

Mississippi University for Women



International Student Guide to American Customs and Values

2006-2007

AMERICAN CULTURE

The United States is a country full of people from many social, cultural, and national backgrounds, different economic situations, and different philosophies of life. Because of this diversity, it is difficult to generalize about Americans. However, there are some general characteristics that most Americans share.

CHOICES

International students often discover that they must make more decisions than would be necessary at a university in their home country. You must choose a major subject to study, whether or not to change roommates, when to study, etc. You will also choose the courses you take, within certain restrictions and with the help of your adviser. Whenever a choice seems difficult, you should seek advice from a counselor or adviser. When you do not know whom to ask, come to the International Programs Office and you will be referred to the right person.

INTERACTION OPPORTUNITIES

You are an Ambassador for your country. As a foreign student in the United States, you have an opportunity to contribute a great deal to a better understanding between people of your country and Americans. Many Americans you meet will want to know more about living conditions, cultural practices and local customs in your country. Answers to some of the questions they ask may appear obvious to you, but your replies will help generate interest in your country among your American colleagues. You should also find that the Americans you meet will be hoping to answer similar questions you may have about this country. Such interchange is likely to provide you with useful information and provide you with an opportunity to make some new friends.

There may also be special requests, for you to speak to groups of people or to participate in a radio or television program. You may be asked if you are willing to be interviewed by local newspaper reporters. Although you are not required to accept such invitations, speaking in public is an excellent opportunity for you to help people in this country learn more about your country. Therefore, your personal involvement makes a valuable contribution to international understanding. If you should accept requests to speak in public, or provide information for a newspaper story, we hope you will share this experience with the Office of International Programs.

COMMON THEMES IN AMERICAN LIFE

Unspoken language and gestures can be a common cause of misunderstanding between people of different cultures. Because these gestures or unspoken answers are so automatic, we tend to forget they might mean something different in another culture. To avoid misunderstandings, be sure to discuss issues further, it might be safer to use words.

Payment upon service is expected by medical doctors, dentists, lawyers, auto, and appliance repairman. It is usually best to get an estimate of cost before beginning the service. Doctors and dentists have set fees for services and do not negotiate and often charge patients who are not present or are very late for an appointment. Discuss your bill BEFORE the service and make sure you understand how your insurance might be used.

Personal time is valued by American professionals. It is considered a courtesy to make home telephone calls only between 9.00 am and 9.00 p.m. You should not call a professional such as your professor, academic adviser, doctor, or foreign student adviser at home unless it is an emergency. It is best to talk to them during their office hours.

Americans are generally obsessed with **personal hygiene**. It is not unusual for them to bathe more than once a day, change into clean clothing at least once a day, and wash their hair daily. Americans tend to find natural body odors very unpleasant, and in addition to frequent bathing, they use perfume, cologne, and underarm deodorant on a daily basis.

Individuality The American concept of individuality may be our single most important distinguishing traits as a people. Americans have strong family ties and strong loyalties to groups, but individuality and individual rights are deeply imbedded in our history and government structure. Americans value their own individual self-worth, have great respect for the individuality of others, and share a belief in human equality.

Independence and self-reliance related to individuality are the American traits of independence and self-reliance. From an early age, children are taught “to stand on their own two feet” (an American expression that means, “to be independent”). You may be surprised to learn that most U.S. students choose their own classes, select their own field of study, follow their own careers, live away from their parents, and arrange their own marriages rather than follow parental direction in these matters.

Directness Honesty and frankness are qualities that are more important to Americans than “saving face”. At times, Americans may seem very blunt, and they may raise topic issues in a polite conversation, which you think are embarrassing, controversial, or even offensive. It is not their intention to embarrass or offend. Americans are quick to get to the point and do not spend much time on formal, social amenities. In fact, they may be uncomfortable with prolonged social courtesies. Directness encourages Americans to talk over disagreements and try to solve misunderstandings by themselves, rather than to ask a third party to mediate disputes.

Questioning Sometime Americans will ask you a lot of questions and they may seem pointless, uninformed, or elementary. You may be asked very personal questions by someone you have just met. No offence is intended, as these questions come from a genuine interest. A common saying is, “There is no such thing as a dumb question.” You will be encouraged to ask questions in classes.

Materialistic For many Americans, “success” is measured by how much money a person has, how much profit a business deal makes, or how many material goods an individual owns. You will find some Americans who are like this. However, many Americans do not measure success in this way. These people enjoy simple pleasures, and are neither inordinately ambitious nor aggressive. Many Americans will appear materially successful by world standards.

Time-Conscious Americans value punctuality. They keep appointment calendars and live according to schedules. They are usually on time for appointments. To foreign students, American students seem “always in a hurry”, and this often makes them appear brusque. In fact, Americans are generally efficient and accomplish a great deal, simply by rushing around. You will need to adapt to this fact of American life by being on time to class, meeting appointments punctually, and showing that you value other people’s time.

