



# INTERNATIONAL PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK

Your guide to the campus and community

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# Welcome to UNO!

All of us are happy you have chosen the University of Nebraska at Omaha. We hope you will enjoy your educational experience at UNO and take advantage of the many services and facilities offered on the UNO campus. The International Studies & Programs office has many dedicated professionals to help make your experience enjoyable and productive. Please let us know when you need our assistance.

## **INTERNATIONAL STUDIES & PROGRAMS**

Arts & Sciences Hall, Room 241

Office: 402.554.2293

Fax: 402.554.2949

[world.unomaha.edu](http://world.unomaha.edu)

### **Leadership**

Dr. Patrick McNamara, Interim Director

Bruce Grogan, Interim Director

### **International Admissions**

Lee Westphal, Assistant Director

Jessica Hohman, Sr. Admissions Associate

Amanda Abbott, Admissions Associate

Gabriela Duarte, Communications Assistant

### **International Student Advising**

Lori Arias, Assistant Director

Jennifer Stahl, Advisor

Connor Willingham, Advisor

### **ILUNO Intensive English**

Sarah Osborn, Interim Assistant Director

### **International Professional Development**

Sarah Osborn, Manager

Heather Gragg, Office Assistant

### **Education Abroad**

Emily Hassenstab, Manager

Emily Krueger, Advisor

Natalie Floreani, Program Assistant

### **Office Management And Service**

Elizabeth Schwartz, Office Manager

Kathleen Kline, Clerical Assistant

Brenda Peters, Project Assistant

### **Intensive English Instructors**

Jessica Anderson

Kari D'Angelo

Chris Hanna

Kathy Kroeger

Linda Loftus

Cara Lustgarten

Stephanie Lynam

Deirdre McMurtry

Josh Miller

Stacie Ortmeier

Lesia Perry

Asta Reiff

Lori Splett

Amber Tallent

Anne West-Leclou

### **IPD Instructors**

Sue Aschinger

Eileen Boswell

Stephen Houston

Amber Tallent

# Campus Services

## CAMPUSWIDE ADMINISTRATION SERVICES

Administrative services for all students are located in the Eppley Administration Building (EAB).

### Campus Security

Located in Room 100, [Campus Security](#) is available 24 hours per day. The Campus Security Office's regular, non-emergency phone number is 402.554.2648. Emergency assistance is available at 402.554.2911.

Campus Security provides crime prevention, first aid assistance, campus safety programs, and protection of life and property. If you lose something on campus, you should report it to Campus Security.

### Student Safety and UNO Emergency Website

UNO's Division of Student Affairs works closely with campus and community partners to provide resources to assist with student safety. Please see the website for more information: <http://www.unomaha.edu/student-life/student-safety/>. Be sure to sign up for emergency alerts to receive text messages on your mobile device. The link to sign up for emergency alerts and find useful resources for various types of emergencies is [emergency.unomaha.edu](http://emergency.unomaha.edu).

### Cashiering/Student Accounts

Located in EAB Room 109, is [Cashiering/Student Accounts](#) . Visit their website for information on UNO's billing policy (due date for tuition and fees), tuition and fees, and the refund policy. The longer that you wait to withdraw from a class, the less tuition and fees you will get back as a refund. Unpaid tuition and fees will prevent you from registering for classes and accessing other university services. You can also log into [Mavlink](#) to see the amount due.

UNO accepts cash, checks, and credit card payments for tuition and fees. You can mail your check for tuition and fees to cashiering, make your payment in person at the counter, or make a credit card payment via the web. Billing and payment deadlines vary for summer sessions. At Cashiering Services you may also cash personal checks for up to \$25 with a current UNO ID and buy bus tickets.

### Employment

The UNO Academic & Career Development Center located in EAB 115 creates and enhances partnerships with employers, the community and alumni to assist students with career development and educational experiences needed to be successful in the future. The center holds fall and spring career fairs. For more information, please visit the UNO Career website: [www.unomaha.edu/careercenter](http://www.unomaha.edu/careercenter).

For information about on-campus work, contact the Office of Human Resources via their webpage at [www.unomaha.edu/humanresources/](http://www.unomaha.edu/humanresources/).

### Information Services

Located in EAB Room 104, IS provides a centralized location for help with campus accounts, software questions, trouble with memory devices, hardware repair, equipment checkout, virus prevention software, and more. IS also maintains the open-access computer user rooms located around campus. They rent laptops to students, staff, and faculty. Check the IS website for hours of operation, holiday hours, and available software

and hardware. Please be prepared to show your student ID in the labs. Contact the Information Services help desk via e-mail at [unohelpdesk@unomaha.edu](mailto:unohelpdesk@unomaha.edu) or the website: [its.unomaha.edu](http://its.unomaha.edu).

## **Parking Services**

[Parking Services](#) is located in EAB and issues parking permits and provides traffic control. Visit their website to learn about parking permit options, view parking maps, and learn about the shuttle service. Parking services, in conjunction with Campus Security, helps with jump-starting stalled vehicles, opening vehicles when the owner locks the keys inside, changing flat tires when the owner is physically unable to do so, and provides escort on campus. Vehicle assist can only be done for vehicles on campus.

## **Postal Services**

Located in EAB Room 106, [Mail Services](#) can mail letters, bills, magazines, and packages both within the United States and internationally. You can also purchase U.S. first class stamps, post cards, and plain envelopes. As a student, you are also eligible to rent your own personal post office box at Mail Services.

## **Records and Registration**

Please visit the [UNO Records and Registration](#) website when you want to view the academic calendar or UNO Course Catalogs, learn how to request official transcripts, and read information about UNO's graduation procedures and time lines.

## **Service Learning Academy**

The [Service Learning Academy](#) provides various ways for students and staff to work together to see the community. Many international students have enjoyed serving during fall and spring breaks. For other volunteer opportunities outside of UNO, see the following: [Volunteer Solutions](#), [Volunteer Match](#), [United Way of the Midlands](#), and [Habitat for Humanity of Omaha](#).

## **Tutoring Services**

Be sure to take advantage of the services on campus including these: [Writing Center](#), [Speech Center](#), [Math Science Learning Center](#) (MSLC).

## **COMPUTER LABS**

Several computer labs around campus provide quiet places to study and conduct research online. You will need your MavCard in order to print documents in these labs. Be sure your card has money on it.

Arts & Sciences Hall	ASH 300	402.554.2138
Durham Science Center	DSC 104	402.554.2528
Health, Physical Education & Recreation	HPER 211	402.554.2876
Milo Bail Student Center	Elmwood Room	402.554.4933
Milo Bail Student Center	Dundee Room	
Peter Kiewit Institute	PKI 158A	402.554.2096
Mammel Hall	MH 213	402.554.3418

## THE CRISS LIBRARY

UNO's state-of-the-art library and media center offers books, music, movies, computer labs, satellite television from around the world through SCOLA, and a quiet place to study. Students find a wealth of printed material and robust research databases, as well as experienced staff to guide their research.

A current MavCard is required to check out library materials. Borrowers are financially responsible for each item charged on the borrower's account until the item is returned. Fines may be added to a student's account for overdue, damaged, or lost items. Items can be reserved or renewed at the circulation desk or online. Checked out items that are requested by another customer may be recalled by the library.

Three photocopy machines (two black-and-white and one color) are located on the first floor of the library in the print center just south of the service desk. Two additional copiers (one black-and-white and one color) are located on the second floor of the library in the print center northeast of the service desk. Use your MavCard to pay for these copies.

Credit can be added to your MavCard account using the machines in the library, Arts & Sciences Hall, Peter Kiewit Institute, or at MavCard Services on the second floor of Milo Bail Student Center. Additionally, you can use MavCard online to add money to your account at [mavcard.unomaha.edu](http://mavcard.unomaha.edu).

Use the library's website and your UNO credentials to access the catalog, online databases, special collections, and general information: [library.unomaha.edu](http://library.unomaha.edu). Contact the library by phone if you have any questions:

Circulation Desk	402.554.3206
Library Hour Hotline	402.554.2361
Reserve/Media	402.554.2861
Reference Desk	402.554.2661
Interlibrary Loan	402.554.3209

## MILO BAIL STUDENT CENTER (MBSC) \*remodeling project Summer 2015. Information subject to change.

The [Milo Bail Student Center](http://milo-bail-student-center.unomaha.edu) is a good place to meet people and to get involved in campus life. The Student Center houses the following offices and student services:

### Bookstore

All of your textbooks and class materials are available at the UNO Bookstore. The bookstore is located on the first floor of the MBSC. Leave your backpacks (not your valuables) on the shelves as you enter. Save your receipts for books that you purchase.

### Chapel

The chapel is open for quiet meditation or prayer for anyone who wishes to enter. Please do not use the chapel as a study hall. The chapel is on the second floor of the MBSC.

### Computer Lab

Labs are located in the MBSC on the first floor. You will need to have your MavCard with you in order to print in the lab.

### Convenience Store

The Convenience Store sells snack foods, drinks, sandwiches, candy, and other small items. You can also purchase international calling cards from the Convenience Store. It is on the first floor of the MBSC.

### **Food Court**

A variety of food and drinks are available in the Food Court. It is located on the second floor of the MBSC.

### **International Student Services (ISS)**

ISS organizes numerous educational, social, and cultural activities throughout the year for international students and Americans. The organization also provides services to help new students as they adjust to American culture. ISS sponsors activities such as picnics, soccer games, and short trips to places of interest in and around Nebraska. Once each year the organization hosts an International Cultural Fair and Banquet for the Omaha community. Contact them at 402.554.2937.

### **Television**

You may join other students in watching television in the lounge on the north side of MBSC.

## **HEALTH, PHYSICAL EDUCATION & RECREATION**

UNO's Health, Physical Education, and Recreation building is often referred to by its initials, [HPER](#), pronounced "hyper." Your MavCard allows you free use of these excellent facilities and more:

50-meter swimming pool	Basketball courts	Treadmills
Handball courts	Badminton courts	Rowing machines
Steam rooms and saunas	Stair machines	Free weights
Squash courts	Multipurpose rooms	Dance studio
Tennis courts	Rock-climbing wall	Indoor track
Racquetball courts	Upper-body ergo meters	

A variety of recreational equipment is also available free or for a small fee. If you want a locker, you must pay a refundable deposit and a small fee per semester. Showers and towels are available free of charge.

