

LANGUAGE CUSTOMS and PROTOCOL

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A Guidebook for the International Student and Employee

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WHY THIS BOOK?

Technologies are advancing at a rapid pace, and countries are experiencing upheaval because of it. At work and school, new, challenging responses are required of many students and workers. English may become the most popular second language course in college, as many corporations seek the markets that wealth in America may bring to them.

Who are the workers of the future who must meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world? Some will be high school graduates, who will fill basic jobs. Work requiring advanced skills and knowledge will demand qualified college graduates from many countries, including yours. As you complete at least some college courses, you will attain and develop these higher skills. As you and other college students graduate, you will be better qualified to step forward and take on these tough new challenges with enthusiasm.

What can students expect from the colleges that will train the workers of tomorrow? First, universities will change to meet the corporate demands for greater excellence. Second, as America's ethnic makeup shifts, college campuses will reflect these shifts. In fact, this has already happened: the United States is a multicultural mirror reflecting a complexity, change, and diversity never seen before.

Language, Customs and Protocol will help you to understand and cope with much of this cultural diversity. If you are lucky, you will also be in a campus or work setting composed of students, full- and part-time workers, colleagues, managers, and teachers familiar with the language and culture of your homeland. Please seek their help and advice when possible. Beyond those sources of help, this book gives you examples, tactics, and ideas to aid your progress.

To do well in America, you will be encouraged and challenged to adapt to the new language, customs and protocol demanded by a complex, rapidly changing, and diverse society. *Language, Customs and Protocol* will help you adjust to academic and college life, master the rules for conducting an effective job search, and prepare for the lifestyle and competitive rigor of American corporations. We trust that you will find this guidebook helpful in your journey toward success.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THIS BOOK

Language, Customs and Protocol is meant to help international students and employees make smooth adjustments to campus and corporate life. The term “international” includes people with student and work visas, permanent residents, and naturalized citizens. This book is useful because:

- It is appropriate for all college students and employees of virtually any background or national origin
- The cost is low
- It refers students and employees to support groups and other helpful publications
- Organizations can develop their own materials to supplement this book

Language, Customs and Protocol is a unique self-help workbook that is meant to be used. Each reader brings valuable ideas, resources, and experiences that may be applied to understanding the situations described in this book. These situations are commonly found in campus and corporate settings of America as illustrations of what can be expected.

This book is meant to be read with a pencil in hand. The worksheets provided will encourage the reader to learn by doing. Because the book is self-paced, you can use it to learn on your own. Do the sections first that appeal to you most. In this way, your learning will be highly motivated.

Language, Customs and Protocol can be used in many ways. Beyond individual study, possibilities include:

Orientation sessions and workshops: This book is ideal for a basic study guide or supplement for all types of orientation programs.

Group study: You may want to do the exercises and cases in this book with your friends. It will be especially helpful if your study partner or other members of your group are from diverse backgrounds and cultures. In this way, learning can be broader and richer.

Preadmission: *Language, Customs and Protocol* is also designed for those who wish to prepare at home before reporting to the campus or office. It could be included in the welcome package mailed out to all newly accepted students and employees as a special goodwill gesture to help them get started.

Other possibilities depend on the aims, orientation program, or ideas of the college or corporation. However it's used, it is certain that even after this book has been read, it will be looked at, thought about, and shared time and time again.

TO THE READER

Beginning college or adjusting to campus life may be among your main goals to accomplish now. You may be in search of a job that is challenging and fits your talents or college program. Your aim may be to become successful in corporate America. This book can be read in less than one hour and help you with these outcomes. Using it as a guide for any of these adventures can make a difference for you.

This book can provide both help and pleasure along your journey from college to employment. To get the most out of it, skim the pages first. Relate each of the three major sections to your situation. Do the exercises. They will help you with three things:

- You will strengthen your confidence and ability to master English.
- You will better understand important customs for a professional search when you are ready to pursue a job in the United States.
- You will recognize and use the appropriate business protocol in your next (or present) corporate position.

