

International Faculty & Scholar Services



Welcome Handbook

International Faculty & Scholar Services
Texas A&M University
August 2004

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International Faculty & Scholar Services

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International Faculty and Scholar Services (IFSS) assists and supports academic departments across Texas A&M University and System components in successfully attaining and maintaining the appropriate immigration status for the employment of their international faculty, scholars and staff. It also serves as a source of guidance on immigration matters related to employment. The core responsibility of IFSS involves the preparation and submission of documents required by federal regulations to obtain the appropriate nonimmigrant/immigrant status of the foreign nationals while working at TAMU and System components.

In addition, IFSS provides initial welcoming and settlement assistance to international faculty and scholars at Texas A&M University to aid integration into the campus and local communities. Working with other IPO offices and academic departments, IFSS serves as a clearinghouse of information and data to facilitate joint program activities between international faculty, scholars and staff and Texas A&M faculty and international scholars.

Office Hours:
Monday – Friday
8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.



Staff Directory:

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Important Phone Numbers & Websites



Emergency

At home: 911, On campus: 9-911

Texas A&M Police

(979) 845-2345

<http://www.tamu.edu/upd/>

Texas A&M Police Online Report Form

<http://www.tamu.edu/upd/formsmain.htm>

Bryan Police Department

(979) 209-5301

www.ci.bryan.tx.us/police/docs/intake.htm

College Station Police Department

(979) 764-3600

<http://www.cstx.gov/home/index.asp?page=334>

Other Helpful Phone Numbers & Websites:

Texas A&M University

<http://www.tamu.edu>

Texas A&M University Campus Directory Assistance

(979) 845-3211

International Programs Office

(979) 845-3086

<http://www.international.tamu.edu/>

Bryan- College Station Convention and Visitors Bureau

<http://www.bryan-collegestation.org/>

U.S. Department of State

<http://www.travel.state.gov>

Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services

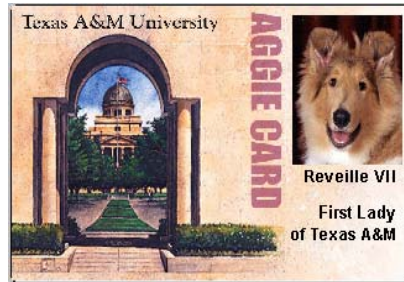
<http://www.bcis.gov>

Internal Revenue Services (IRS)

<http://www.irs.gov>



The Aggie Card



The Aggie Card is the official ID for students, faculty and staff at Texas A&M University. While the primary function of the card is identification, your Aggie Card also allows you to:

- Access your resident hall
- Make use of the library, labs and other academic resources
- Enter sporting events and recreational activities
- Utilize a meal plan
- Access ATM's
- Use your Aggie Bucks

The Aggie Card Office is located in Room 114 of the Pavilion. The office is open Monday-Friday 8:00am- 5:00pm. Don't forget to bring a photo ID such as a driver's license or passport.

You also need to bring the Faculty/Staff Form completed, with the original signature of the appropriate department head or supervisor. The Faculty/Staff Form can be found at <http://finance.tamu.edu/sfs/aggiecard/forms/Faculty-Staff-ID-Form.pdf>. There will be a \$5 charge for ID's.

If you lose your Aggie ID, it is important that you cancel the card immediately. Call the 24 hour Hot Line at (979) 862-4884 to deactivate your card. To obtain a replacement card, go to Room 119 of the Pavilion; the cost of the replacement card is \$12.

Obtaining a Social Security Number



The Social Security number keeps track of your earnings and withholdings, and will allow you to receive a pension upon retirement or disability. A social security number is needed for a variety of things such as opening a bank account. If you are working at Texas A&M University you will need to obtain a Social Security number. This is given to you in the form of a card after you have made the appropriate request to the Social Security Administration. The office is open Monday - Friday from 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.



You will need to take the following documentation in order to obtain a Social Security number:

1. Copy of your passport
2. Copy of your visa
3. Copy of your I-94 card (front and back)
4. If you are a J-1, a copy of your DS 2019 (front and back)
5. Copy of your offer letter of employment

It is imperative that you wait at least **eleven days** after entering the United States before you request a Social Security number. This waiting period will give the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services sufficient time to enter your arrival data into their computer system. The Social Security Administration is required to match your data with your arrival information entered by the U.S. CIS. Applying for your card before this time could result in further delays. Make sure you provide a correct address when applying.

It takes approximately two weeks to obtain your Social Security number after you have applied. However, in certain cases and for different circumstances, the process can take longer. Please do not call the Social Security Administration to inquire about your application until six weeks have passed from the date you filed your application.

Banking



The cities of College Station and Bryan are home to numerous banks and financial institutions. We recommend that you consult the Yellow Pages of the local phone book to locate the bank that you would like to work with. The new accounts department at the bank will help you open an account. In order to open an account, you will need the following documentation: social security card and photo identification.

There are different kinds of bank accounts to choose from. The three most common are:

1. **Savings Accounts**

This type of account allows your money to earn interest over time. Some savings accounts charge a fee for frequent withdrawals and keeping a balance below a designated amount. This type of account is best if you need to deposit money for safekeeping over an extended period of time.

2. **Checking Accounts**

This type of account is designed to hold your money but also allows you to access it whenever needed through checks and check cards. Some of these accounts earn interest and some have restrictions on the number of checks you can write. Most have minimum balances and penalties for going below the minimum balance.

3. **Certificates of Deposit (CD's)**

These are savings certificates that earn higher interest rates than savings and checking accounts. They also require you to keep money in the CD for a specific length of time.

