



**Blinn College
International Student
Orientation
Fall 2006**



**MOVED TO BANQUET
ROOM E-105**

FALL 2006
International Student Orientation
Blinn College – Bryan Campus

August 23, 2006

Blinn College International Student Program – we opened our Bryan Campus International Office in the fall of 1998. Currently, the Bryan campus has more than 150 International Students from more than 40 countries. We hope this brief orientation session and the International Student Organization activities we have planned will be helpful to you as you begin your career of study at Blinn College.

International Student Contacts:

Brandie Bothe: International Student Coordinator
Bryan Campus – Office: A142
979-209-7305

Pat Jozwiak: International Student Advisor
Brenham Campus – Office: A213
979-830-4150

F-1 Student Visa Regulations

The F-1's stay is valid for D/S or "duration of status." This is canceled if the student enters the US with a different visa type, or if F-1 regulations are broken. Breaking the rules, results in the student being out of legal status. **Regulations change frequently**, so stay alert.

The following is required of the F-1 student:

- Maintain a permanent residence outside the US to which they intend to return
- Be a full time, degree seeking student.
- Register for and complete a **full course of study** each semester at the school that issued the I-20. There are a few reasons for falling below the minimum numbers of hours – ALL of the, with the possible exception of medical emergency, **must be approved** by the Foreign Student Advisor **in advance**. A full course of study is **12 credit hours** minimum during the Fall and Spring semesters. A student who submits the initial enrollment application and applies for the I-20 for the summer session is expected to enroll for at least 3 credit hours per summer session. Developmental course hours count toward the minimum. A student who does not *register for and maintain* the minimum credit hour is **out of legal status**. See an international advisor about these reasons before dropping a full course of study or withdrawing from school.
- Form I-20 and passport must not expire or the F-1 student is out of legal status and must file a motion for reinstatement with Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS). Extensions of program beyond the completion date on the I-20 may be applied for through the international student office. This must be done **before** the I-20 expires.
- If paid by Blinn College, F-1 students may work part time (up to 20 hours) on campus during regular semesters and full time during vacation (summer) periods. Off-campus employment is **not authorized** except situations of economic hardship and must be applied for and granted through INS.
- The I-20 must be endorsed by the Designated School Official (DSO) before an F-1 student travels outside the US. Make all entries to the US with the I-20 and be sure the I-94 is marked "F-1" (or "F-2" for dependents).

- **Plan ahead** – All of these I-20 actions take time. If you are not sure what action must be taken, meet with an international advisor. Blinn College has no control over INS policy or action, so you must be aware of your international status at all times. Once a decision is made by INS, it is very difficult (impossible) to get it changed. **Be right the first time!**

Academic Requirements

Use an academic advisor to assist you with your academic planning the entire time you are at Blinn College. There are many degree program, pre-requisite and pre-transfer details that must be considered and could cause delays and wasted effort if not factored in to your academic planning.

If you have college credit from your own country that may transfer to your 4-year school, it must be considered in academic planning. Although Blinn College does not, as yet, evaluate international transcripts, your advisor can help you work around some courses that may transfer to avoid duplication of work. An English language translation of your transcript will be required for planning.

Don't rush your academic program! Balance your course load so that you don't overestimate your ability to complete your semester. Most course drops cause F-1 status violations are a result of the student trying to take too heavy a course load or jumping ahead to avoid pre-requisite and becoming overworked. Completing your program in a timely manner is important, but the Grade Point Average is essential. Keep a balanced view of your academic program.

Blinn College offers Associate in Arts (AA), Associate in Science (AS), and an Associate in Applied Science (AAS) degrees. The pre-transfer courses for the 4-year school can be integrated into the AA and AS degree plans. Your academic advisor can assist you in this planning.

Absentee registration by Blinn professional staff will no longer be permitted after the Fall '98 semester, except in emergency circumstances. If all requirements for registration are completed in advance, however, another individual may register for you. Check with an international advisor about this procedure.

College Transfers

Our advisors can assist you with preparations for transfer to your 4-year institution. There are some special requirements for international student that must be fulfilled when applying to another college. To ensure timely compliance with your chosen college, **START EARLY**. One requirement that must be adhered to is the Foreign Student Advisor's Report (FSAR). This form must be completed by the DSO at Blinn College and

sent to the 4-year institution. It verifies you **entire history of compliance** while you are attending Blinn College. Be sure you have nothing to worry about by being attentive to all your compliance requirements. Each school has its own FSAR form – be sure you get the one for your 4-year institution and submit it to the DSO for completion...

Welcome to Blinn College – We're glad you're with us!



Health Care

Health care in the United States is very expensive. It is very important for you to be aware of the following information:

- Social Security is mandatory retirement system in the USA and does not pay health care costs.
- No medical costs in the USA are subsidized by the government for international people who are non-resident.
- Payment of medical bills is usually made at the time the care is given, even if you have insurance. Insurance companies will reimburse you later for part of the medical costs.
- Payment of the bills and/or submitting claim forms if you have insurance is the responsibility of each individual who receives treatment.
- If you have health insurance, reimbursement can take several months, and copies of all medical bills and papers should be kept for at least one year.