Energetic The United States is a highly active society, full of movement and change. If you are used to a more leisurely pace, you may find the fast tempo exhausting; on the other hand, you may find it stimulating.

TICK-TOCK GOES THE CLOCK

Citizens of the U.S. are known for living a fast-paced style of life. Time, and the effective use of it, is very important to them. **Time is considered valuable**, something not to be wasted; and Americans feel that the achieving of goals depends on the productive use of time. As a result, you will probably find that the society is efficient and progress-oriented; however, this sometimes occurs at the expense of developing interpersonal relationships.

Promptness is very important in the American culture. In appointments with dentist, doctors, professors, or carrying out business transactions, you are expected to appear exactly at the scheduled time. If a problem arises which makes you late, a telephone call is necessary. Promptness is also expected for meetings, classes, weddings, and dinners. Many professors will not give credit for attendance to students who arrive in their classes after the lecture has begun

The way most Americans view time is both a direct and underlying reason for the structure of their society. You will find that technology has helped “instantize” the U.S., so that banks, restaurants, business offices, and supermarkets are all devoted to getting people in and out quickly. Even meals have gone “fast” food from quick-service restaurants and microwave meals at home have become a substantial part of the average citizen’s diet. In fact, most people carry calendars with them throughout their day, and very few do not wear watches! .

Although Americans are usually informal people, you will find that schedules are very important to them, and their lives are highly structured.

ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Citizens of the U.S. are proud of their democratic origins and tend to believe strongly in democratic ideals; thus, your birthright may not be as important to an American as your individual values, achievements, and goals. Americans believe in equal opportunities for all, and rigid hierarchies are uncommon in this country. The competitive culture of the U.S. encourages personal accomplishments; people are viewed as individuals, rather than as collective group members. Consequently, **independence is a highly valued** characteristic and privacy (space and time to be alone) is considered an essential part of life. Change is generally viewed as a positive force; mobility is equated with progress. As

a result, you will find that the U.S. is a largely transient society in economic, social, and geographic terms.

Freedom of speech and the right to privacy are values cherished by the majority of Americans and protected by the U.S. Constitution. You may hear people criticizing the government and its leaders during your stay and perhaps even laughing at the country's weaknesses. You will also hear people exchanging their opinions on a variety of subjects, and they may ask you for yours. Americans openly challenge one another about their ideas, and this is considered an integral part of society. Do not be shocked if you hear someone say, "I couldn't disagree with you more" before launching into an impassioned speech about his or her own ideals. Students may even challenge professors in the classroom about something that has been said. As long as questioning is done diplomatically and without contempt, professors generally will take the time to address the student's query. What you may feel to be a sign of open disrespect is often the norm because many people in the U.S. do not feel restricted by social status.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Americans tend to be frank people and place great value in eye contact with others. When introduced to someone new, or when greeting a person in a formal situation, they will generally smile, look the other party straight in the eye, and offer a firm handshake while saying such phrases as "How do you do?" or "It's nice to meet you." If contact between two people is made on an informal, continuous, and frequent basis, a handshake is not always used in greeting, just a simple "hello." Many people will also say, "How are you?" in passing. Usually this is not an invitation to discuss your life in detail but rather a different way of saying "hi." The common response to "how are you?" is "fine, thanks," or "great, and you?" Often, good friends or relatives will hug and/or kiss when they see each other after an absence of some time.

In conversation, people will stand about two feet away (or more) from each other. Personal space is important to Americans and if you violate the realm of an individual's personal space, you may find that he or she will back away from you. For the most part, American culture is informal and posture is often casual. Many people also "talk with their hands." Because of a generally open, frank attitude toward the world, Americans may use lots of expressive hand and facial gestures. Some hand gestures are considered offensive in the U.S.; you should avoid using them. Additionally, some hand gestures that are offensive in your home country may mean "ok" or something equally common in the United States.

Because many Americans maintain a busy lifestyle, eating out is a frequent occurrence, both for social enjoyment and because cooking at home may be time-consuming. If you are invited to dine out with friends, plan to pay for your own meal (called "splitting the check") unless explicitly invited to eat out at the host's expense. (This may be worded as "This is on me," "I'd like to treat this time," or "I'd like to take you out for lunch.")

Never accept an invitation unless you plan to attend. If you cannot or do not want to go, it is polite to say, "Thank you, but I won't be able to go." If you do accept an invitation and a problem arises which will prevent your attendance, contact your host and explain.

When invited to someone's house, you should arrive promptly. If you are unsure of the dress code, it is perfectly acceptable to ask the host: "will the dress be casual or formal?" If you observe dietary restrictions, let your host know in advance; cultural preferences and dietary restrictions are understood and respected. It is not necessary to take a gift to the hosts, but it is not inappropriate. If you stay with someone for a few days or more, a small gift and letter of thanks is a polite way of letting your hosts know that you enjoyed your stay. For a birthday or holiday party, you may bring a gift if you choose. A small souvenir from your country would be a good choice.