Most banks will provide the following basic services as well as several other special services. Before opening an account, ask the bank about these additional services:

- Bank Statements
- ATM's
- Canceled Checks
- Wiring Service for Money
- Traveler's Checks
- Loans
- Checking Reserves
- Credit References
- Safety Deposit Boxes
- Foreign Currency Exchange
- Money Orders
- Draft
- Cashier's Checks
- Notary Public
- Check Cashing
- Night Deposit

Transportation



Driving

Owning an automobile can be very convenient, but it can also be expensive. In addition to the initial cost of purchasing the car, there are insurance costs, general maintenance, gasoline, licensing, and parking costs. To drive a car in Texas you must have a valid Texas driver's license. Please be advised that an international driver's license is only valid for one year.

For identity purposes, a driver's license is a major form of identification in the United States. For example, you may be asked to show your driver's license when you write a check. You can obtain a picture identification card from the Department of Public Safety (DPS). It is similar to a driver's license but does not allow you to drive. The cities of College Station and Bryan are large areas. As a result, you may want to obtain a driver's license in order to drive a car in Texas and the United States. In this case, the driver's license will act as an identification document and as a license for you to operate a motor vehicle.

In order to obtain information on the requirements and on how to obtain a driver's license, please visit the following website:

http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/administration/driver_licensing_control/dlindex.htm

Or contact the following agency:

Department of Public Safety (DPS)
License and Voter Registration
1003 N. Earl Rudder Freeway

Driver's License Office
(979) 776-3110



If you decide to buy a car, make sure that the Certificate of Ownership or Title is transferred to you from the previous owner. Also, make sure that you register the car within ten days after purchase. Contact the Brazos County Tax Assessor Collector's Office for additional information.

300 East William Joel Bryan Parkway
Bryan, TX 77803
(979) 361-4470

State safety inspection laws require that the automobile be inspected once a year at a DPS approved Official State Inspection Station. These include certain gasoline stations and automobile repair garages. There is a fee (around \$15.00) for the inspection.

License Plates are required on the front and back of your automobile for identification purposes. For additional information, contact the Brazos County Tax Assessor Collector's Office at (979) 361-4470.

Automobile Insurance is imperative if you own a vehicle. By law, you are required to have liability insurance before you drive the car. Insurance can be obtained from many companies; refer to the Yellow Pages for a complete listing. All rates in Texas are about the same for the same risk classification and types of coverage. There are three types of automobile insurance:

1. Accidental
 - Pays for damage to your automobile when you have an accident.
2. Comprehensive
 - Insures against many kinds of damage to your car (i.e. weather, vandalism, etc...).
3. Liability
 - Pays for injury, loss of life, and damage to other cars or property caused by your automobile.

Campus Shuttle

Texas A&M University provides a free shuttle to students, faculty, staff and visitors. During the school year, the on and off campus shuttle systems operates between the hours of 6:30 a.m. and 6 p.m. For a complete list of bus routes and updates to existing routes, refer to the Transportation Services website at <http://www-ptts.tamu.edu>

Taxis

For a complete listing of taxi services in the Bryan/College Station area, refer to the Yellow Pages. Please be aware this is one of the most expensive means of transportation.

Rental Cars

In order to rent a car, you must have a valid driver's license and a credit card. Be aware that most rental agencies require the person renting the car to be at least 25 years of age. For a complete listing of rental agencies, please refer to the Yellow Pages.

Bicycles

Bicycles are a popular, inexpensive and convenient type of transportation at Texas A&M University. There are bike racks available throughout campus to park your bicycle. For extra protection, you will want to invest in a bike lock. Contact the Texas A&M Police Department if you are interested in registering and/or engraving your bike. Be advised that bicycle riders are required to observe the same traffic rules as automobiles. Information regarding rules and regulations are available at the Transportation Services website as well as the Texas Drivers Handbook.

Airports

For long distance travel, flying is the fastest and most efficient mean of transportation. In order to book a flight you can enlist the help of a travel agent, or do it yourself online. Many of the major

airline carriers book flights online. For a complete listing of travel agents in the area, refer to the Yellow Pages. Bryan/College Station has an airport that provides flights to larger cities in Texas. Listed below are the major airports closest to Bryan/College Station:

- Austin-Bergstrom International Airport

Austin-Bergstrom International Airport is located in southeast Austin eight miles from downtown and the State Capitol. It has 240 commercial passenger flights per day with 28 nonstop destinations.

3600 Presidential Blvd
Austin, TX 78719

512-530-2242
www.ci.austin.tx.us/austinairport

- Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport

DFW Airport is the second largest airport in the United States and the third largest in the world in terms of land mass. It has nonstop service to more than 160 international and domestic destinations with access to 95% of the population within four hours fly time. It has approximately 50 daily nonstop international departures to Canada, Mexico, Central and South America, the Caribbean, Europe and Asia.

3200 East Airfield Drive
DFW Airport, TX 75261

972-574-8888
www.dfwairport.com

- George Bush Intercontinental - Houston

Bush Intercontinental is located approximately 23 miles north of downtown Houston. It is the 8th busiest airport in the United States for total passengers and has nonstop service to 152 cities around the world.

2800 North Terminal Road
Houston, TX 77032

281-230-3100
iah.houstonairportsystem.org

- William P. Hobby Airport - Houston

Hobby Airport is located seven miles south of downtown Houston. It is Houston's second largest airport and has nonstop or direct service to over 65 cities throughout the United States.

7800 Airport Blvd.
Houston, TX 77061

713-640-3000
hou.houstonairportsystem.org



Housing



Bryan/College Station offers a variety of housing options. When choosing a place to live you should consider location, budget, preferences and safety. Many international students and scholars choose to live near campus for an easy commute. Most housing units do not include monthly utility expenses in the rent. You will want to consider this when you decide your price range.