LOCAL HEALTH CARE FACILITIES

CLINICS: There are many clinics located in the community at which you can receive medical care. They are, however, less expensive than hospitals. Several clinics that are commonly used include the following:

TEXAS AVE. MEDICAL CLINIC..... 779-4756 (Bryan)
(Monday-Saturday 8 am-8pm/ Sunday 12-6 pm)
CARE PLUS MEDICAL CENTER.....774-7587 (College Station)
(Monday-Saturday 8 am-7 pm/ Sunday -7pm)
CARE PLUS DENTAL CENTER.....774-1255 (College Station)
(Monday-Thursday 9 am-6 pm / Friday 9 am -1 pm)
SCOTT AND WHITE.....691-3300 (College Station)
(Monday-Friday 8 am-5 pm)
SCOTT AND WHITE.....691-3300 (PRESS 0)
(Monday-Thursday 8 am- 7:30 pm / Friday-Sunday 8 am-5 pm)

HOSPITALS: There are two full hospitals, one in each city. For the treatment of serious injuries, they might require proof of medical insurance.

ST. JOSEPHS REGIONAL HEALTH CENTER.....776-3777 (Bryan)
COLLEGE STATION MEDICAL CENTER....764-5100 (College Station)

Health Insurance

Because health care in the USA is expensive, we encourage all international students have medical health insurance. Students who have families with them are strongly encouraged to obtain additional insurance coverage for them. There are important facts and terms that you need to know about health insurance.

Most major US health insurance companies will not sell health insurance policies to international students. There are, however, companies that sell only to internationals that you may purchase for yourself and your family.

The USA does not have socialized medicine. All costs of health care are paid by the patient.

Even if you buy a health insurance policy, your insurance provider will likely require that you pay all the bills first and fill out a claim form to request reimbursement by the insurance company. It usually takes as long as two months to process a claim.

All insurance policies are different in their coverage, costs, and the percentage of your medical costs that will be reimbursed. **COMPARE POLICIES BEFORE YOU BUY ONE.**

The following are terms that policies have in common and that you should be sure to understand before you buy a policy. If you have doubts about any aspect of a policy, call the company and clarify information before you buy it.

Department Coverage means insurance for your spouse and children. It is available in most policies at an extra cost.

A **premium** is the amount you pay to buy the policy.

A **deductible** is an amount of money that you must pay for your health services. It can be a specific amount or a percentage of the cost of the medical bill. This is a non-refundable cost.

Basic medical benefits refer to the maximum amount of money that a policy will pay to you for whatever basic medical services are covered by the policy. A policy does not necessarily cover all medical services. Also check what percentages of the costs are covered by your policy. Many only cover 80% of the bills.

Major medical benefits refer to supplemental programs that you can purchase for an additional cost to cover the expenses of major medical emergencies that will go beyond the maximum amount covered in the basic medical benefits.

A **repatriation benefit** pays an amount to help cover the cost of returning the policy holder's body to his home country in the event of his death. Such costs can be as high as \$6,000.

A **pre-existing condition** clause allows the company not to pay for treatment on conditions that existed a certain number of months or years before the policy was purchased.

In some policies, items such as coverage for prescription drugs, eyecare, and dental coverage cost extra.



Owning an Automobile

To drive a car in the United States, you must have a valid U.S. driver's license or another driver's license that is recognized by U.S. authorities. If you have an international driver's license, be aware that it is only valid for one year. To obtain a Texas driver's license you must pass both a written and a driving examination. A Learner's permit allows beginners to practice driving with a licensed driver in the car. For complete information and a license, call or stop by the Department of Public Safety (DPS), the address is 1540 North Earl Rudder Freeway (Hwy 6), Bryan.

Buying an automobile requires experience and knowledge. Whether you look at a car dealership, or answer an advertisement by a private individual selling a car, take the automobile to a mechanic and have him examine it. This can help you to avoid making a bad purchase.

If you decide to buy a car, make sure that the **Certificate of Ownership** or **Title** is transferred to you from the previous owner. Also, make sure that you register the car within 10 days after purchase (call the Brazos County Tax Assessor Collector's Office, 261-4479, The address is 300 East William Joel Bryan Parkway, Bryan TX 77803). **YOU MUST HAVE LIABILITY INSURANCE BEFORE DRIVING THE CAR.**

State safety inspection laws require that the automobile be inspected once a year at a DPS approved Official Inspection Station. These usually are gasoline stations or automobile repair garages. There is a fee (about \$15.00 in cash) for the inspection, and proof of the inspection (a sticker) will be placed on the inside of the front windshield on the driver's side. The large number on the sticker tells you what month to have your car inspected each year.

