment.

The following is a list of helpful guides when looking for a place to live off campus:

1. Here is an EXAMPLE of what a lease may look like:  
[http://occs.syr.edu/\\_documents/modelleaseagreement.pdf](http://occs.syr.edu/_documents/modelleaseagreement.pdf)
2. How and where to look for a place to live:  
[http://occs.syr.edu/\\_documents/smartrenterschecklist.pdf](http://occs.syr.edu/_documents/smartrenterschecklist.pdf)
3. A List of Questions to ask the landlord before you sign a lease:  
[http://occs.syr.edu/\\_documents/lease-signing-checklist.pdf](http://occs.syr.edu/_documents/lease-signing-checklist.pdf)

If you want to learn more information about housing for international students, we recommend you to read a booklet, compiled by EducationUSA advising counselors, *Getting Ready to Go: Practical Information for Living and Studying in the United States*. It gives you a detailed

introduction on various types of on-campus and off-campus housing options, as well as useful suggestions for first-year international students. You may download the PDF version from: [https://www.educationusa.info/5\\_steps\\_to\\_study/Bk4\\_English.pdf](https://www.educationusa.info/5_steps_to_study/Bk4_English.pdf)

### ❖ **Important Documents**

Before leaving China, confirm that your passport and nonimmigrant visa are still valid for entry into the United States. The passport should be valid for at least six months beyond the date of your expected stay.

Your visa should accurately reflect your correct visa classification. If the visa states the name of the institution you will attend or identifies the exchange program in which you are participating, verify that this information is accurate as well. If your review indicates any discrepancies or potential problems, visit the U.S. Embassy or Consulate to obtain a new visa.

Make sure all of your important documents, such as visa, I-20, passport, airline tickets, school acceptance letter, credit cards, important phone numbers and address, are in a safe place. We strongly advise you to make copies of these important documents and keep these copies also separate from the original ones, in case that any of these items are lost or stolen. It is much easier to cancel and /or replace them when you have copies. Carry these documents in your carry-on luggage; do not check them.

Be sure to carry letters in English providing evidence of your immunization history. Make copies of these documents; they will typically be requested by the government of the state where you live, as well as your school.

It is also a good idea to scan these documents and save them to your computer. You should also email a copy of these to yourself so that you will always have an electronic copy of these important documents.

### ❖ **Other Information**

- **Prescriptions for Medication**  
When you enter the United States, you must declare any medications you are carrying to the customs officials at your port of entry. Certain drugs may not be brought into the country. If you have questions, check with the U.S. Customs and Border Protection INFO Center (<https://help.cbp.gov/>) before you leave home. If you take prescription medicine on a regular basis, bring a sufficient supply and a copy of the prescription, written in English.
- **Medical and Dental Records**  
If possible, bring detailed and up-to-date medical and dental records for you. These records should reflect recent visits to health care professionals for general examinations, blood tests, dental and eye checkups, x-rays, and other procedures. This will help your U.S. doctors better understand past diagnoses and treatments, and help you avoid paying to repeat tests in the United States.

- **Academic Documents**

Bring official transcripts from secondary schools, colleges, or universities, as well as syllabi, catalogs, bulletins, course descriptions, or other relevant materials issued by the school you attended most recently. These records can help the Admissions Office and academic departments if questions arise concerning academic credit or placement in courses at your American college or university.

- **Contact Information**

Be sure to carry the name, address, and telephone number of the individual at your university to contact in case of a travel delay or emergency. Also include the name, address, and telephone number of a contact person at home and the name, address, and telephone number of Chinese embassy or consulate in the United States.

Find the website of your school's office of international students and bookmark it. Read through all the information there before you leave for the U.S., and check back regularly for any important updates during your time overseas.

## **II. Preparation**

Before you make travel arrangements to the United States, find out when you are expected to arrive on campus. If you do not receive this information from your school, ask your international student advisor. U.S. immigration regulations allow you to enter the United States no more than 30 days prior to the start date on your F-1 or J-1 immigration document, the I-20 or DS-2019. It is not advisable to make your plane reservations until you have been issued your U.S. visa.

### **❖ Airlines**

Confirm all flight arrangements with the airlines at least 72 hours before departure. For your international flight, you are advised to arrive at the airline counter at the airport three hours before departure. If you have any dietary restrictions, advise the airlines at least one week before departure so that they can prepare a special meal for you.

### **❖ What to Pack**

#### **1. Luggage Weight Restrictions**

Please check with your airline to confirm the luggage weight and measurement restrictions for your flight. You will be responsible for any excess baggage fees charged. For travel to the United States, you will usually be allowed two suitcases whose dimensions (L-W-H) cannot exceed 158 cm and whose weight must not exceed 23 kg each. If the suitcase weighs more than 23 kg you will have to pay an extra fee of \$70 or more. Suitcases over 32 kg are not allowed. However flights within the U.S. will only allow one checked suitcase. In some situations, domestic flights connecting from international ones will allow an extra bag to be checked with no added fee. As of 2013 some airlines may only allow one (1) suitcase on international flights and will require that you pay for any overweight or additional suitcases. It is important that before you start packing, you look up the baggage restrictions for the specific airline that you are flying with as to avoid any problems. In addition to large suitcase(s), you may bring one piece of carry-on baggage up to 18 kg with

dimensions up to 56cm x 35cm x23cm on the plane as well as one personal item such as a handbag, briefcase or small backpack. For more information about hand luggage on flights to the U.S., check the website of the Transportation Safety Authority: [www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov).

## 2. Liquid Restrictions in Carry-on Baggage

Liquids, gels, and creams may be packed in you carry-on baggage, provided they are each carried in containers of not more than 100 ml (3 fluid oz). These containers must be placed within a re-sealable transparent plastic bag with a total volume of no more than one liter, which must be separately presented for inspection at the security checkpoint. Only one such plastic bag may be carried per passenger. There are no liquid restrictions on checked luggage.