To aid in your housing decision, Texas A&M University Department of Student Life may be of assistance. Their website contains all the information you will need to make an educated decision. Please refer to their website at <http://studentlife.tamu.edu/agoss/> for additional help.

Dining



Eating on Campus

Texas A&M University offers a variety of dining options throughout campus. We encourage you to visit their website at <http://food.tamu.edu/> for detailed information of their services.

Eating Out

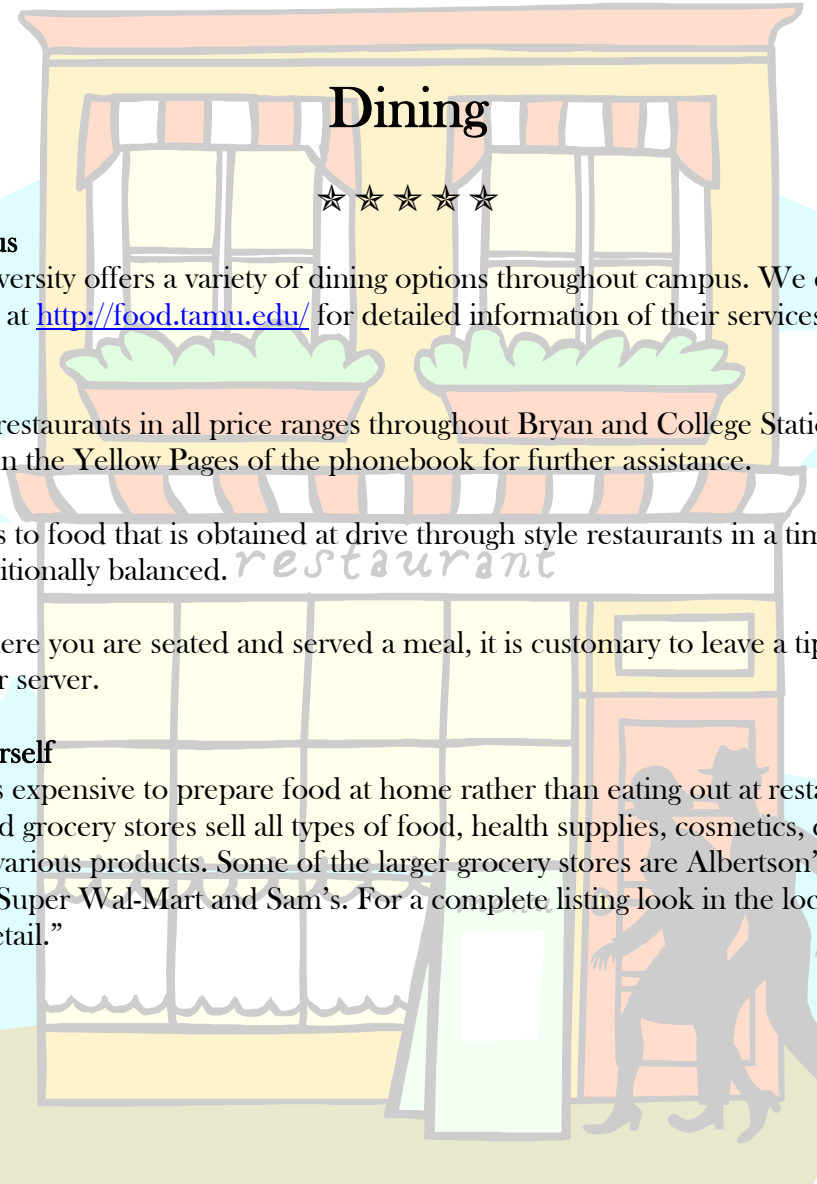
There are many restaurants in all price ranges throughout Bryan and College Station. Refer to the restaurant guide in the Yellow Pages of the phonebook for further assistance.

“Fast food” refers to food that is obtained at drive through style restaurants in a timely manner, but is not always nutritionally balanced.

In restaurants where you are seated and served a meal, it is customary to leave a tip (15-20% of your bill) for your server.

Cooking for Yourself

It is generally less expensive to prepare food at home rather than eating out at restaurants. Supermarkets and grocery stores sell all types of food, health supplies, cosmetics, cooking utensils and many other various products. Some of the larger grocery stores are Albertson’s, Appletree, Kroger, H.E.B., Super Wal-Mart and Sam’s. For a complete listing look in the local Yellow Pages under “grocers-retail.”



Utilities and Other Services



Water, Sewage, and Electricity

Depending on the type of housing you choose, water, electricity or gas may or may not be provided. In order to set this up, you will need to contact the utility company in the city you reside in.

Bryan Utilities
205 E. 28th Street
Bryan, TX 77803
(979) 821-5700

<http://www.btutilities.com/index.html>

College Station Utilities
310 Krenek Tap Road
College Station, TX 77840
(979) 764-3535

<http://www.ci.college-station.tx.us/>

Telephone/Cable/Internet Services

Telephone services are privately owned companies. In Bryan/College Station Verizon is the local telephone service provider.

Verizon
607 E. University, Suite 105
College Station, TX
(979) 846-1271

There are a number of cable and internet service providers in the Bryan/ College Station area. For a complete listing, refer to the Yellow Pages under "Television - Cable" for further assistance.

