



Living Essentials

International Student Services – Texas A&M University

Sometimes, everyday aspects of living in a foreign country can be confusing because of the differences between your homeland and your new host country. Below are some helpful hints to help prepare you for those differences. There are several handouts about this material in the ISS office, or online at <http://international.tamu.edu/iss/>.

COMMUNICATION NEEDS

News and Information Sources:

- There are a number of sources for international news on cable television. Channels such as CNN, Bloomsburg, CNBC, CNN Headline News, Fox News Channel, MSNBC, and the International Channel provide various amounts of international news at various times of the day.
- CNN, Bloomsburg and Fox News Channel provide 24-hour news service, and the International Channel shows news and other programs broadcasted from other countries. You may be able to view the same programs being broadcast in your home country, in your own language.
- National Public Radio (NPR) KAMU 90.9 FM is the radio station with the most news coverage.
- There are also many sites for you to find national and local newspapers around town. The larger, better-known newspapers like *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *The Washington Post* will have more international news than the local newspapers. You can find certain daily newspapers to read in Evans Library, specifically the *Austin American Statesmen*, *Houston Chronicle*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Dallas Morning News*, *The New York Times* and *The Eagle*.
- These and numerous other publications are found on the internet. Local newspapers include *The Eagle*, and the *Thrifty Nickel*, which has classified ads selling a variety of things. Texas A&M's campus daily newspaper is the *The Battalion*.

Keeping in touch with home

- **Telephone** – There are long distance companies, calling cards, and international cell phones that you may buy to call home. Calling cards may be bought at many stores. All calling methods can be very expensive. To call internationally, enter 1-011-country code-telephone number.
- **Internet** – The internet can be a cheap and convenient way to keep in touch with people at home. All of the open access labs on campus (the SCC, Blocker, and West Campus Library) have free internet service where you can email and talk online.
- **Mail** – Mailing letters and packages home is also a good way to keep in contact. Although, be prepared for mail to take a little longer to arrive in your country. International shipping on packages can also tend to be very expensive for heavy packages. To receive packages, have them mailed to your home address, or rent a post office box at one of the US Post Offices. There are two US Post Offices locations on campus:
- Memorial Student Center (MSC), window hours are 10am-3pm, M-F. Post office boxes are accessible 24 hours a day.
- Post Office at Northgate, on the corner of Houston St. and College Main (right in front of northgate). Hours are 9:30am-4pm.

SHOPPING

Food

- It is generally less expensive to prepare food and eat at home than to eat out at restaurants. Several supermarkets or grocery stores sell all types of food, health supplies, cosmetics, cooking utensils and a variety of other things. These stores include HEB, Kroger, Albertsons, Appletree and Wal-Mart Superstore.
- There are also vegetable and fruit markets such as the Farm Patch, Farmer's Market and The Fisherman where you can buy fresh foods.
- Sam's Club is also a place to buy food and other items in larger quantities, but you must purchase a yearly membership for \$40 to shop there. This membership entitles you to two member cards.

Furniture, Household Items, and Clothing

- Furniture can be purchased inexpensively from used furniture stores like Twin City Mission, Saint Vincent de Paul, Salvation Army, or Goodwill Stores. Also, check "For Sale" notices on the bulletin board in the ISS office. There are several furniture stores that you can find in the telephone book.
- Household items such as sheets, towels, dishes, lamps, and personal items will be less expensive at stores like Wal-Mart or Target.
- There are several shopping centers in the community where you can buy clothes, shoes and other accessories. Post Oak Mall is a shopping mall with several department stores and shops selling numerous items.
- Check the classified ads in any local newspaper to find various used items for sale.

Garage and Yard Sales

These sales of used household items and clothing take place at private homes and are advertised in the local newspapers each Friday. People will expect you to bargain with them to determine the final cost of the item. It is easy to find good prices at these sales, but look carefully at each item and be certain they are in good condition before you buy.

Sales Tax

- Texas has an 8.25% sales tax that is added to the purchase price of items bought in Texas stores. Be aware that the price tags do not reflect this tax; it is added on at the register.
- Although most foods are not taxed, some prepared foods (as well as all other items purchased in the supermarket) are. Food served in restaurants is taxed.
- If you plan to travel around the other US states be aware that they have other sales tax rules.