### **Outdoor Venture Center**

The Outdoor Venture Center, located in Room 117 of the HPER building, offers many different kinds of outdoor recreation equipment. Canoes, camping equipment, hauling equipment, and much more are available for a nominal rental fee. OVC also plans recreational trips for students such as camping, paddling, and hiking. For more information, call the OVC at 402.554.2258 or check out the website: [www.unomaha.edu/wwwocr/ovc/](http://www.unomaha.edu/wwwocr/ovc/).

### **Sports Clubs**

Sports clubs at UNO include: aquatics, badminton, bowling, fencing, golf, various martial arts, soccer (football), Tae Kwon Do, tennis, ultimate Frisbee, and volleyball among others. Clubs are open to all students, and while some are competitive, others are just for fun.

## **THE BARBARA WEITZ COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CENTER**

A state-of-the-art, unique campus addition in 2014, the Barbara Weitz Community Engagement Center (CEC) is home to more than 20 organizations that are housed in the CEC's partnership spaces. There are numerous meeting rooms for groups of five to just under 225. All have access to state-of-the-art technology and technology assistance during normal campus business hours.

Its mission is to contribute positively and measurably to the community's quality of life by creating, supporting, and expanding mutually beneficial partnerships, engaged scholarship, and academic and student programming that create tomorrow's leaders and agents of change.

<http://www.unomaha.edu/community-engagement-center/>

# UNO Policies and Rules

A full listing of the UNO policies and procedures can be found at the [Office of Academic & Student Affairs](#). These policies are especially important to know and remember:

## Drug-Free Schools and Campuses Act

It is illegal to possess, use, or distribute controlled drugs (such as marijuana, cocaine, or heroin). It is illegal to share any medications a doctor gave to you by prescription.

## Equal Opportunity/Non-Discrimination

All students and staff members (men and women) must be given equal opportunities for education, participation in athletics, and for use of university services. None of these may be denied on the basis of gender, age, religion, race, or country of citizenship. If you believe you have been subjected to discrimination, contact an international student advisor immediately.

## Sexual Harassment

All people have the right to be protected from unwelcome sexual attention. Likewise, all people, regardless of their country of citizenship, can be arrested for these offenses. Unacceptable behavior can include speech based on sex, visual contact based on sex, physical contact, unwelcome sexual advances, and requests for sexual favors. If you feel like rejecting such conduct will affect your grades or the possibility of getting a job, or if it makes it very difficult for you to study or work, the behavior may constitute sexual harassment. If you believe you have been the subject of sexual harassment, or if you have been accused of sexual harassment, contact an international student advisor or contact the campus Title IX Officer at 402.554.3490.

## Privacy of Information

UNO staff members may not give out personal and confidential information about students and other staff members. This can include information such as school transcripts, test scores, medical records, advising or counseling records, addresses, and telephone numbers.

## Alcoholic Beverages

Alcoholic beverages (beer, wine, drinks with liquor) are not allowed on the UNO campus, including the residence halls. Additionally, it is illegal to drink beer, wine, or any other alcoholic beverage in Nebraska if you are under the age of 21. It is illegal to give beer, wine, or other alcohol to people under the age of 21. It is illegal for anyone to drink while driving, and it is illegal to drive any vehicle while drunk. It is illegal to be drunk in public.

## Smoking Policy

**Update:** On 24 February 2015, leaders from UNO's Student Government, Faculty Senate and Staff Advisory Council presented recommendations to the Chancellor's Cabinet to establish UNO as a smoke-free campus and to create an implementation task force to plan and initiate next steps.

The cabinet unanimously agreed to these recommendations and additionally included that the taskforce should explore UNO being tobacco-free as well as smoke-free. However, until the taskforce's recommendations are made, approved, and communicated to campus, there is no change to the current university policy.

Current UNO smoking policy: [https://www.unomaha.edu/policies/docs/Smoking\\_Policy.pdf](https://www.unomaha.edu/policies/docs/Smoking_Policy.pdf)

# Guidelines for F-1 Visa Holders: Degree Seeking Students and Scholars

## Class Requirements

Make sure you meet these requirements in order to avoid complications with your visa status:

- Enroll in and attend 12 UNO credit hours per semester if you are an undergraduate (excluding summer).
- Enroll in and attend 9 UNO graduate credit hours per semester if you are a graduate student (excluding summer).
- Have permission from both your academic advisor and international student advisor before dropping below full-time status. Both must show their approval by signing the [reduced courseload recommendation letter](#).
- Make progress in your studies and pass your classes.

For undergraduate students, valid reasons for less than full-time enrollment include:

- Initial problems – occurring early in your studies – with English, American teaching methods, or reading requirements.
- Having been enrolled in the wrong level of class.
- Graduating in the current semester and needing fewer than 12 credits to graduate.
- Serious medical problems authenticated by a licensed medical doctor or psychiatrist.

For graduate students, these additional reasons may also be valid for less than full-time enrollment:

- Doing a research or teaching fellowship.
- Working on a thesis or dissertation after completing all required coursework.

## Distance Education

U.S. Immigration regulations require that international students take only one distance education class and have it count towards full-time enrollment during the fall and spring semesters. At UNO, any class that is listed as a totally online class is considered a distance education class. For example, an undergraduate student enrolled in 12 credit hours can take only one totally online class and have it count toward their required course load. A graduate student enrolled in 9 credit hours can take only one totally online class and have it count towards their required course load. If in the final semester with one course remaining, the final course cannot be totally online. Sponsored students must follow their sponsor's guidelines regarding online class restrictions.

## Graduate Students Working on a Thesis

International students who are required to take comprehensive exams must plan to take these exams while taking other coursework (excluding summer). Only in exceptional circumstances and with prior approval from both an academic advisor and international student advisor will an international student be permitted to take comps during a semester (excluding summer) in which they are not enrolled for any coursework.

International students should register for a thesis, thesis project, or dissertation along with other coursework, when possible. If the international student has not finished the thesis, thesis project, or dissertation after two semesters (excluding summers), they will need to meet with the thesis advisor and submit a projected date of

completion form for an international student advisor's approval. It is recommended that the international student register for credit each semester in which they are working on a thesis, thesis project, or dissertation.

### **Duration of Status (D/S)**

A nonimmigrant student may be admitted for duration of status. This means that you are authorized to stay in the United States for the entire length of time during which you are enrolled as a full-time student in an educational program and any period of authorized practical training plus sixty days. While in the United States, you must maintain a valid foreign passport unless you are exempt from passport requirements. You may continue from one educational level to another, such as progressing from high school to a bachelor's program, or a bachelor's program to a master's program, simply by invoking the procedures for school transfers.

### **School of Record**

For initial entry to the US, you must report to the school whose form I-20 you used to enter the US. Report by submitting copies of your form I-20 or DS-2019, passport ID page, visa, and I-94 to the IS&P front desk in ASH 241. Submit your US address by updating Mavlink. If you have a form I-20 from more than one school, it is important to have the name of the school you intend to attend specified on your visa by presenting a form I-20 from that school to the consular officer. Failure to report to the specified school will result in the loss of your student status and subject you to deportation. In special circumstances, you may request an immediate transfer out to another school that you have been admitted to and where you will be able to enroll within 30 days of entering the US. Students transferring from one school to the next must report to an international student advisor within 15 days of the start of their program and sign their new transfer form I-20.

### **Re-entry**

A nonimmigrant student may be readmitted after a temporary absence of five months or less from the United States if the student is otherwise admissible. You may be readmitted by presenting a valid foreign passport, a valid visa, and a form I-20 endorsed for re-entry on page 3. All of the information on the form I-20 must be current.

### **Transfer from or to another School**

When transferring from another school in the US to UNO, students must make an appointment with an international student advisor within 15 days of the start of their program to sign and receive the transfer form I-20. Please schedule an appointment before school starts or during the first week of classes.

When transferring to another school from UNO, a student should be admitted to the new school for the next available session and receive the admission letter within 30 days from program completion at UNO or by the SEVIS registration deadline if you did not complete a program. If dismissed from a program, you would have only 81 days to transfer out. Students must provide the international student advisor with the new school's transfer form, and request to have the SEVIS record released to the new school. Some schools will also require a transfer form about UNO. The next school will issue a form I-20 upon release of the SEVIS record from UNO. Be sure to buy health insurance coverage for the time between schools.

## **Extension of Stay**

If you cannot complete the educational program by the end date on your form I-20, you must apply for an extension at least two weeks before the form I-20 expires. An application for an extension of stay must be requested and approved prior to the expiration of your authorized stay in order to maintain your visa status. Poor academic performance is not in itself a permissible ground for approving an extension. Students requesting an extension must provide a compelling academic or medical reason verified by the academic advisor and international student advisor, an updated [financial affidavit form](#), and bank documents showing funding to complete the program. ILUNO students must meet with an international student advisor with a new ILUNO financial guarantee and bank statement at least two weeks before their form I-20 expires.

## **Employment – F1**

As an F-1 student, you are permitted to work on-campus up to a strictly enforced maximum of 20 hours per week while school is in session and full-time during the summer or official school breaks. F-1 students are not permitted to work off-campus or to engage in business without specific employment authorization.

## **Work Authorization Based on Financial Need – F1**

After your first year in F-1 student status, you may apply for [employment authorization](#) based on unforeseen, severe financial needs arising after receiving student status. Remember, when you obtained the F-1 visa, you assured the visa officer that you would have sufficient funds to cover the duration of your academic program. Your need for employment must be based on new, unforeseen financial stress that can be clearly documented. A work permit based on financial need ends when a student graduates or transfers to another school.

## **Practical Training – F1**

[Optional Practical Training](#) (OPT) is a benefit for F-1 students who have completed their studies and have been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis for one full academic year. It allows them to work for one year in their field of study and at their level of education. OPT can be granted after one degree program, then again after a higher educational degree program, to students who have maintained status. A job offer is not required at the time of application. The request for OPT must be submitted through SEVIS. Students may apply prior to completion of studies or during the 60-day grace period following completion of studies. Students should apply for OPT at least 90 days before they plan to begin working. Students must complete OPT within 14 months of graduation. Students cannot apply more than 90 days before graduation. Work cannot begin until the employment authorization card for OPT has been received

Students with degrees in science, technology, engineering, or mathematics and employed by an e-verify employer may apply for an OPT STEM extension which gives them 17 additional months of OPT.

[Curricular Practical Training](#) (CPT) is a benefit for students who have maintained status by enrolling full-time for at least one academic year, who have a job offer for a given semester, and who have enrolled for credit associated with the CPT. By immigration regulation, CPT must be integral to your program of study. Other students may refer to similar jobs as internships. CPT must be authorized by an international student advisor on the student's form I-20 before work can begin.