U.S. Postal Service

You can either receive your mail at a home address, or you may rent a Post Office Box. Post Offices in Bryan/College Station include the following:

College Station

Northgate Station
104 Houston Street
College Station, TX 77841
(979) 846-5716

College Station Main Office
2130 Harvey Mitchell Pkwy
College Station, TX 77840
(979) 693-4152

Bryan

Bryan Post Office
2121 E. William J Bryan Pkwy
Bryan, TX 77801
(979) 774-2300

Downtown Station
210 W. William J Bryan Pkwy
Bryan, TX 77803
(979) 774-2300

Hospitals



St. Joseph Regional Health Center – Bryan

St. Joseph Regional Health Center is the largest hospital in the Bryan/College Station area. It is a nonprofit hospital that offers complete services for emergencies, inpatient surgery, outpatient surgery and critical care cases.

2801 Franciscan Drive
Bryan, TX 77802
(979) 776-3777



College Station Medical Center

1604 Rock Prairie Road
College Station, Texas
(979) 764-5100

Bryan/College Station also has smaller health clinics. Refer to the Yellow Pages under “Clinics” for a complete listing.

Childcare



Bryan/College Station has a variety of childcare services. It is up to the parent to decide what kind of childcare service they feel is appropriate for them. Please go to the following website for a listing of childcare services in the area.

<http://studentlife.tamu.edu/agoss/resources/Parents/childcare/care.asp>

PLEASE NOTE: International Faculty and Scholar Services, Texas A&M University and the Department of Student Life cannot make recommendations regarding particular caregivers. Deciding which caregiver to use should be made after careful investigation and evaluation by the families. This online guide is designed to help families narrow down their options. However, it is the sole responsibility of the families to screen and decide on the caregiver.



Public Schools



In the United States, law requires that all children between the ages of 5 and 18 attend school. Which public school your child will attend depends on how old he/she is and where you live. Public schools are generally broken down into elementary school (ages 5-10), middle school (ages 11-14), and high school (ages 15-18).

College Station Independent School District (CSISD)

Call the district office at (979) 764-5400 to find out what school your child will attend, or visit their website at <http://www.csisd.org/>

Enrollment:

- Head Start/Pre-Kindergarten - Must be 4 years old on or before September 1 of the year the child is entering school.
- Kindergarten - Must be five years old on or before September 1 of the year the child is entering school.
- Parents who wish to have their child tested for placement out of a grade should contact the Director of Program Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability at (979) 964-5419

Registration Requirements:

- For Non-Citizen Students - birth certificate, child's passport and I-94, a photo I.D. of the student and the parent/guardian, immunization record and proof of residence (such as an electric bill or lease agreement).

Bryan Independent School District (BISD)

Call the district office at (979) 361-5200 to find out what school your child will attend, or visit their website at <http://bryanisd.org>

Enrollment:

- Pre- Kindergarten - Instructional programs are available for 4 year olds meeting the following criteria: 4 years old on or before September 1, and Limited English language proficiency or income within guidelines for free/reduced meals.
- Kindergarten - Must be five years old on or before September 1 of the year the child is entering school.

Registration Requirements:

- For Non-Citizen Students- birth certificate, passport and I- 94, immunization record and 2 proofs of residency (such as an electric bill, lease agreement, driver's license, or builder's contract).

Dealing with “Culture Shock”



What It Is

“Culture shock” is the name given to a feeling of disorientation or confusion that often occurs when a person leaves a familiar place and moves to an unfamiliar one. There are many things to adapt to when arriving at any new location. The environment is much different, the food is different and the people look, act and speak differently than what a person might be accustomed to. The English language that may have served you well in your home country may not serve you as well as expected. As a result of these changes you may feel confused, lost and homesick and doubtful about your decision to come to Texas A&M University.

Symptoms

Nervous and tired feelings are often associated with culture shock. Many people have the desire to sleep a lot and often try to correspond with their family and friends back home. People experience different intensities of culture shock. Some may have the tendency to become very impatient with the local people and their culture. Others may avoid the local people all together. These behaviors make adjusting to new surroundings and using foreign language skills much more difficult and may cause discouragement.

Coping with Culture Shock

Depression or even physical illness can be associated with culture shock. The following may be helpful in dealing with these feelings:

- Maintain your perspective
Try to keep in mind that many others just like you have come to Texas A&M from around the world and have had to adjust to these same differences. Below are seven helpful tips from writer Craig Storti’s book *Cross-Cultural Dialogues*:
 1. Do not assume sameness.
 2. What you think of as normal or human behavior may only be cultural.
 3. Familiar behaviors may have different meanings.
 4. Do not assume that what you meant is what was understood.
 5. Do not assume that what you understood is what was meant.
 6. You do not have to like or accept different behavior, but you should try to understand where it comes from.
 7. Most people behave rationally; you just have to discover their rationale.
- Take practical steps
J. Daniel Hess makes many suggestions for adapting to culture shock in his book, *The Whole World Guide to Culture Learning*.
 1. Find people to interact with. Give them a smile or a small gift. Ask them questions.
 2. Surround yourself with some familiar things – a favorite jacket, a photo, a music cassette. Make your new environment pleasant and reinforcing.

3. Slow down. Simplify your daily tasks. Relax. Let your emotions catch up with the newness all about you.
4. Develop patterns. Follow the same routine each day so that you get a sense of returning to the familiar.
5. Cry. Laugh. Sing. Pray. Draw a picture. Give expressions to your feelings.
6. Give new energy to language study, and use it on simple occasions. It is amazing what language success can do for you.
7. Find times and places to get physical exercise.
8. Confide to friends, and even your host family, that you are sad. Their support will warm you.
9. Make a few small decisions and carry them out. Your resolve in small things will pay big confidence dividends. Be assured that, however stressful, culture shock passes if you are willing to let the process of culture learning and cross-cultural adaptation take its course.

