



WELCOME

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS



IMMACULATA
UNIVERSITY



Bienvenue 歡迎 **bem-vindos** ยินดีต้อนรับ **Bienvenidos** خوش آمدید

WELCOME!

On behalf of the Office of International Student Services at Immaculata University, we welcome you. This office is one of many offices that will be serving you during your time at Immaculata. Please feel free to contact us at any time with questions you may have, especially issues relating to immigration law.

HELPFUL LINKS

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services

www.uscis.gov

Internal Revenue Service

www.irs.gov

United States Embassies

www.usembassy.gov

CAMPUS OFFICES & SERVICES

Administrative Offices

Office of International Student Services	82 DeChantal
• General information, immigration law, information about working on and off campus, visa information	
Office of Financial Aid	Lettiere Center
• Loan and scholarship information	
Registrar	Villa Maria Terrace Level
• Academic calendar, course information, transcripts, grades, exam schedule, transfer credits	

Campus Services

Campus Safety	Lourdes Terrace Level
• Safety issues, parking tickets and permis, campus shuttle, escorts	
Counseling Center	Bruder Center
• Personal counseling, Amigo program	
Health Center	Bruder Center
• Health information and concerns, medical assistance	
Career Services	Gabriele Library
• Career counseling, vocational assessment, employment opportunities, career exploration	
Campus Bookstore	Good Counsel Hall
• Follett store, textbooks, Immaculata items	
Campus Mail & Print Center	Nazareth Hall Terrace Level
• General postal services, mail, package delivery	

स्वागत आहे Willkommen සාදරයෙන් පිලිගන්නවා Welcome 환영합니다 Aloha

IMMACULATA & COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Faculty

Faculty are the first resource for students who need help with a course. Immaculata faculty keep office hours so students can get the academic support they need in that professor's class. American students frequently question professors outside of class about grades and to clarify course assignments. This is not considered rude or disrespectful when handled tactfully.

Advisors

Advisors are also a valuable resource for Immaculata students. Faculty advisors can assist students with time management, course selection, and program requirements, which are all essential for academic excellence. Every student is assigned an advisor by major. Be sure to connect with your advisor; set up a time to meet with him or her at least once each semester.

Math Center

Tutors are available for one-on-one tutoring. All you have to do is sign up for an appointment at a convenient time. The tutors are trained to provide you with the help you need. If you are having problems with the prerequisite material, if your instructor is moving too fast through the material, or if you just have a problem with one homework question, then they can help.

Writing Center

The Writing Center at Immaculata University is focused on enhancing the writing skills of Immaculata students. Their goal is to help writers across the disciplines in all stages of the writing process, including planning, drafting, and revising.

Gabriele Library

The mission of the Gabriele Library is to support the educational goals of Immaculata University and its student body. Whether you use the library on campus or from a computer at home, Gabriele Library is your library. The Staff encourages you to use and explore the many resources the library has available.

ESL: English as a Second Language

Improve your English! Get a better job! Free classes offer four levels of instruction with both day and evening hours. Teachers instruct non-native English speakers from beginner to advanced. Call for class times and placement information. To register call 610-692-2344.

Chester County Opportunities Industrialization Centers (CCOIC)

Chester County OIC is a non-profit organization dedicated to providing free adult basic literacy education and essential life skills programs that prepare individuals for employment and self-sufficiency.

ACADEMIC LIFE IN AMERICA

Academic life in the United States is probably quite different from that of your home country. Many foreign students comment that U.S. students are competitive but don't seem to study very hard, and that the professors are very demanding. Teaching styles and classroom attitudes vary widely and are influenced by many different factors.

American professors expect their students to ask questions. Class participation is important and in many cases is a part of your class grade. Silence can be misunderstood as lack of interest. Professors expect to be approached for help if you are confused or have questions.

Informal attire and the omission of titles in interpersonal communication are common in American university teaching practices. However, this should not be taken to mean that your professor has a relaxed attitude toward assignments, class attendance or the quality of your work.