## **Employment and Academic Training – J1 students**

UNO's website contains more information on [employment and academic training for J-1 visa holders](#), including internships. It is important that all work be recorded on your DS-2019 prior to beginning work. This includes unpaid internships. If you have questions, please meet one of our J1 advisors.

## **Concurrent Enrollment**

All undergraduate students doing concurrent enrollment at another school in the Omaha area must have at least nine credits at UNO and have concurrent enrollment approved by your academic advisor and international student advisor at UNO. Please be sure that you turn in a concurrent enrollment form signed by your academic advisor for final approval from an international student advisor prior to the beginning of our fall or spring terms. If approved, our office will issue a letter for you to take to the other school. Upon enrollment at the other school, you must turn in a copy of your course schedule from that school. For more information, view the [concurrent enrollment form](#). If you are a graduate student enrolled at UNMC or UNL, please provide our office with a copy of your course schedule.

## **Address Updates**

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) requires that you submit any change of address within 10 days of your move. Please make any changes in Mavlink. If you are uncertain about how to update your address, you may fill out an address change form at the ASH 241 front desk. In Mavlink, list your Omaha address as your local/current address and your home country address as the permanent address. Immigration does not accept post office box numbers for permanent addresses.

## **Travel Overseas**

When you arrive in or leave the United States, your travel history will be recorded on an electronic I-94 record. If you plan on returning to the United States to continue school, remember to have the international student advisor sign your I-20 at least 1 to 2 weeks prior to your departure. A valid visa is required for re-entry. If you will be traveling out of the United States and will be applying to renew your visa, be prepared to provide financial documentation for your interview at the consulate. If you are changing sponsors, provide our office with an updated financial affidavit and bank document so that your form I-20 can be updated before you travel. Passports should always be kept valid six months into the future. Contact your [embassy](#) to renew a passport. Keep copies of all your immigration documents for your own records and be sure to give copies for you and any dependents to International Studies and Programs. For more information, please visit the [U.S. Customs and Border Protection website](#).

## **Financial Support**

When you obtained your F-1 visa, you showed documentation that you would be financially able to support yourself for the entire period of stay in the United States in which you would be pursuing a full course of study. If this situation changes, notify an international student advisor.

## **Authorization to Release Information by School**

By coming to the US as an F1 or J1 student or scholar, you have given authorization to the school whom holds your form I-20 to release reportable information to the USCIS.

## Penalty for Failure to Maintain Status

Failure to comply with immigration regulations will result in the loss of your student status. This means that you lose benefits associated with your visa type, such as on-campus employment. [Reinstatement](#) to F-1 status is only possible through re-entry into the United States or application through USCIS. Applying for reinstatement must be done within five months and is a lengthy, difficult, and risky process. Reinstatement may be denied and deportation is possible.

## F-2 Visa Holders (Dependents of F-1 Visa Holders)

F-1 visa holders may have dependents with them in the United States. Dependents should purchase UNO health insurance immediately upon arrival. F-2 visa holders cannot work in the United States. F-2 visa holders may study at UNO or ILUNO on a *part-time* basis. UNO defines part-time study as the following:

- ILUNO – Less than 18 clock hours per session
- Undergraduate – Up to 9 credit hours per semester
- Graduate – Up to 6 credit hours per semester

F-2 visa holders wishing to engage in full-time study must change their status to F-1. **The change of status application must be approved before enrolling full-time at UNO.** Information on changing status within the United States can be found [here](#).

## Vacation for UNO Students

Please see the [UNO academic calendar](#) for holidays when UNO is closed, fall break, winter break, and spring break. International students are required to enroll full-time each fall and spring term; summer enrollment is optional. Summer is the vacation term. Students who arrive in the US on an I-20 for summer must enroll for the summer term as well as the following fall and spring terms.

## Important Immigration Responsibilities

Keep these guidelines in mind to avoid serious SEVIS issues:

- You must enroll full-time at the beginning of each semester, attend your classes, and make academic progress to maintain your status.
- Never work off-campus without authorization from an international student advisor.
- Report any changes in your local address, immigration status, or legal name to an international student advisor within 10 days of any change. This is required by immigration.
- You must notify an international student advisor if you need to leave the program early.
- Notify an international student advisor immediately if you change your major or change your level of study in order to be issued a new form I-20.
- Be sure to keep your I-94, I-20 or DS-2019, and passport with you at all times.
- Make certain your passport is always valid six months into the future.
- Never leave the United States without your form I-20 or DS-2019 (signed by an international student advisor), a valid passport, and a valid re-entry visa.
- You are responsible to request in advance to have your form I-20 or DS-2019 extended prior to the last date if you decide to study past the date of expiration.
- If you are outside the U.S. for more than five months on an F-1 visa, you will need a new visa, new SEVIS fee, and new I-20 for re-entry to the U.S.

# SEVIS Information

## What is SEVIS?

SEVIS is the Student and Exchange Visitor Information System. It is a national database mandated by the U.S. government that stores current information on non-immigrant students (F-1 and M-1 visas), exchange visitors (J-1 visas), and their dependents (F-2, M-2, and J-2 visas). SEVIS enables schools and program sponsors to electronically transmit information via the internet to U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and the Department of State (DOS) throughout a student or exchange visitor's stay in the United States.

## What must be reported in SEVIS?

The following events must be reported to SEVIS within 21 days by your international student advisor:

- Any student who has failed to maintain status or complete his or her program.
- A change of the student or dependent's legal name or U.S. address.
- Any student who has graduated prior to the end date listed on form I-20.
- Any disciplinary action taken by the school against the student as a result of the student being convicted of a crime.

Additionally, each semester, no later than 30 days after the first day of classes, schools are required to report the following:

- Whether the student has enrolled at the school and is physically present, dropped below a full course of study, or failed to enroll.
- The current address of each enrolled student. This cannot be a P.O. Box.
- The start date of the student's next session, term, or semester.

## The Nebraska Service Center and District Immigration Office

USCIS has regional service centers and district service centers that serve different purposes related to immigration applications and concerns. The regional service center is the Nebraska Service Center in Lincoln. The Nebraska Service Center is an application processing center only; applicants cannot go to the center to inquire about applications. The local district office is the Omaha District Office located at 1717 Avenue H, Omaha, NE 68110-2752. The Omaha District Immigration office does not address F1 or J1 issues.

## Stay Informed

Please contact an international student advisor if you have any questions about your immigration status or immigration regulations.

Please check your UNO e-mail regularly for important immigration information.

Timely information and reminders about immigration policies are always available in the International Student Advising section at [world.unomaha.edu/advising](http://world.unomaha.edu/advising).

# **Intensive Language Program at UNO (ILUNO)**

## **Important Program Policy and Immigration Information**

### **Full-time Attendance:**

Students with F1 visas in ILUNO are required to attend 21 hours of class time each week for the full eight week session. In our program, 21 hours is considered full-time for immigration purposes. Generally students take two nine-hour classes and one three-hour class. Classes run throughout the year and start six times per year.

### **Absence Policy:**

Upon entering the ILUNO program, students will be asked to sign an attendance policy statement. Attendance is required and all absences are counted. Students who miss more than 15 hours will receive a warning. Students who miss more than 35 hours in once eight week session will be asked to leave the program. In some cases, UNO may terminate the SEVIS record. Any person who has a health or personal problem should meet an international student advisor immediately. Only students with an official letter from a medical doctor or psychiatrist might be able to have absences excused and continue in the program.

### **Planned Absence Requests:**

If an ILUNO student must miss a few days of classes, they must ask ILUNO teachers to sign an absence form. The days missed will still count towards the total number of absences allowed per session. We require this form so that we can assist students who may be traveling long distances for the first time in the US. Please let us know when you are leaving town and will be missing classes.

### **Vacation from ILUNO**

There are four days off between each eight week session (Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday). After the June to August and October to December sessions, there are vacations which are approximately two weeks long. After four sessions of ILUNO or eight months in ILUNO, you can ask your international student advisor for a two month vacation if you will continue studying in the program.

### **Transfer from or to another School**

When transferring from another school in the US to ILUNO, students must make an appointment with an international student advisor within 15 days of the start of their program to sign and receive the transfer form I-20. When transferring to another school from ILUNO, a student should be admitted to the new school for the next available session and receive the admission letter within 30 days from the end of the ILUNO session or by the SEVIS registration deadline if you did not complete the session. If dismissed from a program, you would have only 81 days to transfer out. Students must provide the international student advisor with the new school's transfer form, and ask the ILUNO advisor to release the SEVIS record to the new school. Some schools will also require a transfer form about UNO. The next school will issue a form I-20 upon release of the SEVIS record from UNO. Be sure to buy health insurance coverage for the time between schools.

### **Extension of I-20**

If you cannot complete the educational program by the end date on your form I-20, you must apply for an extension at least two weeks before the form I-20 expires. An application for an extension of stay must be requested and approved prior to the expiration of your authorized stay in order to maintain your visa status. Students requesting an extension must provide a new ILUNO financial guarantee and bank statement at least two weeks before their form I-20 expires.

### **ILUNO Transcripts and Certificates**

To order ILUNO transcripts at the completion of your program or before transferring to another school, visit the UNO [records and registration website](#) or request them on Mavlink. Certificates can be requested in advance by filling out a form at the ILUNO front desk in ASH 241. Please meet with an international student advisor to complete an exit interview.

### **Travel outside the US**

If you plan to travel outside the US to your home country, Mexico, Canada, or other countries, please remember that you must have your form I-20 signed for travel. All information on your form I-20 should be correct. Also, be sure you have the proper visa and unexpired passport. If you need to extend your passport, contact your [embassy](#). Contact an international student advisor at least one week before traveling.

### **Notification of Address Updates**

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) requires that you submit any change of address within 10 days of your move. Fill out an address change form at the ASH 241 front desk or on Mavlink. For SEVIS purposes, UNO must always have an accurate local/current address as well as the permanent address in your home country.

### **Emergency Leave**

If you need to return home sooner than expected, please let an international student advisor know about your plans before you leave. There are no refunds for ILUNO, but tuition may be moved to a future session in emergency situations. Often, a copy of your plane ticket will be requested as well as the stamp in your passport or boarding pass showing the return home. SEVIS records are handled differently depending on your future plans.