In contrast to formal dinner parties, most invitations you receive will be quite casual, especially invitations to a large party. For this type of invitation, arrival time tends to be flexible (check with the host if you feel uncertain), the atmosphere is very informal, and snack food is eaten throughout the evening. Americans also like "pot luck" dinners where each guest contributes a dish to the meal and the host generally provides the beverages. Take advantage of such invitations as an opportunity to share your native food and to taste food others have prepared.

Americans like for people to "make themselves at home" during visits and will generally show a visitor all over the house and emphasize where guest towels, water glasses, and other items are located. If you are staying for a substantial length of time, you should not expect your host to pour you a glass of water whenever you are thirsty; you will be expected to do so yourself. To Americans, who place value in independence and autonomy, this is a way of making you feel comfortable in their home, so that you are not obliged to depend on your hosts for your every need. If you are living with a host family, guidelines vary as to what you expected to do around the house, but you will probably be considered a part of the family and asked to help in the home as any other family member would.

RELATIONS WITH THE OPPOSITE SEX

In the U.S., relations between the genders tend to be somewhat casual. There are few strictly defined gender roles, and men and women often share household chores. Today, half of all working Americans are women; they expect the same professional respect as that given to men. Additionally, Men are playing a larger role in child rearing than they did in previous decades. Men and women generally treat each other as equals, and in an informal, casual way. There often is a lot of banter (friendly teasing) between men and women.

Modern dating Arrangements – Traditionally, the man asks the woman for a date (a specific opportunity to be with her) and he pays the expenses involved. In American society, it is acceptable for a woman to ask a man for a date. The expenses may be divided, or one person may pay for both. Some dates, like taking a walk together or going to a free concert, involved no expense.

It is acceptable in the U.S. for men and women to ask each other out, either as friends or in a relationship. However, under NO CIRCUMSTANCES is there any obligation or expectation to have sexual contact with that person; dating does not indicate a willingness/desire for sexual involvement or for a long-term commitment. You have a

right to say YES or NO. Any form of sexual harassment, from verbal commentary to physical touch, is socially and legally unacceptable. If you have questions dealing with these issues you can get advice from The W Counseling Center or the International Program Coordinator.

In the U.S., views on sexual relations differ from person to person. From an outside perspective, it may seem that Americans have a relaxed or liberal view of sexuality; in reality, however, and particularly in the south, sexuality is a very personal issue, and the individual makes her or his own choice.

Sexual Involvement -- In the U.S., to invite someone on a date or to accept a date expresses an interest to get acquainted with that person. It does not imply any kind of desire for sexual involvement. Male-female relationships in the U.S., as in countries all over the world, may be casual and platonic or they may be romantic. However, while sexual involvement may exist, the stereotype of the promiscuous American is neither fair nor accurate. Every situation is different and must be approached with consideration towards the personal standards, values and sensitivities of the other person.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

❖ *Most Americans seem very friendly; they smile and speak to me but do not seem to want to become friends. Am I doing something wrong?*

Probably not, making close American friends takes awhile because American friendships tend to develop over time with repeated contact between parties. Be patient and do not assume that you are doing something wrong if it takes time to build friendships with Americans.

Some W students have been on campus for some time and have already established friendships with others. Because many Americans are involved in a number of different activities or work to support themselves, they may not have much free time or engage in lengthy conversations. A number of Americans would be interested in getting to know you and learning about life in your home country.

❖ *I hate the University, I hate the U.S., I hate my roommate. What should I do?*

Adjusting to a new country, new university, and new people is often very difficult, and sometimes students think they have made the wrong choice in coming here. The most important thing to do is to talk over your feelings or problems with someone who can find some answers. The ISA members, the Counseling Center, and your friends can help. Do not make any quick decisions—talk with someone first—and you may find that things are not as bad as they seem. Conversations with the Counseling Center are confidential.

❖ *This person in my class is nosy and asks rude questions about my personal life. I am very offended by this and do not know what to do.*

Americans tend to be more casual about details of their private lives than some cultures. Most feel comfortable in discussing their families, where they are from, what they are studying, their career goals, their political inclinations, their religious affiliation, and certain aspects of their personal relationships (such as “I’m dating this guy from Louisiana and we like to go dancing on weekends”). They may question you about some of these topics as a way of getting to know you and do not mean to insult you or make you uncomfortable.

Please remember that in this society, **queries of this nature are NOT considered unusual** or intrusive. If you feel that your privacy is being invaded, you might explain that you are unaccustomed to talking about these things because, in your country, they are considered private topics.