“Liquids” include: Aerosols, chocolate spread, cream cheese, creams, deodorants, drinks of all kinds, foams of all kinds, gels, hair gel, liquid lipsticks (e.g. gloss), liquid mascara, liquid/solid mixtures, lotions, oils, pastes, perfumes, roll-on deodorants, shaving foam, shower gel, soft cheeses and cheese spreads, soups, sprays, syrups, toothpaste, water, yogurt and all products of similar consistency.

Medicines: Essential liquid medicines are permitted. But the amount carried may not exceed the amount needed for the flight. A corresponding medical certificate or doctor’s confirmation (in English) is required.

## 3. Things to Leave at Home

There are strict rules governing what can and cannot be brought into the U.S. You should not bring any of the following items into the U.S.: gold (except personal jewelry); illegal drugs (prescription medication is acceptable in its original container with label); firearms and ammunition; plants; meats and hides (The United States has very strict restrictions on importing foods, perishables, and agricultural goods into the country); pirated software, music, and DVDs. More information on customs regulations is available online at <http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/>.

Do not bring:

- Things you can easily buy in the United States, such as notebooks, pens, paper, toiletries, towels, or bed sheets. These items will take up valuable space in your luggage.
- Books that can easily be obtained in U.S. libraries. Some universities have their library catalog on the Internet, where you can check the availability of books. You can also contact the university library staff to verify the availability of all essential books. You can also usually obtain books through interlibrary loans.
- Expensive jewelry, treasured possessions, family heirlooms, or delicate things, since there is always a chance that these items will get lost, stolen, or damaged during travel or during your stay.

## 4. Things to Bring with You:

- All of your essential identification papers and documents, to be carried on your person or in your carry-on baggage. **Do not put important documents in bags you have checked onto the plane.**

- Copies of important medical records, X-rays, vaccinations, eyeglass prescription, allergies, etc. Have prescriptions written in English in generic terms, so that they can be referenced in case you need to receive treatment in the U.S.
- Books, manuals, or journals that you think may be useful for reference in your field of study and that definitely will not be available in the United States.
- Pictures of your family, home, and country, for yourself but also to show to your new friends.
- Special consideration should be given to musical collections, musical instruments, art supplies, sporting equipment, and small gifts, etc. based on how much you will use them and whether they can be obtained at a minimal cost at your destination. You may use these items to share your talents and customs with people in the U.S.
- Small gifts – postcards, tea, paper cuttings, etc. Things that are representative of your culture are good. They need not be expensive.

#### 5. Other Useful Tips

Many people like to pack an extra change of clothes in your carry-on bag in case your luggage is delayed. It is also a good idea to bring reading materials for the time you spend on the airplane or waiting in airports.

If you plan to take personal electronic device such as laptop with you in your hand baggage, you will be asked to take them out of your baggage for the security check x-ray.

Never leave your luggage unattended in any public place. Be sure that your luggage is clearly identified by attaching a nametag securely. This should include your address/contact information in your home country and at your U.S. host school/residence. You may also want to insert the same information inside your suitcase near the top in case your luggage tag becomes dislodged during transit. Your checked baggage must be unlocked so that it can be checked by security personnel.

### III. Arrival at the U.S. Airport

#### ❖ **Passing Through U.S. Customs and Immigration Enforcement**

By the end of May 2013, U.S. Customs and Border Protection will no longer require international non-immigrant visitors to fill out a paper Form I-94 Arrival/Departure Record upon arrival to the U.S. by air or sea. With the new CBP process, a CBP officer will stamp the passport of each arriving non-immigrant traveler. The admission stamp will show the date of admission, class of admission, and the date that the traveler is admitted until. If travelers need the information from their Form I-94 admission record to verify immigration status or employment authorization, the record number and other admission information will be available at <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/I94/request.html>.

Once you have left the airplane, follow the other passengers into the terminal area reserved for incoming passengers. You will be asked to get in line in front of the immigration inspection booths. As you approach, have your passport, I-20 or DS-2019 form and CF-6059 Customs Declaration Form ready for inspection by the immigration officer. You are likely to be asked what your purpose is for entering the United States, as well as your final destination. It is important that you tell the

CBP Officer that you will be a student or exchange visitor. Be prepared to include the name and address of the school or exchange visitor program where you will enroll/participate.

Please note as of May 2013, all international students entering the U.S. will be directed to secondary inspection after completing the first level of screening by the CBP. Secondary inspections give CBP access to the Department of Homeland Security's Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) to confirm students' eligibility for entry to the U.S.

It is recommended that you have readily available the name and phone number of the foreign student advisor at your school or the person responsible for your J-1 Exchange Visitor Program in case your admission/participation needs to be verified. In the event you arrive during non-business hours (evenings, weekends, holidays), you should have a phone number where this individual can be reached during non-business hours.

The secondary inspection is most likely to extend the waiting hours at immigration inspection booths. Please take it into consideration when your need to transfer between international and U.S. domestic flights. Therefore, at least 3 hours is recommended between international and U.S. flights.

After going through the Immigration area, proceed to the baggage claim area to collect your luggage, and then with your baggage pass through customs. A customs inspector will ask you to declare what you have brought into the country, inspect your bags, and review the customs form you filled out on the airplane. Penalties for concealing declarable items can be very severe, so be honest and make a full declaration.

Items for your personal use may be brought into the United States without paying duty. As a nonresident, you are also allowed to bring in gifts with a total value up to \$100 duty-free. If the total value of such items exceeds \$100, you will need to pay duty. You must declare the amount of money you have with you, but you do not have to pay duty on it. Money in any amount may be brought into and taken out of the United States, but anyone bringing more than \$10,000 into the country must file a report with the customs official. As mentioned above, do not bring fake DVDs, CDs, or computer software into the U.S. For more information about clearing U.S. customs, please visit: <http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/travel/clearing/>.

