

U.S. Campus Culture and Lifestyle

1. What important documents should I bring?

Plan to bring with you to the United States any important documents that relate to your legal, medical, and academic history.

While traveling to the United States and while in the country, it is important that you carry all important documents on your person. Do not put them in a suitcase. Do not loan or give them to anyone unless that person can show some form of identification stating that he or she is authorized to receive them.

2. How do I budget for my stay in the U.S?

Look at the cost estimates that appear on the I-20 or DS-2019 form that accompanies the letter of admission from your U.S. university. These estimates are usually accurate, and international students are expected to have funds to cover the full amount shown. Look also at the budget you prepared yourself based on estimated expenses, and ask your international student adviser, a U.S. educational adviser, or your sponsor for advice on how much money you will require. Use the list below to help you think about all potential expenses you may have.

- **Tuition and Fees:**
- **Living Costs:**
- **Travel Insurance and Health Insurance:**
- **Baggage Insurance:**
- **Books and Supplies:**
- **Transportation:**
- **Communications:**
- **Personal Expenses:**
- **Incidentals:**
- **Recreation and Travel**
- **Taxes:** If you are receiving a scholarship or assistantship from your U.S. university, keep in mind that the federal and state governments usually tax these awards. Make sure you also know whether any income or awards from your home country are taxable.

3. What about health insurance?

Health Insurance

The United States does not have a government medical plan or health care service that covers the whole population. Instead, most people have private health insurance.

The U.S. Department of State requires students on J-1 exchange visitor visas to have insurance coverage that includes health and accident, medical evacuation, and repatriation of remains. The U.S. government has no specific health insurance requirements for students on F-1 and M-1 nonimmigrant visas. However, most educational institutions have set their own mandatory health insurance requirements to ensure that international students do not become a "public charge" — that is, they do not become dependent on the U.S. government to take care of them. International students usually are required to prove they have a certain amount of health insurance (determined by the university) before they will be allowed to enroll in classes.

Kinds of health insurance:

- Travel insurance
- Life insurance.
- Personal belongings insurance
- Automobile insurance

3. What about professors?

The social code of behavior between students and professors is not as precisely defined in the United States as it might be in other countries. While some professors adhere to more traditional methods, others will come to class wearing jeans and sports shirts and insist that you call them by their first names. Here are a few pointers to help you deal with professors:

Always address teachers as "Professor" or "Doctor" unless instructed otherwise. If the teacher desires to be called something else, he or she will usually tell you. Do not be shocked to hear students calling professors by their first names. This is especially common among graduate students, since they develop a closer professional relationship with their teachers than undergraduate students do.

Professors in the United States hold office hours, usually several times a week, when they are available for consultation. It is an opportunity used by many students to discuss projects, to review material covered in class, or simply to exchange ideas on a given topic. Most professors are willing to meet students for these purposes, and they can be very helpful. Take advantage of the availability of office hours. These informal meetings could prove to be a turning point in your understanding of a subject and in your relationship with a professor. Professors usually take notice of students who show interest by

participating in class and by visiting during office hours. If you cannot be available during a certain professor's office hours, he or she will generally give you the chance to schedule meetings at other times.

Much of the professor's impression of you will be based on your level of class participation. Be prepared for each class. Demonstrate interest in class, speak up, ask questions, and respond to others' comments. However, make sure your participation is not simply to be noticed, but that it contributes constructively and positively to the class.

At the undergraduate level, many Teaching Assistants (TAs) work with professors and often teach partial or full courses. These TAs are usually graduate students from the department. You should not call them "Professor" but rather "Mr." or "Ms." or, if they ask you to, by their first name.

4. What about the academic advisor?

When you enter a university or college, you will usually be assigned an academic adviser who may be a member of the faculty or a member of the university staff. Your academic adviser will help you select your classes and plan your program, and he or she may also monitor your progress. You are free to seek advice from other faculty members as well. Your college or university will provide you with information about academic advising.