## **International Professional Development (IPD) Important Program Policy and Immigration Information**

### **Full-time Attendance**

IPD is a set program of classes. Participants in IPD are expected to be in class for the entire program day to maintain fulltime status and comply with F or J visa requirements. The program offers five eight-week sessions per year. The first session begins in August and the final session is completed at the end of June. Please look on the website for session dates at: [world.unomaha.edu/ipd](http://world.unomaha.edu/ipd).

## **Absence Policy**

Upon entering the IPD program, the participants are expected to be in class every day. Attendance is required and all absences are counted. Attendance is also part of the program assessment. Unexcused absences could prevent the completion of the program and the participant will then be asked to leave the program. When a participant will miss a day because of a minor illness, they should contact their instructor before the start of the program day to let them know they will not be in class. Any person who has a health or personal problem that will interfere with program attendance should meet with the IPD program manager immediately. Only participants with an official letter from a medical doctor or psychiatrist might be able to have absences excused and continue in the program.

## **Planned Absence Requests**

If an IPD participant must miss a class due to a planned absence, this absence must first be approved by the IDP program manager. If approved, the participants must inform their instructors so they can arrange to make up any class assignments.

## **Holidays and Session Breaks from IPD**

There are no classes on the following holidays: Labor Day, first Monday in September; Thanksgiving, no classes are held from the Wednesday before Thanksgiving through the following Monday; Martin Luther King holiday in January. After the October to December session, there is a scheduled vacation which is approximately four weeks long.

The IPD program year ends in late June. The program is not held from late June through mid-August. After four sessions of IPD/ILUNO or eight months in IPD/ILUNO, you can ask an international student advisor for a two month vacation if you plan to continue studying in the program.

## **Transfer from or to another School**

When transferring to IPD from another school in the US, participants must report to an international student advisor within 15 days of the start of their program to sign and receive the transfer form I-20. Please set your appointment on your first day in IPD.

When transferring to another school from IPD, a student should be admitted to the new school for the next available session and receive the admission letter within 30 days from the end of the IPD session or by the SEVIS registration deadline if you did not complete the session. If dismissed from a program, you would have only 81 days to transfer out. Students must provide the international student advisor with the new school's transfer form, and request the SEVIS record released to the new school. Some schools will also require a transfer form about UNO. The next school will issue a form I-20 upon release of the SEVIS record from UNO. Be sure to buy health insurance coverage for the time between schools.

## **Extension of I-20**

If you cannot complete the educational program by the end date on your form I-20, you must apply for an extension at least two weeks before the form I-20 expires. An application for an extension of stay must be requested and approved prior to the expiration of your authorized stay in order to maintain your visa status. Participants requesting an extension must provide a new IPD financial guarantee and bank statement at least two weeks before their form I-20 expires.

## IPD Certificates

Certificates can be requested in advance by filling out a form at the International Studies & Programs front desk in ASH 241. Please meet with the IPD Program Manager to complete an exit interview.

## Travel outside the US

If you plan to travel outside the US to your home country, Mexico, Canada, or other countries, please remember that you must have your form I-20 signed for travel. All information on your form I-20 should be correct. Also, be sure you have the proper visa and unexpired passport. If you need to extend your passport, contact your [embassy](#). Contact an international student advisor at least one week before traveling.

## Notification of Address Updates

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) requires that you submit any change of address within 10 days of your move. Fill out an address change form at the ASH 241 front desk or on Mavlink. For SEVIS purposes, UNO must always have an accurate local/current address as well as the permanent address in your home country.

## Emergency Leave

If you need to return home sooner than expected, please let the IPD program manager and an international student advisor know about your plans before you leave. There are no refunds for IPD, but tuition may be moved to a future session in emergency situations. Often, a copy of your plane ticket will be requested as well as the stamp in your passport or boarding pass showing the return home. SEVIS records are handled differently depending on your future plans.

# Working on Campus

## Am I eligible to work on campus?

You are eligible to work on campus if:

- You are a full-time UNO student.
- You are making satisfactory progress as a student.
- You are in F-1 status.

If you are placed on academic probation, you will NOT be eligible to work on campus.

## Where do I find work?

Follow these steps to find and begin employment on campus:

- Learn about Student Employment at <http://www.unomaha.edu/business-and-finance/human-resources/student-employees/index.php>
- Find a student worker position that you are interested in. Note that “work study” positions are federally funded and not open to international students.
- Apply online and interview directly with the department that has the job opening.

- Obtain a signed letter of intent to hire on department letterhead.
- Bring the letter of intent to hire, passport, I-20 or DS-2019, I-94, and MavCard to the front counter in the International Advising office and complete the Student Request Form.
- Your Social Security letter from our office should be ready to pick up in a few days.

### **Where do I get my Social Security Card?**

To work, you must obtain a Social Security card.

- Take the Social Security letter from the International Advising office, your letter of intent to hire, your passport, I-94, I-20 or DS-2019, and your student ID to the Social Security office, where you will fill out an application for a Social Security number.
- Due to security clearances, the issuance of your card may take several weeks or even months.
- New international students who entered the United States with an initial I-20 must wait at least 10 days from the date of entry to visit the Social Security office.
- A receipt from the Social Security office, but not the Social Security card itself, is required to begin work.

### **Social Security Administration**

The nearest Social Security office is accessible by Metro bus:

Social Security Administration  
 Old Mill Centre  
 604 N. 109<sup>th</sup> Court  
 Omaha, NE 68154

Local office: 1.866.716.8299

National toll-free: 1.800.772.1213

TTY: 1.800.325.0778

### **What should I do next?**

Take your receipt from the Social Security office to the UNO Payroll Office in the Eppley Administration Building, Room 205. Bring your passport, I-94, I-20 or DS-2019, and your MavCard.

### **Income Tax**

All international students who are physically present in the US are required to complete Form 8843 regardless of earned income or not. All students who earned income are required to report their earnings to the IRS and state government. 15 April is the deadline each year for completing tax forms for the previous year.

UNO hosts a VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) site each year for non-resident tax payers. International Studies and Programs coordinates this program along with the United States Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Any person who is considered a non-resident for tax purposes is welcome and most international students and scholars fall into this category.

Nonresident tax payers cannot file U.S. taxes electronically – any return done electronically by a nonresident will be filed incorrectly. This information comes from our local IRS nonresident expert. Nonresidents must complete and mail paper forms.

As the filing deadline approaches each year, pay attention to the International Advising website, [world.unomaha.edu/advising](http://world.unomaha.edu/advising), and International Newsletters for information on free workshops to help in filing the necessary forms.

# Housing

## On-Campus Housing

For information about living on campus at University Village, Scott Hall, Scott Village, Scott Court, or Maverick Village, inquire with your international student advisor or visit <http://www.unomaha.edu/student-life/housing-and-residential-life/>.

## Off-Campus Housing

Unfurnished and furnished apartments are available for rent in Omaha. The average cost for a one-bedroom, unfurnished apartment is \$600-\$800 per month. Many apartment owners, known as landlords, will ask you to sign a six-month or one-year lease. A lease is a legal agreement. If you sign a lease, you agree to stay in the apartment for the entire term, obey all the apartment rules, and pay your rent. Generally, you cannot let someone else take over your lease without permission from the landlord. Most apartments will request a Social Security number.

For a list of off-campus housing options, check out the International Student Advising section at [world.unomaha.edu](http://world.unomaha.edu).

## Electrical Service

Electricity may or may not be included in a lease agreement for off-campus housing. If you need electricity, call Omaha Public Power District (OPPD), 402.536.4131. A security deposit is usually required before service can begin.

## Gas and Water Service

If you live in an apartment, you may need to pay for gas and water. Contact Metropolitan Utilities District (MUD), 402.554.6666.

## Telephone Services

There are a variety of cell phone providers. You may want to consider a monthly contract. Many companies will ask you to provide a Social Security number to get a less expensive contract. Ask several other students for advice. Pre-paid phones are the least expensive for those who don't want to sign a contract. It is also possible to get an in-home phone service from local telephone companies.

## Telephone Use

Many Americans usually don't receive calls or call others after 10 p.m. On weekends, many people like to sleep late, so don't call before 10 a.m. unless it's extremely important. Be careful when using your cell phone from your home country; this may be very expensive.

## Renter's Insurance

An important way to protect your possessions against damage or theft is to purchase renter's insurance. This inexpensive insurance helps to replace items that are damaged by fire or a water leak, or were stolen from your apartment. If you own a car, ask your auto insurance agent if the company offers a discount on renter's insurance.

# Health Care and Safety

## Health Insurance

The policy of the University of Nebraska at Omaha is that all international students on F-1 or J-1 visas must have health insurance due to the extremely high cost of health care in the United States. UNO Health Insurance is added to your tuition and fees bill each semester and can only be waived during the first two weeks of the semester. In the fall, you pay for insurance for the fall term. In the spring, you pay for insurance for both spring and summer. If you are a degree seeking student and arrive for summer, you must visit UNO Health Services to make sure that health insurance has been added to your UNO bill.

UNO strongly recommends that UNO students and scholars (and dependents) purchase the UNO group policy as described [here](#). Policies purchased abroad often DO NOT match the UNO requirements.

For the most current health insurance coverage requirements please see the UNO HEALTH SERVICES website: <http://www.unomaha.edu/student-life/wellness/health-services/insurance-policy.php>.

A major medical Blue Cross Blue Shield student insurance policy is available to UNO undergraduate students enrolled in at least seven (7) credit hours or a degree-seeking graduate student. This reasonably priced policy is designed to provide benefits for medical and dental expenses.

International students are required to carry this, or a similar insurance policy with the following requirements:

- Must be able to pay for care in Nebraska
- Deductible must be \$500 or less
- Unlimited major medical coverage including pre-existing conditions
- Unlimited medical evacuation and repatriation coverage
- Coverage premium must be paid in full for the entire semester
- Maximum out-of-pocket coverage is \$2,500 or less

**PLEASE NOTE:** If a policy purchased abroad or in the US does not meet the minimum requirements of the UNO policy, International Students and scholars will be required to purchase additional coverage. This could cost an additional large sum of money. In addition, the waiver check process may not allow much time to find supplemental coverage. This means that students and scholars may also be billed for the full cost of the UNO health insurance policy if the requirement is not met.

**Any non-UNO Health Insurance policy must be reviewed each semester within the first two weeks of the semester.** The reason is because each semester the UNO Health Insurance policy is added to your tuition and fees bill. Therefore, to remove the cost of UNO Health Insurance you must bring your health insurance policy to Health Services to be reviewed and waived from your bill each semester. You have the first two weeks of class

to do this. Failure to do this each semester will result with leaving the cost of UNO's health insurance plan on your bill. There will be no exceptions to this rule.