If you have another flight to reach your final destination, you can recheck your bags at the transit desk, usually immediately outside customs.

❖ **Lost or Damaged Luggage**

Airlines have a responsibility for lost or damaged luggage. If your baggage is missing, notify the airline agent in the baggage claim area and ask to file a claim for lost luggage, or a report for damaged luggage. To ensure reimbursement, you must file the claim or report before you leave the airport. In most cases, airlines are responsible for delivering lost luggage to you at your final destination. Baggage insurance protects you against loss, damage, or theft of your baggage. The cost of this insurance is reasonable. It can be purchased at travel agencies and airport kiosks.

❖ **Ground Transportation from the Airport**

Every airport has a Ground Transportation Information Desk that can assist you if necessary. Some schools may have their own arrangements, so try calling student services or searching on your school's website. You may also book a shuttle on <http://airportshuttle.com/>.

**IV. Study in the U.S.**

❖ **U.S. Classroom Culture**

Many international students find American university classrooms very different than those of their home country, particularly in the way students interact with their professors. You should treat your professor as an equal, but also as a respected expert in his or her field. Often class sessions will include interactive discussions and group activities, as well as hands-on projects and presentations. Students are expected to demonstrate their knowledge of the subject and assigned readings by participating meaningfully in class discussions.

Students are expected to be active learners, sharing their own opinions and ideas and asking questions when they do not understand. When a professor opens a topic for discussion, he or she is genuinely interested in knowing what students think. You should feel comfortable sharing your views, even if they differ from the professor's, as long as you remain polite and respectful.

Participation in class lectures and discussion groups is a key feature in American schools. Most professors will even change your grade depending on how much you participate in class. Participation in class will account anywhere from 5-40 percent of your final grade so it is very important that you contribute to class discussions.

At first, some students may find that the professors speak too quickly when giving a lecture which makes it hard to take notes in class. Students might find it useful to record the professor's lecture so that they can replay at a different time.

Typical university course require reading of textbooks and academic journals; researching and writing papers; group projects; and presentations throughout the course. Another feature of the American university systems is that professors are available to meet with students in their offices outside of class time, usually during certain predetermined time slots or "office hours." This is an excellent opportunity to ask questions or discuss certain topics. It is also a good way for your professor to get to know you.

It is a good idea to familiarize yourself with the resources available to students at your university. School libraries offer extensive book and periodical collections, as well as free access to online collections for research use. Additionally, many schools offer free extra help in the form of private tutors for certain subjects, writing workshops, and more.

If you want to learn more about U.S. classroom culture, there is a brochure available on the NAFSA website, which guides international students through the culture of U.S. college classrooms by addressing a variety of topics including an overview of U.S. higher education, its academic

structure and faculty roles, and the classroom itself. You may view a sample copy online at: [http://www.nafsa.org/uploadedFiles/NAFSA\\_Home/Resource\\_Library\\_Assets/Publications\\_Library/u.s.pdf?n=1388](http://www.nafsa.org/uploadedFiles/NAFSA_Home/Resource_Library_Assets/Publications_Library/u.s.pdf?n=1388)

❖ **Academic Advisor**

Each student at a college will be assigned an academic advisor to help the student with picking classes, deciding or switching majors, adjusting to college life and even helping to find tutors for courses the student may be having trouble with. In addition to this many schools will have an office dedicated to helping international students adjust to college life in America. These resources are free and it is important for students to use them.

❖ **Course Selection and Registration**

Try to take different types of classes, but also keep in mind which classes are required for your major. Feel free to consult your academic advisor if you're unsure about which classes to take or ask fellow classmates. Most schools have online course registration, but systems may vary among campuses.

❖ **Switching Majors and/or Schools**

Try taking different types of classes and research different majors, so you have a pretty good idea about what you want to choose. If you're thinking of changing schools, then also research different schools and talk to people about which schools might suit you best. After you have a pretty good idea of what major or what school you want to go to, go talk to your advisor about the necessary steps to take.

❖ **Scholarships**

Some schools may have special programs for people to apply for scholarships, so it is best to talk to your academic advisor. In addition, you can also search online to see what other options there are.

❖ **The Honor Code**

Most colleges and universities in the United States have honor codes or statements of rules that students are expected to follow in their academic work. These rules relate primarily to academic honesty and originality. U.S. educational institutions take these rules very seriously, and ignorance of the rules is not an excuse for breaking them. Violating a school's policy of academic honesty can result in suspension from school.

The university honor code, or the university code of conduct, is usually distributed to new students at the beginning of the academic year and is frequently a topic of discussion during new student orientations. If you have questions about any of these issues, talk to your instructor, your academic adviser, or the international student advisor.

## V. Life in the U.S.

### ❖ **Banking**

In the U.S., all denominations of paper money are the same size and color (green): \$1, \$5, \$10, \$20, \$50, \$100. Quarters are 25 cent coins, dimes are 10 cent coins, nickels are 5 cent coins, and pennies are 1 cent coins. There are also larger, gold-colored \$1 coins. \$1 is equivalent to 100 cents. Students should not carry large amounts of cash with them on a daily basis. This can make them a target for theft crimes. Student should aim to have no more than \$100 USD in cash on their person.

Standard banking hours are 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday- Friday. Some banks may be open evenings or Saturday mornings. All banks are closed on Sundays and on national holidays. All banks have Online Banking and 24-Hour Phone Banking. ATM machines are available in all locations at all hours of the day.

One of the first things you should do upon arrival is to open a bank account. If you are under 18 years old then your parents should open an account for you.