License plates are required on the front and back of your car to identify the car as yours and to prove you paid the license tax. Contact the Brazos County Tax Assessor Collector's Office (361-4470) for information about how to obtain these.

TIPS ON AUTOMOBILE PURCHASES: Prior to purchase of a previously owned vehicle, the buyer should make certain inspections and investigations including, but not limited to, the following:

- Inspect the Certificate of Title to the vehicle to determine the actual owners, the lien holders to be paid-off at the time of the sale, and if the vehicle has been reconditioned after extensive repairs.
- Take the vehicle to mechanic for a complete inspection to determine any repairs which will be necessary and if the vehicle has had allot of body repairs after an incident.
- If you do not have a written warranty, you probably purchased the vehicle in "AS IS" condition without any warranty. The seller will neither want to reimburse you for repairs after the sale or refund your purchase money.

- The Police will give you a ticket if you drive any vehicle, which does not have liability insurance, current registration, and inspection certificate. Also, you need a driver's license.
- When you sell your vehicle to an individual, do not accept either a personal check or payment plan

If you have any questions or need assistance, please contact the Auto Registration Office in the Brazos County Tax Assessor Office. Prior to transfer of funds, you may want to meet with the seller in the Auto Registration Office to have their staff review and complete the necessary documents for both parties.

FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN CASE OF ACCIDENT: IF you are in any accident involving you as an **operator or owner** of the automobile in which any person (including yourself) is injured, or in which there is at least \$500.00 in property damage, you should follow the guidelines for reporting an accident (Found in your DPS Driver's Handbook) and contact an International Student Advisor (845-1824/845-1825). **Be sure that you and the other person involved in the accident exchange the following information: (1) phone numbers, (2) names, (3) addresses, (4) name of automobile owner's insurance company.** This is extremely important.

AUTO INSURANCE: Insurance can be obtained from many insurance companies. Look in the Yellow Pages under "Insurance." All rates in Texas are about the same for the same risk classification and types of coverage. **There are three types of automobile insurance:**

- **Accidental** –pays for damage to your automobile when you have an accident
- **Comprehensive** – insures against many kinds of damage that occur to your car (e.g. a tree falls on it, vandalism, etc.).
- **Liability** – pays for injury, loss of life, and damage to other cars or property caused by your automobile.

State law makes the owner (not necessarily the driver) subject to high losses if his/her automobile causes injury, loss of life, or property damage. Protect yourself! Be very careful about allowing others to driver your car. Be sure the person has driver's insurance.

Secure at least the minimum amount of liability insurance required by the State Financial Responsibility Law. This coverage includes \$20,000 for bodily injury or death for one person, \$40,000 for bodily injury or death for two persons, and \$15,000 for property damage. Cost to you will vary because of age and driving experience, but it is usually \$500.00 or more per year.

Local Transportation

TAMU CAMPUS SHUTTLE BUS SERVICE: The **Intra-Campus** us service begins service at 7:00 a.m. on regular class days and operates until 6:30 p.m. during fall and spring semesters. Night and weekend service is also available. To get more information, visit the website, <http://www-ptts.tamu.edu/bus/default.asp>. A Regular **Off-Campus** shuttle service runs from 7:00 a.m. until 6:30 p.m., Monday through Fridays. After 6:30 p.m. some off-campus routes are combined, and fewer buses are scheduled. For more information visit the PTTS website, <http://www-ptts.tamu.edu/> or call 862-PARK. There is no charge to ride the TAMU shuttle bus.

THE INTERURBAN: The Brazos Transit District offers a city bus for travel around Bryan/ College Station. There are schedules and maps available in the International Advising Office and online at <http://www.btd.org>. You may also call (979) 778-4480 or 1(800) 735-2989 for more information.

TAXICABS: Taxi services in this area are listed in the Yellow PAGES of the Telephone Directory under "Taxicabs." Be aware this is one of the more expensive means of transportation.

AUTOMOBILES (CARS): Owning an automobile can be very convenient, yet it can also be fairly expensive. In addition to the initial cost of buying a car, there are insurance costs (Texas law requires liability insurance), repairs, general maintenance, gasoline, and licensing costs, as well as on-campus parking permits. To drive a car in Texas, you must have a **Texas driver's license. An international driver's license is only valid for one year. A Texas license is issued after you pass both a written and a driving examination. A learner's permit allows beginners to practice driving with a licensed driver in the car. For complete information and a license, call or stop by the Department of Public Safety (DPS), 1540 South State Highway 6, Bryan (776-3110). Please note that you will need a Social Security Card or a Social Security Denial Letter in order to apply for a driver's license.**

Purchasing an automobile requires experience and knowledge. Whether you look at a car dealership, or answer an advertisement by a private individual selling a car, take the automobile to a mechanic and have him examine it. This can help you to avoid making a bad purchase. If you decide to buy a car, make sure that the **Certificate of Ownership** or **Title** is transferred to you from the previous owner. You should go with the previous owner to the Brazos County Tax Assessors Office located in Bryan, Telephone: 361-4470. Also, be sure that you register the car within 10 days after purchase. **You must have liability insurance before driving the car.**

State safety inspection laws require that the automobile be inspected once a year at a DPS approved Official Inspection Station. The Inspection Stations have signs in front of the station. Many gasoline stations and automobile repair garages are also Official

Inspection Stations. There is a fee (about \$15.00 in cash) for the inspection, and a proof of the inspection (a sticker) will be placed on the inside of the front windshield on the driver's side. The large number on the sticker tells you what month to have your car inspected each year.