More practical suggestions

- Learn local English
The more comfortable and experienced you become at speaking the local English the better you will be able to express yourself and understand those around you. Do not be afraid to try. Just attempting will let others around you know you are trying, and you will be less afraid to interact and become involved in more social settings.
- Be patient
Adjusting takes time and effort on a day-by-day basis. Being patient with yourself and those around you will help you to adapt more smoothly and quickly. Different people require different lengths of time to become acclimated. Realize there might be things you will never understand or be comfortable with, but remember that remaining patient with those around you will make the transition less traumatic.
- Take care of yourself
Eating a balanced diet, remaining active and getting adequate rest are important to not only your physical health but your mental health. Not taking care of yourself properly can make you sick and also make your entire experience even worse. Try to keep your stress levels down so as not to become overwhelmed with various tasks.
- Realize that you will often be treated as a stereotype
Foreigners everywhere are subject to stereotypical treatment. When you first arrive natives may refer to you as a “foreigner” or something similar. Do not be offended by these references. They are not meant in a derogatory manner. The nature of these responses is not directed at you personally. Avoid becoming angry or getting your feelings hurt because of these statements, after all, people are just acting like people. Instead, you could start up conversations about stereotypical attitudes and behavior. After all, you and people from your home country most likely have your own set of stereotypes about your foreign hosts.
- Talk with experienced foreigners
They might offer advice to help you adjust and learn about your new environment. The more you speak with people, the more comfortable you will become, and this will better enable them to answer any questions you have.

- Expose yourself to a variety of cultures
Author, Craig Storti, advises not to spend all of your time with others from abroad; this could inhibit you from capitalizing on all the opportunities you have to learn about in this new country. To realize all of these opportunities you must try to engage with people other than expatriates like yourself. Remaining around fellow expatriates can sometimes result in developing negative attitudes about your new surroundings because it is so different for all of you. Some of you will inevitably want to learn and experience more than the others. The amount you take away from your experience here lies directly in the amount of effort you put into it.
- Learn the local criteria for success
Try to find out from your colleagues, teachers, native students, neighbors and many other people what the criteria are for good performances in aspects of life here at Texas A&M. Whether it be excelling in studies, physical activities or social aspects, it is always beneficial to know the standards of which people are compared and measured.
- Learn how to get things done in organizations
Many things at Texas A&M are accomplished through organizations or in group form. For example, there are many different academic departments, government agencies, businesses and other University offices that handle many different areas. It will be beneficial for you to learn how these organizations work, who is in charge and how things are run throughout the organizations that you are required to handle your business through or are interested in getting involved with. Secretaries usually sit at the front desks of these different offices and are good sources for you to contact if you have any questions or concerns. They may not be able to offer very specific information but will be able to direct you in the right direction.
- Realize that the status of your role here may contrast with the status you are accustomed to
Your assigned status here in the U.S. may be very different than the status you are associated with in your home country. “University students” or “professors” may be somewhat of a lower status here than what you are accustomed to. You may be referred to as an “international visitor” and may not draw as much attention as you might have expected. It is important that you realize this is not an insult and you are not being downgraded in status. You might have to adjust to the difference in status perceived.
- Avoid being excessively influenced by particular dramatic events
Many newcomers may experience a variety of situations. Some of these situations may be common and some, on the other hand, may be rare. If you experience something that you feel is unusual it is best to ask the native people about the behavior rather than automatically making generalizations about this new culture from one person’s actions.
- Try to understand other people’s situations
The reasons people act the way they do may be attributed to a variety of factors. Some of these may be individual characteristics and others may be situational factors. The situations people are in have quite an influence, so it is best not to attribute all of their behaviors on the individual. Being a newcomer, you know less about people’s situations and should, therefore, be more careful when developing your opinions about people’s behavior. In the same way, the local people may know little about your situation and may make the same inaccurate attributions of your behavior. They may not realize you are a foreigner and attribute some of your behavior to your personal characteristics. Try to remain positive if placed in this type of situation, and remember to be patient with yourself and others.

- Do what you think is appropriate and explain if necessary
It is a good idea to act as you feel is appropriate. If your behavior causes some sort of reaction by others it is important to explain yourself and what in your culture influenced your actions.
- Evaluate your expectations
Before coming to the U.S. and Texas A&M you formulated many expectations. It is important to keep in mind that the way you interpret your first experiences here will largely be based on those expectations. If things happen that may be difficult for you or that you are not happy about, you must remember to consider the expectations you had prior to your arrival and that will help you keep things in perspective. Just because things may not turn out to be exactly as you thought does not mean they are bad. This will also keep you from blaming others for issues. Keeping an open mind is vitally important. People's values differ vastly around the world. Things that may be against your cultural values are not against ours and should not be evaluated against your cultures standards.
- Learn from the experience
The time you spend away from your home country can be an incredible experience. You have the opportunity to learn a great deal about yourself and a whole new culture. Take time to experience as much as you can while you are here because it will go by faster than you think, and you will return home satisfied and enlightened.

Adjusting to a New Culture



General Comments

When you are adjusting to the new culture observe others for many clues as to what is normal. Observation is an integral step in understanding yourself and your new environment. While observing others, try to remain as unbiased as possible. Remember there are situational as well as personality factors that can cause people to behave in a certain way. Factors such as degree of self-confidence, sense of humor, ability to interact with other people, ability to tolerate ambiguous or frustrating situations and so on. Particular situations call for particular behaviors. When in doubt, try to observe, and do not be afraid to ask questions.

Phases of Adjustment

Many social scientists study adjustment phases very thoroughly and have come up with four main phases of adjustment through which many newcomers go through. The following are summarized by Marjorie Klein:

- Spectator Phase
The new person is excited and optimistic.
- Stress and Adaptation
Problems, disappointments and internal conflicts emerge. Feelings of sadness, depression, anger, hostility or rebellion might result.

