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Society and Culture

Characteristics of Americans

It is not easy to make generalizations about the United States — above all, it is a land of diversity. The size of the country, its geographic and climatic differences, and the ethnic mix of its people all contribute to its variety. Still, there are a few characteristics you will encounter in “typical” Americans from the Atlantic to the Pacific.

For example, Americans tend to value their individuality, to think themselves the equal of any other man or woman, and to believe they are masters of their own destiny. They feel free to speak their minds on most subjects and are often astonishingly frank in expressing political opinions, cherishing above all other rights the freedom of speech guaranteed by the United States Constitution. They are direct in their communications; they ask questions when they need information; they say “no” when they mean no. Americans do not commonly exhibit class consciousness or make distinctions amongst themselves along class lines. If anything, the vast majority identify themselves as belonging to the middle class. Except for perhaps the very rich or very poor, Americans do not usually feel that their success in life will be determined by the social class into which they were born and do not usually show excessive deference or superiority to each other in public situations.

Americans appear open and friendly at first meeting, but this means only that they are pleased to make your acquaintance; it may or may not lead to true friendship. They are informal; they often introduce themselves by their first names and call others by their first names on very slight acquaintance. In professional situations, however, it is preferable to address people using their title and last name (e.g., Dr. Smith, Ms. Jones) until they ask you to use their first name. Americans tend to stand at least an arm’s length apart when conversing and are not inclined to touch one another, except to shake hands upon greeting one another. They value their privacy and rarely visit, even good friends, without telephoning first.

Appointments/Punctuality

It is always appropriate to make an appointment before visiting someone, particularly at an office. It is best to be on time for appointments. When they are professional in nature—an appointment with a doctor or a colleague at the university—you should appear within 5 minutes of the time you have agreed upon. On social occasions, especially when the invitation is for a meal, plan to arrive no more than 10 to 15 minutes after the appointed hour (but never before the hour—the hosts may not be ready). In both cases, be sure to telephone if you are unavoidably delayed. Remember that public events such as concerts and university classes begin promptly at the scheduled time.
Invitations
If you accept an invitation or make an appointment, it is very important that you appear as promised since your hosts will have taken considerable trouble to prepare for your visit, and professional people will have arranged their schedules to accommodate you. It is perfectly acceptable to decline an invitation if it is not convenient for you, but some response is always called for. On a formal, written invitation, “RSVP” means “please reply.” It is not necessary to bring a gift unless the occasion is a birthday or Christmas party or perhaps if the invitation is for an entire weekend. In these cases, a simple, inexpensive gift of flowers, candy, a bottle of wine, or a small souvenir from your own country would be appropriate. A thank-you note to your host or hostess, especially following an overnight visit, is considerate. If you have been invited to go out for a meal, you should assume that all parties will pay for themselves, unless the invitation included a specific offer to pay for your food.

Dietary Restrictions
If health or religious beliefs restrict the foods that you can eat, you should feel free to explain this when you accept an invitation to visit. Such preferences are always understood; your host or hostess will usually be happy to take them into account when the menu is planned. You can also be assertive about dietary preferences or restrictions in a restaurant. Many places will try to accommodate your request.

Smoking Restrictions
It is now quite common in the United States for cigarette smoking to be either restricted or completely prohibited in public places. This includes restaurants, airplanes and other public transportation, theaters, stores, museums, and many office and university buildings. Cigar and pipe smoking are almost always prohibited. You should also be aware that Americans often object to guests smoking in their homes, and it is considered a courtesy to inquire whether your host will mind before you “light up.”

Alcohol Restrictions
The minimum age for the purchase or public possession of any alcoholic beverage in the U.S. has been established nationally as 21. Each state, however, has its own laws which allow local communities to regulate youth access to alcohol through local ordinances and law enforcement. State laws address youth-related violations separately in regards to the sale of alcoholic beverages to minors; purchase of alcohol from vendors; possession or handling of alcohol by minors; consumption of alcohol by a minor; and penalties against minors who present false identification or otherwise represent themselves as being of legal purchase age.
Violators of state and/or alcohol laws may be subject to criminal penalties. Such penalties against vendors or minors are processed through state or local criminal courts and include fines, jail sentences and diversion programs, such as community service.

**Asking Questions**

Probably the best advice this handbook can give is to suggest you ask questions whenever you need guidance or information. Americans do so freely and never think that inquiries are a sign of ignorance or weakness. On the contrary, questions indicate interest, and you will find most people glad to be of help.

**CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN THE UNITED STATES**

The United States is one of the most culturally diverse countries in the world. This cultural diversity stems from having had a steady flow of immigration from different parts of the world for over 150 years, which contributed to the already existing culture. These immigrant populations have influenced both the cultural as well as the physical landscape of their environment. The degree to which each group’s influence is felt depends on the density of a given ethnic group and the length of time that the community has been in the United States.

Interesting statistics of United States households (citizens and non-citizens) from the 2000 United States Census were that 11% of people living in the United States are foreign born and 18% of households speak a language other than English at home. The largest groups of immigrants in the last ten years have been from: Mexico (25%, nearly 2 million), the Caribbean (11%, 836,200), China/Hong Kong/Taiwan (6.6%, 501,000), South America (5.8%, 443,000), Philippines (5.7%, 432,100), Central America (5.5%, 422,200), India (4%, 311,100) and Middle East/Central Asia (3.6%, 274,000). The Latin American community in the United States, which includes immigrants and United States native-born descendents, has become the largest minority group with over 35 million people (13.5%), followed closely by the African-American community with 34 million people (13.1%). The United States census Bureau is mandated by the U.S. Constitution to take a count of everyone living in the U.S. every ten years.

Climate as well as geography are other factors that play a role in the cultural diversity of the United States. This is reflected in the lifestyle differences found in the various regions of the United States expressed through their choices in architecture, cuisine, leisure activities, etc.

**The Law and Civil Rights**

The United States is governed by the “rule of law.” It must be observed by every resident, including the President and other public officials, and can be changed only through estab-
lished legislative procedures. The law also offers everyone its equal protection; it applies to everyone equally, regardless of position or wealth.

The Constitution of the United States, which supersedes all federal, state, and local law, protects all persons within the borders of the country. With the exception of a few laws that regulate such matters as immigration and voting, foreign nationals enjoy the same rights and privileges as American citizens. They also have the same obligations under the law.

The first 10 amendments to the Constitution, collectively termed the Bill of Rights, contain this country’s most cherished legal principles, among which are

- the right to freedom of religion, speech, press, and assembly;
- the right to refuse to testify against oneself, to keep silent rather than answer questions that might be incriminating;
- the right to protection against unreasonable search and seizure; and
- the right to “due process,” to be safe from punishment under the law unless—and until—specified, orderly procedures have been followed. For example, persons charged with a crime need not prove their innocence; rather, they are considered innocent until proven guilty. They are also entitled to representation by legal counsel, appointed by the court if a defendant cannot pay for such services.

The body of civil law regulates contractual relationships between individuals. If one party to a contract fails to observe its conditions, the injured party can ask the court to enforce the terms or demand compensation for loss or damages.

The Exchange Visitor Program Regulations promulgated by the U.S. Department of State govern the requirements for your J-1, and any dependent’s J-2, visa. These regulations implement the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961, as amended. In September 1996, the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (IIRIRA) was enacted, which directed the development of an electronic information collection system, known to you as SEVIS, for individuals in J visa status. In October 2001, the USA PATRIOT Act subsequently amended IIRIRA and mandated that the SEVIS database be implemented by January 2003 as part of its underlying effort to facilitate information sharing and cooperation among government agencies. Other laws were also passed by the U.S. Congress that further defined the types of information to be collected and maintained in SEVIS. Thus, it is important for you to be aware that, although the electronic collection of exchange visitor information is a new practice and the SEVIS database a new tool for United States government agencies, the laws that have promoted educational and cultural exchanges and have defined the requirements for your J-1 and J-2 visas have been in effect for over four decades.
The Government of the United States of America
ELECTORAL COLLEGE

The Electoral College was established by the founding fathers as a compromise between election of the president by Congress and election by popular vote. The electors are a popularly elected body chosen by the 50 States and the District of Columbia on the Tuesday after the first Monday in November. The Electoral College consists of 538 electors (one for each of 435 members of the House of Representatives and 100 Senators; and 3 for the District of Columbia). Each state’s allotment of electors is equal to the number of House members to which it is entitled plus two Senators. The United States Census is used to reapportion the number of electors allocated among the states.