License plates are required on the front and back of your car to identify the car as yours and to prove you paid the license tax. Contact the Brazos County Tax Assessor Collector's Office (361-4470) for information about how to obtain these. The address is 300 East William J. Bryan Parkway, Bryan TX 77803.

RESPONSIBILITY IN CASE OF AN ACCIDENT: If you are in an accident and you are the operator or owner of the automobile, follow the guidelines for reporting an accident. Information on reporting an accident is located in your DPR Driver's Handbook. It is also recommended that you contact an International Student Advisor (209-7305). Exchange your name, phone number, address and name of your automobile owner's insurance company with the other persons involved in the accident. Be sure to get the other person's information.

AUTO INSURANCE: Insurance can be obtained from many insurance companies. Look in the Yellow Pages under "Insurance." All rates in Texas are about the same for the same risk classification and types of coverage. There are three types of automobile insurance:

- Accident** pays for damage to your automobile when you have an accident.
- Comprehensive** insures against many kinds of damage that occur to your car (e.g. a tree falls on it, vandalism, etc.).
- Liability** pays for injury, loss of life, and damage to other cars or property caused by your automobile.

State law makes the owner (not necessarily the driver) subject of high losses if his/her automobile causes injury, loss of life, or property damage. Protect yourself! Be very careful about allowing others to drive your car. Be sure the person has driver's insurance.

Secure at least the minimum amount of liability insurance required by the State Financial Responsibility Law. Your insurance must include \$20,000 against injury or death of one person, \$40,000 against injury or death of two persons, and \$15,000 against property insurance. The cost of insurance will vary person to person because of a variety of factors, such as age and driving experience. On average, insurance costs \$500 or more per year.

Travel in the U.S.A.

While you are in the United States, take advantage of opportunities to travel both in Texas and other states. There are many ways to travel on your own or in a group.

BY AIR

Air travel can be arranged by contacting a travel agent (listed in the Yellow Pages of the telephone book) that will make your flight arrangements free of charge to you. The local airport has commuter air service to major airports in Texas.

BY BUS

By bus, you can travel long and short distances relatively inexpensively. Check the Yellow Pages under "Bus Lines" for information.

BY RENTAL CAR

If you wish to rent a car, you must have a U.S. driver's license and usually one credit card. Be aware that most rental agencies require the person renting the car to be at least 25 years of age. Because rates vary between rental companies, call several and compare rates. Look under "Automobile Renting and Leasing" in the Yellow Pages of the telephone book for help.

BY SHARING A RIDE

Sharing expenses with another driver is a fairly common practice on college campuses. You will notice signs posted around campus in which a student advertises for someone to share a ride to a specific location. The Texas A&M Travel Committee maintains a travel board in the Memorial Student Center (MSC) that also lists people who want to share rides.

ISS encourages international students traveling outside Texas but inside the U.S. to carry their original passport, I-94 card and I-20 or IAP-66. This precaution will clearly identify you as a student and provide immediate identification for your nationality. Because there is always a danger of losing original documents, it may also be a good idea to make a copy of your original passport and maintain that copy in a safe location.

OTHER SERVICES AVAILABLE TO YOU FOR TRAVEL PURPOSES:

International I.D. cards may be obtained through the Study Abroad Program Office at Texas A&M University, 1st Floor Bizzell Hall West. Telephone 845-0544. This I.D. (cost about \$22.00) will allow you to take discounts on airfare, travel insurance, and certain tours and performances as you travel throughout the U.S.A. or the world.

American Youth Hostel books and membership information (cost is about \$25.00) may be obtained through the Study Abroad Program Office at Texas A&M University, 1st Floor Bizzell Hall West. Telephone 845-0544, or contact Bluebonnet Council of American Youth Hostels, 256 South Loop West, Suite 510, Houston, TX 77054, open M,

W,F from 1:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. Telephone (713) 661-2050. You can get more information from the net at www.hiayh.org. You may use youth hostel cards from your own country in these hostels.

The Y's Way International offers inexpensive housing in major cities as well as package tours. For more information, contact The Y's Way International, 224 East 47th St., New York, NY 10017. Telephone: (212) 308-2899 fax (212) 308-3161.

