

WELCOME TO SOUTHEASTERN

Welcome to Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and Wake Forest, North Carolina. We look forward to getting to know you and discovering the special talents and contributions you bring to this institution.

International Student Services is located in the Ledford Center and is part of the Ministry Referral Office. We hope you will feel comfortable coming to visit us with any concern that you may have. We can direct you to resources that will help you solve problems, such as getting a driver's license, understanding your lease, or finding a bank. You are in a totally new culture and environment, and we are here to help you!

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SOUTHEASTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

MISSION & VISION STATEMENT

Southeastern's Identity

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary is an institution of higher learning and a Cooperative Program ministry of the Southern Baptist Convention.

Southeastern's Confession

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary affirms the Bible as the authoritative Word of God. We covenant to teach in accordance with and not contrary to the Abstract of Principles and the Baptist Faith & Message. We further affirm the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy and the Danvers Statement on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.

Southeastern's Mission

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary seeks to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ by equipping students to serve the church and fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19-20).

Core Competencies

To fulfill the mission of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary we seek to develop the following competencies in students who graduate from this institution:

Spiritual Formation: Acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to pursue a vital Christian life and witness manifest in all personal relationships and vocational endeavors.

Biblical Exposition: Gain a basic comprehension of Scripture and learn to interpret and communicate it properly and effectively.

Theological Integration: Understand and apply the doctrines of Christianity to all areas of life and ministry.

Christian Leadership: Cultivate a godly disposition marked by wisdom, humility and grace and develop skills to lead effectively in the church and world.

Ministry Preparation: Acquire and apply the knowledge and skills necessary for Christian ministry.



Welcome to the Southeastern family! Yes, we are an institution of higher learning and a training ground for gospel-bearing world changers, but we also resemble a family. Families have brothers and sisters, and we are related to one another through Christ. Family members love each other, and Jesus declared that His disciples will be defined by love. Families have recognized roles of authority; this school family also has a well-defined authority structure. Christian families worship together, and so do we. Families have fun, and being a part of the Southeastern family is a blast.

Families also have rules, like “If you turned it on, turn it off,” and “Wipe your feet before coming in the house.”

The Southeastern family has rules, too. Please do two things with the rules in this handbook – read them and heed them. In addition to rules, you will find an abundance of information herein. If you will take the time to review that information it will be a great help to you. We in the Student Services Division also want to help you; come by and talk with us.

May God bless you abundantly during your time at Southeastern!

Allan Moseley

Vice President for Student Services/Dean of Students

U.S. IMMIGRATION REGULATIONS

As an international student or scholar in the United States, you must be aware of and abide by the U.S. immigration regulations that govern your stay here. Most applicants for non-immigrant visas are now required to have a personal interview, and as a result it can take longer to get a visa. As of August 1, 2003, all persons in F and J status are included in the U.S. government's Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) and all visa documents are issued through SEVIS.

OBTAINING A VISA

Every student must have a SEVIS visa eligibility form I-20 (F-1). You must apply for international student admission in order to obtain an I-20. For information on applying through the Admissions Office, visit www.sebts.edu/prospective_students/become_student/international_students.cfm.

VISA APPLICATION

After completing all the necessary paperwork through the Admissions Office, you will receive your I-20 form from Southeastern. Once you receive this form, try to get your visa as soon as possible.

F-1 Visa: The F-1 visa is called the Student Visa. The form issued from Southeastern is the I-20, the Certificate of Eligibility for Non-Immigrant Student. Specific features include:

- Financial support for the applicant is required and may be through personal means or may be received from a sponsor.
- Work is permitted only on campus, except in cases of unforeseen economic hardship resulting after one full academic year in the U.S. or Optional Practical Training (OPT) after one full academic year in F-1 status.
- Spouses and dependent children of F-1 students hold F2 status and may not work in the U.S. under any circumstances.
- An F-2 spouse may not engage in full-time study, and part-time study is permitted if it is non-vocational or recreational. *If after arriving in the U.S. the F-2 dependent wishes to change his/her status to F-1 in order to earn a degree, please discuss this possibility with International Student Services.
- All F-1 students at Southeastern are required to have health insurance.

F-1 EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS

This provides you with an introduction to employment issues and options for international students in F-1 status.

The most important employment issue that you always need to keep in mind is the issue of legal (or "authorized") versus illegal (or "unauthorized") employment. You must always make sure that any employment you plan to engage in is legal employment. Any unauthorized (i.e. illegal) employment—even for one day—even if you did not know it was illegal poses a grave threat to your ability to remain in or return to the United States. And you must always make sure that you have the necessary employment authorization before you begin work, since starting work without prior authorization—even if you receive authorization later—constitutes illegal employment.