**Insurance for dependents is strongly encouraged and should be purchased at UNO Health Services.**

**Students who are on Optional Practical Training (OPT) through UNO must go to UNO Health Services to purchase insurance unless they have insurance through an employer. It is important to have continuous health insurance. Please provide Health Services with proof of your insurance through an employer.**

The UNO group policy for international students recommends that you go to Health Services, HPER Room 102, before seeking off-campus medical care. If you must, because of an emergency, seek medical care off-campus, you must contact Health Services as soon as possible to notify the insurance company of your having been treated. If you do not do this promptly, you may not be covered by insurance.

Be sure to read your health insurance policy carefully. Some policies do not cover conditions that began before the effective date of the policy. Dental treatment is covered only in the event of an accident. Always keep your health insurance current and paid in full.

Contact Health Services at 402.554.2374 or visit the website, <http://www.unomaha.edu/student-life/wellness/health-services/>, for more information.

## **General and Emergency Medical Care**

The biggest mistake many students make is going to a hospital emergency room when they do not have a medical emergency. Emergency rooms are places for true medical emergencies, and if you are waiting with a non-emergency, you will be considered low-priority, and will have to wait a very long time, often for hours.

What is a medical emergency? A medical emergency is any situation in which a doctor is needed immediately. Examples include a broken bone, a head or neck injury, heavy bleeding, or a severe car accident.

## **Responding to a Medical Emergency**

In case of a serious injury or illness, the victim should go to a hospital. The closest to campus is the University of Nebraska Medical Center, located at 42<sup>nd</sup> and Dewey Avenue (five blocks south of Dodge Street). Another option is Methodist Hospital located at 8303 Dodge Street.

If you or anyone else is critically injured or not able to move or drive, call 911 immediately. A dispatcher will answer and request specific information about your location and the nature of the injury or illness. Do not hang up the phone until the dispatcher directs you to do so. An ambulance will arrive shortly, and sometimes a fire truck or police will also respond. Treatment will be provided on-site or the victim will be transported to a hospital. Ambulances are expensive, and should only be used in an emergency. You can call 911 to get police, fire, or medical assistance in any serious emergency.

## **Health Services**

Located in the Health, Physical Education, and Recreation (HPER) building Room 102, Health Services is a medical clinic where students can schedule appointments to see nurse practitioners and doctors with varying specialties, from family medicine to orthopedics to psychiatry. All visits are free, with minimal fees for any necessary lab work. For an appointment, call Health Services at 402.554.2374.

## **Injury Prevention and Care**

The Injury Prevention and Care clinic is staffed by certified athletic trainers and student workers who are certified in First Aid and CPR/AED for the Professional Rescuer by the American Red Cross. Services include ice bags, hot packs, taping, wound care, injury evaluation, and rehabilitation. These services are available to students with an active MavCard for free. Injury Prevention and Care is located in HPER Room 109. For more information, call 402.554.3170.

### **After-Hours Medical Care**

For health care services after regular business hours, a nearby clinic is open in the evenings. Rockbrook Urgent Care is located at 2821 S 108<sup>th</sup> Street. Their phone number is 402-933-8201. Open Mon-Sat 8:00 AM to 8:00 PM and Sunday's from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM. No appointment necessary.

### **Personal Safety Reminders**

While Omaha is generally safe, risks do exist. Follow these guidelines to ensure your personal safety. When walking:

- Walk in well-lit areas. Avoid walking after dark. Walk confidently and stay in groups when you go to your car or if you must walk in the dark.
- Be aware of your surroundings, taking note of other people and the environment.
- Don't wear obviously expensive clothing or jewelry that might attract an attacker.
- If robbed, don't hold on to purse, bag, or possessions.
- Don't carry more money than you are willing to lose.
- Purchase a pocket sound alarm if you must walk alone often.
- Avoid becoming intoxicated and walking alone at night.

When driving or riding in a car:

- Keep your car doors locked at all times even if you live in a residence hall on campus.
- Avoid driving after midnight, as more people drink and drive late at night. Always avoid being in a car alone late at night. If you are at a friend's home and the hour is late, consider staying overnight.
- If you have been drinking, do not drive. It is illegal and extremely dangerous. Call a taxi service, or ask a friend who has not been drinking to drive you home. If you are at a friend's house and have been drinking, consider staying overnight.
- Stay alert when you drive. Watch the cars and people around you.
- Make sure you have a full tank of gas.
- If you own a car, it is a good idea to have a towing service or at least a cell phone.
- Visit ATMs, convenience stores, and gas stations in daylight if possible.
- If you see suspicious activity that you think could be criminal in nature, get the license plate number of the vehicle involved and a description of the car for the police. Go to a lighted public area where there are other people.

When in your home:

- Keep your doors and windows locked.
- Don't give your address or phone number to people you do not know.

- Don't open your door without finding out who is there. If someone comes to repair something, or to check your meter, ask to see identification before letting them in. If anyone comes to your door and says they are a police officer, ask to see identification.
- Don't give personal information over the phone or internet to strangers.
- You do not need to feel obligated to speak to strangers who come to your door or call you on the telephone. If a salesman or recruiter comes to your door or calls on the telephone, don't feel you must buy something or talk to them. Politely say you are not interested and shut the door or hang up.

Protect your personal property and private information:

- Do not leave your books, book bags, or other personal items unattended, even for a few minutes.
- Never share your bank pin number or Social Security number with anyone.
- Do not leave digital media lying in public spaces. Log out of e-mail and bank websites and close the internet browser when you are finished using a public computer.
- Do not be too open with information about your whereabouts on social media.

## **Emergency Telephone Numbers**

Off-campus:

911

On-campus:

402.554.2911

(Campus Security Emergency Number) or press the call button on a Blue Emergency pillar. Call

**402-554-2648** Campus Security for minor emergencies. Please visit

<http://www.unomaha.edu/security/> for their website.

# Banking and Credit Cards

## Automatic Cash Cards

You can use these cards to receive cash from an automatic teller machine (ATM) using a PIN number. If you don't use the machine correctly, it may keep your card after your second attempt. Using an ATM card at a different bank than the one it was issued from may incur a fee.

Many cash cards are now issued with a Visa logo in the corner like a credit card. These can be used to pay for your purchase at the point of sale, simply by signing the receipt. You can also use these as debit cards to make purchases at stores by entering your PIN number. Cards like this can also be used to order merchandise online or over the telephone. The money is withdrawn directly from your checking account, so be careful not to overdraw your account.

Be sure to report lost or stolen cash cards or checks to your bank as soon as possible.

## Checking Accounts

You may not be familiar with our system of writing checks, but most Americans do not carry a lot of cash. If you have a checking account, you should keep good records, as it is illegal and expensive to overdraw your account, which means to write a check or withdraw money when your account is empty. Some banks charge \$20 or more for each check which overdraws your account, and the store where the check was used will also charge a penalty fee.

## Credit Cards

Many international students want to apply for a credit card when they arrive in the United States, but they are almost always rejected. This is because they do not have sufficient credit history, or a record of paying bills regularly and on time. You cannot use a parent or sponsor as proof that you will pay your bills because these people often do not have a credit history in the United States. If you have a checking account, particularly one with a debit card that you can use like a credit card at the point of sale, you almost never need a credit card. If you must have a credit card, it is best if your parents have the bank in your home country issue a card in your name.

## Savings Accounts

A savings account is an interest-earning account for large sums of money. You can make deposits (add to your account) and withdrawals (take away from your account); however, you should not use it like a checking account. Savings accounts currently limit the number of withdrawals that can be made, or charge extra fees for excessive withdrawals.

# Living in Omaha

## CLIMATE AND WEATHER

### Seasons

People in Nebraska experience four distinct seasons. Temperatures are often very cold at the peak of winter and very hot in the middle of summer.

Summer weather begins in June and lasts into August. Summers are typically hot and humid, with little rain. In summer, a “heat index” is often reported with the temperature, which is a combination of the air temperature and the humidity, since the combination of heat and humidity feels warmer than the air temperature.

Fall begins in September and is characterized by warm days and cool nights, lasting until November. As winter approaches, the days become colder and precipitation increases.

Winter can arrive as early as November and lasts through February. Snow is common, and temperatures can become very cold. It is not common for much snow to fall in November and December, but a light snowfall can make streets and sidewalks slippery and dangerous. The coldest times are usually in January and February. It is important to listen for the “wind chill index” because it will tell you the effect of both air temperature and wind speed. The wind chill index often is colder than the actual air temperature.

Spring arrives toward the end of March and last through May. The weather is usually cold and wet in early spring, but the temperatures get warmer as summer approaches.

Average daily high temperatures are:

Spring (March-May)	16 C
Summer (June-August)	28 C
Fall (September-November)	17 C
Winter (December-February)	1 C

### Severe Weather

In Midwestern states like Nebraska, weather conditions are sometimes dangerous. When these conditions occur, announcements will appear on television and on the radio. Most of the time the weather warnings are not very serious, but it is helpful to know how to interpret broadcast weather warnings. Weather notices are often identified by county. If the weather notice mentions Douglas County (the area surrounding Omaha) or any county south or west of Douglas County, you need to pay attention to it.

If the weather warning is really important, all regular programming on the television (NBC, CBS, ABC, and FOX) and radio will be replaced with news and weather broadcasts. If there is a tornado warning, sirens all over Omaha will sound to let people outside know that they need to seek shelter. The sirens are tested for a few minutes every month during the spring and summer. A testing message will appear on TV screens letting people know that the siren is only a test.

A “warning” for Douglas County means the bad weather is happening right here and right now. Examples include a tornado warning, severe thunderstorm warning, and blizzard warning. You should go indoors when there is a warning. For a tornado warning, you should seek shelter in the interior, lower-level of the nearest building away from windows.

A “watch” for Douglas County means that the bad weather has a chance of coming, but it is not here yet. Examples include a severe thunderstorm watch or a tornado watch. There is no need to take action, but you should monitor subsequent weather announcements closely.

Please note: A sudden drop in temperature during the spring or summer signals a good chance of a storm. You should get closer to shelter and monitor broadcasts for weather warnings.