Along the pathway, *Language, Customs and Protocol* offers you:

- Confidence for making friends while coping with new rules
- Ideas to make studying, living, and working in America fun
- Tips on adjusting smoothly in a new and different culture
- Recommendations on meeting difficult language challenges
- Aid on interviewing and conducting an effective job search
- Suggestions for making the transition from campus to corporation
- Ways to prepare for and manage changes in your career path
- Useful sources for additional information and assistance

You may have goals in these and other areas that are important to your first term in college or probationary period at work. Please remember that many people are willing to help you reach these goals and assist with your adjustments to campus or corporate life. Many resources and people are mentioned in this book, and alternates will be suggested to you by other sources on and off campus.

After graduation, you can still go back to your local college career placement or counseling office for guidance and referrals. At work, your local personnel and human resource office will help you with questions you might have.

Use these resources wisely, and best wishes for success!

Herff L. Moore

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL ADVISOR OR EMPLOYER

Language, Customs and Protocol can help international students and employees to complete their transition from their native land to campus and corporate life successfully. Using *Language, Customs and Protocol* during this period of adaptation can result in benefits for college administrators and business managers that include:

- Better performance quality achieved earlier
- Improved understanding, clear communication, and healthy interactions among students and teachers or among managers, international workers, and their colleagues
- A basis for focusing patience and guidance during the settling-in period among international students on campus and employees at work
- Closer identification of internationals with campus and organizational teams, yielding more constructive attitudes and creativity that show loyalty and career orientation.

Language, Customs and Protocol is an excellent supplement that complements information sometimes offered by assigned sponsors or the international student advisor or the personnel and human resource department. It may be used by students or employees before, during or after your regular orientation activities. If your organization does not have a formal orientation program, or normally provides limited college or company literature, then *Language, Customs and Protocol* is recommended.

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PART I

PREPARATION



ARRIVING ON U.S. SOIL

Your arrival in the United States, whether by ship or airline, will be at a major port of entry. All persons must be cleared by U.S. Customs and Immigration officials. If your passport and visa are in order, you may travel in the United States. You will probably be surprised by the variety of areas in this country that will welcome you.

You may be amazed at the vastness of this country. The midwest is flat, mostly farming land. Conversely, in a heavily populated metropolitan area, you will see many cultural groups living in close proximity. America has been known as a "melting pot," where peoples from the world over become acculturated. However, this is changing, and the kinds of people entering the United States in this century have helped bring about a more multicultural environment. The United States has many cultural and ethnic groups, especially in the larger metropolitan areas. Most such groups organize themselves into small communities, where they can recreate some of the cultural elements they value; they often live in harmony side by side with natives of this and other countries.

As soon as you arrive on campus you should present yourself to the dean of students, international advisor, or other designated officials whose responsibility is to work with students from other countries. They will put you in touch with other staff members and academic departments, as needed, and help you start your college career in America.

Many U.S. colleges and universities require students to live in residence halls (dormitories) for at least one year. Living in a residence hall for a while has advantages: living near other students of similar age and objectives can help you gain a better appreciation of many cultural, religious, racial, and academic differences.

At first, your feelings may be confused. You will feel good about being accepted to an American college or university. You may test and clarify your values. There are great opportunities for improving your knowledge and earnings. But you will miss family, friends, and familiar surroundings.

ARRIVING ON U.S. SOIL (Continued)

With practice, these positive and negative feelings can be managed. A way to develop a positive outlook is to visualize your stay in the United States as an extended vacation. There are many things to experience, learn, and absorb about the ways Americans live before returning to your home country with a well-rounded knowledge and understanding of their culture. If you plan to stay in the United States after graduation, you could view your experiences as a training period in which you can learn to compete effectively in the business world with native Americans.

MANAGING MONEY

The basic monetary unit in the United States is the dollar (\$), which is based on the decimal system. The dollar is equivalent to 100 cents (pennies). The coins commonly used are as follows:

Penny	=	1 cent	or 1/100 dollar
Nickel	=	5 cents	or 1/20 dollar
Dime	=	10 cents	or 1/10 dollar
Quarter	=	25 cents	or 1/4 dollar
Half dollar	=	50 cents	or 1/2 dollar

U.S. currency, or paper money, is all the same size—regardless of value—and is primarily in denominations of \$1, \$5, \$10, \$20, \$50, and \$100.