Some good advice:

- Attend class regularly and take good notes.
- Ask your instructor for help if you feel that you are falling behind in class or if you do not understand something.
- Keep your class syllabus and refer to it for course objectives, material to be covered, assignment due dates, examination dates and grade determination methods.
- Immaculata University prides itself with regard to its dedication to academic excellence. Academic support is integral to fostering this excellence.

At Immaculata, you will find many individuals and offices employed expressly to help you to be a better student.





ADJUSTING TO LIFE IN THE UNITED STATES

Citizens of the U.S. are proud of their democratic origins and tend to believe strongly in egalitarian ideals. You might find that 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 which are cherished by the majority of Americans and carefully protected under the U.S. Constitution. You will probably 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 their own ideals.

As long as criticism does not take the form of a personal attack, it is not considered improper. Students frequently challenge professors in the classroom about something that has been said, and as long as questioning is done diplomatically and not with 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.

Greetings and Conversation

In America, people tend to greet each other by saying “Hi,” “Hello,” or “How are you?” “How are you?” is an expression used as a greeting and not usually used as a question. If someone keeps moving past you as they say “How are you?” they mean it as “Hello.” If an acquaintance stops walking to chat with you and then asks “how are you?” they usually expect a short, positive answer. The typical response is, “Fine.” This may seem impersonal, but it has become a part of the American cultural greeting practice between strangers and acquaintances.

American men usually shake hands when they meet someone for the first time. Some American women will also shake hands with men or women they first meet, but as this is a fairly new cultural convention in America, Americans tend to wait for the woman to offer her hand first. Unlike many countries, it is uncommon for Americans, especially American men, to hug or kiss each other when they greet one another. You may notice, however, that men who are particularly close friends may greet each other with vigorous, backslapping hugs from time to time.

When Americans speak to each other, they tend to maintain a conversational distance of about three feet from one another. Americans often feel uncomfortable with someone who stands too close to them, even if the person is a close friend. Despite this seemingly distant behavior, you may find that Americans you have just met will ask you intimate questions. The questions Americans may ask of you usually come out of a genuine curiosity about you and your culture, with which they may be totally unfamiliar. Trust your instincts about whether a person is being curious or intrusive and remember you can politely refuse to answer anything that makes you uncomfortable without compromising a new friendship.

- Be open-minded
- Have a sense of humor.
- Communicate your feelings and thoughts with others.
- Be curious about your new environment.
- Be tolerant of other cultural beliefs.
- Be positive.
- Maintain a strong sense of self.



SOCIAL ETIQUETTE

If you are invited to someone's house, you should arrive promptly. If you are unsure of the dress code, it is perfectly acceptable to ask the hostess/host about the attire: "Will the dress be casual or formal?" It is not necessary to take a gift to the host, 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 host know that you enjoyed your stay. If you observe dietary restrictions, let your host know in advance; cultural differences and dietary restrictions are understood and respected. Americans 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/hostel to pour you a glass of water whenever you are thirsty; you will be expected to get it yourself.

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. In a restaurant in which you are waited on by a waiter/waitress, a tip (service charge) of 20 percent is expected. At a fast-food establishment, you don't need to leave a tip but you do need to clear your table before you leave.

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 will be worded as "This is on me," "I'd like to treat this time" or I'd like to take you out to 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.

SAFETY

Immaculata University employs its own department of Campus Safety and Protection. Being safe, however, is not just a matter of having a security force. You can avoid precarious situations by following a few recommended precautions. Below are safety tips recommended by Campus Safety and important emergency numbers. Remember the ultimate responsibility for a crime rests with the perpetrator, not the victim.

General Personal Safety Tips

- Be aware of your surroundings and avoid dark, secluded areas.
- If you think you are being followed, walk quickly to a lighted area or group of people.
- Don't walk alone at night. You can call for an escort from Campus Safety if you need to go out at night.
- Keep your door locked when you are in or out of your room. Always ask who is at your door before you open it.