The term “electoral college” does not appear in the Constitution. Article II of the Constitution and the 12th Amendment refer to “electors,” but not to the “electoral college.” In the early 1800s, the term “electoral college” came into general usage as the unofficial designation for the group of citizens selected to cast votes for President and Vice President. It was first written into Federal law in 1845.

The slates of electors are generally chosen by the political parties. State laws vary on the appointment of electors. Electors are often selected to recognize their service and dedication to their political party. They may be state-elected officials, party leaders, or persons who have a personal or political affiliation with the Presidential candidate. The electors meet in each State on the first Monday after the second Wednesday in December. A majority of 270 electoral votes is required to elect the President and Vice President. No Constitutional provision or Federal law requires electors to vote in accordance with the popular vote in their state.

If no presidential candidate wins a majority of electoral votes, the 12th Amendment to the Constitution provides for the presidential election to be decided by the House of Representatives. The House would select the President by majority vote, choosing from the three candidates who received the greatest number of electoral votes. The vote would be taken by State, with each State delegation having one vote. If no Presidential candidate wins a majority of electoral votes, the Senate would select the Vice President by majority vote, with each Senator choosing from the two candidates who received the greatest number of electoral votes.

You can find additional information regarding the Electoral College in the following suggested websites:

HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

Higher education is the term used in the United States for formal education beyond the twelve years of elementary and secondary school. United States higher education is decentralized and diversified. Educational institutions may be supported by state funding, private organizations or religious denominations. Each United States institution of higher education is headed by a President or Chancellor and is usually controlled by a governing board of trustees or regents.

Although there is a difference, the terms college and university are usually used interchangeably. Colleges in the United States have no exact counterpart in the educational system of any other country. Colleges are usually referred to as liberal arts colleges, although most offer courses in many fields, including the sciences. A college may be an independent institution or part of a university. A university is made up of a group of schools which may include an undergraduate liberal arts college, graduate schools, and professional schools.

Graduate study, which prepares the student for professional practice is largely a function of the university, but there are also many individual tax-supported professional and technical schools. The standards of professional schools are usually established by the professional associations and societies in each field.

The academic year lasts between thirty-two and thirty-six weeks, beginning in August or September and lasting through May or June. Most colleges and universities divide the school year into two equal parts called semesters or terms. Some divide the year into a system of three equal trimesters. Others have four quarters, of twelve weeks each, and require their students to attend classes during three of the four quarters. Many schools have summer sessions, which last from six to twelve weeks; tuition and fees for this period may be charged in addition to those paid for the academic year.

At the undergraduate level, courses offered at each college or university and the regulations and requirements are listed in the college catalogue, published by each institution in print and/or made available on the university website. The first two years of an undergraduate program are usually devoted to general learning. Study programs include many subjects, and the scope of each subject is usually broad. Since they survey an entire field of study, they are usually taken as introductory courses or as prerequisites for more specialized courses. During the final two years of college student specialize in one subject by concentrating most of their courses in it. The field of concentration is called a major. Some courses are required for the degree and others may be chosen as electives.

Graduate study is the advanced specialized studies leading to a master’s degree or a doctor’s degree and emphasizes preparing students for research or for professional practice. Graduate work leading to a masters of arts (M.A.) or masters of science (M.S.) degree requires a minimum of a one-year, but usually a two-year program of study beyond the bachelor’s degree is the norm. The typical requirements for a master’s degree include
successfully completing 32 to 36 credits of graduate courses, including a minimum of 20 credits in the major field of study; maintaining a minimum average of grade B; writing a thesis; and passing examinations in all required courses. Study for the master’s degree is sometimes undertaken as preparation for further graduate work or as an extension of the general education of the bachelor’s degree program. Degrees for doctor of philosophy (Ph.D.) and doctor of education (Ed.D) require a minimum of three years full-time study beyond the master’s degree, but in most fields more is necessary. Graduate students attend lecture courses and seminars and carry out research under professional guidance. Graduate study leading to a doctorate emphasizes original research.

The method of teaching in most colleges and universities consists of lectures supplemented by reading assignments and class discussions between the professor and students. Science courses include lectures and laboratory periods. Art courses (except history of art courses) generally include lectures and studio classes in which the students work with artistic media. Education courses sometimes offer opportunities to observe class sessions and to practice teaching in elementary and secondary schools. Assignments usually call for the student to read a number of books and/or articles and to write essays, reports, and/or term papers. Reading lists are distributed to the students at the beginning of the semester listing the reading material a student needs to read by a given date.

Most examinations are written, not oral. Quizzes and tests are short examinations. They may be given regularly throughout the semester, or they may be unscheduled and even unannounced. Quizzes may consist of short questions requiring short responses. Common questions are ones that contain answers of “true” or “false” or a series of multiple choices and the correct one must be selected. Midterm examinations are usually longer than quizzes and are given in the middle of the school term. Finals are examinations which cover the subject matter of an entire course and are usually given at the end of the term.

Every course is worth a certain number of hours, credits or points, depending upon how many hours of lectures, class meetings, and laboratory work are offered each week. A course which lasts for one term and consists of three one-hour class periods a week is valued at three hours, points or credits. As a Fulbrighter, you are expected to be a full-time student at all times. Please see pages 33 and 39 for information.

Grading systems vary among institutions. Many employ the first five letters of the alphabet to denote levels of achievement. To receive full credit for their courses, students must maintain an average of grade ‘C’, considered a satisfactory level of academic work. ‘B’ denotes above-average or superior work and in most graduate programs a grade of ‘B’ is considered the lowest satisfactory grade. ‘A’ indicates excellent achievement. ‘D’ is a passing grade, but denotes lower-than-average work, and ‘E’ or ‘F’ symbolizes completely unsatisfactory work. A student who receives an ‘E’ or ‘F’ as a final mark fails to receive credit for the course. The course therefore does not contribute toward his degree requirements. When a student receives an unsatisfactory grade for an examination or a course
he/she is said to have failed. Often an elective course may be marked only Pass or Fail. Some schools use the symbol ‘I’ to denote incomplete work and allow the student to make up the work for a course after the end of the semester. If a student’s work is incomplete or unsatisfactory, the college may put him or her on probation – that is, allow him or her a period of time, usually one school term, in which to make up incomplete work and/or raise grades to a satisfactory standard.

Many graduate schools make assistantships available to candidates for graduate degrees. Assistantships are, in a sense, paying jobs. Sometimes the assistant is paid in cash; sometimes he/she receives free tuition for his services. Assistantship duties range from grading papers to serving as a laboratory technician to teaching freshman courses or doing specialized research. In general, research assistants will work on the projects of the particular school or department in which they are employed. Hours of service generally range from ten to fifteen per week, but some research assistants may be expected to devote up to twenty hours.

Please be aware that you may not, unless negotiated as part of your total (grant) funding package, accept an assistantship (or any other employment in the United States) without permission from IIE.
Other Useful Facts

HOLIDAY PERIODS DURING THE ACADEMIC YEAR

Most colleges and universities close for two weeks or more during the Christmas and New Year holidays in late December, as well as for several days between quarters or semesters. As you will note from your Terms of Appointment, you are expected to pay any extra expenses during vacations from your own funds or from the regular maintenance stipend you are receiving. Some dormitories and residence halls may be closed or may not serve meals during vacation periods. Fellows who wish to travel and sightsee during vacation periods should ask the Foreign Student Adviser’s office about any local trips planned for foreign students and visitors.