F-1 visa holders are allowed to be employed by the seminary, although the number of positions available on campus is extremely limited. Spouses on F-2 visas are not permitted to work at all.

OPTIONAL PRACTICAL TRAINING

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is temporary employment authorization that gives F-1 students an opportunity to apply knowledge gained in the classroom to a practical work experience off campus. You may use some or all of the available 12 months of practical training during your course of study or save the full twelve months to use after you complete your studies. Authorization for optional practical training is granted by the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS)—formerly known as the Immigration and Naturalization Service or INS—and can take at least 90 days and frequently up to 120 days to obtain. It is important that you apply for the authorization at the earliest possible date.

To be eligible for OPT you must:

- Have been in full-time status for at least one full academic year preceding the submission of your OPT application
- Be maintaining valid F-1 status at the time of the application
- Intend to work in a position directly related to your major field of study
- **If you are requesting OPT for post-graduation, you must apply for the OPT prior to graduation, and your start date must be no later than 60 days after graduation.**

To apply for OPT you must:

- Complete the OPT request form
- Complete the I-765 form
- Provide a copy of your I-94 form (both sides) and a copy of the visa and identification pages from your passport
- Provide copies, front and back, of all previous I-20s
- Provide two recent photographs with your name and SEVIS number in pencil on the back
- Provide a check for the amount currently set by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security
- Make an appointment with the International Student Services Office to bring the above documentation for review and to receive a new I-20. Once all your documentation is in order, you will be asked to make copies for your personal records and to mail the papers by registered mail to the following address:

*U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service
Vermont Service Center
75 Lower Welden Street
Saint Albans, Vermont 05479*

The International Student Services Office will review your application and submit a recommendation for OPT by updating your record in SEVIS. The SEVIS system will produce a new I-20, a copy of which you will submit with your application for OPT.

***The name and address of your OPT employer must be reported to the International Student Services Office within 60 days of beginning OPT.

CURRICULAR PRACTICAL TRAINING

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is an employment option available to F-1 students where the practical training employment is considered to be an integral part of the curriculum or academic program. According to the immigration regulations, this employment may be an internship, cooperative education job, a practicum, or any other work experience that is required for your degree, such as mentored ministry.

To be eligible for CPT, you must:

- Be enrolled on a full-time basis for one academic year
- Your employment must be an integral part of your degree program
- Your job must be related to your major
- You must have your employer prepare a letter to be sent to the International Student Advisor, Southeastern Theological Seminary, P. O. Box 1889, Wake Forest, NC 27587. The letter should be written on the church letterhead stating that you will be working under the CPT agreement toward fulfillment of the Mentored Internship requirement. Please state the beginning date and ending date and that you will be working no more than 20 hours per week. A letter will be required for each subsequent year that you will be working.

Employment for 20 hours or less per week while you are enrolled in classes is considered part-time CPT. The employment authorization page of your CPT I-20 will specify permission to engage in part-time training and you must limit your work to no more than 20 hours per week. The time you spend on Curricular Practical Training will not be deducted from the twelve months of allowable Optional Practical Training unless you use 12 months or more of full-time Curricular Practical Training. You must have a job offer prior to submitting your application for CPT.

F-1 EMPLOYMENT AUTHORIZATION BASED ON SEVERE ECONOMIC HARDSHIP

US Immigration regulation stipulates: "If other employment opportunities are not available or are otherwise insufficient, an eligible F-1 student may request off-campus employment work authorization based upon severe economic hardship caused by unforeseen circumstances beyond the student's control." [8 CFR 214.2 (f)(9)(ii)(C)]

To be eligible to apply for off-campus employment authorization based upon severe economic hardship, F-1 students must meet the following conditions:

1. F-1 student must show severe economic hardship resulting from one of the following:
 - Loss of financial aid or on-campus employment without fault on the part of the student
 - Substantial fluctuations in the value of currency or exchange rate
 - Unusual increases in tuition and/or living costs
 - Changes in the financial condition of the student's source of support
 - Medical bills
 - Other unexpected expenses
2. Student must be in good academic standing and registered full-time, and the employment must not interfere with their studies.

THE I-94 CARD

The I-94 card is one of the most important immigration documents since it is what indicates your non-immigrant status in the U.S. and how long you may legally remain in the country for that particular trip. It is a small white card that is normally stapled inside your passport. It is evidence that you have entered the country legally.