MONEY & BANKING

Drinking Age/Alcohol Policy

In the United States, you must be 21 years old to drink alcohol. The sale or service of alcohol to anyone who has not yet reached the age of 21 is prohibited. For many of you, this may be an adjustment. Immaculata University is a “dry campus” – no alcohol permitted. This policy is strictly enforced.

Health Records

Each international student is required to complete a University Health Form which indicates proof of required immunizations.

Health Insurance

All international students will need to prove adequate health insurance coverage as a condition of enrollment. This insurance must cover medical evacuation and repatriation. Practice healthy behaviors, avoid stress, seek time for relaxation, and engage in activities you enjoy.

American paper currency (dollars) comes in denominations of \$1, \$5, \$10, \$20, \$50 and \$100. American dollars are all the same size and color. Coins or “change” make up the smaller units of money called cents. They come in the amounts of 1 cent (a penny), 5 cents (a nickel), 10 cents (a dime), 25 cents (a quarter), and 50 cents (a half-dollar – these are rarely used.)

Checking Account

You open a checking account by depositing money into the account, which you access with checks. Checks are paper documents issued by your bank that have your name, address, phone number (if desired) printed on them and function as money when you write one for a purchase. Most stores require you to present some form of ID when you write a check that includes your address and picture.

Savings Account

A savings account is less active than a checking account. If you want to save money and gain interest on it, opening a savings account is your best option. The more money you deposit, the more interest you earn on it. This is ideal for money that you do not touch unless you really need it.

ATM (Automatic Teller Machine)

When you open a checking or a savings account with a bank, you can also get an ATM card and a credit card combined. They can be used like credit cards for most purchases, but unlike a credit card, for which you receive a bill with interest, the debit purchase comes directly out of your bank account. This is a nice option especially if you are concerned about getting into credit trouble or would rather not pay interest to the credit card company for your purchases.

IMMIGRATION ISSUES

SEVIS is the web-based tracking system that is used by the Department of Homeland Security to monitor all non-immigrants. SEVIS stands for the "Student and Exchange Visitor Information System." SEVIS compliance began for all academic institutions on January 30, 2003. The I-20 that you received is a SEVIS issued I-20. It has a bar code for scanning at all U.S. ports of entry. The regulations for F-1 international students are stricter than in the past, as well as carrying more severe consequences if violated. The two main violations of status are unapproved employment and enrolling less than full-time while at Immaculata. Therefore, be sure to review all of the following information on immigration issues. Keep the handbook with you during your entire time at Immaculata so that you can review it as necessary. In addition, always ask the International Advisor if you have any questions or are uncertain of policy. The main contacts at Immaculata are:

Sister Janet M. Walters, Designated School Official
Office of International Student Services, 82 DeChantal
Phone: 610-647-4400 x3116 E-mail: jwalters2@immaculata.edu
Kate Kearney, Principal Designated School Official
CAPS Office, Good Counsel
Phone: 610-647-4400 x3239 E-mail: kkearney@immaculata.edu
Sandra Rollison, Designated School Official
Phone: 610-647-4400 x3215 Email: srollison@immaculata.edu

Customs and Immigration

Before landing at any International Airport, flight assistants will give you a white, Arrival-Departure Form, called form **I-94**. The I-94 contains your unique identifying number issued by the USCIS. If you change your visa status while in the U.S., a new I-94 will be issued with the approval notice. A flight assistant will also distribute Customs Declaration Forms. Follow the instructions on the form and have it ready for Customs.

After disembarking you must go to immigration to present your passport and visa to USCIS. Inside the airport an immigration inspector will examine your passport, I-94 form, and I-20 form. The Immigration officer may ask you questions before stapling the I-94 to your passport. Students leaving the United States will return the I-94 when checking-in for the departing flight. When you finish with immigration, go to Customs with your passport and Customs Declaration Form and then go to the Baggage Claim area.

Changes in Name or Address

All students must report any name or address changes within 10 days to the Designated School Official. These changes will be recorded into the SEVIS system.