Before you meet with your academic adviser, however, it may be helpful to design a tentative program plan based on your own needs and desires. Know what the degree requirements are or, if you are not certain, prepare a list of questions. Study the university catalog, departmental course schedules, and the printed schedule, which lists all the courses being offered during the term and the days and times these courses will meet. Note that not all courses must be taken in a particular order; there is usually some flexibility in designing your program.

At the first meeting with your academic adviser, you may wish to discuss both your short-term and long-range professional plans — that is, what you hope to do during your program and after you finish your academic studies. You should discuss the tentative program plan that you have drawn up for the semester and possible adjustments to it. You may also wish to discuss opportunities for field experience and other activities that might enrich your educational experience. This information will be useful as your academic adviser helps you decide about various "elective" courses (courses you choose rather than those you are required to take). If you do not speak up, you will not benefit as much as you could from the knowledge and experience of your academic adviser.

Many international students think they should not express their opinion to their academic adviser, since this may be perceived as inappropriate behavior or a sign of disrespect in their own cultures. However, in American culture, it is considered appropriate behavior to speak up and voice your opinion freely. The role of the adviser is to help you make

your own decisions, not to make decisions for you. On most campuses, your academic adviser is responsible for approving your plan of study and the number of courses you will take during each semester or quarter. Remember that taking a full course load (usually 12 to 15 credit hours for undergraduates and nine to 12 credit hours for graduates) is required in order for your nonimmigrant student visa to remain valid.

Using your personal plan and his or her knowledge of the school's requirements, your academic adviser will help you decide upon a study plan based upon your goals and the requirements for a degree. During the academic year, you should make appointments with your academic adviser at regular intervals (a good time is just prior to the next semester registration period) in order to review your progress.

5. And what about Americans?

American society is enormously diverse and complex and cannot be reduced only to a few stories or stereotypes. Important differences exist between geographical regions, between rural and urban areas, and between social classes. In addition, the presence of millions of immigrants who came to the United States from all corners of the world with their own culture and values adds even more variety and flavor to American life.

The characteristics described below represent that image of U.S. society that is thought of as being "typically American."

Individuality

Probably above everything else, Americans consider themselves individuals. There are strong family ties and strong loyalties to groups, but individuality and individual rights are most important. If this seems like a selfish attitude, it also leads Americans to an honest respect for other individuals and an insistence on human equality. Related to this respect for individuality are American traits of independence and self-reliance. From an early age, children are taught to "stand on their own two feet," an idiom meaning to be independent. You may be surprised to learn that most U.S. students choose their own classes, select their own majors, follow their own careers, arrange their own marriages, and so on, instead of adhering to the wishes of their parents.

Honesty and frankness are two more aspects of American individuality, and they are more important to Americans than personal honor or "saving face." Americans may seem blunt at times, and in polite conversations they may bring up topics and issues that you find embarrassing, controversial, or even offensive. Americans are quick to get to the point and do not spend much time on social niceties.

Competitiveness

Americans place a high value on achievement and this leads them to constantly compete against each other. You will find friendly, and not-so-friendly, competition everywhere. The American style of friendly joking or banter, of "getting in the last word," and the quick and witty reply are subtle forms of competition. Although such behavior is natural to Americans, some international students might find it overbearing and disagreeable.

On the other hand, even if Americans are often competitive, they also have a good sense of teamwork and of cooperating with others to achieve a specific goal.

Measuring Success

Americans are often accused of being materialistic and driven to succeed. How much money a person has, how much profit a business deal makes, or how many material goods an individual accumulates is often their definition of success. This goes back to American competitiveness. Most Americans keep some kind of appointment calendar and live according to schedules. They always strive to be on time for appointments. To international students, American students seem to always be in a hurry, and this often makes them appear rude. However, this attitude makes Americans efficient, and they usually are able to get many things done, in part, by following their schedules.

Many Americans, however, do not agree with this definition of success; they enjoy life's simple pleasures and are neither overly ambitious nor aggressive. Many Americans are materially successful and still have time to appreciate the cultural, spiritual, and human aspects of life.

For more information on American society and values, visit <http://usinfo.state.gov/USA>.
And <http://www.educationusa.state.gov>