To open an account you will need your passport with ATM card or Visa card from your bank in China. These will be considered forms of identification. Also, you will need proof of residence. This can be a driver's license, a utilities bill or any other piece of mail that was sent to your house. To open an account, you will need to deposit money into the account when you open it. Different banks have different minimum balance requirements to open an account. We suggest you to find a bank that offers a free student checking account which won't charge you monthly service fees if you don't maintain a minimum balance.

Everyone should have a checking account for your day-to-day expense, but also it is also good to have a savings account for your extra money and for emergency use. A savings account will pay a higher rate of interest.

You can withdraw money from your account using a check or an ATM card. Never overdraw on your account. Overdrawing is when you have spent more than you have in your bank account. For the first three such transactions, the bank will charge \$40 to \$50 per transaction. After the third one, it will go up to \$75 per transaction. If you continue to overdraw on your account (within 3 to 6 months) your account will be closed by the bank as a charge-off and this will give you BAD CREDIT. If you still have money in your account they will close your account and mail you a check for your balance.

- **ATM card**

Also called a debit card, an ATM card comes standard with most checking accounts opened in the U.S. Banks operate 24-hour ATMs, so you can perform essential tasks such as withdrawals and deposits even if the bank is closed. Most people don't carry a lot of cash, because they can get cash from an ATM when they need it. Remember to ask the bank about Daily Withdrawal Limits.

PLUS (1-800-843-7587) and CIRRUS (1-800-424-7787) are the largest national ATM networks. Be careful selecting an ATM to use, because the bank that owns the ATM can charge a fee in addition to any fees your own bank may charge for ATM withdrawals.

You can use China's ATM card in the U.S. as long as your card has one of the following companies logos: PLUS, EPS, MAESTRO, CIRRUS, STAR, INTERLINK, VISA. However, be aware that there may be additional fees.

Notify your bank right away if your ATM card is stolen. If you report quickly, then you will not usually be held liable for more than \$50 worth of losses.

- **Credit Card**

A credit card allows you pay for things on credit. At the time of a transaction, you sign an invoice and at the end of the month or bank statement cycle date, you will receive your credit card invoice stating the amount you owe. You will have to pay before the DUE DATE, if not the amount you owe accumulates interest in the form of a "financial charge" added to the bill.

The use of credit cards is widespread in the United States. If you want to place an order by phone, go shopping online, rent a car, or buy airline tickets, you need to have a credit card. Banks, credit card companies, gas companies, department stores, and other organizations issue credit cards. Having a credit card will help you to build up your credit, which is very important in the U.S. Be careful not to build up too much debt. You will have to pay high interest rates, sometimes as much as 21%.

As a student, especially an international student, you may find it difficult at first to obtain a credit card. So if you already have a major credit card such as a MasterCard or Visa, it is a good idea to bring it with you for a credit check. Also, if you open a checking or savings account with a bank that offers credit cards, it may be easier to get a credit card from that bank. Many credit card companies also offer special student credit cards, subject to certain conditions. The credit card companies will have tables set up on campus with applications and you can also find applications on bulletin boards around campus. Look for a card that does not charge an annual fee.

To avoid too much debt, we suggest you delay obtaining a credit card or making large purchases involving long-term debt for the first few months that you are in the United States. Instead, make your initial purchases by cash or debit. At the same time, keep careful records of your expenditures. By doing so, you will know exactly how much it costs to live and study in your city. You will then be in a good position to know when to use or not to use a credit card and how much debt you can actually support. Every four or five months thereafter, you should monitor your expenditures again to make sure that you are not spending too much or building up too much debt.

- Checks

A check (sometimes written “cheque”) is a negotiable order of withdrawal which allows the person who wrote the check to pay an amount of money to another party. The bank takes the amount of money specified on the check out of the check writer’s account and transfers it. Banks will give you a book of blank checks when you first open a checking account. They are custom-printed with your name and address, and often bear a design of your choosing.

When writing a check, the amount on the check is written twice, once using numerals and once using words. If you were writing a check for \$23.35, you would write the words as "Twenty-three and 35/100 dollars", where the word "and" separates the dollar amount from the cents. You would write \$23.00 as "Twenty-three and NO/100 dollars". Draw a horizontal line through any leftover space, to prevent someone from adding extra digits to the amount.

- ❖ **Tipping**

In the United States, tips (gratuities) are not usually added to bills. While it is always your decision whether to tip or not, you are usually expected to leave a tip for certain services. People who commonly receive tips are paid a lower wage than those who do not receive tips and often depend upon tips for a significant part of their income. The average tip is 15 percent, depending on the extent and the quality of the service provided.

**Waiters/Servers:** The expected tip in a restaurant is 15 or 20 percent in a good restaurant with excellent service. You should leave your tip on the table for the waiter or waitress as you leave. If you pay with a credit card, you can add the tip to the credit card charges before you total the bill. Restaurants usually include the tip in the total bill for large groups (6 or more people), in which case no tip is necessary. Check on the bill or ask the waiter if a tip is already included. If you sit at a counter in a restaurant, the tip is usually smaller; 10 to 15 percent is sufficient. In a fast-food restaurant, the bill is paid when the food is ordered, and no tip is expected. No tip is expected in a cafeteria or self-service restaurant.

**Taxi Drivers:** It is customary to give 10 to 15 percent of the total fare.

**Airport and Hotel Porters:** It is customary to give \$1.00 to \$2.00 for each bag.

**Barbers, Hairdressers, and Beauticians:** They are usually tipped 10 to 20 percent of the bill, depending on the type of establishment. You might give a stylist at a high-end salon who spends a lot of time on your treatment more than someone who gives you a quick haircut at a barber shop.