Vacation trips are available through a variety of host family organizations across the U.S. Registration information is available in the I.S.S. Office about two months before major vacations (Christmas, Thanksgiving, Spring Break, Summer) , and you should look into these programs early due to registration deadlines. Also, local church groups, international clubs, and campus organizations sponsor trips that are announced by poster fliers. Check the I.S.S. Bulletin boards monthly for information about such activities.

General Banking Information

ACCOUNTS: There are different kinds of bank accounts. Three of the most common are:

1. **Savings Account** – Your money earns interest, but there may be a fee for frequent withdrawals. Some banks charge a monthly fee if the balance in the account is below a specified amount. It is used to deposit money for safekeeping over a long period of time.
2. **Checking Account** – Designed to hold your money safely in a bank, but allow you to spend it as you wish. Some earn interest and have restrictions on the number of checks you can write. Most have minimum balances required and penalties for going below that amount. After opening a checking account, you will receive an account number and personalized checks which will be charged to your account. Checks may be written for cash or directly to a business to pay bills or services. You will need identification such as a driver's license or a Texas ID card to cash checks. Sometimes it is difficult to cash checks from a Bryan/College Station bank if you are outside the area, especially outside of Texas.
3. **Certificates of Deposit (CDs)** – Savings certificates earn higher interest rates than regular savings accounts, but must remain on deposit for a specific period of time. There is a penalty for early withdrawal.

CHECKBOOK: This contains three parts:

1. Checks
2. Deposit Tickets (located behind the checks)
3. Record of Account Balance (check Register or Ledger)

BANK SERVICES: Most banks will provide the following basic services as well as several other special services. Before opening an account, ask the bank about the services it provides.

- ❖ **Bank Statements** – Printed record of your account activity sent monthly from the bank.
- ❖ **Automated Teller Machine Cards (ATM Cards)** – A Plastic card issued by the bank; when used with a P.I.N. (a personal identified number), it allows immediate cash withdrawals from either checking or savings accounts 24-hours a day at special banking machines called automated tellers.
- ❖ **Canceled Checks**- Checks that have processed by the bank and whose amounts have been deducted from your account.
- ❖ **Wiring Service for Money** – Enables long-distance electronic transfer of funds
- ❖ **Traveler's Checks** – Special checks purchased at the bank, used in place of cash or personal checks when traveling. Many types are accepted worldwide in shops, restaurants, hotels, etc.
- ❖ **Loans** – Borrowing money from the bank, to be repaid within a specified amount of time with interest added.
- ❖ **Checking Reserve** – A specialized bank service that ensure there will be funds in your account at all times. This helps avoid bouncing checks.

- ❖ **Credit References** – A statement provided by the bank to give someone information about your credit history.
- ❖ **Safety Deposit Boxes** – Secured boxes located in a bank which are used to store valuables (documents, jewelry, etc.). There is a fee for this service.
- ❖ **Foreign Currency Exchange** – Amount of foreign currency that may be traded for U.S. Currency.
- ❖ **Money Orders** – Form of check purchased with cash, often used when sending money by mail (available at banks or post offices).
- ❖ **Draft** – Similar to money order; however, the money is deducted from your account instead of being paid in cash.
- ❖ **Cashier's Check** – a special check issued directly by the bank cashier from your account. It is used when our personal checks are not accepted (ex. Buying a car, buying a house, etc.).
- ❖ **Notary Public** – Person who verifies the validity of legal documents. There is a fee for this service.
- ❖ **Check Cashing** – Withdrawal of funds from your account by writing a check in exchange for cash.
- ❖ **Night Deposit** - Located outside of banks, this allows for depositing money or checks after the bank has closed.

- ❖ **BANKING TERMS DEFINED**
- ❖ **Balance** – The current amount of money you have in your bank account. This term is also used to refer to the process of reconciling the checks you have written to the bank statement.
- ❖ **Stop Payment (“put a hold on a check”)** – Asking the bank to keep a check from being deducted from your account.
- ❖ **Insufficient Funds/ Overdraft (“bounced or hot check”)** – Occurs when a check has been written, but you do not have enough money in your account to cover it. There are charges of \$20-\$25 per check for this. Also, it becomes part of your legal record.
- ❖ **Direct Deposit** - Funds are deposited electronically into your account by another institution (ex: your employer).
- ❖ **Auto Debit** – Funds are withdrawn automatically from your account by another institution (ex. A credit union to whom you owe a monthly amount for a car loan).
- ❖ **Credit Union** – An institution providing services similar to a bank for its members. There is a fee to become a member.
- ❖ **Bank Teller** – Employee of a bank that handles the exchange of money.
- ❖ **FDIC Insured** – Protection on your accounts offered by U.S. government for up to \$100, 000. Banks are not always stable, be sure yours is insured.
- ❖ **Service Charge** – These are monthly fees the bank withdraws from your account for maintaining it.
- ❖ **Interest Earned** – The bank pays you a percentage of your account for keeping your money in the institution.
- ❖ **Interest Paid** - The amount the bank charges you for borrowing money from them (see “loan”).
- ❖ **Credit** – A deposit of funds to a bank.