It is very important to pay attention to what is written on this card when you enter the U.S. Before you leave the immigration area, be sure to check the status you have been given and the date you must depart.

If you find anything that appears to be in error, politely point it out to the immigration official. It is the date written on the I-94 and not the expiration of the visa stamp that controls how long you can

remain in the U.S. A new I-94 card with a new date is issued each time a nonimmigrant legally enters the U.S.

LEAVING AND RETURNING TO THE U.S.

The following information will clarify what documents you should take when traveling outside of the U.S. to ensure your re-entry.

F-1 visa holders must have:

- A valid passport
- A valid U.S. Visa (the visa stamp in your passport should be valid beyond the date you return to the U.S. and should have multiple entries)
- A valid Form I-20 (check the expiration date item 5 on your I-20 and check the back of your I-20 for our signature).

ARRIVAL CHECKLIST

- Check in with International Student Services. Bring passport, immigration documents, and I-94 card.
- Attend the International Student Orientation and New Student Orientation
- Open a bank account.
- Sign up for health insurance.
- If you will be working, apply for a Social Security card 10-14 days after arrival in the U.S.
- Check with the Student Life Office for activities for new students.
- Do not hesitate to ask for help. Southeastern staff is here to help you but you must ask for their help.

QUICK-REFERENCE F-1 STATUS MAINTENANCE

To maintain F-1 status, a student must:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Report to the DSO to have his or her SEVIS record registered in SEVIS in a timely fashion. DSOs must register the student in SEVIS no later than 30 days after the program start date (new students in Initial SEVIS status), and each semester thereafter, no later than 30 days after the each Next session start date (continuing students).
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• For the first entry for initial school attendance, the school listed on the visa and on the I-20 must be the same, and that is the school the student must intend to attend.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pursue a "full course of study" at the school listed on the currently valid Form I-20 during every academic session or semester except during official school breaks, or unless approved under a specific exception, in advance, by the DSO.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make normal progress towards completing the course of study, by completing studies before the expiration of the program completion date on Form I-20.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep Form I-20 valid by following proper procedures for extension of stay
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep Form I-20 valid by following proper procedures for change in educational levels or programs of study
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Keep Form I-20 valid by following proper procedures for transfer of schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Abide by the F-1 grace period rules
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Report a change of address to the DSO within 10 days of the change, so that SEVIS can be updated.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Abide by rules requiring disclosure of information and prohibition on criminal activity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Abide by any special requirements, such as Special Registration requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Not work, either on or off-campus, unless specifically authorized under the regulations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Abide by the aggregate unemployment rules while on post-completion OPT

GETTING SETTLED IN THE COMMUNITY

BRINGING MONEY INTO THE U.S.

This matter can be difficult, especially if your country has strict regulations about taking funds abroad. Check with your bank's foreign exchange department when you are getting your financial support documentation in order, and make the necessary arrangements to bring sufficient funds with you and transfer other needed funds.

Arrange a convenient way to bring funds into the U.S. or to have them transferred efficiently to your American bank account once you open one (as soon as possible after your arrival). You should bring sufficient funds with you in U.S. currency and traveler's checks to get through the first few weeks while your account is being opened and your bank is clearing bank drafts. It is suggested that you carry a recognized credit card (Visa or MasterCard, for example), and (A) at least two hundred dollars if single, or (B) five hundred dollars if married: one hundred in cash and the rest in traveler's checks. Bring the rest of your money in traveler's checks or a bank check. Be sure that bank drafts are payable to you personally and are made out in U.S. dollars, drawn on a U.S. bank. When traveling it is helpful to have some one-dollar (\$1) bills for small needs, and quarters (25-cent pieces) for telephone calls. Do not carry large amounts of cash.

If you arrive at Southeastern less than a month before registration and have not paid fees ahead from your own country, you will need to have access to sufficient funds (such as traveler's checks) to pay in full your first semester tuition at registration and pay for your accommodations, etc. Remember, you cannot count on being able to establish a bank account immediately and have quick access to funds.

ANNUAL EXPENSES

Tuition and Fees vary according to program

(www.sebts.edu/BusinessOffice/Payment/Schedule%20of%20Fees.cfm).

Apartment rent and utilities Information concerning on-campus living option can be found at www.sebts.edu/housing.

Groceries: Costs range from \$100– \$200 for a single person, \$200–\$300 per month for a family. Purchasing ready-made foods or eating in restaurants is significantly more expensive.