❖ *I was walking in the park and saw two people kissing. I was very embarrassed and upset. In my country, this behavior is considered terribly inappropriate.*

Attitudes toward displays of affection in public vary not only from country to country but also from one person to the next. Some American people may find nothing wrong with such behavior; others may be offended. Social norms may regulate touching behavior outside the privacy of one’s home, though few laws prevent people from engaging in contact with each other. (One such law is indecent exposure, which prohibits the exposure of certain parts of the anatomy in public). Your best option is simply to ignore the people and continue on your way.

CULTURE SHOCK

“Culture shock” is the term Americans use to describe the many adjustments people make when they move between different cultures. Naturally, the degree of culture shock a person experiences is related to the degree of similarity between the two cultures, but here are also other factors which may influence your experience with culture shock such as: How familiar you are with the new culture.

- ❖ How comfortable you are when experiencing unfamiliar situations.
- ❖ The availability of friends with whom you can discuss your feelings.
- ❖ How accurate your expectations are of the new culture.

The Counseling Center & the Office of International Programs at The W will be available to discuss related issues with you throughout your time at The W.

It’s important to remember all college students will experience culture shock. Even American students whose parents live one hour away will face this adjustment and its challenges. Talking with your peers and the counseling staff can help you adjust to campus life and succeed as a W student!

Dealing with “Culture Shock”

A. What It Is “Culture shock” is the name given to feelings of disorientation or confusion that often occur when a person leaves a familiar place and moves to an unfamiliar one. Coming to MUW from another country, one encounters a multitude of new things. The buildings look different, and so do the trees and the birds. The food is not the same as it is at home, and the people look, speak, and act differently from the people at home. Your English might not serve you as well as you thought it would. You might not be able to convey your full personality in English, with the result that you think other people are seeing you as a child. And your family and friends are far away. As a result of all this you may feel confused, unsure of yourself, and you may have some doubts about the wisdom of your decision to come here.

B. Symptoms. People experience culture shock in varying degrees. Some people are more affected by it than others. Those who do experience it tend to become nervous and unusually tired. They want to sleep a lot, and write many letters home. They may feel frustrated, and hostile toward their host country. They may get excessively angry about minor irritations. It is not unusual for them to become very dependent on fellow nationals who are also in the new country. All these may make it difficult to deal with residents of the host country and to use their language.

C. Coping with Culture Shock. Different people react differently to culture shock. Some become depressed, while others are stimulated by the new experiences that are open to them. Here are some ideas that might be helpful. Maintain your perspective. Try to remember that thousands of people have come to The W from other countries and have survived...even when they arrived in the cold of winter!

Social scientists who have studied the phenomenon of adjusting to a new culture frequently identify four phases of adjustment through which newcomers to a culture commonly pass. As summarized by the social scientist Majorie Klien, those phases are as follows:

1. **Spectator phase:** The new person is excited and optimistic.
2. **Stress and adaptation:** Problems, disappointments, and internal conflicts emerge.
3. **Coming-to terms:** Increasing involvement with the host society reduces the foreign generalized hostility and disappointment, and helps him or her find a relatively comfortable or at least acceptable position in the society.
4. **Decision to return home:** This is period of excitement and self-examination. If the foreigner has detached from his or her own society, this phase brings about tension and feelings of ambivalence. If the foreigner still identifies strongly with his or her country, this phase brings feelings of release and pleasant anxiety.

This is only one way of looking at the question of “phases of adjustment”. Not everyone goes through all of these phases, and different people spend different amounts of time in those through which they do pass. It can be interesting for you to see whether you pass through phases like this yourself.

If you find yourself lethargic, sad for long periods of time, not adjusting to the social and academic opportunities at The W, contact the Counseling Center.

CINEMAS

There is one theatre in the Columbus area. The Malco Cinema 8 is five miles from campus on Highway 45 West. www.malco.com

Hollywood Premier Cinemas in Starkville, Miss. (about 30 minutes away by car) has stadium styled seating and state-of-the-art surround sound.

RESTAURANTS

There are many varieties of restaurants in Columbus, from steakhouses to seafood to southern cooking. Most of these places are casual and do not require dress clothes; they offer affordable and enjoyable meals if you want an evening out. Among some favorites of former students are: Applebee's, Barnhill's, Little Tokyo, and The Grill. In restaurants where you are served by a waiter/waitress, it is customary to leave a tip of approximately 15-percent of the bill.

FAST FOOD restaurants with hamburgers, etc. include Burger King, Kentucky Fried Chicken, McDonald's, Pizza Hut, Taco Bell, and Wendy's. There are also sandwich shops such as Arby's, Hardee's, Sonic, and Subway.

PLACES THAT DELIVER are Domino's Pizza, Papa John's Pizza and Pizza Hut.

BARS AND PUBS

If you enjoy going out for the occasional drink with friends, there are several bars in Columbus, where you might do so. PLEASE BE AWARE THAT THE DRINKING AGE IN THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI IS 21 YEARS. IT IS UNLAWFUL FOR THOSE UNDER THE AGE OF 21 TO PURCHASE OR DRINK ALCOHOL. Most bars do "card" (check your I.D. at the door or the bar) before you will be served an alcoholic beverage to ensure that you are at least 21. Therefore, you will need to remember to take along a government issued ID (driver's license, state ID or passport, a Student ID will not work) when you go out.