- Coming-to-terms

Increasing involvement with the host society reduces the foreigner's generalized hostility and disappointment and helps him or her find a relatively comfortable, or at least acceptable, position in the society.

- Decision to return home

This is a period of excitement and self-examination. If the foreigner has become detached from his or her own society, this phase brings about tension and feelings of ambivalence. If the foreigner still identifies strongly with his or her home country, this phase brings a feeling of release and pleasant anxiety.

Not everyone will go through every phase discussed above. These are just examples of the most common phases of adjustment. People also vary in the length of time they may remain in a certain stage or go through the process.

According to Richard Brislin, "adjustment" in a new culture has four aspects. First, you feel good about your interactions with the host people. Second, the hosts feel good about their interactions with you. Third, you successfully complete whatever tasks you undertake that require interacting with the hosts. Lastly, you don't suffer from any invisible, stress-related symptoms such as digestive problems or headaches that stem from frustration or unhappiness in your intercultural dealings.

Throughout your stay in the United States you will constantly be learning and adjusting to new things. Therefore, it is important to realize that the adjustment process is never ending. Being confronted with new types of situations and different types of people will expose you to a variety of new ideas that will take adjustment. Remember, you can hold true to your ideas and values while remaining accepting of others views and beliefs.

Adjustment for Spouses and Children

You may not be alone in the adjustment process. Spouses or children with you will also have to go through the adjustment process. They may have different initial feelings than you because of the unique experiences they may have. Your spouse may not be as proficient in English, may have more negative or positive expectations to begin with or may not be as open-minded and willing to interact in the new environment. Whatever their issues may be, it is crucial to remember to be patient with others and for them to remain patient with you because everyone has their own style of adjustment.

During the initial period, your spouse may feel very isolated and lack the self-confidence you may gain interacting in the university environment. You will most likely become involved in your studies which may cause him or her to feel lonely.

To overcome this, encourage your spouse to interact in social settings. Meeting new people can make their new surroundings seem less harsh and more welcoming. Encourage your spouse to practice English, maybe even take some English classes. The more confident they are in their knowledge of the language, the more likely they are to practice it in real life settings. Joining clubs and volunteering are also helpful ways to make you and your spouse increase your perception of self worth.

Your children may have a tough time adjusting as well. Young children may cling to their parents and shy away from others they do not know. Going to daycare programs or attending school can be a very frightening experience, so talking with their teachers or care-takers prior to their enrollment could be very beneficial for you, the teacher and your child.

A serious issue that faces many parents while raising their children during the time spent in a foreign country is the degree to which the children may adopt the local ways. Many parents prefer their children to remain strict to their native culture while others are more accepting of their children seeming somewhat “American.” A common fear is that their children will lose their native identity and conform too greatly to their new environment.

Your family as a whole needs to decide on what degree of conformity is going to be acceptable and instill in your children the ideas, values and behaviors of your native culture that are not to be changed and what ideas and values of American culture are acceptable to adopt. Children learn and adapt very quickly, especially when they are exposed to many types of media as well as other children. They may want a more American first name or have more of an American attitude towards things. All of these issues vary with the amount of time you and your family are going to spend in the United States. The important thing is to talk with your children and maintain a good relationship, and be able to communicate with your children about these issues. Remember, this is a difficult process for them as well as you, and the way in which each of you copes with it may be different.

Thinking about Going Home



Upon your arrival to a new country, it is normal to consistently compare it to your own country and to think about all of the aspects of your new environment. An important thing to remember is that you will only be here for a limited length of time, but the experience will still impact you. All of our experiences change us in some way. It may be a gradual change so that you do not even notice it. When you return home you will also notice some things have changed there as well. All environments are constantly changing. Social, political and economic situations can change just as attitudes, beliefs and behavior. This may mean that when you get back home things may be a bit different than you might remember or be used to. This readjustment is easier if you realize change is necessary, prepare yourself for it and remain open-minded to these new differences.

Notable Characteristics of Americans



Individualism

American culture focuses more on individuals, not representatives of a community, family or other groups. Americans usually consider ourselves as self-reliant individuals who are responsible for making our own decisions. This differs from many other cultures that have more of a collectivist

view. Americans are associated with more selfishness, but this could also be viewed as more individual freedom.

Equality and Informality

“All men are created equal.” This phrase is the basis of much of American life. Although some behaviors might contradict this, others stress it with great emphasis. American society is very informal. Even when the differences between social statuses are great, Americans tend to act similarly. By some this is seen as a lack of respect, but by most it is seen as an illustration of the lack of concern for social status rituals.

Time Consciousness

Many foreigners see Americans as being “ruled by the clock.” This is because of the emphasis on punctuality here in the United States. Many people are often hurried and rushing from place to place. This type of lifestyle makes everyday life a little more stressful, and it is harder for many of us to slow down, relax and enjoy ourselves without guilty feelings that we should be working on other tasks.

Materialism

Often times here in the United States we place more emphasis on the accumulation of material goods. Many people here base their success on the goods they have been able to acquire. Foreigners often see this as a lack of appreciation for the spiritual or human things in life. However, many see it as just a means by which we compare ourselves against others.

The Communicative Style of Americans



Preferred Topics

“Small talk” such as the weather, sports, jobs, people, experiences and current events are often discussed in casual, everyday conversations of Americans. As American children grow up they are taught not to speak of religion or politics with people they do not know very well. This is because of the variety of opinions in America. You never know what religion or political backgrounds the people around you have, so it is advised to be polite and stay away from these topics until you feel more comfortable in your relationships. Other topics that should be avoided are sex, bodily functions and perceived social inadequacies. These issues are considered very personal and should not be discussed around people you do not know very well. Younger Americans are more likely to discuss sexual topics, but it is advised not to do so.