**Valet Parking:** The attendant should usually receive \$1.00 to \$2.00.

Never offer a tip to public officials, police officers, or government employees. This is against the law in the United States. There is no need to tip hotel desk clerks, bus drivers, theater ushers, salespeople, flight attendants, or gas station attendants.

## ❖ Telephone

Most dormitories have phone/internet lines available for personal use in your room. You may have to sign up for long distance service and you will have to research the best phone service options for you and your budget. The most popular cellular service providers in the U.S. are Verizon, T-Mobile and AT & T.

To call China, the most commonly used method is to buy a calling card in a Chinatown, a Chinese grocery or from ordering online. You can pay as little as \$10 to call China for 500 to 550 minutes. You may also make free calls online to anywhere in the world through Apps/software, such as Skype or Viber.

You may want to consider buying a prepaid cell phone. It is usually around \$20 for the phone and it comes with a \$10 credit for minutes. Minutes have to be filled as they are used up. Cost per minutes is from \$0.25 to \$0.40. Consider getting one with a monthly plan to save money if you use the phone more regularly.

The U.S. phone system divides the country into areas and assigns each area a three-digit area code. Usually there are maps/lists of area codes in the telephone book. On business and residential phones, local calls are free. Most calls outside of your area code are long distance calls. You must dial a 1, then the area code, then 7-digit telephone number. Rates vary according to day and time. Weekends and weekday evenings are generally the cheapest time to call. If you are using a mobile phone, you will not need to dial “1” but you will need to dial the area code first no matter where you call to. Many business and corporations have toll-free numbers. You can dial toll-free numbers at any phone, including pay phones. Simply dial 1, then 800 (or 888), followed by the telephone number.

In many communities in the United States, when you need police, the fire department, or paramedics in an emergency situation, you simply dial “911.” Once you have dialed 911, the operator will ask you what the emergency is, ask for your address, and then summon the appropriate help. Most of the time, the operator will stay on the line and give you support or advice until help arrives. It is very important to call 911 only in an emergency situation, and it is illegal to use it otherwise.

## ❖ Internet

Internet services are free on many campuses, but some institutions charge a technology fee. Some universities have network connections available in all dorm rooms. Off-campus students can sometimes apply for access to the university’s server at a discount or, possibly, for free. Most colleges and universities have their own Internet Acceptable Use Policy. By using the internet services on campus, students must agree to comply with such policy and to remain responsible for all activity originating from their accounts. Violating this policy will lead to internet services suspension and termination, fines, and even legal charges. We strongly recommend you to read your school’s internet usage policy and consult with your international student advisor if you have further questions.

❖ **Restaurants and Other Eateries**

Universities usually have cafeterias that are open during scheduled hours and offer a variety of foods. Often students can sign up for one of several meal plans which lets them pay ahead of time for the food they will consume. Cafeterias are generally closed during holidays and vacation periods.

Many dormitories have small cooking facilities available in the building or on the floor where students live. Students can prepare meals for themselves if they choose, depending on how close the dorm is to a market and how well-equipped the kitchen is.

Occasionally you may want to go out somewhere else to eat. There are many types of eateries in the U.S., from fast food establishments and cafeterias to restaurants and cafes.

❖ **Alcohol**

The drinking age in the U.S. is 21. Bars, restaurants and grocery stores will ask to see an ID card with your birth date on it before serving or selling you alcoholic beverages. Be careful when requesting a beer or other alcoholic beverages to use the proper units or you might get more or less alcohol than you expected. A British pint is twenty ounces while an American pint is 16 ounces.

❖ **Public/Local Transportation**

Many destinations on your campus will be in walking distances, but depending on your location, you may need use public transportation as well. Public transportation in the United States varies significantly from city to city. Several of the major U.S. cities have a dependable, comprehensive system. Others have very little public transportation. Make sure you get acquainted with your area's most convenient form of public transportation. You can usually get a map of the transit network at bus stops, subway stations or tram stops, at the public transportation office, at some gas stations, or from your university's information bureau. Many cities also have public transportation information available on the Internet. If you need to take public transportation daily, it is recommended that you get a monthly pass to save on transport expenses. These passes are available at the public transportation office in your city and often in other locations such as drugstores or post offices.

• **Buying A Car and Driving**

If you are 17 years or older, you are eligible to apply for a driver's license. It is a good idea to get a driver's license issued in the state where you will live, since some states do not recognize an international driver's license. Even those that do recognize an international license will accept it for only one year after you arrive in the United States. Check with the local office of the state motor vehicles department to get information on obtaining a state driver's license.

If you decided to buy a car, take your time and look for deals on good cars for less money. When shopping for a car, bring along someone who is knowledgeable about cars and how they are sold in the U.S. Most car dealers will negotiate prices with the customers.

Used cars are less expensive than new cars. *The Kelley Blue Book* (online at <http://www.kbb.com>) is a useful resource that lists the fair market value of many different

makes and models of used cars; take a look so you know how much you should expect to pay. Used cars are sometimes advertised on bulletin boards on campus and in newspapers, or you can go to a used car lot. Even though the cost is almost always higher, many people prefer to buy a used car from a dealer because there is usually a 30- to 90-day “warranty” on the car. A warranty is a guarantee to repair any problems that arise within the warranty period. When you complete the purchase of a used car, be sure that you obtain from the previous owner the documents (“title” or transfer of ownership papers, antismog certification, and so on) required by the department of motor vehicles in the state where you buy the car. Before you buy any car, contact the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) in your state to find out about state requirements for owning a car.

In most of the United States, automobile insurance is mandatory, but the amount and cost of coverage required varies from state to state. If a car is not insured, the owner of the car is financially responsible for any accidents or damage connected with the car. Also, legal problems resulting from an accident can be complicated and very costly. Therefore, it is very important to have at least the minimum amount of insurance coverage.