It is also important to note that there are strict drinking laws in the U.S. The legal drinking/driving limit on a "breathalyzer" (which analyzes your blood alcohol content) is .10 -- which can be reached in varying times for different people, depending on height, weight, metabolism, and what you have eaten. WARNING: If you exceed the legal limit for drinking and driving, you will be charged with DUI (driving under the influence), which carries stiff repercussions -- steep fines and perhaps even a jail sentence. It is best not to take chances, so, when in doubt, don't drive.

TIPPING

Tipping for service is expected in many situations in the United States. The standard tip for restaurants and cabs is 15%, however it is not necessary to tip in fast food restaurants or cafeterias. The airport porters ("skycaps") and hotel porters should be tipped 50 cents per bag. If you have your car parked by a valet service, the attendant should be tipped one or two dollars.

NOTE: YOU SHOULD NEVER TIP government officials, customs officers, police, or other public servants. It is not necessary or expected to tip hotel desk clerks, bus drivers,

gas station attendant, flight attendants, sales people, or, air carriers, to name a few. If you have any questions about when tipping is appropriate, ask at International Services Office.

NEWSPAPERS

Columbus has one local newspaper, The Commercial Dispatch, sold at coin-operated stands at many grocery stores and banks. In addition to the local paper, the campus Library receives newspapers from major U.S. and international cities. The University publishes a student newspaper, the Spectator, once a week, and this paper welcomes student-written articles. Newspapers are also available to students living in the residence halls.

SHOPPING

SHOP WISELY!!! During your first few weeks here, you may be tempted to buy a lot of unnecessary items. Don't yield to the temptation! It is better to purchase only necessities at first (bed linens, soap, etc.); then, after you become more familiar with the local stores and their merchandise, you can purchase the "nice to have but not essential" items. The best way to find bargains is to comparison shop. Compare the prices and brand names in several stores before you decide to buy a product in one particular store.

Prices can vary widely from store to store. Prices in most instances are not negotiable; this means **NO BARGAINING**. The exception to the rule on bargaining is in the purchase of an automobile or used items such as furniture.

Refunds or exchanges of merchandise are allowed by most stores **IF** you are able to present the sales receipt. Merchandise bought "on sale" usually cannot be returned or exchanged. Many stores will sell their merchandise at a discount ("on sale") during holidays, especially after Christmas and July.

Clothing in the U.S. is sized differently from clothing in many other countries.

DOWNTOWN SHOPPING

Besides MUW, Columbus has a great deal to offer. Among these benefits is our downtown area. This part of town has grown a lot recently and continues to grow! Best yet, it is within walking distance (a little more than a kilometer from back campus).

Some stores offer MUW students a 10% discount with your student ID!

The Downtown area offers pharmacies, gift shops, banks, toy stores, restaurants & a cinema. It is safe to walk around downtown, but use the tips from the Safety & Security portion of this guide. *Example: Don't walk alone at night!*

SHOPPING CENTERS AND MALLS

Malls and shopping centers are collections of stores in one location. They are very popular in the U.S. because of their convenience. In addition to the mall and shopping centers in Columbus, there are several discount stores where necessities such as towels, sheets, soap, etc. can be purchased at lower prices than in department stores or specialty shops.

Leigh Mall contains many stores, including department stores, pharmacies, discount stores, gift shops, etc., and is located on Highway 45 West.

University Mall is located on Highway 45 West about five miles from campus.

GROCERY STORES AND SUPERMARKETS:

There are a number of grocery stores in Columbus where you can purchase food, toiletries, etc. Some of these include Kroger's, Sunflower, and Southern Family Markets. Most people in the United States do their grocery shopping weekly. You will find a large variety to select from.

A supermarket is a large store that sells food and drugstore items, kitchen and house wares, plants, greetings cards as well. Prices are often cheaper than the small, independent grocery stores. Some supermarkets are open 24 hours days for your convenience, such as Wal-Mart.

DISCOUNT STORES

These stores are like departments stores but the prices are lower. They carry a large selection of house wares, kitchenware, electrical goods, clothing, and miscellaneous items. The more popular discount stores are Wal-Mart, Fred's and K-Mart. All have pharmacies.

Wal-mart is located about three miles from campus. This vast store offers discount prices on just about any item you want to purchase— including sporting and outdoor equipment, garden supplies, clothes, toiletries, cosmetics, educational materials (notebooks, pens, calendars, etc.), bed linens, blankets, pillows, some furniture, fabric and sewing materials, audio and audio-visual equipment, toys, kitchen wares, jewelry, etc.