OFFICIAL HOLIDAYS

Official holidays are those days of celebration recognized by the U.S. government and usually include the closing of government offices and private businesses and banks.

New Year’s Day (January 1)
New Year’s Eve, December 31, is more important to Americans than New Year’s Day itself. Everyone gathers with friends and family to “ring out the old and ring in the new,” an expression that reflects the old custom of ringing church bells at midnight to greet the new year.

Martin Luther King, Jr.’s, Birthday (Third Monday in January)
Martin Luther King, Jr., a distinguished African American, organized and led the civil rights movement in the United States during the 1960s in his capacity as the leader of the Southern Leadership Conference. During the 1963 March on Washington, he delivered the stirring and memorable “I Have a Dream” speech to a quarter million people gathered before the Lincoln Memorial. Dr. King received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964 in recognition of his message of change through nonviolence to promote freedom, equality and dignity of all races and people.

Presidents’ Day (Third Monday in February)
This holiday commemorates the birthdays of George Washington, the first President of the United States, and Abraham Lincoln, President during the Civil War (1861–65).

Memorial Day (Last Monday in May)
Memorial Day is the day on which people in the United States honor those who died in military service to their country. Many families visit their loved ones’ graves and decorate them with flowers. The day is also marked with patriotic parades. This holiday is considered the beginning of the summer season.
**Independence Day** (July 4)
Independence Day commemorates the day the U.S. Declaration of Independence was signed in Philadelphia on July 4, 1776. Independence Day is celebrated all over the country with picnics, political speeches, parades, and community get-togethers that culminate in firework displays.

**Labor Day** (First Monday in September)
This holiday was established in recognition of the labor movement’s contribution to the productivity of the country. This day marks the end of the summer season and is celebrated with picnics and other outings.

**Columbus Day** (Second Monday in October)  
*Official holiday in many states*
By popular tradition, Columbus “discovered” America in 1492, although the continent was already populated by Native Americans and had been visited earlier by other seafarers. The holiday, originally and still occasionally celebrated on October 12, is chiefly observed by Americans of Italian descent with parades and festivals. In the Northeast, the long weekend is the high point of the season for viewing the brilliantly colored fall leaves.

**Veterans Day** (November 11)  
*Official holiday in many states*
Originally established to commemorate Armistice Day—the end of the First World War—and celebrated on November 11, the date still observed in some areas, the holiday was changed after World War II to serve as an occasion to pay tribute to veterans of all wars. It is marked by parades, speeches, and the laying of wreaths at military cemeteries and war memorials.

**Thanksgiving Day** (Fourth Thursday in November)
The first Thanksgiving Day was observed by the pilgrims of Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts in 1621 to give thanks for the bountiful harvest and their ability to survive in the wilderness. Today, it is a time when Americans give thanks for the good life they enjoy. They celebrate by getting together with family and friends to eat traditional foods such as turkey, cranberry sauce, sweet potatoes, and pumpkin pie.

**Christmas Day** (December 25)
Many people regard this as the most celebrated holiday of the year, with the Christmas season extending from a few days before December 25 to January 1, New Year’s Day. Although originally a Christian holiday, commemorating the birth of Christ, people of many faiths join in the secular festivities common during this period. These include gift exchanges, the singing of holiday carols, visits to Santa Claus at the local shopping mall, and the decoration of a Christmas tree. Family members travel great distances to be together for Christmas, a day on which gifts are exchanged and a traditional dinner is shared.
CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS

Cultural holidays are those days of public celebration where businesses are not necessarily closed.

Valentine’s Day (February 14)
A holiday celebrated by sending cards and giving candy in heart-shaped boxes and flowers to loved ones.

Saint Patrick’s Day (March 17)
Saint Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland, and this holiday was brought to the United States by Irish immigrants. People mark this day by wearing green clothing and getting together with friends to celebrate. Some U.S. cities with large Irish American populations, like Boston and New York, also hold Saint Patrick’s Day parades.

Passover (8 days, usually in April)
The Jewish holiday of Passover commemorates the liberation of the ancient Hebrews from slavery in Egypt in 1200 B.C. A highlight of the festival is the Seder, a ceremonial dinner attended by family and friends, during which the memory of the exodus is recounted through readings, singing, and the consumption of symbolic foods. Unleavened bread or matzoh is eaten during this time.

Mother’s Day (Second Sunday in May)
On this day, Americans honor their mothers by sending them flowers, buying them small gifts, and taking them out to eat.

Father’s Day (Third Sunday in June)
Fathers are honored on this day with cards and gifts from their family members.

Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur (3 days in September and October)
The holidays of Rosh Hashanah (New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) and the 10-day interval between them comprise the most sacred period in the Jewish calendar. Known as the High Holy Days, this period combines the welcoming of the New Year with reflective examination of the course of one’s life during the past year. Rosh Hashanah is characterized by prayer, family feasts, and the sending of New Year’s greetings. Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish year, is a time of fasting and prayer.

Easter Sunday
Easter, the Sunday of the Resurrection, Pascha, or Resurrection Day, is the most important religious feast of the Christian liturgical year, observed at some point between late March and late April each year (early April to early May in Eastern Christianity), following the cycle of the moon. It celebrates the resurrection of Jesus, which Christians believe occurred on the third day of his death by crucifixion some time in the period AD 27 to 33. In the United States, Good Friday (Friday before Easter Sunday) is observed by many businesses including the New York Stock Exchange.
Halloween (October 31)
In the United States, this day, the eve of a Christian holiday—All Hallowed’s or All Saints’ Day, which falls on November 1—has lost its original religious character. Today, it is largely celebrated as a day for children. Traditions include carving pumpkins with funny faces (jack-o’-lanterns), telling scary stories, and going door to door in costume to receive candy and treats from neighbors. When a door opens after they knock, the children say “trick or treat,” meaning, “if you don’t give me a treat, I will trick you.” Many children and adults also attend costume parties and decorate their homes to celebrate Halloween.

Hanukkah (8 days, usually in December)
This Jewish holiday commemorates the successful uprising of a small band of Jews known as the Maccabees against their Hellenistic Syrian conqueror in 164 B.C. As part of the reconsecration of the Temple in Jerusalem, the victors lit a menorah or candelabrum with a small flask of holy oil that miraculously burned for 8 days. Hanukkah thus came to be known as the Festival of Lights and is celebrated today by the lighting of a menorah for 8 days. It is a time of conviviality and is marked by the gathering of family and friends and gift giving.

Kwanzaa (7 days, December 26 through January 1)
African-American nonreligious celebration of family and community patterned after African harvest festivals. Each day is dedicated to one of seven principles: unity, self-determination, collective responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith. Each evening, family members gather to light one of the candles in the kinara, a seven-branched candelabra; often gifts are exchanged.

Ramadan (9th month of the Muslim Calendar)
The Month of Ramadan is when it is believed the Holy Quran was sent down from heaven. This celebration lasts a whole month during which Muslims fast during daylight hours and indulgence of any sort is forbidden. It is a time to worship, contemplate and concentrate on their faith and spend less time on the concerns of their everyday lives.

Other Holidays
The United States is very culturally diverse and there are many communities with large immigrant populations. Such ethnic communities also celebrate their ethnic and religious holidays, such as: Chinese New Year, Devali the Hindu Celebration of lights, Cinco de Mayo and the Independence Day of several different countries.

Different months are also designated to the celebration of different populations in the United States, such as: Black History Month (February), Women’s History Month (March), Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15 to October 15) and Asian-Pacific American Heritage Month (May).
TIME ZONES

The continental United States is divided into four time zones, as shown on the map below. The relative times for the outlying states are also indicated. Eastern standard time is 5 hours earlier than Greenwich mean time. Most states observe daylight saving time during the summer months. This means that clocks are advanced 1 hour on a given date in March and restored to standard time in November. (They “spring forward” in the spring, “fall back” in the fall.) Exceptions to this rule are made in Arizona, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and most of Indiana. Arrival and departure times of planes and trains are usually given in the current time of the arrival or departure point.
**HOURS OF BUSINESS**

Offices are usually open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday, with employees taking an hour for lunch sometime between noon and 2 p.m. Banks are generally open to the public only until 2 or 4 p.m. and most have automatic teller machines that dispense cash from your account or accept deposits 24 hours per day.