On-Campus Employment

Any IU student can apply for On-Campus jobs. During the academic year, many students work part-time and a few remain on campus over the winter and summer break to work full-time. F-1 students may work on-campus part-time (20 hours/week) during the academic year and full-time (40 hours/week) during the summer and university break periods without formal authorization.

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

If you have been enrolled as a full-time student for at least nine months, you are eligible for Optional Practical Training. An OPT job must be related to your academic major and be intended to cultivate practical experience. As an F-1 student, you have a total of 12 months of OPT. You may use the OPT during the summers or all of it after graduation; just keep in mind that the total of all OPT is 12 months. You are excluded from OPT if you use one year of Curricular Practical Training. OPT can be granted while school is in session, summer breaks, or after graduation.

Curricular Practical Training (CPT)

Curricular Practical Training allows F-1 students to work before graduation in an internship or independent study related to their field of study. You must have been a full-time student for at least nine consecutive months to qualify for CPT. The benefit of CPT is that it does not reduce the amount of OPT available, unless you use 12 months of CPT. CPT must be a course requirement or it must be done for academic credit.

Off-Campus Employment Due to Severe Economic Hardship

F-1 students who encounter unforeseen, severe economic hardship after completing one academic year (also defined as nine consecutive months) may apply to USCIS for permission to work off-campus. To apply, you must document an unanticipated change in your financial support showing that your expenses have increased significantly or that your income has decreased significantly. You must also show USCIS that you have exhausted other employment opportunities. Students who can document that they have encountered an unforeseen economic hardship after completing one academic year in the U.S. should contact the Office of International Student Services. Generally, it takes USCIS two months to approve an application for off-campus work based on severe economic hardship.

Enrollment – Part time approval

All international students are required to be enrolled in 12 credits each semester. (Graduate students must be enrolled for 9 credits). A student must receive permission from the DSO to enroll part time in any semester. Generally, the only possible scenarios for approval are medical emergencies (which require medical documentation) and final terms of degrees. If permission is not granted prior to part time enrollment, a student's record in SEVIS will reflect the violation of status and the student's record will be closed in SEVIS. The only possibility to reopen the record is to apply for a reinstatement through the USCIS; reinstatements are rarely approved.

Extension

The timeframe given to a student for completion of the degree is indicated on the I-20 form. It is possible that a student may need more time to complete the degree in various circumstances, for instance a medical emergency. In this case, a student must request the extension prior to the ending date on the I-20. A new I-20 would be issued including the extra semester(s) needed.

Grace Periods

Students are given varying times to leave the country based on the circumstances at hand:

- Completion of degree or authorized employment: 60 days
- Authorized withdrawal by DSO: 30 days
- Violation of status: immediate departure, NO grace period

Graduation

Student records in SEVIS are automatically completed once the student's graduation date is reached. If a student applies for OPT, the student's record remains open until the OPT is completed. Students who wish to transfer their F-1 status to a graduate school must notify the DSO so that the transfer process can be completed. Other-wise, the student's record in SEVIS will be completed automatically upon graduation.

Income Taxes

All people employed in the United States must pay state and federal income taxes. These taxes are deducted from employees' paychecks and go to fund various local, state, and federal programs. The tax deducted from your paycheck each pay period is called Income Tax Withholding. Income tax forms are due on or before April 15.

Frequently, full-time students make so little income that they usually get a tax refund, which means that too much tax was withheld from the yearly income. In this case, when you file your taxes, you will determine the amount owed to you by the United States government and/or the state of Pennsylvania.

If however, not enough taxes were withheld from your income, you may owe taxes to the federal and/or state government. In which case you will find out how much you must pay the government when you file your taxes. This can happen if you make quite a lot of money or if your employer withholds insufficient funds. All international students must file tax forms with the government, even if no money was earned.

Social Security Number

Students who have obtained a position on campus while in the United States are required to get a Social Security Number (SSN).

International students are not permitted to work off-campus during their first year of study in the U.S.