- **Bicycles**

On many U.S. campuses and in many communities, bicycles provide useful, inexpensive, and convenient transportation. Bicycle shops often sell new and used bicycles. Notices of used bicycles for sale sometimes are posted by students on bulletin boards and in classified advertising sections in the school or community newspaper. Some universities and some city police departments require that bicycles be licensed. Always lock your bicycle when you leave it, even for a few minutes, as it can be a popular target for thieves.

- **Long Distance Travel**

**Airlines**

The United States has several major national airlines as well as many regional carriers. Because of the competition between airlines, you may find that airfares are surprisingly low, particularly when airlines offer sales. You can book tickets directly with the airlines, through a travel agent, or through the Internet. There are several popular Web sites that can help you find the lowest fare for the trip you wish to make. Try [www.expedia.com](http://www.expedia.com) or [www.travelocity.com](http://www.travelocity.com).

**Train**

Many suburban areas are served by commuter rail lines, which offer service within the local area. AMTRAK trains offer service nationwide, but to a limited number of cities. Most AMTRAK trains offer two classes of service, first class and coach, and some provide sleeping accommodations.

**Buses**

Bus travel is often the least expensive way to travel in the United States and provides excellent opportunities to see the country. Reservations are not required, but if you plan a trip on a busy route you may wish to contact the company ahead of time to hold a seat. The major bus company serving the United States is the Greyhound Bus Company, which offers a “Discovery

Pass” that provides unlimited travel and stopovers for periods of 7, 15, 30, or 60 days. There are also many private bus lines that make several trips per day between major cities; these are particularly popular along the East Coast, where passengers frequently travel between Boston, New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC. Ask your international student adviser for more information.

### ❖ **Security**

While the vast majority of the Americans you meet will be friendly and happy to help you, there may be some who will try to take advantage of you. As in any city in the world, some areas of cities are considered safer than others. In order to avoid problems and to have a safe, pleasant and productive stay in the United States, we recommend that you follow these suggestions to protect yourself and your possessions:

- In case of any emergency, dial 911 on any telephone to connect yourself with the police/ambulance/fire department. A 911 phone call is always free of charge, even when using a pay phone.
- Do not leave cash or valuables in your dorm room unlocked. Make sure your other valuables (computers, cameras, MP3 players, etc) in your dorm room are secured as much as possible.
- Students may want to purchase “Renter’s Insurance” for a small monthly fee, an insurance company will replace your valuable (jewelry, T.V., laptop and other electronics) in case of a fire, flood, or theft.
- Most dormitories are locked and access is by a card key or telephone for visitors. Keep your place of residence secure, particularly at night. Always lock your room or apartment doors and windows, even if you are going out for a very short time.
- Student may want to invest in a small safe to keep their important documents and belongings in i.e. passport, visa, jewelry etc.
- Your university will have an orientation that will tell you about the security measures they have, when and where to use extra caution, and how to alert someone if you need assistance. Some universities have volunteer escort services if you need them returning home late from the library, etc. Others have special phones located around campus.
- Being alert and informed will reduce the chance that anything unpleasant will happen to you. Especially when leaving the campus, take precautions to know where you are and where you are going. Some cities have areas with high crime rates; ask your international student advisor, your dorm counselor or other students who know the area well if you are unsure about going to an unfamiliar part of the city. You may also prefer to have someone accompany you, especially at night.
- Never accept a ride in an automobile from a stranger.
- On the streets, pay attention your purse or backpack, keep to the more traveled and better-lit streets after dark and avoid walking in parks after dark.
- When using ATMs to withdraw money after dark, be sure you are in a well-lit area. If possible, go with another person to ensure your safety.
- As a precaution, do not carry large amounts of cash.
- If a robber threatens you at home or on the street, do not resist unless you feel that your life is in danger and that you must fight or run away. Do not fight back, as this might provoke

your attacker to cause you harm. Remain calm and observe as much as possible about the robber. Report this crime to the police right away and give your best description of the attacker.

These recommendations are not meant to discourage independent exploring, which is always an exciting part of traveling and a good way to learn about another country and people. They intend to encourage you to take precautions that will ensure a safe and enjoyable experience.

#### ❖ **Time Zones**

The continental United States is divided into four time zones, each 1 hour apart. From West to East, the zones are Pacific, Mountain, Central and Eastern time zones. Arrival and departure times of planes and trains are given in the current time of the arrival or departure point.

The U.S. follows a 12-hour time system, instead of the 24-hour time system observed in other parts of the world. In the U.S., A.M. refers to times between midnight and noon and P.M. refers to times between noon and midnight. 6:00A.M. is 6:00 in the morning (06:00) and 6:00P.M. is this hour at night (18:00).

#### ❖ **Geography and Climate**

The continental U.S. is divided into eight unique regions. The following characteristics are associated with each region:

- **Pacific Coast:** the western coastal region is known for its beautiful environment adjacent to the Pacific Ocean. From the Cascade Mountain range and shimmering bays of the north, to Yosemite National Park and Death Valley in the south, the Pacific Coast offers a variety of scenery. Some of the larger cities of this area include Los Angeles and San Francisco, California; Portland, Oregon; and Seattle, Washington. Industries such as computer components, electronic equipment, agriculture, lumber and tourism all help this region maintain economic stability.
- **Mountain States:** Not unlike the other regions of the U.S., the Mountain States differ greatly geographically. The forests, lakes, and Rocky Mountains of the northern states are very different from the Great Plains and deserts in the south. Major cities in the region include Boise, Idaho; Salt Lake City, Utah; Denver, Colorado; and Las Vegas, Nevada. The markets of agriculture, mining, electronics, computers, non-electrical machinery, manufacturing, retail service and tourism keep the economy of the Mountain States running full speed ahead.
- **Midwest:** This area of the U.S. encompasses not only rolling hills of the plains states, but the woods and water land of the Great Lakes Region. Cities such as Chicago, Illinois; Detroit, Michigan; Minneapolis, Minnesota; Des Moines, Iowa; and Sioux Falls, South Dakota are all within this area. Just as the landscape of the region differs greatly, so does the economy. Agriculture and manufacturing, finance, mining, oil refineries, shipping, export trade employment, auto production and tourism are all characteristic of this region.