With the exception of those governments that restrict the amount of money taken out of their country, it is usually a routine process to transfer money from your home bank to a U.S. bank. You should know your government's regulations before you leave home. It is best to have your bank issue a foreign draft on a U.S. bank that is located near your school.

Upon your arrival, you may elect to exchange your foreign currency for the equivalent American dollars. This is only one service that banks perform. It is generally wise to open a checking or savings account (or both) at a local bank. Keeping large sums of money in your room or personal possession is not recommended.

Many banks offer several types of checking accounts. Account fees vary depending on the amount deposited, extent of services required, and other factors. To select the checking account best for you, consult with the bank about the options available. Money that will not be needed for short-term use can be placed in a savings account. This will earn interest at the prevailing rate, which can fluctuate depending upon the fiscal policies at the time.

Banks offer many other services. Some of the most common include:

- **Drive-Up Windows** You may drive your vehicle into the service area and conduct your business from it.
- **Automatic Teller Machines (ATMS)** These are computerized machines you can either walk or drive up to. By using a special card and your individual code numbers, you can deposit, withdraw, or check balances in your accounts. These are available 24 hours a day.
- **Travelers Checks** You can purchase travelers checks if you will need large amounts of money and the safety from loss or theft while you travel.
- **Money Orders** Money orders can be purchased when cash or personal checks are not a practical means of exchange and records are needed.
- **Money Transfers** Funds can be transferred from other banks to a local bank; however, allow sufficient time to complete the transaction.

Commercial and savings banks perform many other services such as lending money, purchasing securities, and administering trusts. Your individual financial requirements will vary, so you should visit your local bank for information. Consult with your college international advisor or student affairs office concerning large amounts of money you may need assistance in managing.

MEETING PERSONAL NEEDS

To adjust to the American way of life quickly and easily, you must meet your immediate personal needs: food, clothing, shelter, transportation, health care, and contact with home. The United States is a large and diverse nation with numerous ethnic and cultural groups and thousands of communities, large and small. Each has its own unique characteristics, and it is hard to sort out what would be best for you. But other international students and workers have suggested ideas that could help you to adjust during your first few months in this country.

CONNECTING

It is helpful to contact family and friends in your home country, especially just after arriving on American soil. They will certainly want to know that you arrived safely and how you are doing. You may also need to talk with a familiar person nearby for emotional support. But writing or phoning home, or even reading a newspaper from home, can help ease loneliness. To help you connect better with relatives or old friends and help you establish new friendships, you need to understand some of the more important ways to do this, including the phone system and the U.S. Postal Service.

Public telephones are coin operated and can be found near most stores, service stations, theaters, and other public places. For local calls, the pay phone will usually state the amount in coins needed to make a phone call. Carry coins with you, because these public phones do not give change. For long distance calls (outside your area or overseas), an operator will come on the line or you will get a recording telling you to deposit coins for the first three minutes of a call. Calling places outside the United States can be expensive, so these might be more conveniently placed from a private phone. To place a long distance call, dial the Operator, who will tell you the rate and place the call for you. State whether you wish to reverse the charges to the receiving person, if you want to speak with a particular person, or if you want to have the charges for the call billed to the phone from which you are calling. Operator-assisted calls cost more, but many phones allow you to dial direct by following the instructions.

The U.S. Postal Service operates post offices, stamp vending machines, and mail collection boxes in convenient places in most communities. Mail going overseas should be weighed by a clerk at the Post Office so the proper charges can be assessed. Receiving your mail the first semester on campus may be difficult. Colleges sometimes encourage international students to have their mail sent to the office in charge of international student affairs. You may wish to consider renting a Post Office box for receiving mail. This is especially convenient for individuals who do not have an established residence address.

Developing friendships is important for your emotional well-being and your adjustment to American life. It is in your best interest to interact with others, who can advise you on available resources and the procedures to use in securing them. As an international student, you will probably be assigned to a college or academic advisor who will assist you in outlining your academic requirements for your areas of study.