Shops open about 9:30 a.m. and remain open continuosly until 5:30 or 6 p.m., often until 9 p.m. one evening per week. All are open Monday through Saturday, and many on Sundays too. Most shops in suburban malls are open until 9 p.m., Monday through Saturday, and usually from noon to 5 p.m. on Sundays. Drugstores, supermarkets, and smaller food shops usually remain open until late in the evening and on Sundays.

**ELECTRICITY**

Electrical current in the United States is produced at 110 volts, 60 cycles. Appliances manufactured for other voltages can be operated only with a transformer. Even so equipped, appliances with clocks or timers will not function properly, nor will television sets not built for the U.S. color system (N.T.S.C.).

**CLIMATE**

Because of its size and geographical diversity, the climate in different parts of the United States varies widely. To a certain extent, Americans are insulated from weather extremes. Homes, offices, cars, and buses are routinely air conditioned in the warmer parts of the country, and central heating is the rule everywhere. Indoor temperatures are thus maintained at 20–22 °C (68–72 °F).

The **Northeastern States or New England** (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont): Winters can be very cold and long with lots of snow, and the summers are warm. In the north, winters can be very severe. Fall and spring are usually cool and crisp. You will find cooling fog along the coasts during winter and summer.

The **Mid-Atlantic Region** (Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Virginia, Washington, DC): Summers tend to be hot and humid, and late afternoon or early evening thunderstorms are common. Winters, while milder and a little shorter than in New England, can still produce a lot of snow. Spring and fall are very pleasant with relatively low humidity.

The **Southeastern States** (Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, West Virginia): The southeastern states have long, hot, and humid summers and warm winters. Summertime, with its high humidity, can bring frequent but short-lived thunderstorms. Along
the Atlantic coast, the hurricane season lasts from July to October. Southern Florida has an almost tropical climate where freezing temperatures are uncommon. In the mountains of West Virginia, the winters are similar to those in New England.

**The Midwest** (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Ohio, Wisconsin): This region occupies the Great Plains, a vast, flat expanse located in the center of the country. Winters in the northern section of this region can be severe with blizzards and much snow, while summers in the southern section can be quite hot with frequent heat waves and drought.

**The Southern Interior and Gulf States** (Alabama, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, Texas): Summers are hot and frequently humid, especially along the Gulf of Mexico. Average winter temperatures rarely fall below freezing, but there are occasional cold spells.

**The Rocky Mountain Region** (Arizona, Colorado, Southern Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming): Because of the range of altitudes in this mountainous region, there is considerable variety in local temperature and precipitation. Winters are very cold in the mountains and bring heavy snowfalls. Large areas of Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, and Nevada are desert, where even winters can be extremely hot and dry.

**The Pacific Northwest** (Northern Idaho, Oregon, Washington): The region enjoys mild winters and moderately warm summers. The Pacific Ocean helps keep the weather mild and wet along the coast, with a number of rainy days.

**California**: Southern California, including Los Angeles and San Diego, enjoys warm to very hot but dry summers, while the winters are mild and moderately rainy. Smog (fog and pollution) is a problem in Los Angeles. Northern California, including Berkeley and San Francisco, has a cooler, milder climate year round. San Francisco is known for its morning fog.

**Alaska**: Alaska is the northwestern most state of the United States and borders northwest Canada. It has long, snowy, frigid winters and short, mild summers. Days during midwinter will only have 3 to 4 hours of daylight, and in mid-summer, only 3 to 4 hours of darkness.

**Hawaii**: A chain of tropical islands in the Pacific Ocean, Hawaii is situated approximately 6,900 miles from the west coast of the United States by airplane. The weather is low in humidity and comfortable year round.

WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Few Americans speak of weights and measures in metric terms. Temperature is the principal exception; these days, temperature is often quoted in both Fahrenheit and Celsius.

Children’s clothing is sized according to the child’s age from infancy through approximately 6 years. Infants’ clothing is sized according to months of age, from newborn (NB) through 18 months. It is always wise to consider the child’s height and weight when buying clothing. It is not uncommon for infants and toddlers to wear much larger sizes than what their age indicates. It is a good idea to ask a salesperson for assistance until you are familiar with children’s clothing sizes.

Adult clothing sizes vary somewhat from one manufacturer to another. It is wise to “try on” clothing before making a purchase.

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<tr>
<th>Temperature</th>
<th>Fahrenheit (°F)*</th>
<th>Celsius (°C)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>-5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32 (freezing)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>86</td>
<td>30</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>95</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>104</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>212 (boiling)</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(°F=9/5 °C + 32)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Equivalent</th>
<th>Metric</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>pound (lb)</td>
<td>16 oz</td>
<td>0.454kg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ounce (oz)</td>
<td>1.0 oz</td>
<td>28.35g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2,000 lbs</td>
<td>0.907 metric ton</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.04 oz</td>
<td>1 g</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.20 lb</td>
<td>1 kg</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Equivalent</th>
<th>Metric</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>acre</td>
<td>4,840 square yards</td>
<td>0.405 hectares</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>square mile</td>
<td>640 acres</td>
<td>2.590 square km</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Comparable Clothing Sizes

**Women's sizes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Junior</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continent</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Misses</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA &amp; England</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continent</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ladies</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA &amp; England</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continent</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shoes</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metric</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Men's Sizes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coats &amp; Pajamas</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA &amp; England</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continent</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shirts</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA &amp; England</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14½</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15½</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continent</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Shoes</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metric</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Distance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Equivalent</th>
<th>Metric</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>inch (in)</td>
<td>2.54 cm</td>
<td>2.54 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>foot (ft)</td>
<td>12 in</td>
<td>30.48 cm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yard (yd)</td>
<td>36 in (3 ft)</td>
<td>0.91 m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mile (mi)</td>
<td>5,280 ft</td>
<td>1.61 km</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100 mi</td>
<td>160 km</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.39 in</td>
<td>1 cm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.28 ft</td>
<td>1 m</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.62 mi</td>
<td>1 km</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 mi</td>
<td>8 km</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Volume

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit</th>
<th>Equivalent</th>
<th>Metric</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>teaspoon (tsp)</td>
<td>5 mL</td>
<td>0.05 mL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tablespoon (tbs)</td>
<td>15 mL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ounce (oz)</td>
<td>29.57 mL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cup (c)</td>
<td>8 oz</td>
<td>0.237 L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pint (pt)</td>
<td>0.55 L</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quart (qt)</td>
<td>1.101 L</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gallon (gal)</td>
<td>3.785 L</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.34 oz</td>
<td>10 mL</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.06 qt</td>
<td>1 L</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.26 gal</td>
<td>1 L</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SALES TAX
You should also be aware that state and local sales taxes—ranging up to 9 percent of the price, depending on the area—are added to the marked price of many items at the time of purchase. Thus, a $10 item with a 9 percent sales tax will actually cost $10.90.

U.S. CURRENCY
The American Monetary system follows the decimal system. The basic unit of the U.S. monetary system is the dollar, which can be divided into 100 cents. The “$” is the dollar symbol and a “¢” or “.” may appear to denote cents. Bills in denominations of $1, $5, $10 and $20 are the most widely used. There are also $50 and $100 bills. Please note that all bills are the same size.

Coins may be used for self-service machines available in many public building to purchase soft drinks, coffee, or candy. Some forms of public transportation such as buses also allow you to use coins. You may also need coins to use public telephones, parking meters, and washing and drying machines in some dormitories or apartment buildings. You should note that most machines do not accept pennies (1 cent coins).