Bring the following items to the Social Security Administration Office:

- A letter from the Office of International Student Services indicating that you are eligible for employment.
- A letter from your supervisor indicating your job and hours per week
- Your completed SSN Application
- Your passport
- Your form I-94
- Your form I-20

The nearest Social Security office is located at: Social Security Administration 1101 West Chester Pike
West Chester, Pa. 19382
Phone: 610-431-0795

Travel

Your I-20 must be signed by one of Immaculata's Designated School Officials in order to re-enter the country when you travel. The signatures are good for one year (Except during OPT, signatures are good for only 6 months.) You should have your I-20 endorsed before traveling if you are before, but close to, the one-year mark on the previous signature. It is advisable to make a couple of copies of your I-20 and bring them with you when you travel. New procedures for processing these documents may lead to confusion. The originals of both should be returned to you when processed at the port of entry. In the case a USCIS official takes the original form, you would at least have a copy to show other officials when asked.

Remember that no one can guarantee your entry back into the United States. An Official can decide not to let you back in if there are problems with your documentation or other related issues.

In light of stricter policies at ports of entry, international students should travel with several documents: your signed I-20, your passport with the visa page, evidence of financial support (that you used to obtain your visa), a transcript showing your full-time enrollment at Immaculata and a letter from the DSO indicating that you are a student in good standing.



Visas

International students must have a visa to attend school in the United States. All international students are required by law to be full-time students in order to get a student visa. For full-time status, Immaculata University students enroll in a minimum of 12 credits each semester for undergraduate students, and 9 credits each semester for graduate students.

Once you are accepted at IU, you will receive an I-20, Certificate of Eligibility. Sign this form immediately and have it with you whenever you enter or leave the country.

As an F-1 student, you may enter the country 30 days prior to the entry date on your I-20. Housing at Immaculata is not available until International Student Orientation in the Fall, or the beginning of the semester in Spring.

F-1 Visa

An F-1 visa allows you to enter the United States as a nonimmigrant to attend school. Prospective F-1 students will receive an I-20 form from Immaculata. Take all pages of this form to your nearest U.S. Consulate to apply for a student visa. Your name on the I-20 should match that on your passport.

Note the financial portion of the I-20 that indicates the amount of money you (or your sponsor) are expected to contribute under Personal Funds. Strictly speaking, the U.S. embassy will require you to provide documents that prove you have personal funds for your entire program in the U.S. In practice, the U.S. Embassy will normally look for funds for one year of study and sufficient income from your sponsor. Proof of funding may be established through U.S. tax returns, employer letters, pay stubs, accountant statements, and bank statements. Each U.S. Embassy will require different documentation based on the location.

Do not enter the U.S. with a B-1, B-2 or B1/2 Visa unless it is marked "Prospective Student." You will most likely not be allowed to change your status to F-1.

Do not enter the U.S. without a visa (unless you are Canadian). The U.S. allows individuals from certain countries to simply show a round-trip ticket to enter the U.S. Do not do this. You will not be allowed to stay past 90 days and you cannot change to student status.

Applying for a Student Visa

Pay your SEVIS fee and bring receipt to your consulate appointment. Go to the United States Embassy or United States Consulate with jurisdiction over your per-manent residence with your I-20 form issued by Immaculata University, your passport, and proof of sufficient funds to live and attend school in the United States.

At the Embassy or Consulate, fill out a visa application form OF-156. The application fee is non-refundable.

You must provide documentation that shows a residence in your home country to return to when your student visa expires.

In addition, you may be required to prove that you are qualified to attend school in the United States. Proof includes transcripts of past grades and/or TOEFL scores.

Visa applications require the following information: address in country of origin; names and addresses of spouse, children, parents, and siblings; references who can verify accuracy of application; employment history including names and addresses of employers.

Consulates will run background checks on all visa applicants from Cuba, Iran, Iraq, Libya, North Korea, Sudan, and Syria, so visa approval may take an extended number of months.





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