- ❖ **Debit** – A withdrawal of funds from a bank.
- ❖ **Personal Identification Number (P.I.N)** – A security code entered when using an ATM.
- ❖ **Charge Back Fee** – A processing fee the bank charges a customer for depositing a check with insufficient funds in the account (a hot check).
- ❖ **Truncated Checks** – Processed checks that are not returned to the customer with the bank statement. Instead they are kept on file at the bank.

Utilities

WATER, SEWAGE, AND ELECTRICITY

Bryan Utilities: 205 East 28th Street, Bryan, TX 77803. Tel: 821-5700
<http://www.btutilities.com/index.html>

Monday – Friday, 7:00a.m. -6:00 p.m.

A deposit is required for connecting your water, sewage, and electricity in Bryan. The deposit is \$160 for electricity and water service or \$145 for electricity service only. If you need sewage service and garbage, a \$10 deposit is required. The deposit is smaller for homeowners. The deposit may be refunded when service is disconnected. You need to bring a copy of your lease and some type of identification, such as passport, social security card, and driver's license.

College Station Utilities: 310 Krenek Tap, College Station, TX. Telephone: 764-3535
Monday – Friday, 8:00a.m.-5:00p.m. <http://www.ci.college-station.tx.us/>

No deposit is usually required unless you pay your bill late for three months or you do not have a credit record. If you have to pay a deposit, it is \$135 for electricity and water service or \$105 for electricity service only. Sewage service is \$20.65 for apartments per month and \$15.14 for houses per month. Garbage service is \$5.50 per month for apartment/general access to a dumpster or \$10.70 per month for residential/private dumpster.

NATURAL GAS SERVICE

TXU Electric & Gas provide Natural Gas service. You may request gas service by calling 800-460-3030. The connection charge is \$27.50. <http://www.txu.com/us/default.asp>

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 may be required to make a deposit, which will be returned upon when you discontinue service and pay all your phone bills. You can pay the installation fee over several months rather than paying it all at once. 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.

You will be responsible for paying for all calls made from your phone even if someone else made the calls.

Verizon: 607 East University, Suite 105, Albertson's Shopping Center
College Station, TX Local Tel: 846-1271
Monday – Friday, 9:00 a.m. – 6 p.m., Saturday 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Some of the Long Distance Carriers:

AT&T	800-222-0300
LDDS WorldCom	800-275-0100
MCI	800-444-6000
STARTEL	821-2830
US SPRINT	800-746-3767

POSTAL SERVICE

You can either receive your mail at your home address or you may rent a Post Office Box. Mail can be posted from any US Post Office or any US Postal Service mailbox. A Post Office Box is accessible 24 hours a day.

TELEGRAMS, CABELGRAMS, or RADIOGRAMS

Contact Western Union Telegram Co. at 1-800-325-6000 or <http://wetstenunion.com/>
The least expensive is the deferred night letter or telegram. You can also send and receive money.

Information provided by TAMU-International Student Services



Living Essentials

Sometimes, everyday aspects of living in a foreign country can be confusing because they are different than what you are used to. Below are some helpful hints to help prepare you for those differences.

NEWS AND INFORMATION SOURCES

The best sources of international news in Bryan and College Station are through two cable television channels: CNN (channel 24) and the International Channel (channel 48). CNN is a 24 hours-a-day news service based in the U.S., with events interpreted by U.S. reporters. The International Channel shows news and other programs that are picked up by satellite as they are broadcast from other countries. Therefore, if your country's programs are picked up, you can see the same programs being broadcast in your home country, in your own language.

Bryan and College Station have many radio stations that play popular music. The station, which has the most news coverage, is National Public News (NPR) at 90.9 FM. Two long news programs begin at 6:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m.

The most extensive source of newspapers in town is available at Hastings Music, Books, and Video store. Major U.S. newspapers that provide good coverage of international news include The New York Times and The Washington Post. Major Texas newspapers include the Austin American Statesman, the Dallas Morning News, and the Houston Chronicle. Many of the major newspapers also have internet home pages covering the same news. Local newspapers include The Eagle, The Press, and the Thrifty Nickel. Texas A&M University's student newspaper is called the Battalion. While little international news is found in local papers, they provide excellent information about community services, businesses, entertainment and inexpensive sales.

GARAGE AND YARD SALES

These sales of used household items and clothing that take place at private homes 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.

STATE TAX

Texas has an 8.25% state sales tax that is added to the purchase price of items bought in Texas stores. Most food are not taxed although some prepared foods are taxed as well as all other items purchased in the supermarket.

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. There are several different types of credit plans. *Charge Accounts* use plastic charge cards and allow you to purchase merchandise and pay for it later. If the bill is paid in full within 30 days, there is usually no interest charge.