Samples of U.S. Currency:

1 cent (penny) 5 cents (nickel) 10 cents (dime) 25 cents (quarter) One Dollar

(Photos courtesy of U.S. Mint and Bureau of Printing and Engraving)

TIPPING FOR SERVICE
There are a number of circumstances in the United States when tipping is expected and, in fact, where tips make up a substantial portion of the wage of the person involved. Although tipping should be based on the quality of the service rendered, most people tip as follows:
• to porters at airports and train or bus stations, $1 per piece of luggage
  (unless a set fee is posted in the terminal);
• to bellboys who show you to your room and carry your luggage in hotels,
  a minimum of $1;
• to waiters or waitresses in restaurants, 15–20 percent of the bill
  (for large groups,
  a service charge may already be included in the bill);
• to taxi drivers, 10–15 percent of the fare;
• to barbers or hairdressers, 10–20 percent of the bill.

Unless they perform some unusual service for you, you need not tip hotel clerks, doormen, or chambermaids, nor is it customary to tip gas station attendants, theater ushers, bus drivers, or airline personnel. If you do not wish the services of a porter or bellboy, you can simply indicate your preference to handle your luggage yourself. Under no circumstances should you offer a tip to public officials, including police officers; this may be looked upon as an attempt to bribe the official and could have serious consequences.

**TELEPHONES**

The telephone system in the United States is composed of many privately owned but cooperating companies. The system is effective, and a good deal of business is conducted over the telephone. One can reserve hotel rooms, make travel reservations, buy theater tickets, and shop for any item one might want without leaving home.

Telephone numbers in the U.S. contain 10 digits: a 3-digit area code, a 3-digit number for the local exchange (occasionally 2 letters and 1 digit), and a 4-digit number for the individual subscriber. Under the system, the United States is divided into many small regions or areas, each reached by an area code that must be dialed whenever you are calling outside your local area. Usually when you call a local number, only the exchange and individual subscriber number must be dialed. For example, the IIE number is

1-212 984-5400.

*Area code Exchange Subscriber*

In some large metropolitan areas that span more than one area code, it may be necessary to dial the area code, as well, even if it is within the same area code.

In most locations it is necessary to dial “1” before the area code if calling outside your local area. Be careful not to confuse the letter “1” with the numeral “1” or the letter “O” with the numeral “0” (zero).
When calling outside your local area, or “long distance,” it is least expensive if you dial direct at night without using an operator. Calls from hotels often include a substantial service charge. All numbers in the United States can be dialed directly (i.e., without operator assistance), and overseas calls can also be dialed from many local exchanges. To ask an operator for assistance, dial “0.” He or she will be able to give you the area/international code for the city/country you wish to call and place “collect” calls (which are billed to the person called) and “person-to-person” calls (which incur a charge only if the person you wish to speak to is present, even if the phone is answered). It is also useful to remember that you can save about 35 percent of the cost if you dial domestic long-distance calls after 5 p.m. and 60 percent if you call between 11 p.m. and 8 a.m. on weekdays, all day on Saturday, and before 5 p.m. on Sundays or holidays. (This may vary, however, according to the long-distance provider you choose.) Some businesses in the United States have “800” or “888” as an area code; such numbers can be dialed (preceded by “1”) without charge to the caller from anywhere in the United States. You can obtain a local number by calling “Information” (dial “411”) and a long-distance number by dialing the area code followed by 555-1212. The services usually carry a small charge.

Telephone calls to numbers with “900” area codes cost more than normal long-distance calls—sometimes as much as $50 for a 1-minute call! By dialing 900 numbers, you can order products, get financial tips, talk with a willing stranger, and much more. Although some legitimate services are provided through 900 numbers, it is vital to be aware that ALL of them cost money. Some companies are starting to send bills for calls placed to 800 numbers, as well.

In case of emergency, call the operator (dial “0”), and ask for the police, fire department, or an ambulance. In many cities, there is a special number (usually “911”) to use in the event of an emergency. It can be dialed from a pay phone without the use of coins.

Public coin-operated telephones can be found on the street and in railroad and bus stations, airports, hotels, restaurants, drugstores, and other public buildings. Prepaid telephone debit cards are available almost everywhere in the United States. With them, you may place local, long-distance, and international calls from any location without the necessity of coins for a pay phone or a long-distance account with a U.S. telephone company. You may purchase these cards in $5 and $10 increments at convenience stores, supermarkets, drug stores and post offices or through your local telephone company. NOTE: These debit cards often offer the most economical rates for calling overseas and you avoid the various taxes and charges that will accompany your home phone calling plans.

To have a telephone installed in your home, dial the telephone company’s business office (see a telephone directory). Ordinarily, service can be provided within a week. The company charges for initial installation of the line and a monthly fee for local service and rental of equipment (or you may purchase your own phone), with extra charges for long-
distance calls. A deposit of approximately $50 will usually be required of new subscribers. Although there will be only one company providing local telephone service in a given area, you will be given information and asked to make a selection on a number of competing long-distance companies and their individual service options. If you have a long-distance account with a U.S. telephone company and plan to place international long-distance calls frequently, you may wish to enroll in your company’s international calling plan. These plans offer special discounts for international calls and can save you a lot of money.

Telephone Answering Machines and Voice Mail

Telephone answering machines or voice mail are in frequent use in many U.S. homes and offices. Although this may seem impersonal at first, you will soon become accustomed to this practice and learn to leave comprehensive messages.

Cellular/Mobile Telephones

Cell Phones are very popular and you can find very competitive prices or package deals. There are also many styles of telephones at different prices that offer a variety of features beyond cell phone use. Unlike in other countries, where prepaid phone cards are popular, in the U.S. you will need to purchase a service plan including pre-paid or pay as you go plans. Some systems in the U.S. require a 2-year service agreement to get the best price; however, terminating the contract early carries a high penalty that may actually make the contract more expensive. Service Agreements carry a number of minutes of services you agree to purchase per month. If you go over your agreed allotment you will be charged by the minute at a much higher rate. Be sure to purchase the amount of minutes that will serve your usage needs. You will need to read the contract carefully and sign only for services that you will need.

Internet Access

You may choose to have a computer at home and will need to have access to the internet. Most telephone companies offer some form of DSL (Digital Subscriber Line) access for an increased price to your telephone bill. You may also purchase a high speed Internet connection through your television cable company. If high speed internet connections are beyond your price range, most internet service providers (ISPs) still offer traditional dial-up connections for lower prices. There is a large variety of internet providers available and you should shop around first before deciding.

Fax and Electronic Mail

Americans frequently communicate with others by facsimile (fax) machine or electronic mail (e-mail). It is becoming increasingly popular to seek out information and communi-
cate with others by computer. E-mail allows you to correspond with anyone in the world with an Internet account. The World Wide Web, newsgroups, and online forums allow you to obtain news and specialized information. Ask your host institution about acquiring and using an Internet account. Sending information by fax is a common way to conduct business because it is quick and costs the same as a telephone call. Fax machines are available in most college and university departments. Some stores also provide fax services for a modest fee.

**MEDIA IN THE U.S. (NEWSPAPERS, RADIO, TELEVISION, WEB)**

The press in the United States is independent and free of governmental control. The editorial policy of each TV or radio station or newspaper is determined by its owners. Most are supported financially by advertisers, although there are “public” TV and radio stations that broadcast no commercials and are supported by contributions from individuals, foundations, and corporations. Public TV usually features more educational and cultural programs than the commercial stations.

Local newspapers, daily and weekly, abound, but it is also possible to purchase or subscribe to daily papers of regional or national stature. Among the latter, The New York Times is best known for general news coverage; The Wall Street Journal, for financial and business news.

There are four nationwide TV/radio networks (NBC, CBS, ABC, and Fox), each with affiliated local stations that carry almost all the networks’ programs. These are in addition to independent local commercial and public stations. In most areas, therefore, one can choose from among 6 to 10 stations. There is no fee for TV or radio usage unless one subscribes to a “cable service,” which offers such special programming as recent movies and CNN and requires the installation of special equipment. CNN and the public access stations in your area often broadcast news in a variety of foreign languages. They may provide more information about current events in your home country than is available in the local newspapers.