## Weather Vocabulary

A tornado, also called a cyclone or a twister, are swirling columns of wind, and are the most violent of all storms. The greatest potential for such storms exists from April through September. If there is a tornado warning for Omaha or Douglas County, you will hear loud sirens sound for three minutes. After the first three minutes, cities and towns that may be affected by the tornado will continue to sound their sirens until the danger is past. Hearing these sirens is a signal for you to take shelter in a basement immediately. Stay far away from windows, which may break. If possible, take a flashlight and a battery-operated radio with you. The radio will keep you informed of the storm conditions, and the flashlight is useful if electric power goes out. Do not go outside when a tornado warning is in effect – you may be injured. If you are outside, go inside a building as soon as possible. If there is no shelter nearby, lie down in a ditch or depression in the ground.

A severe thunderstorm is a very strong and fast rainstorm accompanied by thunder, lightning, high winds, and sometimes hail. It is very dangerous and you should seek shelter indoors.

A thunderstorm is a strong and fast rain storm accompanied by thunder, lightning, and sometimes high winds. It does not threaten serious injury, but you do not want to be caught outside in a thunderstorm.

Hail is frozen pellets of rain, ranging in size from a pear to a golf ball. Large hail can be dangerous and damaging to cars and buildings. Find shelter immediately, since hail can injure you.

A blizzard is an intense and sometimes long-lasting snow storm that limits visibility and results in hazardous snow accumulation. You should not drive or walk in a blizzard.

## TEMPERATURE, WEIGHTS, AND MEASURES

The metric and Celsius systems of weighing and measuring are not in use in the United States. Here are some informational tables that will help you:

### Temperature

Fahrenheit    Celsius

212°            100    (water boils)

104°            40°

98.6°           37°    (body temperature)

86°             30°

68°             20°

50°             10°

41°             5°

36°             2°

32°             0°     (water freezes)

23°             -5°

14°             -10°

5°              -15°

Conversion rates:  $1^{\circ} F = (C \times 9/5) + 32$ ,  $C = (F-32) \times 5/9$

## Weight, Volume, Distance, and Speed

16 ounces (oz.)	=	0.45 kilograms
1 pound (lb.)	=	0.45 kilograms
1 ton	=	907 kilograms

1 cup	=	0.24 liters
1 pint	=	0.47 liters
1 quart	=	0.95 liters
1 gallon	=	3.8 liters

1 inch (in.)	=	2.5 centimeters
1 foot (ft.)	=	0.3 meters
1 yard (yd.)	=	0.91 meters
1 mile (mi.)	=	1.6 kilometers

35 miles per hour (mph)	=	56 kilometers per hour
45 miles per hour (mph)	=	72 kilometers per hour
60 miles per hour (mph)	=	97 kilometers per hour

## MAIL AND PARCEL DELIVERY

The United States Postal Service (USPS) has the primary responsibility for delivering mail. Regular mail (letters, magazines, packages) will be delivered to your address, whether you are at a homestay, residence hall, or apartment, every day except Sundays and official U.S. holidays. If you have questions about how to mail something, or if you just need to buy postage stamps, most post offices are open Monday through Friday and Saturday mornings to help you.

The nearest off-campus Post Offices are located at 1124 Pacific Street (402.348.2696) and 608 North Saddle Creek Rd (402.551.5158).

Located in EAB Room 106, UNO Mail Services, also known as the mail room, the office can mail letters, bills, magazines, and packages both within the United States and internationally. You can also purchase U.S. first class stamps, post cards, and plain envelopes. As a student, you are also eligible to rent your own personal post office box in the UNO mail room.

Other than the U.S. Postal Service, there are independent carriers who will deliver your letters and larger packages. The two most accessible alternative carriers are United Parcel Service (UPS) and Federal Express (FedEx). These companies will ship to addresses in the United States and to most other countries. Costs and regulations for these independent carriers are often different from what the U.S. Post office charges.

## NEWSPAPERS

A number of regional, national, and international newspapers can be obtained from news media stands in Omaha. The Omaha World-Herald is available for home delivery and online at [www.omaha.com](http://www.omaha.com). Additionally, copies of the paper are free to UNO students at any of the paper kiosks located in the main buildings on campus. To find out about cultural events in Omaha, look in the Go section of the daily editions and the Entertainment section of the Sunday World-Herald.

The Gateway, the student newspaper, is published Tuesday and Friday during the fall and spring semesters and Friday during summer sessions. The paper is distributed free in all of the main buildings on campus.

## RADIO STATIONS

### AM Stations

Frequency	Call sign	Name	Format
590 AM	KXSP	Fox Sports Radio	Sports
1020 AM	KMMQ	La Preciosa	Spanish
1110 AM	KFAB	NewsRadio 1110	News/Talk
1420 AM	KOTK	La Luz	Spanish
1490 AM	KOMJ	Magic 1490	Nostalgia
1620 AM	KOZN	ESPN Radio	Sports

### FM Stations

Frequency	Call sign	Name	Format
88.1 FM	KMLV	K-LOVE	Contemporary Christian Music
89.7 FM	KIWR	89.7 The River	Alternative
90.7 FM	KVNO	Classical 90.7	Classical
91.5 FM	KIOS	Omaha Public Radio/NPR	Public radio
92.3 FM	KEZO	Z92	Rock
93.3 FM	KFFF	US 93.3	Classic country
93.7 FM	KLCV	CRI because truth matters	Religious
94.1 FM	KQCH	Channel 94.1	Top 40 (CHR/Pop)
96.1 FM	KISO	96.1 All the Hits	Top 40
97.3 FM	KBLR	Country 97.3	Country
97.7 FM	KBBX	Radio Lobo	Regional Mexican
99.9 FM	KGOR	Super Hits 99.9	Classic Hits
101.9 FM	KOOO	The Big O-101.9	Classic rock
103.7 FM	KXKT	Kat 103	Country
105.9 FM	KKCD	CD 105.9	Classic rock
106.9 FM	KOPW	Power 106.9	Hip Hop

## TELEVISION

### Broadcast

Call letters	Channel	Description
KMTV	3	3.1 CBS affiliate; 3.2 Live Well Network
WOWT	6	6.1 NBC affiliate; 6.2 WeatherNow
KETV	7	7.1 ABC affiliate; 7.2 Me-TV

KXVO	15	15.1 CW affiliate; 15.2 Azteca America
KYNE	26	PBS member station, part of NET Television
KBIN	32	PBS member station, part of the Iowa Public Television network
KPTM	42	42.1 Fox affiliate; 42.2 My Network TV This TV; 42.3 Estrella TV

## Cable

For a monthly fee, you can have cable television service. Most cable television providers have basic packages as well as premium movie and sports packages. Make sure to check with your cable television provider for a complete list of channels, packages, and prices. A deposit may be required when purchasing cable service.

## MOVIE THEATERS

Omaha has many movie theaters, some specializing in new releases, others in artistic, independent films, and others showing older films with inexpensive ticket prices. A list of movie theaters and current shows can always be found at [www.omaha.com](http://www.omaha.com). Some theaters give a discount if you show your student ID. Most of the time it costs less to see a movie if you go before 6 p.m.; earlier showings are known as matinees. Expect to pay high prices for popcorn, candy, and drinks. Movie ratings offer some guidance to a film's content:

G = General Audience. Expect to see families at these movies, which are usually targeted at children. There is no violence, nudity, or profanity.

PG = Parental Guidance Suggested. Expect to see some younger children at these movies, too, even if their parents are not with them. These movies contain some violence or mildly strong language.

PG-13 = Parental Guidance Suggested for Children under the Age of 13. There's nothing magic about the age of 13, and you will still see some young children in the theater who are not accompanied by a parent. These movies contain some violence, some strong language, and possibly some nudity.

R = Restricted. Technically this means you can't go if you are under the age of 17, but few theaters enforce this rule strictly. (Some may ask to see identification, such as a driver's license, to verify you are over 17.) These movies may contain violence, strong language, nudity, and adult situations.

Additionally, you may see movies rated NC-17, meaning no one under the age of 17, or NR, meaning the film is not rated but may be in the future. These films contain the strongest profanity, violence, or sexual content.

# Shopping

Omaha offers a wide variety of shopping malls, specialty boutiques, discount department stores, and thrift stores, which sell second-hand goods. For a full directory of shopping outlets in Omaha, check out the shopping section at [www.visitomaha.com](http://www.visitomaha.com).

Clothing sizes in the United States may differ significantly than those used in your home country. This table will help you convert from one to another:

## Women's Clothing Sizes

American	6	8	10	12	14	16	18
British	28	30	32	34	36	38	40
Continental	34	36	38	40	42	44	46
Japanese	5	7	9	11	13	15	17

## Men's Clothing

American	34	36	38	40	42	44	46
British	34	36	38	40	42	44	46
Continental	44	46	48	50	52	54	56
Japanese	S		M		L		LL

## Men's Shirt Collars Sizes

American/British	14	14 ½	15	15 ½	16	16 ½	17
Continental/Japanese	36	37	38	39	40	41	42

## Women's Shoes Sizes

American	6	6 ½	7	7 ½	8	8 ½	9
British	4.5	5	5.5	6	6.5	7	7.5
Continental	36	37	38	39	40	41	42
Japanese	23	23.5	24	24.5	25	25.5	26

## Men's Shoes Sizes

American	5 ½	6 ½	7 ½	8 ½	9 ½	10 ½	11 ½
British	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Continental	39	40	41	42	43	44	45
Japanese	24.5		26		27.5	28	29

# Grocery Stores and Dining Out

## Dining Out and Tipping Practice

Omaha is a “restaurant city” with nearly every type of food available. Dining out can be considerably more expensive than purchasing groceries and cooking yourself. It is customary to tip the waiter or waitress when you pay for your meal, either by leaving cash on the table or adding gratuity to the receipt when you pay by credit or debit card. The amount of the tip should reflect the quality of service you received; however, a tip of 15 to 20 percent is considered necessary, as service workers rely largely on tips for their earnings.

To explore the dining possibilities of Omaha, check out the restaurants section at [www.visitomaha.com](http://www.visitomaha.com). You can also read the latest reviews at the [Omavore dining blog](#).

## Grocery Stores

Omaha has many types of grocery stores. Full-service supermarkets, such as Hy-Vee or Baker’s, sell most foods a student would need, including a full selection of fresh produce. Discount supermarkets, such as No Frills, have a similar variety, but offer slightly lower prices because they do not bag groceries for you or offer as many specialty foods. Whole Foods and smaller competitors offer only healthy, all-natural foods, some labeled as “organic,” meaning they were produced without man-made chemicals such as pesticides. These stores tend to be more expensive. You can also purchase groceries at smaller convenience stores. While these stores may be faster or closer to your home, their prices are typically higher.