Buying items on Credit

- Before you buy on credit, or "charge it," make sure you understand the interest charges and all terms of the charge agreement.
- Charge accounts use plastic charge cards and allow you to purchase merchandise and then pay for it later. If the bill is paid in full within 30 days, then there is usually no interest charge. If not all of the bill is paid every month, then interest will be charged on the remaining balance of your account.
- Like a charge account, installment payments allow you to take the item home immediately and pay a small amount of the bill each month.
- Lay-away plans allow you to pay in part for an item and receive the item whenever the total bill has been paid in full. Some stores have policies that prevent them from giving charge accounts to international students.

EATING OUT AND EATING ON-CAMPUS

Eating out

- There are many restaurants in all price ranges in Bryan-College Station. Check the restaurant guide available in the yellow pages of the telephone book.
- “Fast food” obtained at drive-in type restaurants, is offered with very quick service, but it is not always nutritionally balanced.
- In restaurants where you sit down and are served a meal, it is customary to leave a tip (15-20% of your bill) for you waiter/waitress. You may choose to leave more or less depending on the quality of the service.

Eating on-campus

- There are several cafeterias and snack bars on campus. The MSC Cafeteria and 12th Man International are open seven days a week 7:30 am to 2:00 pm. Snack bars include the Common’s housing area, the Underground, Hullabaloo, Bus Stop Cafe, Pie are Square, Ag Café, Bernie’s, the Pavillion, and Rumours.
- In addition, you may purchase a meal plan at registration that will allow you to eat in the areas mentioned above as well as the campus dining halls: Sbisa and Duncan.

HOUSING NEEDS

Utilities

- **Water, Sewage and Electricity:** You must contact either the Bryan or College Station Utilities office to have your water and electricity connected in you house or apartment. A deposit may or may not be required.
- **Telephone Service:** Telephones are operated by privately owned companies. Verizon is the local telephone service provider. You may either connect your phone by calling 800-483-4000 or by going to the Verizon store. You will be billed for local calls and for long distance calls. You must select a long distance provider; however, choose carefully because you can get better rates for international calls from certain providers.

Safety Issues

- There are several steps that you can take to make sure that you are safe and protected in your new housing situation. Renter’s insurance can be purchased to provide protection for your personal belongings against perils such as fire, theft, or vandalism.
- You should familiarize yourself with household appliances and make sure that you know how to properly use and take care of them. Smoke, gas and carbon monoxide detectors should be present in all homes. Batteries in these should be replaced if they begin to beep slowly. It is suggested that the batteries in such devices be changed when the clocks are adjusted in spring and fall.
- Keep emergency numbers easy to reach so that you have them nearby and readily accessible.
- Keep your doors locked at all times, especially while not at home. Theft can be common in areas of Bryan-College Station and you should take the necessary precautions to prevent being burglarized.

BANKING AND FINANCIAL NEEDS

Banking Information

- There are different kinds of bank accounts that you may open while living in the US. The most common are savings accounts and checking accounts:
 - Savings accounts are used to deposit larger amounts of money for safekeeping over a long period of time, while checking accounts are designed to hold your money safely, but allow you to spend it as you wish.
 - With a checking account, you can write checks to a business to pay bills or services.
- Most banks provide several services to people who have accounts with them. These may include:

- ATM's, which allow you to immediately withdraw money from your account using a bank machine and your bank issued debit card
- Wire service to transport money long distance
- Lending money in the form of loans that are to be paid back
- Exchanging foreign currency
- Providing safety deposit boxes for valuable documents or possessions

Financial Aid

- **A Scholarship** is money given to you that you are not required to pay back. These are usually awarded based on good academic standing, financial need, and campus/community involvement. There is a list of scholarships available at the ISS office.
- **Grants** are given by the various organizations and are not required to be paid back. One such example is the Texas Public Education Grant for which International students are eligible to apply.
- **Emergency Tuition and Fee Loans** are available at Texas A&M's Student Financial Aid Office.