Favorite Form of Verbal Interaction

Americans have a much more brief and to-the-point conversational style than many other cultures. Conversations usually consist of more back-and-forth communicating rather than one person speaking for a long period of time. Arguments are avoided if at all possible. Common greetings are: “hello, how are you?” “Fine, thank you.” When asked how you are doing a one word brief response is acceptable. The phrase “how are you” is used very frequently but it is not meant as literally as many foreigners tend to think. This phrase is used as more of a polite greeting. The

person may not really want you to tell them all about how you are. The best response is just to say “fine” or “good.”

Depth of Involvement Preferred

Generally, Americans do not expect high involvement with the people with whom they are conversing. Only with very close friends do we discuss private matters. Usually conversations are brief and include much back-and-forth discussion. Silence is usually kept as short as possible. The goal of learning a great deal about the other person is not usually the focus of conversations with strangers. Getting to know another person is usually more of an ongoing process and with many instances of conversations.

Americans do not touch very often when conversing. Most Americans are more verbally adept. Moderate volume voices and fewer hand gestures are most common.

Nonverbal Communication



Often times when we think about communicating with people of a foreign country we think about the verbal communication only and tend to overlook the nonverbal. Nonverbal communication is just as significant as verbal because misinterpretations can be just as serious. Nonverbal as well as verbal communication differs from culture to culture and it is very important to know the norms of nonverbal gestures used in the country you are visiting.

Eye Contact

When Americans are listening to one another the listener looks consistently in the speaker’s eyes while they are speaking. While in other cultures, the speaker usually glances in the listener’s eyes but does not remain on them the whole time. Eye contact is important to Americans because it signifies that the listener is paying attention and cares about what the speaker is telling them.

Touching

Americans tend to be in about the middle range when it comes to touching each other. There are many cultures that touch much more often and also many who touch much less frequently. American women are much more likely to touch others than American men, except for shaking hands. When talking or just being around other people, Americans tend to stand about an arm’s length away, giving each other more personal space than may be allowed in other countries. When two people are involved in a more romantic relationship they may remain much closer and more side by side. There are no strict rules for people not to touch when communicating with Americans. If the other person touches you perhaps on the shoulder or arm when they are speaking with you, feel free to reciprocate.

Hygiene

Americans grow up being taught to pay close attention to personal hygiene. Body odor and bad breath are thought of as being in very bad taste. Most Americans bathe or shower daily if not more than once a day due to physical exercise. They also brush their teeth with toothpaste and frequently use mouth wash to make sure their breath doesn’t smell and their teeth are clean.

Wearing deodorant or antiperspirant is a daily routine. Women often wear small amounts of perfume and men sometimes a bit of cologne. When Americans are exposed to bad breath or foul body odors they may back away or leave the presence of that individual. This is a sensitive topic so the American may not even say anything to that person about their odor.

Other Guidelines

Cornelius Grove offers the following pointers to those entering into American society and culture:

1. Americans have no taboo associated with the left hand; they are as likely to touch you or to hand you objects with the left hand as with the right.
2. Americans have no negative association with the soles of the feet or the bottom of the shoes; they do not feel it necessary to prevent others from seeing them.
3. A common way to greet small children in the United States is to pat them on the top of the head.
4. People in the United States often point with their index finger and wave it around in the air as they make especially important points in conversation.
5. One beckons to another person to come closer by holding the hand with the palm and fingers up, not down.
6. Americans show respect and deference for another person by looking him or her in the face, not by looking down.
7. Informal, relaxed postures are commonly assumed by Americans when standing or sitting, even when they are conversing with others; lack of formal posture is not a sign of inattention or disrespect.
8. Americans are uncomfortable with silence; they expect to talk rather constantly when in the presence of others.
9. In the United States the doors of rooms usually are left open unless there is a specific reason to close them.
10. Punctuality - being on time - is important to many Americans; they are likely to become quite annoyed if forced to wait more than 15 minutes beyond the scheduled time for meetings or appointments.

Grove, C. "A Fondness for Icewater: A Brief Introduction to the U.S.A. and Its People," AFS International/Intercultural Programs, 1984.

Guidelines: Practical Situations



The following is more specific information about the behavior expected by Americans in certain situations.

Shaking Hands

It is common practice for men to shake hands upon meeting. Men will also shake hands with women if the woman extends her hand first. There are no official greetings for women. It is appropriate if they shake hands and also appropriate if they use some sort of other gesture. If someone offers their hand for you to shake you should do so. It is considered very rude to refuse or hesitate.

The Workplace

Cultural differences are reflected in the workplace as well as in other parts of society. Individualism, equality and efficiency are cultural values particularly noticeable in American workplaces. The culture in each workplace is different and you will need to observe and learn from how the people in it react and behave towards one another. Here are a few guidelines that may help you accomplish this:

- Arrive to work on time. If you are running late or will not be able to come in for some very important reason be sure to let your boss know.
- When you are hired, ask what is appropriate to wear to work.
- When given an assignment, ask questions about it, and make sure you understand exactly what you are to do before beginning the project.
- Be sure to follow any safety and health rules.
- If you are finished with your duties offer to help others in the workplace.
- Be friendly and sociable with your fellow employees. Getting to know the people you will be working with is very beneficial and creates a more pleasant working environment.
- Treat all the employees with respect, and always try to exhibit a positive attitude.

If something happens at work that you feel is unacceptable you should notify your supervisor immediately. Going straight to them with any problems you may have is always best. They can then assess the issue and deal with it directly and quickly.