Also, Omaha has many specialty grocery stores tailored to immigrant communities:

Omaha Oriental Food and Gifts	10737 Mockingbird Dr.	339-2671
Asian Market	321 N. 76 <sup>th</sup> St.	391-2606
Indian Grocery	3029 S. 83rd Plaza	391-0844
Jacobo’s Mexican Grocery	4621 S. 24th St.	733-9009
Mediterranean Foods, Inc.	3025 S. 83rd Plaza	390-0120
Midwest Oriental Foods	2920 S. 84th St.	399-8180
Mison’s Oriental Food Mart	1414 Harlan Dr Bellevue.	292-0250
Mediterranean & European Grocery	8601 Blondo St.	391-2546
Subzi Mundi	2320 N 72 <sup>nd</sup> St.	933-4460
Laos Thai Market	4520 S 24th St.	733-0579

# Transportation

## DRIVING A CAR

### Learning to Drive

To practice driving you must have a Learner's Permit, which allows you to drive only when you are accompanied by a licensed driver.

It is important for you to learn how to drive well and to get to know Omaha's streets before you buy a car. Also, remember that if you have never driven in winter weather you may have difficulty driving on ice. Ask an Omahan about winter driving because there are special techniques you need to know. Cornhusker Driving School and other driving schools offers several hours of classroom and road instruction. Call 402.707.8689 or see <http://www.cornhuskerdriving.com> for more information about Cornhusker Driving School.

Good places to practice driving are shopping mall parking lots or large church parking lots during the early morning hours. You can also practice on the road early Sunday mornings when there is little other traffic. You must always be with someone who already has a Nebraska driver's license when practicing.

### How to Get a Driver's License

First of all, you need to pass a written test. Then you have to pass a driving test with an examiner in the car. The written test consists of 25 multiple-choice questions, which are shown with pictures. You can prepare for the test with a driver's manual, available at the testing center. If you fail the test, you can take the test again at any time you want. In addition, you can bring a dictionary because there is no time limit during the test.

For the driving test, you must bring your car. If you don't have a car, you can borrow a car from a friend and take the test. The car you use to take the test must have working seat belts and turn signals. While you are taking the driving test, you have to follow the examiner's directions very carefully. If you pass all the tests, you can get your driver's license right away.

The most important thing is to be sure to bring your passport, I-94 form, and two letters postmarked with your address.

For more information and current fees, visit <http://www.dmv.nebraska.gov/>.

All written and driving tests are taken at the following Douglas County offices in Omaha:

2910 North 108th Street (108th and Maple)

7414 North 30th Street (North Omaha)

4208 S 50<sup>th</sup> Street (South Omaha)

5730 S 144<sup>th</sup> Street (Millard Area)

### Buying a Car

"Let the buyer beware" is an American saying that suits car-buying very well. In plain English, it means someone can sell you an unreliable car, or a "lemon," and you won't know it until it is too late. Before you buy a used car, arrange to take the car to a reputable mechanic (of your choosing, not the seller's) and have it checked out completely. You might have to pay \$100 to have the car checked out, but it is better than having to pay \$1500 for major repairs afterward.

Once you pay for the car, it is yours. You can't go back to the seller and demand a refund if you discover problems later. Cars are expensive. If you buy a used car, you will probably need repairs once in a while – sometimes often. Make sure you are financially prepared to own and maintain an automobile.

If you plan to buy a car, always take a U.S. friend with you when you look at used cars. Some used car salesmen are famous for dishonesty and fast sales. Also, do not pay cash. You can often ask for a much lower price if you are a skillful negotiator. Be sure you have the title of a used car signed on the back by the former owner. You will also need a bill of sale signed by the former owner showing the car's mileage.

## **Registering Your Car**

After you buy a car, you can drive it for 30 days with an in-transit sign on the windshield before buying license plates. In order to obtain license plates for your car, you must take the title to the car, the bill of sale, an odometer reading form, proof of insurance for your car, your identification, and your checkbook or cash to the Douglas County Treasurer's Office, 411 N. 84<sup>th</sup> Street, 444-7103.

When you buy a car, the seller gives you the title of the car and a sell-purchase certificate that says how much you paid for the car. Once you have that, you must go to the Douglas County offices with these two documents. You also must have proof of insurance.

After registering your car, you must buy the license plates. Registration costs and sales taxes may vary; sales tax will usually be around 7 percent in Omaha. Registration costs depend on the size of the vehicle, and could run as high as \$100 to \$150.

Whether you buy a car from a dealer or from a private owner, the procedures for registration are the same.

## **How to Get Car Insurance**

It is illegal and dangerous to drive without car insurance. If you have an old car, you must have at least liability coverage. This means that your insurance would cover damage to the other person in case of a collision. Full coverage is recommended if you have a new car which you will wish to resell later.

You must get insurance as soon as possible after purchasing your car. Without insurance, you can't register your car. In addition, if you are caught by the police driving without insurance, you will be cited and fined. It is recommended to shop around and get several insurance quotes before purchasing a policy. Insurance rates vary by the type of car, your age, and even where you live. Discounts may be available for students who earn good grades. You must ask the insurance company if these discounts are available to you.

Generally speaking, there are two types of insurance: liability and full-coverage. Liability insurance compensates the other victim(s) in an accident. It is required. Full-coverage insurance, however, will pay both you and the other driver in the event of an accident. The price of full-coverage insurance is almost twice that of liability insurance. It is not required, but is a good policy to have if your own car is valuable. Car insurance is usually sold on a six-month contract basis.

## **Sales Tax**

In the Omaha area, you have to pay sales tax of about 7 percent on all items (except grocery food items) that you purchase. This is not a large amount when purchasing everyday goods, but it is a significant cost on top of the purchase price of a car. You do not pay this tax to the car dealer or private seller; it must be paid to the Nebraska Department of Motor Vehicles afterward. Figure this cost as you are deciding what kind of car you can afford.

## **METRO CITY BUSES**

The No. 2 bus is very convenient and runs east and west on Dodge Street every 15 minutes weekdays and every 30 minutes on weekends. Consult the schedule and fee schedule at [ometro.com](http://ometro.com). You can also call Metro Area Transit at 402.341.0800. Cashiering Services in the Eppley Administration Building sells bus passes.

## TAXIS

Taxi cabs can be expensive in Omaha. If you want to take a taxi, call one of the numbers listed below about 15 to 30 minutes before you are ready to leave. For early morning departures, call the day before. They will ask you, “What city, please?” and if you are going to pay with cash or credit (credit or debit card). Note that if the dispatcher has trouble understanding your call, there is no guarantee a cab will be sent – many international students have had difficulty with cab companies. Please remember to tip 10-20%.

Happy, Safeway, 409.292.2222

Yellow, Checker, and

Cornhusker Cab

## BICYCLING

Bicycles are a popular means of transportation for university students. Bicycle parking racks are available in many places on campus. Locking your bike is essential. Use a case-hardened chain and padlock rather than a plastic-coated cable. Secure both wheels and frame to the rack. Omaha does not have separate bicycle lanes so you must be very careful when riding a bicycle in the streets. Always wear a helmet and reflective clothing for protection. At night, your bicycle should have a light.

Bicycles are also a popular form of recreation for people in Omaha. There are a number of trails in and around Omaha that are set aside for bicycling, hiking, skating, and walking. The Keystone Trail is close to the UNO campus. You can get maps of recreational trails from the trails page at [Omaha Parks and Recreation](#).

You will find bikes to rent in front of the MBSC and in the Aksarben Village area.

## AIR TRAVEL

Many airlines offer very low cost fares for round trip travel if you buy your ticket 15 to 30 days in advance.

Here are some tips to make your air travel smoother:

- Leave early. Get to the airport at least one hour before your scheduled departure time if you're flying within the United States. For international flights, be at the airport two hours early, especially if you are traveling during a holiday.
- Label your luggage. Make sure your name, address, and phone number is located on the outside of your bags. Put the same information, plus the address and phone number of your destination, inside each bag.
- Limit your luggage. Most airlines allow you to have only one small bag to carry on to the plane with you, and checked bags may cost extra.
- Know before you go. Check with the airline to see how many bags you can check without paying extra.

# US Culture and Values

Here are a few tips to help you navigate U.S. and Midwest cultural norms:

## What Is A Handshake?

Handshakes are very strange to many international students, but learning to shake hands is an important part of interacting with Americans, especially if you plan to do business with them. People often shake hands in business situations, but do so less in social situations. Young people and teenagers shake hands very infrequently. Women shake hands less often socially than men, and in social situations will extend their hand first if they want to shake hands.

When Americans meet someone for the first time, they usually put their right hand forward so that they may shake hands with their new acquaintance. To shake hands with an American, grasp their right hand with your right hand. Hold the person's hand firmly and only for a very short moment (1 or 2 seconds). Look at the person you are shaking hands with, smile, and say something like, "Pleased to meet you."

## Visiting American Families and Friends

Americans will really enjoy meeting you and learning about your culture. If you want to visit your American friend's home, it is a good idea to call them in advance and ask if you can arrange to see them. You can ask an American almost anything if you are confused or not sure about something. Don't hesitate to get advice, but don't be surprised if Americans are quite frank or direct in their communications with you. Topics you should avoid are religion, age, salary, and marital status. These can be considered private or delicate issues unless you know someone well.

## Smoking

Smoking, once commonplace in the United States, is now considered unhealthy and unpleasant in most situations. In fact, smoking indoors is now illegal in almost all public places. Upon your first meeting, always ask permission before smoking in someone else's house. Several institutions, including hospitals, forbid smoking even on their outdoor property or have strict restrictions on where people can smoke.

## Pets

You may have noticed that many Americans like pets such as cats and dogs. Please don't be afraid to tell your friend if you are afraid or not fond of animals. If you have a pet, it is not polite to bring it with you when you visit someone else's home.

## Restroom Etiquette

Be sure you deposit toilet paper in the toilet. All other items go in the trash. Every country has different customs. If you are not careful, you can damage the plumbing.

## Meeting and Interacting With People

Good places to make friends are in class, in the cafeteria, at church, at parties, or even in the library. A good way to start a friendship is to start a conversation with someone about light-hearted topics and then invite them to sit down for tea, coffee, or your native food. Good intercultural conversation topics could include holidays or

other celebrations, your surprise at various aspects of U.S. culture, dress, families, foods, manners, social customs, and sporting events.