Like a charge account, *installment payments* allow you to take the item home immediately and pay a small amount of the bill each month. Interest charges are added to the monthly bill. *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.

FURNISHING YOUR HOME

Furniture can be purchased inexpensively from used furniture stores like Twin City Mission, Saint Vincent De Paul, garage or yard sales, or from notices in The Eagle newspaper classified advertisements. Also, check the “For Sale” notices on the bulletin board in the ISS office. Smaller household items such as sheets, towels, dishes, lamps, and personal items will be less expensive at discount stores like Wal-Mart or Target. Also be sure to check Twin City Mission, Saint Vincent De Paul, Second Chance, and other resale shops to purchase inexpensive used items. There are many shopping centers in the community including Post Oak Mall.

LAUNDRY FACILITIES

People in the USA attach great importance to keeping their clothing neat and clean. Because of this, there are usually washing machines and clothes dryers 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. A more expensive possibility is to have items *dry cleaned*. Check the “Yellow Pages” of the telephone book for listings of dry cleaners and Laundromats. Wool clothing should be dry cleaned and not washed. Most clothing will have a tag that explains how to clean the item.

COOKING FOR YOURSELF

It is generally less expensive to prepare food and eat at home than to always eat out at restaurants. Supermarkets or grocery stores sell all types of food, health supplies, cosmetics, cooking utensils and many other things. Some of the larger grocery stores are Albertson’s, Appletree, Kroger, Winn Dixie, Randall’s, H.E.B. Pantry, Super Wal-Mart, and Sam’s. Sam’s requires a \$35.00 membership fee. There are also vegetable and fruit markets such as the Farm Patch and Farmer’s Market. Whenever you buy food, read labels for content and directions for storing and preparing. *Fresh foods (especially meats and fishes) can spoil very quickly in the Texas heat and must be refrigerated and cooked properly*. If you have any questions about proper diet and health information, contact the dietician in the Health Center. Also, in most food stores, prices are printed on labels attached to the shelves. If you collect discount coupons for specific products from the newspaper and present these at the cash register, you can purchase some items for less money than the marked price.

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 your waiter/waitress to reward good service. *Be aware that if you eat out every night your food bills will be higher than if you cook at home.*

U.S. Social Customs

INFORMALITY

U.S. students are very informal. This can be seen through their clothing, which will often consist of a T-shirt, jeans or shorts, and tennis shoes. Books are most often carried in a backpack rather than a briefcase. People are often only introduced by first names when they meet. You will also notice that this informality is expressed in class behavior. It is not unusual to see students enter class late, eat and drink in class, put feet up on empty chairs, or even talk quietly during a lecture. In general, these actions are not considered to be overly rude unless they are continuously distracting; then an apology is necessary.

FRIENDSHIP

U.S. college students view their college years as a time for socializing as well as a tie for studying. Therefore, they see many situations to make friends and often express a friendly manner, by smiling, saying “hello” or “howdy,” and chatting. Despite this outward friendliness, U.S. citizens do not make close friends quickly, and generally only have three or four intimate friends and many acquaintances. Do not feel unwelcome if a U.S. citizen is slow to show you deep friendship; this is something that may take more time than you are used to. You may also find that U.S. undergraduate students have more time to develop close friendships than U.S. graduate students.

Although we do not physically touch each other as much as people from other countries, we are also a hug and a touch oriented society. Therefore, do not be surprised if new acquaintances touch your arm, shoulder, or back in greeting or saying good-bye. You will also see what you consider to be private expressions of affection carried out in public: for example, kissing, holding hands or hugging.

DATING

A “date” occurs when a man and a woman make a special appointment to meet and share an activity together. All cultures have “acceptable” and “unacceptable” procedures concerning this type of male-female relationship. As you know, even within your own culture, these carry from region to region and, to some extent, are based on personal preference. This is also true in the U.S. Here, both men and women initiate dates, men more frequently than women. Even among U.S. citizens, there is controversy about who should pay the expenses of the date. Most U.S. citizens still assume it will be the man, even if the female initiates the date. Women should not assume this is true, however, and still be prepared to pay at least one half of the cost of the date. Most men will appreciate this gesture, even if they insist on paying the full bill themselves. It would be wise to clarify this ahead of time if you want to share the costs of the date equally. This is sometimes called “Dutch dating” or “going Dutch” in the U.S.A.

When someone asks you out on a date in the U.S., it will almost always be a verbal invitation for you which you will be expected to make an immediate response. Take special note of the time for the date because U.S. citizens who say they will meet you at 8:00 p.m. will expect you to meet them at 8:00 p.m., not 8:30 or 9:00. It is considered

rude to be late for a pre-arranged date. As a first date with a U.S. citizen, it is not unusual for two people to meet for a soda just to talk, go to a movie, go out to dinner, go to a sporting event, go dancing, or many other similar activities. You should ask about how formally or informally you should dress for a date if you are not sure.