On-campus Employment

- On-campus jobs are a great way for students to work and earn money. You can visit the Student Employment Office or find information at <https://tamujobs.tamu.edu>.
- Some places that are usually hiring student workers are Food Services, The Recreation Center, and Evans Library. In addition, looking for work in your department of study is a great way to work in your field.

TRANSPORTATION

- **Texas A&M University Bus Routes:**
There are several on-campus and off-campus bus routes that travel all over campus and around many areas of Bryan-College Station. This is a free and convenient way to get to, from, and around campus. You can find full route information at <http://transport.tamu.edu>.
- **City Public Transit**
There is a public transit system that has bus routes around Bryan-College Station. The fares are \$1.00 per person per one-way ride, but you can get multiple ride passes that give you a cheaper rate. You can find route information and times at <http://www.btd.org/BryanCollegeStation.htm>.
- **Cars and Drivers' Licenses**
 - You must have a Driver's License to drive anywhere in the US. To receive your license you must take a written exam and a driving exam. See the "Obtaining a Texas Driver's License or Identification Card" section of this manual for more information.
 - When considering buying or leasing a car, you need to keep in mind the additional expenses of owning a vehicle such as having the Texas state minimum auto insurance and all upkeep expenses. Depending on the length of your stay here, it may be easiest to use public transportation.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Laundry Facilities

- Washing machines and clothes dryers are usually located in apartment complexes.
- There are also many Laundromats where you can bring your detergent and do your own wash in coin-operated machines. For a price, some Laundromats offer washing and pressing services, where dirty laundry is dropped off to be cleaned and picked up later.
- Check the yellow pages of the telephone book for listings of dry cleaners and Laundromats.

Getting Involved

- It is very important to get involved while you are studying here at Texas A&M. Joining clubs or organizations on campus or in the community is a great way to make friends and get involved. There is a club for nearly everything. International Student Association (ISA) and International Graduate Student Association (IGSA) are great organizations for all of you to join. MSC Open House, held at the beginning of each semester, is a chance to walk around the MSC and see many of the clubs here at A&M.
- Getting involved is important for many reasons. It will help you adjust to the culture and life as an Aggie. It will help you make friends, and more importantly, being involved in extracurricular activities looks good on resumes.

Religion

- The United States has a very diverse religious culture. There are many religions co-existing together. It is important to remember to be tolerant and accepting of other religions and those that practice them. In addition, keep in mind that the people around you may not know a lot about the religion that you practice, so be patient and understanding of them.
- In the Bryan-College Station area, there are many different places to worship which you can find listed in the phone book. If you have difficulty finding a particular place of worship, you may want to check with friends, a member of the International Student Association or the president of your country's student organization.
- There is an ISS handout with more information available in the office or online.

Loneliness and Homesickness

Since you are away from home, your normal surroundings and culture, and your friends and family, it is likely that you will experience a bit of homesickness as you adjust to your new setting. The best ways to deal with your feelings of loneliness or homesickness is to talk to someone, stay active, and get involved in organizations that match your interests. Remember that there are always people around you that are willing to help and talk with you. You may contact the ISS office for additional resources.

Essentials for the Family

- If you are here with your family, there are many opportunities for them to get involved in the community as well while you are going to school.
- There are English Language tutors and classes around the community and at local churches.
- There is also a program called the Discovery Program for female spouses of Texas A&M international students and faculty and their children. There is more information available about this program in the ISS office.
- If you are having any financial difficulties, please check with ISS before accepting any public assistance, as it may affect your visa status.

Dating, Alcohol, and Drugs

- In the US, it is illegal to date anyone that is considered a minor. The definition of the legal age of consent varies by state.
- The legal age to drink alcohol in the US is 21 years old. You cannot drink or buy alcohol if you are younger than 21. Do not drink and drive!
- Do not use illegal drugs while you are in the United States, other than those prescribed to you by a doctor or those bought over the counter at stores.
- Breaking any of these laws could have grave consequences for you since you are an international visitor. It is possible that you could face problems with your current stay in the US, denial of future visa applications, or denial of adjustment of status to US permanent residency.