It is not considered appropriate to touch strangers or people you don't know well. This includes a child that you think is cute or someone's clothing or hair.

## **Being On Time or Late**

Depending on the situation, you'll find that being late for an occasion is either appropriate or rude. Here is a guide for when to be on time, early, or late. Always feel free to ask classmates and your advisor about customary practices in the United States that may differ from your own.

- For class, be on time or five minutes early.
- For most appointments, arrive five to 10 minutes early.
- For lunch with friends, arrive on time or no more than five minutes late.
- For dinner at a restaurant, arrive five to 10 minutes early.
- For dinner at a friend's home, arrive on time or no more than five to 10 minutes late.
- For a party, arrive on time or no more than five to 10 minutes late.

## **Personal Space**

If you notice that your U.S. friends seem to back away when talking to you, don't take it as an insult. Americans tend to prefer more personal space. So, unless you're planning on kissing someone, which is an expression of intimacy greater than casual friendship, here is a brief guide to acceptable behavior:

- Talking distance with a close friend: arm's length.
- Talking distance with a casual or professional acquaintance: 1 meter.
- For all conversations, eye contact should be regular, but do not stare without looking away.
- For close friends, a brief hug or pat on the back or shoulder is welcome.

For casual or professional acquaintances, a handshake is the norm.

## **American Values**

There is tremendous diversity among the American people. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, to describe values or traits which are typically American and shared by all. Such attempts usually lead to generalizations and oversimplification. To facilitate your adjustment to U.S. culture, we will mention a few of the more common American characteristics and values. Remember that you will always find exceptions to these generalizations.

Americans view themselves as mobile. The average American person moves approximately fourteen times in his or her lifetime. Because Americans move so frequently, the extended family tends to be spread across several cities or even states. Family members may be geographically isolated from one another for long periods of time. Another indirect result of this mobility is the rapidity with which Americans develop light friendships, and also their lack of deep friendships. Friendliness is an asset, even a necessity, when one moves to a new neighborhood or city.

Americans value democracy and equality. Most believe that everyone has a right to his or her own opinion and a freedom to express it. Although Americans sometimes criticize their own government, they may not appreciate frequent criticism of international visitors whom they consider to be guests in their country. Speak carefully when discussing politics; many Americans hold strong political opinions, and they do not discuss those easily. It

is better to ask questions and understand another's point of view before assuming that someone might share your views.

Americans are independent and value privacy. Their personal relationships are often not as close, long-lasting, or strong as those in other cultures. International visitors sometimes misinterpret this independence as an unwillingness to associate with foreigners.

Americans place a high value on personal hygiene and cleanliness. Most Americans bathe daily, brush their teeth twice daily, use deodorant, change their clothes daily, and wash their clothes after wearing them once. This emphasis on cleanliness may seem strange; however, you should realize that this is an area that often causes problems between Americans and international visitors. Americans are not used to body odor, and they are offended by it. You will find that supermarkets, drug stores, and department stores have hundreds of products that Americans use to keep themselves looking and smelling clean.

Americans are less formal than people from other cultures. This informality affects the way Americans dress and the ways in which they communicate and interact with others. Americans commonly call one another by their first names, even the first time they meet. In most situations, Americans dress casually. If you are in doubt about appropriate attire, it is acceptable to ask an American for advice. You will find that Americans do not devote as much time to "social niceties" as do those in other cultures. When formally introduced, Americans customarily shake hands; however, it is not common to shake hands with a person every time you see them. Many international visitors think Americans are abrupt. Unlike those from other cultures, Americans quickly get to the point. When they want something, they ask for it directly. When they offer a gift or extend an invitation, they usually do so only once.

By studying the unique history of the United States and by learning about this complex, multi-ethnic society, you may come to understand why Americans have these values.

# Culture Shock

## What is Culture Shock?

When you leave home and all the things that are familiar, you encounter many new and confusing situations. These situations naturally create stress; the reaction to this stress is called “culture shock.” Some of the differences between life at home and life in a new place are obvious:

- Language
- Climate
- Religion
- Food
- Educational system
- Absence of family and close ties

But other differences are not as obvious:

- How students relate to teachers
- How people make decisions
- How people spend their leisure time
- How people resolve conflicts
- How people express feelings and emotions
- The meanings of hand, face, and body movements

These differences cause feelings of uncertainty and anxiety. You may be asking:

- “Am I speaking properly?”
- “Will I be a successful student?”
- “Will I find friends?”
- “Should I discuss my personal beliefs or my political opinions?”
- “What does it mean when someone looks directly in my eyes?”
- “Should I trust this stranger who seems friendly?”

All of these uncertainties – and more – are confusing. You may feel that you don’t know what to do in certain situations. Probably you did not think about these things at home because you knew what to do and what to expect. You also knew how other people would react to a certain situation, and you could predict what they were thinking. In other words, you understood “the rules” and “the signs.” Life was easier at home.

Your body and your mind may react in unusual ways to the stress and confusion of living in a new culture. Some of the reactions you may experience are:

- Feeling isolated and alone
- Sleeping too much, or tiring easily
- Finding it difficult to sleep
- Suffering pain or feeling sick – especially frequent headaches, sore and stiff backs and necks, and upset stomachs.
- Wanting to return home
- Feeling angry toward local people

These reactions are normal. You are not ill. It is a temporary situation for people who are adjusting to life in a new environment.

## **Managing Culture Shock**

So how can you adjust to your new environment? How can you make a successful transition to living in a new culture?

First, understand that there are and there will continue to be uncertainties and confusion. Imagine how a local resident might react to living in your country.

Second, observe how people in your new environment act in situations that are confusing to you. Try to understand what they believe and why they behave as they do. Avoid judging things as either right or wrong; regard them as being merely different.

Third, remember the ways you have been able to reduce stress in difficult situations in the past and apply those methods in your present circumstances. For example, you might take a long walk, go to a movie theatre, or write a letter to a close friend or relative. Try to see the humor in confusing situations that you encounter; laughter is often the best medicine.

Fourth, accept the difficult challenges of learning to study and live in a new cultural setting. Believe that you can learn the skills to make a satisfactory transition. Gradually try to apply some of the skills you are learning.

Fifth, recognize the advantages of having lived in two different cultures. Your life will be enriched by meeting people whose cultural backgrounds are not the same as yours. Share your time with many different people. Avoid having friends only from your country, but also maintain strong personal ties to your culture while you are away from home. Think about how you can help local residents learn how people from your country behave and act.

Sixth, acknowledge your progress in adjusting to the new culture. Think of all that you have learned since the day you arrived. Recognize that, like other people who have lived in another country, you can and will make a successful adjustment to the other culture.

## **Making Choices: Responding to High Pressure Groups**

This section will help you become aware of certain groups on or around your campus that may try to pressure you to participate in their programs. It is not designed to create fear or reluctance on your part to participate in voluntary groups. Many such groups can provide helpful and desirable contacts, relationships, and opportunities. But remember that the choice is yours.

In the following story, Maria tells how representatives of one group tried to pressure her into joining. Fortunately, she refused to become involved.

“They were the first Americans to invite me to dinner. I had been sitting by myself in the cafeteria when a young girl came over to sit with me. She asked me where I was from and what I was studying. She seemed interested in me. Then she invited me to go to dinner that evening with her friends. I was so happy – I had been feeling very lonely; I was missing my family in the Philippines.

“We had a wonderful dinner. I got together with these people a few more times, but I did not really have the time to visit with them as much as they wanted me to because my classes were demanding more homework and I was going to have mid-term examinations soon. I tried to explain this to them. I thought they were also students and they would understand, but they did not seem to, and they just kept calling and insisting.

“I didn’t know how to say no. They had been so friendly, and in my country declining invitations from friends is considered rude. Finally I told them I had too much studying to do and could not go to all of these dinners with them. Even though they continued to phone me, I didn’t go. I felt so impolite! I never saw any of them again.

Above was an excerpt from “Cult Recruitment of International Students on American Campuses” by Jane R. Lindley in *Cults on Campus: Continuing Challenge*, ed. Marcia Rudin, an International Cult Education Program book published by American Family Foundation, 1991.

## Warning Signs of High-Pressure Groups:

There are many groups on your campus and in your community that you can join, and the vast majority are not harmful or destructive. How can you tell the difference? What are warning signs of a high-pressure, high-impact, or destructive group? Ask yourself whether the group or its representatives:

- Pressure you to give them money or your belongings?
- Offer you so many free things that what they're offering you seems too good to be true?
- Force you to make a decision about joining them immediately without giving you a chance to think about it?
- Flatter you and compliment you constantly?
- Try to control what you think and what you do?
- Discourage you from asking questions and making free choices?
- Tell you that thinking interferes with finding happiness or real answers?
- Insist that you spend so much time with them that you can't get your studying done or you don't have time for your other friends or activities?
- Pressure you to get others involved in the group?
- Discourage you from keeping in touch with your family and friends or not allow you to talk to your friends or your family alone?
- Refuse to answer questions you ask about their group and tell you they'll answer your questions later? □  
Claim to have all the answers to your problems and that you can't find answers anywhere else?

These questions are meant only to help you identify what might be a high-pressure group. Answering "yes" to one or two questions doesn't mean that a group is destructive or harmful, but it does mean you should proceed slowly and investigate the group more carefully.

## How to Respond to High Pressure Groups

- You have the right to choose how and with whom you spend your time.
- It's OK to say no. You can say no firmly but politely.
- You have the right to take your time to make important decisions.
- You don't need to join the group right away. Health groups will let you join them later if you choose to.  
□ Don't give up the things that are most important to you for anyone else in the group or for any group.
- Be sure the group is a student group recognized by your college or university or is well known in the community.
- Find out about the group and freely decide whether or not to join them.
- If you miss your family, feel lonely, are having trouble keeping up with your studies, experiencing personal problems, or having a hard time adjusting to your campus or to life in the United States, talk to your advisors, faculty members, or trusted friends.
- There are many ways to solve problems that the group or its representatives say only they can solve. No one person or one group has all of the answers or all of the correct answers to questions or problems.
- Always stay in contact with your family and friends back home.

If you have questions about this information, please contact an international student advisor.

# Emergency Phone Numbers

## **OFF-CAMPUS:**

911

Reaches police, fire, and rescue. Call any time you feel in danger.

## **ON-CAMPUS:**

4.2648

Reaches Campus Security. Also look for BLUE pillar emergency phones around campus.