Fred's has two locations. One is within walking distance to campus at 304 5th Street (1/2 mile from campus). The other is on 18th Street, 2 miles from campus; this one has a pharmacy. Fred's has a wide variety of goods.

Family Dollar Store is located on 1412 Main Street one block from campus on Highway 82 West (phone 328-3170).

Super K-mart is located on 45 North, about five miles from campus. This store is comparable in size to Wal-mart and offers products similar to those listed at Wal-mart, at competitive prices (phone 329-4810).

Dollar General has several locations throughout Columbus with one location located across from campus on Main Street.

TRANSPORTATION AND TRAVEL

Vehicles on Campus

Automobiles, bicycles, and motorcycles must be registered with Campus Security. You will be issued a decal, which specifies the zone in which you may park your car. Campus Security will also provide you with a map indicating the location of each zone. If you park in some other zone, you will be given a parking ticket (usually \$6). You will find it much easier to move around campus on a bicycle than with a car. Students who have their own cars are often willing to provide rides to stores or downtown. This might help forge a friendship with a classmate or someone on your hall.

Off-campus Transportation

The principle method of transportation is by car. However, due to the responsibility and expense of owning a car, bicycles are a good alternative. Used bicycles for sale are advertised in the classified section of the local newspaper and on many bulletin boards around campus. When you graduate, you might sell the bicycle to another student.

Purchasing a Car

While a number of international students have purchased a car and thoroughly enjoyed having one, others have found this process to be a headache and more trouble than it's worth. Several factors must be taken into consideration before you buy a car: insurance, driver's license, maintenance, license plates, and inspection stickers. Maintaining a car can be expensive! You must take into consideration frequent changes of oil and tires, engine repair, and gasoline.

Car insurance is expensive, but it is unlawful to drive without up-to-date liability insurance. When you buy car insurance, you should visit several insurance agencies to find the best price. If you are in a car accident and **IT IS YOUR FAULT, YOU WILL BE FORCED TO PAY FOR THE DAMAGE TO THE OTHER CAR AND/OR TREATMENT FOR ANY INJURED PARTIES.** If you have insurance, the insurance will pay the costs. If you do not have insurance, you will pay.

A Driver's License is required in Mississippi. You must have a valid driver's license from your home country, a valid international driver's license, or a Mississippi driver's license. To obtain a Mississippi Driver's license, you should first contact the Office of International Programs. You should study a driver's manual, available from the Mississippi Highway Patrol. If you already have a driver's license from your home country, you have to take a written exam only. If you do not already possess a driver's license, you must take both a written and a driving exam. **IT IS UNLAWFUL TO DRIVE WITHOUT A VALID DRIVER'S LICENSE. VIOLATORS ARE FINED.**

License plates are obtained in the Tax Assessor's Office, at the Lowndes County Court House. When you buy a new car or a motorcycle, you should go to the Tax Assessor's Office to register the vehicle in your name, pay the required taxes, and pick up the new license plate. The older the car, the less the taxes for the license plate. For newer cars, license plates can easily cost several hundred dollars.

Bus Travel Travel by bus is relatively inexpensive in the U.S. When traveling between major cities, ask for the “express” bus, which stops only at major cities and thus provides faster travel than on a normal bus. During holiday and vacation times, Greyhound Bus Lines frequently offers special tour packages and special travel fares. Greyhound Bus Lines in Columbus is located on Main Street about 1/2 mile east of The W. (Phone 328-4732)

It serves all cities nationwide and is inexpensive means of travel. Tickets may be purchased from the local Greyhound bus station and their office hours vary according to the size of the city. You should be able to find them listed in the telephone book.

Taxis (“Cabs”)

This is an expensive way to travel in smaller communities. Cabs may be called by telephone to your home. Drivers expect to be tipped. Fares vary according to the distance traveled and are determined by the meter. Fares are generally not negotiable

Airlines

The cost of airline travel will vary greatly, depending on your destination and how much advance notice you have to make your travel plans. The internet is a good resource to check different prices. Delta Airlines operated by Atlantic Southeast is the only airline to fly into GTR. The local number is: 329-4324. If you have a ride, Memphis, Birmingham and Jackson may also provide competitive travel rates.

APPENDICES

ISA EMAIL LIST

The International Student Association listserv offers valuable information for people at MUW with an international interest. This list includes international students, MUW Alums, American students wanting to learn about other cultures and faculty/staff interested in international education and travel. The ISA listserv serves all these people, regardless of their participation with the ISA organization.

If you would like to join this listserv go to the website “lists.muw.edu” and select ISA. The web site will give you directions from there. Additionally, if you receive ISA email and choose not to, this site will aid you in unsubscribing to the list.

CONVERSIONS:

In the US very few measurements outside the classroom use the metric system or Celsius. The website <http://www.convert-me.com/en/convert/> provides handy conversion scales for weight, temperature, distance, etc.