- **New England:** The historical northeastern states add distinct characteristics to the U.S. Some of the well-known cities in the area include: Boston, Massachusetts; Concord, New Hampshire; and Providence, Rhode Island. The Connecticut River divides the states of New Hampshire and Vermont and helps with the transportation of forest industry products. Other industries associated with New England include: textiles, agriculture, industrial and commercial machinery equipment, and tourism.
- **Mid-Atlantic:** In this region, the beauty of the rolling hillsides competes against metropolitan landmarks such as the Smithsonian Institution in Washington and the Statue of Liberty in New Jersey. New York City, Philadelphia, Baltimore, and Washington, DC are all located in the Mid-Atlantic region. Globally, these cities are known for the tremendous influence on political decisions, industrial advancements, and popular culture. Financial services, manufacturing, commerce, agriculture, federal government employment, and medical services underpin the economy as well.
- **South:** This region is home to the Appalachian and Great Smoky Mountains in the West and to sandy beaches and outer-bank islands scattered along the east coast. Known for “southern hospitality,” this region is where the Civil War began and ended. Well-known cities in the regions include Raleigh, North Carolina; Atlanta, Georgia; Miami, Florida; New Orleans, Louisiana; and Nashville, Tennessee. The economy is based on agribusiness, textiles, tobacco, petro-chemicals, farming, mining, furniture production and tourism.
- **Southwest:** The southwest has been popularized by old folk tales of cowboys and Indians, but many things have changed in the area. The economy of the region has become quite diverse and includes industries such as mining, electronics, fabricated metals, agriculture, oil and natural gas, food products, lumber, scientific technology and tourism. Many large cities have experienced tremendous growth from recent economic developments in the south. Dallas and Fort Worth, Texas; Phoenix, Arizona; Santa Fe and Albuquerque, New Mexico have recently become well-known cities in the U.S.

### **Climate Zones**

The type of climate and weather you will experience during your stay depends a great deal on the location of your university. Temperatures vary throughout the U.S., with seven climate zones across the country. Winter brings frequent snowfalls in the northern states, while the south remains temperate throughout the year. The Southwest tends to have hot, dry air, whereas the Southeast has hot, humid air. However, to some extent Americans are insulated from the natural weather extremes by their routine use of air-conditioning and heat. Homes, office, cars and buses are generally air-conditioned or heated to maintain 20-22°C. You may encounter certain weather conditions you would not be familiar with in your home country, such as tornadoes or hurricanes. You can check weather conditions online or on a local TV channel, but you will usually be alerted by email from your university if your area may experience an unusual weather event; they will instruct you on what to do in these instances.

❖ **Shopping**

Shops usually open at either 9:00 or 10:00 a.m. and remain open continuously until at least 5:00 p.m. Monday through Saturday. Shopping malls are open later than small shops, usually until 9:00 p.m. Monday through Saturday, and usually from noon to 5:00 p.m. on Sundays. Some drugstores, supermarkets and smaller food shops are usually open until later in the evening, until 9:00 p.m. including on Sunday. Some supermarkets and other mega stores are open 24 hours a day.

When purchasing items in the U.S., please remember that the product price stamped on the item does not include tax. Be prepared to pay an extra 3-8% for local, state and/or federal taxes. Each state determines what products to tax and the percentage of the tax.

In most cities and towns, you can find large discount stores such as Wal-Mart, K-Mart, and Target that offer clothing, sheets, toiletries and groceries at low prices. There are also re-sale or second-hand stores, such as thrift stores run by the Salvation Army or Goodwill, as well as online clearinghouses where you can buy gently used furniture, clothing and other items at reduced prices.

Stores in the United States are generally very customer friendly. For example, it is usually quite easy and acceptable to return or exchange an item after you have purchased it. If you notice that the goods you purchased are damaged, that the clothing does not fit, or that you have bought the wrong item, you can usually go back to the store with the sales receipt and exchange these goods or get your money back. Keep your sales receipt from every purchase made until you are certain that you are content with the item or that it works properly.

**Clothing Size**

The sizes below are meant as a general guide. It is always wise to try an article of clothing on to determine the fit.

**Women**

**Blouses/ Dresses**

<u>U.S.</u>	<u>Metric</u>
5-6	34-36
7-8	37-38
9-10	39-40
11-12	41-42
13-14	43-44
15-16	46
17-18	48
19-20	50+

**Shoes**

<u>U.S.</u>	<u>Metric</u>
5	35
6	36
7	37
8	38
9	39
10	40
11	41

**Men**

**Suits/ Coats**

<u>U.S.</u>	<u>Metric</u>
36	46
38	48

**Shoes**

<u>U.S.</u>	<u>Metric</u>
6	39
7	40

40	50	8	41
42	52	9	42
44	54	10	43
46	56	11	44

❖ **Miscellaneous**

**Electricity**

The electrical current in the U.S. is produced at 110 volts, 60 cycles. Appliances manufactured for other voltages can only be operated with a transformer and a plug adapter (not always available). Be aware that most televisions (NTSC), electric clocks/timers, video recorders, video tapes, and video games sold in the U.S. may not work in your country even with a transformer.

**Temperatures, Weights and Distances**

Americans mostly use weights and measurements from the English System instead of metric.