If you will be living in a university dormitory or residence, a residence hall advisor will be available for help. If you live off campus, connect with your college's international studies department. If one is not available, link up with social services or culturally based community groups or agencies that can assist you.

EATING

One of the first needs you will experience is eating new foods in this country. Most foods will taste much differently and take some getting used to; adapting to Americanized food is one of the most memorable experiences international students encounter during their initial visit to the United States.

Many college dining services have internationalized their menus. If you dine regularly on campus, you will likely find something familiar to eat. However, the taste will be somewhat bland since the food has been more lightly seasoned to Americanize the taste.

Large communities offer a variety of international restaurants. You can locate these through your local telephone book, along with many grocery stores and supermarkets that offer international or natural foods sections, in case you prefer to prepare you own. Most recipes for American cooking give measurements by volume instead of weight. It may therefore be desirable to buy a standard set of measuring spoons and cups, found in many large food stores.



MEETING PERSONAL NEEDS (Continued)

DRESSING

Clothing worn by American students may appear trendy, ill-fitting, or inappropriate. Americans' approach to dressing for school or other activities is influenced by fashion and geography. In Texas, you would probably see many people wearing cowboy boots. It would be unlikely to see boots at all in some of the Northeastern states. It will not be necessary for you to wear American-style clothing on campus, but you may want to adapt to the prevalent dress. It will show that you choose to be a participating part of your peer group and are not setting yourself apart as being unapproachable, cold, or indifferent to the customs of your host country.

Climate can vary tremendously, so you will need clothing for the hottest and coldest extremes of where you plan to live. Students dress casually on campus. However, there are likely to be occasions where more formal dress is appropriate, such as graduation ceremonies, dates, job interviews, classroom presentations, or work. If you are unsure about what to wear, ask someone whose opinions you value.

LIVING

Try to arrange for housing before your arrival in the United States. If on-campus housing is required, most resident hall (dormitory) assignments must be made several months in advance, or accommodations may not be available to you.

Many colleges and universities prefer or require first-year students to reside on campus. This practice is beneficial to students (both domestic and foreign) because they can more easily adapt to the environment and customs of peers. You will more readily learn the many variations in lifestyles of your fellow students while pursuing the common goal of achieving a higher education.

Most colleges have advisors in their housing office who can assist you in locating either an on- or off-campus residence. This aid usually is free of charge and will cover such information as location, utility estimates and deposits required, convenience, and comparative prices. They may advise you on your rights under U.S. law, your obligations as a tenant, and how to interpret the provisions of a lease contract. Before signing any contract with a private citizen, seek legal assistance. Be especially sure to ask landlords about:

- Required amounts of deposits and conditions under which refunds are given
- Which utilities are to be included with the rent, if any
- When rent payments are due from you and penalties for paying late
- Length of the lease or rental contract (usually you would not want to sign a contract for longer than you expect to live in the apartment or house).

TRANSPORTATION

Where you reside will determine the type of transportation available. Public bus systems are available at low cost in larger communities. However, many smaller communities lack adequate public transportation systems, so private autos or bicycles may be a necessity in some areas. Your transportation needs should be considered together with your housing requirements.

Often, a campus will maintain a bulletin board or registry of students seeking to connect with others who wish to offer or receive transportation assistance. To own, insure, maintain, and operate a motor vehicle in the United States can be very expensive and is subject to many laws. This is why fewer than 10% of international students own cars here. Locating housing near enough to be able to walk to and from the campus deserves serious thought.

HEALTH CARE

You may be in the best of health when you get to the campus of your choice. However, because you will be making many adjustments while in college, it is wise to prepare for occasions of possible medical need. Health care is expensive in the United States compared to other countries. Many colleges do provide health insurance at affordable rates, and some even require that a student's coverage be paid as part of college fees. Most colleges maintain some type of clinic for outpatient care and first aid treatment for minor injuries and temporary health problems. Ask about the health care coverage available where you will be attending school or working.