METRIC CONVERSION TABLES (abbreviations are included in parentheses)

1 inch (in.) = 2.54 centimeters
1 centimeter = .39 inches
1 foot (ft.) = 30.48
1 meter = 39.37 inches or 1.1 yds.
1 yard (yd.) = 3 feet = .91 meter
1 kilometer = .62 or 5/8 of a mile
1 mile (mi.) = 1.61 kilometers
1 quart dry (qt.) = 2 pints = 1.1 liters
1 liter = .91 quarts dry or 1.06 fluid quarts
1 fluid quart (qt.) = .95 liters
1 gallon (gal.) = 4 quarts = 4.4 liters
1 ounce (oz.) = 28.35 grams
1 gram = .035 oz
1 pound (lb.) = 16 oz. = .45 kilograms
1 kilogram = 2.2 pounds

TEMPERATURE CONVERSIONS

CENTIGRADE (C) TO FAHRENHEIT (F): multiply C degrees by 9, divide by 5, add 32.

FAHRENHEIT TO CENTIGRADE: subtract 32 from degrees of Fahrenheit and multiply by 5, then divide by 9.

BOILING POINTS: 212 F OR 100 C

FREEZING POINTS; 32 F or 0 C

KITCHEN MEASURES (approximate)

1 cup (c.) = 250 grams

1 tablespoon (T. or Tbsp.) = 15 grams

1 teaspoon (t. or tsp.) = 5 grams

CLOTHING AND SHOE SIZES

Women's Clothing							
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 Suits, Overcoats & Sweaters							
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

Collar Sizes, Men's Shirts							
American	14	14.5	15	15.5	16	16.5	17
British	14	14.5	15	15.5	16	16.5	17
Continental	36	37	38	39	40	41	42
Japanese	36	37	38	39	40	41	42

Women's Shoes							
American	6	6.5	7	7.5	8	8.5	9
British	4.5	5	5.5	6	6.5	7	7.5
Continental	36	37	38	38	38	39	40
Japanese	23	23.5	24	24.5	25	25.5	26

Men's Shoes							
American	5.5	6.5	7.5	8.5	9.5	10.5	11.5
British	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Continental	39	40	41	42	43	44	45
Japanese	24.5		26		27.5	28	29

USEFUL WEBSITES

The Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services	http://www.immigration.gov/
Embassy World	http://www.embassyworld.com/
Mississippi Division of Tourism	http://www.visitmississippi.org/
MUW Student Handbook	http://www.muw.edu/handbook
MUW International Programs	http://www.muw.edu/international
EduPASS	http://www.edupass.org
Postal Service International Rates	http://ircalc.usps.gov/
International Calling Codes	http://www.the-acr.com/codes/cntrycd.htm
Time Zone Information	http://www.worldtimeserver.com/
US Embassies & Consulates Abroad	http://travel.state.gov/links.html

Mississippi State Symbols can be found online. This site lists the Official State Coat of Arms, Bird, Flag, Song, Flower and other symbols that are part of our state's traditions.
<http://www.its.state.ms.us/et/portal/MSSymbols/symbols.htm>.

The official source of information about U.S. visa policy and procedures can be found at:
<http://www.unitedstatesvisas.gov/>

The International Student Organization in America (ISO) is a membership organization of international students who are currently studying in the USA.
<http://www.isoa.org/home.html>

MUW CAMPUS SERVICES

Academic Support Services: The Office of Academic Support Services is available to assist students with a variety of learning needs, by providing peer tutoring, group study skills workshops and individual consultation, as well as guidance in writing. The office is also equipped with academic assistance resources including study skills information, study guides for professional tests, and computer tutorials in reading, writing and mathematics. Assistance to students on academic probation is offered through this office. This department also provides academic advising information and assistance for newly admitted, transfer, and other prospective students with a special emphasis on undeclared students.

<http://www.muw.edu/un101/AdvisingCtr/Advising.html> Academic Support Services is located in Reneau Hall, room 102. The office is open Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and can be reached at 329-7138. <http://www.muw.edu/academic support>

The Bookend: The Bookend, MUW's university bookstore, is located on the first floor of the Hogarth Student Center. The Bookend offers gifts, cards, posters, school supplies, books, toiletries and "school pride" clothing. Cash, personal checks, and major credit cards (VISA, MasterCard, American Express, Discover) are accepted. It is open Monday-Friday from 7:45 a.m. to 5:15 p.m.