<b>Temperature</b>	$F = 9/5 C + 32^\circ$
Fahrenheit (F)	Celsius (C)
23°	- 5°
<b>32°</b>	<b>0°</b>
41°	5°
50°	10°
68°	20°
77°	25°
90°	32°
95°	35°
104°	40°
<b>212°</b>	<b>100°</b>

**Weight**

2.2 pounds (lb.)	1 kilogram(kg)
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**Distance**

12 inches = 1 foot (ft)	30.48 centimeters (cm)
3 feet = 1 yard (yd)	91.44 centimeters
1 mile (mi)	1.6 kilometers (km)

**VI. Culture Shock**

“Culture shock” is often described as the anxiety or uncertainty someone feels when moving to a completely new environment, usually in a new cultural or country. It is associated with feelings of not knowing what to do or how to do things in a new environment or not knowing what is appropriate in that new location, especially if it is very different from the environment you are coming from. This is normal and almost everyone experiences culture shock to some degree or another. It usually sets in gradually after the first few weeks of coming to a new place. Sometimes individuals are not aware that they are experiencing it. Culture shock can cause physical or emotional discomfort, but many people

feel it can also be a time for personal growth and insight of their own cultural values and the new ones they are experiencing. Understanding culture shock and its symptoms will help you recognize it more readily and enable you to cope with it better if you find yourself having any of these symptoms.

### **Some Symptoms of Culture Shock**

- Extreme homesickness
- Irritability, anger or unwillingness to interact with others
- Loss of sense of humor
- Sadness, loneliness, melancholy, depression or feelings of helplessness
- Insomnia, sleeping too much or too little, fatigue
- Difficulty with coursework or concentration, inability to solve simple problems
- Developing stereotypes about new culture
- Aches, pains, obsessions or other physical complaints

### **Phases of Culture Shock**

Many factors contribute to the way a person experiences and copes with culture shock. It is important to note that not all people go through all stages and for some people one stage lasts longer than another. Nevertheless, the phases can generally describe as:

*Phase 1.* The “honeymoon” period, when everything seems new and exciting. You may feel pleased about all you encounter during this phase.

*Phase 2.* Alienation/cultural fatigue occurs when one realizes it may take some effort to adapt to this new culture. You may resent that effort and feel stressed, isolated, tired or unmotivated.

*Phase 3.* In the “rejection of the host culture” phase, students may feel hostile toward the culture or people of the new culture that is seemingly causing this discomfort and may make generalizations about that culture or its people. They may withdraw or refuse to use the new language and associate only with people from their own culture or other foreigners and have doubts about why they ever came to the new culture in the first place.

*Phase 4.* In this phase, understanding and acceptance of elements of the new culture and greater comfort and familiarity with how to behave increases. One experiences greater pleasure, balance and a sense of humor returns. He or she feels satisfaction from having learned to live in this new environment and may even enjoy it. They may come to evaluate their old ways against the new ones.

*Phase 5.* “Adapting to the new culture” phase is accompanied by feelings of being comfortable and operating effectively in the new environment. Individuals will gain a greater respect for and enjoyment of cultural differences.

*Phase 6.* Re-entry shock happens when one returns to his/her own country of origin and finds that things are not the same or that he or she sees them differently. A traveler may go through some of the phases above again, gradually adjusting to the home country with new skills and insights. This phase is sometimes unexpected but should not be underestimated.

### **Coping with Culture Shock**

- Keep an open mind and try to accept new experiences and sensations even if they are different from what you are used to.
- Be patient with yourself and others and be careful of trying too hard.
- Be grateful for what you have and for the opportunity to learn more.
- Keep your sense of humor and try not to be embarrassed easily. Mistakes will happen; learn from them, but don't let them get to you.
- Maintain contact with the new culture and language, get involved in extracurricular, volunteer and other activities that will help you practice the language, understand the culture and make new friends. Go to the gym or engage in other physical exercise that will keep you active and help to relieve stress.
- Learn meditation or other techniques to promote relaxation and relieve stress.
- Make new friends among international students and others living far from home.
- Treat people as you would like to be treated.
- Realize that missing things about your home and family are normal. Do not let those feelings of sadness overwhelm you.
- Remember that there are people who understand what you are feeling and they are there to support you – your international student advisor, your professors and other on-campus mentors. Call them to talk whenever you need to.

### **VII. Key Internet Resources**

#### **educationusa.state.gov**

EducationUSA is your guide to U.S. higher education. You can find more detailed information about pre-departure preparation from this website, and download the “If You Want to Study in the U.S.” series.

#### **Fulbright Foreign Fellows Handbook: Guide to Living and Studying in the United States 2012-2013**

This handbook is prepared for U.S. government sponsored Fulbright Fellows' pre-departure orientation. You may download the PDF version from

[http://www.foreign.fulbrightonline.org/documents/Student\\_Handbook.pdf](http://www.foreign.fulbrightonline.org/documents/Student_Handbook.pdf)

#### **travel.state.gov**

Department of State's website, which can help you understand visa policy.

#### **help.cbp.gov**

Q&A about passing through customs.

#### **www.usa.gov**

The gateway of the U.S. government, providing one-stop service.

#### **www.china-embassy.org/chn**

Find the Embassy/ Consulates of the People's Republic of China in the U.S.

**www.edupass.org**

This site contains up-to-date information about everything an international student needs to know about studying and living in the U.S.

**www.facebook.com**

The most popular social network website in the U.S. Comparable to Xiaonei.

**www.craigslist.org**

A network of online communities featuring free online classified advertisements.

**www.fastweb.com**

Find scholarship information online.

**www.kayak.com**

Buy cheap flights, airline tickets.

**www.ebay.com**

One of the most popular online auction and shopping website in the U.S. Comparable to Taobao.

**www.amazon.com**

An extensive online shopping website.

**Remember to check your school website and international student office website!**