Although many U.S. TV shows and movies might suggest otherwise, it is not true that going out for an evening with a U.S. citizen will lead to a sexual encounter. Although this type of offer may be extended, you should always be guided in your answer by your own moral convictions and several important facts. First, the possibility of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, especially the fatal disease, AIDS, from a sexual encounter is a reality. If you do have intercourse, be sure that the male partner wears a condom, but be aware that this does not offer full protection from contracting the non-curable AIDS virus. Second, be aware of the age of your sexual partner. Having intercourse with someone under the age of 18, even with that individual's consent, can later be tried in court as statutory rape.

INVITATIONS

It is not unusual for professors or other campus employees and families in the community to invite international students to participate in social activities and family gatherings. Never feel obligated to accept this type of invitation if it makes you feel uncomfortable or if you are unable to do so because of schedule conflicts. It is considered very rude in the U.S. to accept an invitation and then not go to the event. U.S. citizens will expect you to tell them if you cannot attend and will appreciate knowing this. If you accept an invitation and later discover that you cannot attend, always call your host and let them know what has happened. Remember to arrive for the activity at the time stated in the invitation, not earlier and not more than about 15 minutes later.

If someone invites you to a dinner at their home, always feel comfortable in telling them about special dietary restrictions if you cannot eat certain foods. Your host will appreciate knowing this in advance, as many people in the U.S. have special diets they must follow. Your host will be very embarrassed if foods are prepared which you cannot eat.

PERSONAL HYGIENE

People in the U.S.A. often draw conclusions about others based on their physical appearance, clothing, and general hygiene. Remember, we are TV watchers. On television you will notice an emphasis on commercials which sell cleaning and personal hygiene products. It is also true that U.S. consumers spend hundreds of dollars a year on clothing detergents, soaps, perfumes, shampoos, deodorants, powders, toothpastes, and mouthwashes advertised on TV. This has helped to make us conscious of our cleanliness and appearance to an almost fanatic degree; we sometimes bathe more than once a day and are very conscious of how we look and what message that sends to those around us. Because of this emphasis, U.S. citizens react negatively to those who do not bathe regularly, use deodorants and mouthwashes, or keep their clothing clean and tidy.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ORIENTATION
LAWS, RULES, REGULATIONS AND
INFORMATION FOR STUDENT
SAFETY AND WELL BEING

BLINN COLLEGE RULES AND REGULATIONS

Parking:

All students that attend classes at Blinn College and park a motor vehicle on campus are required to register their vehicle with the parking department. They must also obtain and properly display a valid parking permit. Students must park in student parking areas only and must park in a designated parking space.

Campus Traffic Law:

The speed limit on campus is 20 mps(miles per hour). Pedestrians have the right of way.

Citations:

Citations are issued for violations of Blinn College rules and regulations. These citations are payable in the parking department in the E Building on the main campus. Citations are also issued on campus for violations of state law. These citations become part of the criminal justice system and require the defendant to appear in the appropriate court of jurisdiction.

ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE LAW

Legal age:

The legal age in Texas to consume, possess, or purchase alcoholic beverage is 21 years of age.

Possession:

Possession is defined as having immediate care, custody, control or access to something.

False/Altered Identification:

It is a violation of state law to possess a false/altered identification or a drivers license issued to another person or to misrepresent oneself to be twenty one years of age or older

TOBACCO PRODUCTS

Legal age:

The legal age to possess, purchase or use tobacco products is 18 years of age.

SCAMS/THEFTS

Scams

There are too many scams to cover. Police investigators call the most common one a “pigeon drop”. The “pigeon” is approached by one or more persons that are unknown to them. These criminals usually show what appears to be a large amount of money and explain that if you contribute an equal amount they can double or triple your investment in a very short time. The “pigeon” is usually asked to go to the bank and make a withdrawal equal to the amount the criminals have convinced them they have. The withdrawn money is given to the spokesman of the team, he secretly passes it to his partner who then leave with your money. The spokesman excuses himself for whatever reason or just walks away. This sound’s stupid, but these people are very convincing and it works on a large number of people every day. Remember, if it sounds too good to be true, it usually is.

Thefts

Thefts are a major problem across the nation. Always be aware of your surroundings and what is happening. Be careful when you are obtaining money, especially from an ATM machine etc. Always secure money and wallets before exiting a store. Keep your car/home doors locked, and never let a stranger into your vehicle or home. If you ever feel that something is wrong or you are being followed, you are probably right.

TRAFFIC LAW

Always obey the speed limits as posted by county, municipal and state agencies.

Pedestrians always have the right of way.

In the United States, vehicles are driven on the right-hand side of a highway, roadway or street.

If you lend your vehicle to someone or let them drive it, you may be held liable for any damages caused by this person while he or she operates your vehicle.

Texas law requires that the owner and operator of a motor vehicle have at least the minimum liability insurance coverage.

The operator of a motor vehicle and all occupants of the front seat must be secured by a safety belt.