Most national and local newspapers, radio and TV stations operate Websites which feature news, weather, sports, blogs, etc.

**TRANSPORTATION**

**Local Public Transportation**

Without question, the private automobile is the most widely used form of transportation in the United States. There is one car on the road for every two people. Americans jump into their cars for errands even a few blocks from home and view them as an important source of recreation. Because of the prevalence of automobiles, public transportation is less com-
mon in the United States than in many other parts of the world; in some rural areas of the United States, it is virtually nonexistent. Unless you can afford to purchase an automobile (see page 30), it is important to investigate the availability of transportation before you decide where to live.

Cities are served by both public and private bus systems; some larger cities have subways as well. Buses frequently require exact change. Weekly or monthly passes purchased in advance are used in many cities for access to both buses and subways. It is convenient to purchase a supply to avoid waiting in line each time you travel. There is less need for a private car in these areas unless you intend to travel outside the city with some frequency. Indeed, they can often be more trouble then they are worth, given the scarcity of parking spaces in urban environments.

**Long-Distance Travel (Planes, Trains, Buses)**

The United States is covered with a network of air routes, and service is frequent to most destinations. Because distances are great, and because of the value placed on time, Americans frequently choose air travel, despite its relatively high cost. You can easily obtain information on flights and costs by telephone or on the Internet and even reserve a seat that can be paid for when you arrive at the airport to board your flight. Most planes have both first-class and coach- or economy-seating areas. Special low-cost fares, known as “super savers,” are sometimes offered, although they may carry some restrictions as to the length of stay and the days of travel. The lowest fares usually must be purchased at least 7 to 21 days in advance and require that you stay over a Saturday night. Bus transportation from the airport to the city center is usually available and less expensive than taxis.

Many suburban areas are served by commuter rail lines that reach 50 to 60 miles outside major cities. The use of trains for more extensive trips had declined until a decade or so ago, but the railroad is making a comeback to some extent. The passenger service is provided by AMTRAK, which runs trains across the country but to a limited number of cities. A few of the trains travel through particularly impressive scenery and are popular with tourists. Most trains offer two classes of service, first class and coach, and some provide sleeping accommodations. AMTRAK also offers a Eurail-style pass especially for international travelers. A 15- or 30-day USA Rail Pass is available for regional or nationwide travel. This pass is only available for non-U.S. and non-Canadian citizens. Rates are higher for summertime travel. USA Rail Passes may be purchased at any AMTRAK station. Be sure to bring your passport with you when you reserve the tickets. The AMTRAK telephone number is 1-800-872-7245 and their web address is http://www.amtrak.com.

The least expensive mode of transportation is the bus, and those that provide long-distance service can be remarkably comfortable—with reclining seats, air conditioning, and rest rooms. Greyhound is the largest bus passenger service provider in the U.S (www.greyhound.com.).
Airline, train, and bus companies sell passes that permit extensive travel within a given time period well below the usual cost and permit those with limited funds to see a good deal of the country. The companies themselves (see your local telephone directory or check the Internet) or travel agents can tell you current prices and conditions, but some of these passes must be purchased before you leave home.

If you find yourself in an airport with any kind of problem, you should seek a representative of the Travelers’ Aid Society. This organization has desks in airports (and some railroad stations and bus terminals) across the country, operated by staff ready to assist with emergencies of all kinds, including illness, lost tickets, lack of funds, and language problems.

**RELIGION**

Freedom of religion is guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States, which also mandates a separation of church and state. The practice of religion is considered a private matter and a person’s religious preference may not be asked by employers, schools, clubs, etc.

The United States is a country that accommodates a large number of different religions and belief systems. It is often cited as the most openly religious country among the industrialized nations, with less than 10% of Americans selecting “None” as their religion in the 2000 U.S. population census. A large majority of Americans identify themselves as Christian (55% Protestant, 28% Catholic). Over 6 million Americans (2.3% of the population) identify themselves as Jewish, with the largest populations residing in New York, California and Florida. The U.S. is also home to a growing number of Muslims (2% of the population) both due to the growing Arab and African immigrant populations (which grew 38% in the 1990s) and a growing number of converts to Islam, especially in the African American community. Some Muslim organizations put the number of converts to Islam as high 135,000 per year.

One of the most important ongoing debates for Americans is the role of religion in public life. While the separation of church and state is a cornerstone of U.S. government structure, it has been an issue for discussion among Americans as far back as the late 18th century. The debate continues today and is prominent both in national and local politics. Some of the more controversial issues involving religion today include prayer in public schools and the role of public funding in religious social services (e.g. homeless shelters, drug rehabilitation centers). As American religious diversity grows, this debate promises to become even more interesting and should continue to play an important role in American discourse.

In large cities, even relatively obscure branches of the main religions have established their own churches, mosques, synagogues, or temples. A list of such groups can be found in
the yellow pages of your local telephone directory, and many of these organizations also place notices in weekend newspapers announcing the hours of religious services. You will always be welcome to attend the services without invitation, and you may also wish to take part in the social activities many such groups sponsor.

LEISURE

Whatever your leisure interests, you will find a great many pursuits to choose from. Those who prefer the spectator’s role will find that university towns abound in concerts, plays, sporting events, ethnic festivals, and, of course, movies, the favored entertainment of young Americans. There are also small museums all over the country, with a number of distinguished institutions in the major cities that house outstanding collections of fine and applied art or objects of historical or scientific interest. Local newspapers (also the campus paper) regularly list upcoming events. City hotels distribute free booklets to visitors listing current cultural events as well as nearby points of interest with their hours of operation.

If you prefer a more active role, you will find it easy to join groups that make music, produce plays, or organize baseball, soccer, or basketball games. There are golf courses, tennis courts, swimming pools, skating rinks, and bowling alleys open to the public for a modest fee. Again, colleagues and neighbors will often be glad to point you in the right direction.

SAFETY

Many visitors to the United States are concerned about public order and safety, and it is true that certain precautions should be taken, especially in urban areas. It is best to ask a colleague for advice about which areas are safe if you will be residing in a large city, but a few general rules should be observed at all times: Do not leave a room, house, or car with doors or windows unlocked; do not carry valuables or large sums of cash with you; do not frequent parks or deserted public places after dark; do not attempt to arm yourself since any weapon you carry can be used against you; do not resist a robber or mugger; do not pick up hitchhikers; do not permit your pre-teenage children outside the house alone after dark; avoid using bank automatic teller machines (ATMs) alone after dark. Be aware that many university security departments offer escort services for students and faculty during the evening hours.

These suggestions are not made to frighten you, for it is very unlikely that you will experience any problems. You can be most certain of avoiding difficulties, however, if you follow these simple rules of safety.
Glossary

Glossary of Terms Commonly Used on Campus

A.A.: Associate of Arts degree, awarded upon completion of a two-year, liberal arts program, generally with emphasis on the humanities or social sciences.

A.A.S.: Associate of Applied Science degree, awarded upon completion of a two-year program, generally in a commercial or technical field of study.

A.B.D.: “All but Degree” or “All but Dissertation,” an informal title for someone who has completed all Ph.D. requirements except the dissertation.

Academic: A member of the faculty at a university-level institution. Often used as an adjective to describe something related to higher education.

Academic Year: Period of instruction from the beginning of the school year in September to the end in May; usually divided into terms; maybe two semesters, three quarters or three trimesters.

Accreditation: Education in the United States is not controlled by a national ministry. An educational institution as a whole or one of its academic programs is certified as meeting the standards set by a particular association. Colleges and universities may be accredited by six regional and/or 40 professional accrediting bodies. Examples: Middle States Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools, American Medical Association.

Adjunct Faculty: Faculty members who teach part-time for a department without appointments in that department’s regular faculty.

Adviser: A member of the college or university staff who is assigned to assist students with educational planning.