Career Services: The Career Services Office provides resume and interviewing tips and other employment information. For a complete list of services offered contact the Office of Community Living on the fourth floor of Cochran Hall or by phone at 241-7619.

www.muw.edu/career

Comptroller's Office: The Comptroller's Office is where you will go to pay some fees incurred on campus and arrange payment plans for tuition. Additionally, The Comptroller's website lists fees and payment plans. Students may pay fees with money orders, traveler's checks, personal checks or credit cards (VISA or MasterCard) at the Comptroller's cashier windows. The Comptroller is open Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on the first floor of Welty Hall, and can be reached at 329-7210. <http://www.muw.edu/comptroller/>

Community Living: This office supports nearly 600 students who make their homes in MUW's six residence halls. While every residence hall is unique, each offers a community that supports academic excellence at the University. Each residence hall is staffed with a Community Advisor (CA) and a team of Assistant Community Advisors (ACAs). This team can aid your success in the residence hall and University community. ACA's take part in the daily activities of hall life and plan educational programs in the halls. ACA's can help you effectively work through problems with others on the hall and are trained to be good listeners. The Community Advisor leads the team of ACA's. The Community Living Handbook is available on the site listed below. **Be aware of hall rules and regulations.** Community Living is open Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on the 1st floor of Reneau Hall and can be reached at 329-7127.

<http://www.muw.edu/residencelife/>

The Counseling Center: The Office of Community Living is responsible for counseling services to students. They assist students dealing with culture shock and other challenges with the transitions to college life. *Everything said during a counseling interview is regarded as confidential. No information is released to any individual except with the approval of the student.* For a complete list of services offered contact the Office of Community Living on the first floor of Kincannon Hall or by phone at 329-7127.

❖ *For after-hours emergencies, call MUW Security: 241-7777*

Fant Library: The library is located on 5th Avenue South. Students may check out books by presenting their campus-issued I.D. card at the circulation desk. Other services include internet and fax use, copy machines (for a fee per page) and access to Mississippi State University's library holdings. The Library's website lists hours, resources and databases. The Library can be reached at 329-7332. <http://www.muw.edu/library/>

Financial Aid Center: This office offers the opportunity to obtain part-time employment on campus while enrolled as a regular student at MUW. International students who are maintaining their legal immigration status may work up to 20 hours per week on campus; however, they are not eligible for "work-study" jobs. The Financial Aid Center is open Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. in Welty Hall Room 107 and can be reached at 329-7114.
<http://www.muw.edu/finaid/>

Food Services: There are two places to eat on campus, both operated by Sodexo Food Services. Hours of operation vary with each food service location; the hours are posted in the entrance of each building. Your student ID allows you to eat in either of these places. It's important to have your student ID with you at all times.

- ❖ The Hogarth Dining Room is the main cafeteria with multiple meal lines. On-campus residence hall students are required to purchase a meal plan. Contact the Office of Residence Life to change your meal plan. Students living off campus can pre-purchase meals in the cafeteria at a discounted rate. Contact the Dining Center managers for more information.
- ❖ The Goose is similar to a small café and is located in the Hogarth Student Center. The food available at the Goose is limited to sandwiches, salads, soups and burgers. Ody's a smaller part of The Goose offers desserts & Starbucks coffees. Some meal plans offer a credit to be used for food at The Goose.

Health Center: The Health Center is administered through the College of Nursing and is open to MUW students, staff & their families. It is staffed by a nurse practitioner, who will provide the medical care. No fee is charged to students for routine visits, though there is a nominal charge for lab work, supplies and complete physical exams. The center is open Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. in Room 100 of Taylor Hall and can be reached at 329-7289.

Office of International Programs: This office provides a variety of services for international students. These include orientation, cultural adjustment counseling, advising on immigration regulations, and assistance with health insurance. The office offers programs throughout the academic year in conjunction with the International Student Association. International Programs is a smaller part of the Office of Admissions. The office is open Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. in Welty Hall Room 205 and can be reached at 329-7108 or 329-7258.
<http://www.muw.edu/international/>

Intramural Sports: The Intramural Sports program at MUW is governed by the student-led Recreation Association, and sponsored by The Division of Health and Kinesiology. Competition is available through tournaments in tennis, basketball, volleyball, softball, racquetball, billiards, table tennis, and flag football. Other activities can be added if interest is sufficient.
<http://www.muw.edu/intramurals/>

Post Office: Full postal services are available at this office located in the Hogarth Student Center, including stamps, money orders and international mailing assistance. Students living on campus are assigned a box to receive mail; off campus students can rent a box. The Post Office does not accept checks or credit cards and is open Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Office of Student Life: The Office of Student Life seeks to facilitate their transition to the university, and to provide opportunities for growth and development while enrolled through programming, organizations, community service, a supportive and enjoyable living environment and through a strong and supportive network. The Office of Student Life is located on the 2nd floor of Cochran Hall and is open Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Their phone number is 329-6974. <http://www.muw.edu/student/>

Department of Campus Recreation: The Department of Campus Recreation seeks to provide sport and fitness services for students, faculty, and staff to encourage an active, healthy lifestyle and to enhance a sense of community. They do this by offering diverse sport and fitness opportunities, distinctive facilities, a variety of cardio and weight equipment, and avenues for student leadership development. The department of Campus Recreation is located on the 2nd floor of the Hogarth Student Center and is open Monday-Friday from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Their phone number is 329-7494. <http://www.muw.edu/recreation/>