Relationships with Neighbors

Behavior that is common between neighbors varies between different societies as well. In the United States we are generally friendly with our neighbors. Some neighbors become great friends and socialize often. However, there are no strict rules that say you have to do so. Neighbors can serve as an excellent source of information for newcomers. Since you will be living in close proximities, it would be beneficial to at least make the effort to get to know your neighbor.

Social Gatherings

Americans usually want their guests to feel at home and act as natural as possible. Americans do not generally regard social gatherings as opportunities for hosts to display their wealth, generosity or good breeding. The following are some guidelines on how to behave in formal settings as well as common practices in informal gatherings:

- Americans will invite strangers into their homes.
- Tours of the house are often given to welcome their guests.
- Much of the entertaining takes place in the kitchen. This is not seen as exclusive female territory in the United States.
- Many hosts may have pets that remain inside the house.
- Socializing with both of the sexes is very normal. Men and women do not segregate themselves in conversations as much as other cultures may.

Formal Occasions

Invitations to formal events are often written and sent either by mail or delivered in person. If the invitation says to "R.S.V.P.", you will need to notify the host whether or not you will be attending

the event. If it says “regrets only,” you only need to notify the host if you will not be able to attend. If you have certain dietary needs it would be a good idea to let the host know. You will also need to check with them so you know how you should dress. It is very impolite to accept an invitation and say that you will attend and then not show up.

Most parties will have alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages. If you do not consume alcohol you are free to refrain from drinking. Many dinners are served buffet-style, where the food is put on one table and guests serve themselves and eat while standing.

Informal Occasions

Invitations for more informal events will come either by spoken invitation, in person or by telephone. Guests are free to arrive and leave whenever they wish. People attending the party or gathering often bring drinks or some sort of party food to show appreciation for the host. If you are not sure if you should bring something, ask the host. These informal gatherings are intended to enable people to relax and have fun with others.

Keeping Appointments and Dates

Remember that it is considered impolite and extremely inconsiderate to fail to keep an appointment or date without giving prior notice to the other person. It is acceptable to decline an invitation by giving a vague excuse. It is always better to decline the invite than to accept and then not show up. If it is impossible for you to make the engagement just be sure to let the host know, and they will understand.

Gifts

Here are some general ideas about gift-giving customs in the United States. Knowing them can help avoid awkward situations:

- Gifts are given to close relatives and close friends. They are also sometimes given to others with whom you have friendly relationships with but are not required. Gifts are not usually given to teachers or others who hold an official position.
- Christmas and Hanukkah are the most common gift-giving times for many Americans. Birthdays and other special occasions are also accompanied with gifts.
- Often, cards instead of gifts are appropriate to give to close friends.
- The amount spent on gifts is something the giver can afford; generally, it is not expected that people on limited budgets will spend large amounts on gifts.
- If a gift is opened in the presence of the giver (as is often done), a verbal expression of thanks is appropriate. If the gift is opened in the absence of the giver, the receiver should write the giver a thank-you note.

Tipping

Tips are often expected and needed by employees, whose hourly rate of pay is usually quite low, based on the assumption that tips will provide a reasonable income. 15% to 20% of the bill is acceptable for waiters or waitresses. Tips are not expected in cafeterias or “fast food” establishments.

Relationships with Americans



Suggestions for Starting Relationships

International scholars need to take the initiative in meeting U.S. scholars. A group of international students talking about making friends with Americans offered these suggestions:

- Be patient with the Americans' ignorance of your country and their stereotypes about you and people from abroad.
- Seek out Americans who are at leisure. Do not try to start conversations with people who are obviously busy.
- Consciously commit yourself to spending time away from your compatriots and instead spend time with Americans.
- Be persistent through the disappointments with superficial interactions.
- Learn what Americans talk about in different situations. Learn what they do not talk about.
- Observe their focus on themselves, rather than on their families.
- Have a list of topics you are ready to discuss.

If you are having difficulties finding appropriate topics just ask someone.

Starting Romantic Relationships

When Americans are interested in each other, the first thing that typically happens is the two people will go out on a date. A date can consist of going to dinner, going to a movie or even just getting a cup of coffee. First dates are usually fairly informal occasions where the main purpose is for the two people to get to know a little more about each other. A date does not signify the two people as exclusive. People may go on dates simply to talk and enjoy the company of others. The social rules governing romantic relationships in the United States are often flexible and unclear. Relationships often begin with flirting or communicating in subtle ways that you are interested in the other person. This includes:

- Express an interest in something the person is also interested in.
- Go somewhere you are both comfortable and interested in going.
- Express your interest in getting to know what the other person likes or dislikes, and how they feel about certain matters, etc.
- Invite the person to go somewhere very casual.
- Possibly exchange telephone numbers.

It is important when you are getting to know someone to be aware of their feelings and try to recognize if the feelings are mutual. You must pay attention to the signals they are sending back to you so that you might know what they are feeling in return. If the person is uninterested, they may avoid making time commitments to you or try to avoid being available while you are around. However, sometimes a person may be interested in you but have other plans. In this case, try to be

flexible and work out another time to get together. Arrangements for transportation are generally based on convenience.

If you do begin to date someone in the United States generally the best idea is to take things slowly. Getting to know different types of people takes varying lengths of time. Try not to put your relationship on a certain timeline and free it of strict expectations. Hopefully, this will allow the two of you to get to know each other at your own pace and lead you to a long lasting friendship.

Concluding Thoughts



The staff of International Faculty and Scholar Services hopes this welcome handbook will ease your transition into life at Texas A&M University and the Bryan/College Station community. We want you to feel welcome and comfortable during your stay with us. Accordingly, please feel free to contact our office with any questions or concerns you may have.