Alumni: People who have attended or graduated from a school, college or university (male: alumnus; female: alumna). Often alum is used as a catch-all term.

A.S.: Associate of Science degree awarded upon completion of a two-year, liberal arts program with emphasis on the natural sciences.

Assignment: Work required by a professor to be completed outside of class and due by a specific date; also called homework.

Assistantship: A position in teaching, administration, or research, usually for graduate students; involves 10 to 20 hours of work per week and part-time graduate study. Audit: To take a class without receiving a grade or any credit.

B.A.: Bachelor of Arts (or baccalaureate) degree, awarded upon completion of a four-year (occasionally five) program of study, generally with emphasis on the humanities or social sciences.

B.S.: Bachelor of Science (or baccalaureate) degree, awarded upon completion of a four-year (occasionally five) program of study, generally with emphasis on the natural or applied sciences.
**Blue Book:** Essay tests are often written in these light-blue exam books which can be bought at campus bookstores.

**Board of Trustees:** The governing body of a university, composed of prominent citizens; occasionally known as the Board of Regents.

**Break:** A period such as the winter holiday or the end of an academic term when university classes stop temporarily.

**Bursar:** Office or person within the university administration to which all fees are paid; also called the Cashier.

**Call Number:** Code on every library book designating its subject matter.

**Campus:** The college/university grounds, usually characterized by park-like green spaces.

**Card Catalogue:** Traditionally, a collection of index cards in the library listing books by author, title and subject. Access to collections in most major libraries is now through computerized databases.

**Carrel:** A small, enclosed desk in the library reserved by individuals doing research.

**Cashier:** Same as Bursar.

**Catalogue:** The publication issued annually or biannually that gives information about a given school and lists the courses offered; sometimes called the “Register” or “Bulletin.”

**Certificate:** A form of recognition for successfully completing a specified program of study, generally one or two years in length.

**Chairperson:** A professor who administers an academic department; also referred to as the Department Head.

**Chancellor:** Chief executive officer of an institution of higher education; also called the President.

**Class:** Referring to the year of study (1st year—freshman, second year—sophomore, third year—junior, fourth year—senior); also refers to a group of people who meet with a professor on a scheduled basis.

**College:** Institution that offers undergraduate, bachelor’s degree programs in liberal arts and sciences as well as first professional degrees; may be an independent college or part of a university; also a generic term referring to all education at the postsecondary level.

**Commencement:** The graduation ceremony; the event at which degrees are awarded.

**Community College:** Generally a public, two-year institution of higher learning that offers instruction to meet the needs of the local community.

**Comprehensive Examination:** A broad examination covering material in an entire field of study; typically, the examination at the end of a Master’s degree program.

**Conditional Admission:** Admission granted to students who do not meet all admission criteria; students may be placed on probation for a specific period of time until they demonstrate the ability to do acceptable work.
**Consortium:** When there are several colleges and universities within close proximity to one another, they often join in a consortium to share library resources and often courses and other cultural and educational opportunities with one another’s students.

**Continuing Education:** An extension of study at the higher education level for post-high school or college students, usually those beyond traditional university age.

**Co-op:** A store originally organized and operated by students with the cooperation and approval of the school to sell books, school supplies, computers, clothing and other items useful to students. On many campuses, co-ops have developed into small department stores. Sometimes there are also food co-ops, which are student-operated supermarkets.

**Cooperative Education:** Substantial practical work experience related to the student’s major field. It can be an educational plan that requires the student to alternate periods of full-time study with periods of full-time work, usually related to the major field.

**Core Curriculum:** A group of courses in varied subject areas, designated by a college as part of the requirements for a specified degree; same as Required Course.

**Course:** Usually refers to a specific class, e.g., Quantitative Chemistry I.

**Course Load:** The number of credit hours a student carries in one term.

**Course Number:** The number given to identify a course, e.g., (Chem. 236) Chemistry I.
Numbers 100–399 usually refer to undergraduate courses, and numbers above 400 indicate graduate courses.

**Credit:** The quantitative measurement assigned to a course; the recognition given for successful completion of course work; usually defined by the number of hours spent in class per week; one credit hour is usually assigned for 50 minutes of class per week over a period of a semester, quarter, or trimester.

**Dean:** Senior academic officer of a college. A university may have several colleges, each headed by a dean.

**Dean’s List:** List of undergraduate students who have earned above a certain grade point average for a given term.

**Department:** The faculty group, together with its supporting administrative personnel, that provides instruction in a given subject area.

**Discipline:** A field of study, e.g., the discipline of chemistry.

**Discussion Group:** A group that meets with a professor or assistant to discuss lectures presented by the professor.

**Dissertation:** A formal, book-length monograph presenting the results of original study and research that is submitted to fulfill the requirements for a doctoral degree.

**Distance Learning:** Education in which students take academic courses by accessing information and communicating with the instructor, sometimes asynchronously, over a computer network.

**Distribution Requirement:** Predetermined number of courses in specific subject areas required of students for completion of a degree program.
**Dormitory (Dorm):** Living facilities that are operated by the school or privately, including bedrooms, toilet, and bathroom; often no cooking is allowed. Also called a Residence Hall.

**Drop or Add:** To withdraw from a course or add a course before a specified date.

**Drop-Out:** To withdraw from all courses; a person who has withdrawn from all study is a “dropout.”

**Endowed Chair or Professorship:** A specially funded and named faculty position for a distinguished professor who is said to hold the “Chair.”

**Elective:** Refers to a course that may be applied toward a degree but is not specifically required.

**English as a Second Language (ESL):** English language training for persons whose first language is not English.

**Evening College (or Night School):** A division of a college, designed largely for adults, to offer college studies on a part-time basis.

**Extracurricular Activities:** Activities that are a part of student life, but not part of regular classroom study, such as athletics, the drama club, or the student newspaper.

**Faculty:** Teaching staff of a college or university. Normally used to refer to a person or people rather than an organizational unit within a university.

**Fee:** A payment charged for special services, such as late registration fee, graduation fee or application fee.

**Fellowship:** An award of money to a student, usually for graduate study; provides for tuition and living expenses for full-time study.

**Final:** Terminal examination in a course.

**Financial Aid:** Scholarships, loans, grants-in-aid and other financial assistance for students to meet educational costs.

**Foreign Student Adviser:** Chief liaison officer between the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), university, community, and the U.S. government for foreign students; also counselor to foreign students with respect to personal and academic problems. Also called an International Student Adviser.

**Fraternity:** See Greek Organization.

**Freshman:** A first-year student at a high school, college or university.

**Full-time Student:** A student who is carrying a normal load of courses. Undergraduate students must take at least 12 credit hours per term and graduate students 9 credit hours at most colleges and universities to be considered full-time.

**General Education:** Courses covering broad areas of the liberal arts.

**Grade:** The evaluation of a student’s academic work.

**Grading “On the Curve”:** A grading system under which students are measured relative to one another’s performance rather than by absolute standards.
Grading System: Schools, colleges, and universities in the United States commonly use letter grades to indicate the quality of a student’s academic performance: A (excellent), B (good), C (average), D (below average), and F (failing). See the Assessment Section of this publication for further explanation.

G.P.A. (Grade Point Average): a system used by many colleges for evaluating the overall scholastic performance of students. It is found by first determining the number of grade points a student has earned in each course completed and then by dividing the sum of all grade points by the total number of course points or hours carried. See the Assessment Section of this publication for further explanation.

Graduate: Description of a post-undergraduate program leading to a master’s or doctoral degree; also describes a student in such a program (“graduate student”) as well as a person who has satisfactorily completed any educational program (“graduate”).

Graduate Program: A post-undergraduate program leading to a master’s or doctoral degree.

Greek Organization: Also, Greek Life. A social organization of men (fraternity) or women (sorority) who often live together in large house on or near the campus. Though they are not affiliated with Greece, they are often called “Greeks” on campus due to their Greek-letter names, such as the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity or the Delta Gamma sorority.

Honor Fraternity: Organization honoring students who have achieved distinction in academic areas or service.

Incomplete Grade: A grade given (usually “I”) when there is a reasonable delay for the completion of work for a particular course. Another grade is recorded when the work is completed.

Independent Study: A method of receiving credit for study or research independent of any specific course. Such study is often part of an honors program in the student’s major and is supervised by a specified professor to whom the student is accountable.

International Student Adviser: Same as Foreign Student Adviser.

Internship: Supervised practical training that a student or recent graduate may take, often for a summer, semester or year to gain experience. May or may not be paid or for university credit.

Junior: A third-year student at a high school, college, or university.

Junior College: A two-year institution of higher education offering liberal arts, sciences, technical and vocational training; may be under either public or private control; awards an A.A. or A.S. degree after two years or a certificate after a shorter course of study.

Leave of Absence: Approved leave taken by a student in good standing who plans to continue his or her studies.

Lecture: A prepared talk about a specific topic.

Liberal Arts College: A college that emphasizes a program of liberal arts or general undergraduate studies.

Lower Division: The freshman and sophomore levels, the first and second years of an undergraduate program of study.
M.A./M.S.: Master of Arts/Master of Science degree, awarded upon completion of a one-to two-year program of graduate study.

Major Field of Study (Major): A student’s primary field of study.

Make-up Exam: A late examination for students who missed the test on the assigned date.

Matriculated: Accepted for study in a particular degree program by a college or university.

Mid-Term: Examination given in the middle of an academic term.

Minor Field of Study (Minor): A student’s secondary field of study.

Multiple-Choice Exam: Examination in which questions are given followed by two or more answers from which the correct answer is selected.

Nonmatriculated: Refers to a student at a college or university who is not enrolled as a candidate for a degree; also called a Non-degree or Special Student.

Open Admission: College or university admissions policy of admitting high school graduates and other adults generally without regard to conventional academic qualifications, such as high school subjects, grades and test scores. Virtually all applicants are accepted.

Open-Book Exam: Examination in which the student is permitted to use the textbook(s) during the test.

Oral Exam: Examination in which the professor asks the student questions that are answered by speaking rather than by writing.

Part-Time Student: A student who carries less than a full-time course load.

Pass-Fail Grading System: The practice at some colleges of rating students’ quality of performance in their courses as either passing or failing instead of giving grades to indicate various levels of achievement.

Ph.D.: Doctor of Philosophy; highest academic degree in U.S. education; diploma states Doctor of Philosophy in (subject); generally research-oriented.

Point: Used interchangeably with Credit and Unit; also refers to the grading system (4 points=A, 3 points=B, 2 points=C, 1 point=D, 0 points=F).

Postdoctoral Fellow: A person recently awarded a Ph.D. appointment to assist the university in its research and teaching functions.

Preliminary Exam: A written or oral examination given to a Ph.D. candidate to determine readiness for the last stages of the doctoral program.

Prerequisite: Prior coursework required for admission to a class, e.g., introductory accounting coursework required for admission to an advanced accounting course.

President: Same as Chancellor.

Probation: Status resulting from unsatisfactory academic work; a warning that the student must improve academic performance or be dismissed after a specific period of time.

Proctor: A person who supervises examinations; also used as a verb.
**Professor:** The title for all university faculty members, who are ranked as assistant, associate or (full) professors.

**Professor Emeritus:** An academic title generally awarded to retired faculty.

**Professional School:** Institutions that specialize in the study of business, medicine, dentistry, law, engineering, music, art or theology; offer two to seven years of training; may be independent or part of university.

**Provost:** The chief academic officer of the university, who supervises academic policies and budgets.

**Qualifying Examination:** An examination that tests students’ qualifications for doctoral work.

**Quarter:** Usually 12 weeks of classes, including the final examination period; the summer quarter is sometimes subdivided into shorter periods of study.

**Quiz:** A short test that may or may not be announced ahead of time (called a “Pop Quiz” if unannounced).

**Reading List:** A list of books and articles prepared by each professor for a specific course. Required and suggested texts are usually indicated as such. This list is designed to give the student an overview of the particular course.

**Reference Room:** Room in the library with reference books, such as dictionaries and encyclopedias.

**Register:** Same as Catalogue.

**Registrar:** Official recorder of students’ academic information, such as courses taken and grades received.

**Registration:** Procedure of officially enrolling in classes at the beginning of each term.

**Remedial Course:** A noncredit course to help students with weak backgrounds in particular areas prepare themselves for credit courses in those areas.

**Required Course:** A specific course chosen for students to study in order to obtain a degree.

**Research Assistant (R.A.):** Usually an advanced graduate student who assists a professor on a research project. R.A.s may receive payment for their services in addition to a waiver of tuition charges.

**Research Paper:** A written report that includes research findings and the development of the student’s ideas.

**Reserve:** When a book is “on reserve,” it means that the book cannot be removed from the library. This is done when the library has a limited number of copies of a book that is required reading for a particular course.

**Residence Hall:** Same as Dormitory.

**Sabbatical:** A leave of absence granted to a faculty member, usually at the end of six years of teaching at one university.
Scholarship: Any grant, fellowship or remission of tuition and fees to a student that will enable him to further his education.

Section: One time period of a course that is offered at several times in the same term.

Semester: 15 to 18 weeks of classes, including the final examination period; a typical semester calendar includes two semesters (September-December and January-May) and a summer session (June-August).

Seminar: A course of study in which the class meets and decides what and how they would like to pursue their study; the class decides who will do what research; ideas and research are presented by the class members, and the professor serves as a moderator.

Senior: A fourth-year student at a high school, college or university.

Sophomore: A second-year student at a high school, college or university.

Sorority: See Greek Organization.

Stipend: The amount of money given per year to a student or scholar as a scholarship or fellowship.

Student Union: A building on campus used for social and recreational activities.

Summer School: Formal, but reduced, course offerings during the long academic vacation.

Syllabus: An outline of topics to be covered in an academic course.

Take-Home Exam: Examination that may be written at home.

Teaching Assistant (T.A.): Usually an advanced graduate student who assists a professor teaching large undergraduate classes. T.A.s may receive payment for their services in addition to a waiver of tuition charges.

Technical Institute: Institution offering terminal training in applied sciences and technical subjects of two to three years duration (no further degree training).

Tenure: The status of a permanent member of the faculty, awarded on the basis of scholarship, teaching or service.

Term: A general word for a division of the academic year; may be a Semester, Quarter or Trimester.

Term Paper: A formal paper required as a part of coursework and often (at graduate level) the major determinant of the student’s grade.

Textbook: A book containing a general or specific presentation of the principles of a subject.

Theme: A brief composition or essay on a particular topic.

Thesis: A formal paper presenting the results of study and research that is submitted to fulfill requirements for an advanced degree; usually refers to as the Master’s thesis.

Transcript: Official copy of a student’s academic record at a particular academic institution, including dates attended, courses taken, grades, grade point average, degree(s) earned and academic honors.
Transfer: To withdraw from one institution or program and enroll in another. Often times some credit for courses taken at one institution can be transferred to another institution.

Trimester: Usually 15 weeks, including the final examination period; there are three trimesters (September–September) per calendar year, with students generally attending class during two of the three.

Tuition: The fee paid by students for their instruction.

Undergraduate: Description of a college or university program leading to a bachelor’s degree; also a student in the first four years of college or university study.

University: An institution composed of colleges or schools of liberal arts, sciences and technology, as well as professional and graduate schools; offers bachelor’s degree programs and technical and professional graduate training.

Upper Division: The junior and senior levels—or the third, fourth and fifth years—of an undergraduate program of studies.

Withdrawal: Release of a student from enrollment—either from a particular course or from the university in general—without the intention to return.

Work Study: A need-based federal financial aid program whereby students are employed—usually on campus—and the U.S. government subsidizes the pay given.

Source: This glossary has been reprinted and adapted, with permission, from Pre-departure Orientation Handbook; Japan-United States Educational Commission, 1983.