Clothing: Costs will vary depending upon the clothing you bring with you. Wake Forest can be very hot and humid in the summer (up to 100°F. /38°C.). In the winter it is often below freezing, with snow and ice. If you arrive in winter you will need warm clothing (an overcoat/jacket/parka). Southeastern's Sharing Shop is walking distance from the Seminary where you can find used clothing for the entire family at no cost. We can help you locate these once you arrive.

Health Insurance: International students on visas, as well as accompanying spouses and children, are required to carry health insurance. At registration, international students will be required to present documentation showing that they have enrolled in a health insurance program. This will be required BEFORE they can begin classes at Southeastern. In addition to this coverage offered by the school, all international students in F-1 visa status are also required to have insurance coverage for

repatriation and medical evacuation.

Automobile Insurance is required by law and can be expensive.

Books and Supplies: Budget at least \$100 per semester hour of coursework for textbooks.

Telephone: If you want a private land-line phone, the standard fee is about \$50 per month, including local calls, with additional charges for long-distance calls. Cell phone plans are available and often less expensive. Calling cards are often preferred for making long-distance calls; these can be acquired locally and over the internet.

ONE-TIME LARGE EXPENSES

Airfares: Be sure to budget for your return flight.

Setting up a home (not including actual rental costs listed above) costs about \$500–\$1,000 if you are careful to shop for the lowest prices.

Computer: The range is from about \$800– \$2,000. All term papers must be typed. Southeastern does have computers available for students’ use in the computer lab of the library. The printers may be used at a cost of 10 cents per page, which can get rather expensive, so you may prefer to purchase your own if possible.

Telephone: Purchase and installation charges, in addition to monthly fees, range from \$60–\$150. A deposit of \$50–\$100 may be required, which will be returned after you have paid bills regularly for twelve months.

Deposit for Housing: Many apartment complexes and landlords require an up-front security deposit, which can equal as much as one full month’s rent. This deposit is refundable at the end of your lease, provided you abide by the terms and conditions of your lease.

U.S. TAX REGULATIONS

If you have been employed in the U.S., regardless of immigration status, you must submit to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) a complete and accurate income-tax statement each year. F-1 visa holders are required to file tax forms while they are in the U.S. Because of this requirement, they must file a 1040NR Federal income tax form. The student should keep careful record of all earnings and gifts given to him or her by churches and friends, since the total amount must be reported for income tax purposes on a yearly basis.

Income is assessed for income tax purposes in the U.S. on a calendar year basis. “Tax returns” (forms) must be filed with the IRS between January and April 15 of the following year. It is necessary to file federal, state, and sometimes local income tax returns. You can download forms from the IRS website www.irs.ustreas.gov/prod/forms_pubs/index.html, and you can call the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) toll-free telephone number: for tax forms and publications call 1-800-829-3676; for general tax information call 1-800-829-1040 (ask for Technical Division). These numbers are frequently busy so it may take some time to reach them. To determine which federal income tax form to complete, you will need to secure a copy of Publication 519: U.S. Tax Guide for Aliens available from the U.S. Tax Office. It is important to get current instructions each year.

In filing a U.S. income tax return, you should be aware of the provisions of the U.S. Tax Treaty relating to your country (especially where you also file a return in your home country or where you

receive income or scholarships from overseas), non-taxable components of income received from church internships, income of the working spouse and other deductions for which you may be eligible. All of these items can represent a substantial savings in U.S. income tax liability.

BANKING

One of the most important things you should do is to open a bank account. It is not wise to carry large amounts of cash with you. Compare services and fees before you open an account locally. Remember to ask about the arrangements for transferring funds overseas since some banks can accommodate this better than others.

Required documents to set up a bank account:

- Passport
- I-20 or DS-2019
- Letter stating proof of residence (may be obtained from International Student Services Office)

Recommended Bank:

SunTrust Bank
Wake Forest, NC 27587

With your bank account you can apply for an ATM card, which will give you access to a vast number of 24-hour Automated Teller Machines. You will be given a Personal Identification Number (PIN) to use when accessing your account; memorize it and do not give it to anyone. These machines can be found at banks or shopping centers and are a useful way of withdrawing cash from your account.

Be sure to bring enough cash and/or traveler's checks to see you through the first few weeks as you wait for your bank account to open.

CHURCHES

You will want to become an active part of a local congregation and choosing a church may be one of the most important decisions you make during your stay in the U.S. If you live in the dormitories and do not have a car, you may decide to attend a church within walking distance of the Seminary. Several denominations are represented within the community near the Seminary, all of which vary in worship style and focus. A list of local churches is available online at www.sebts.edu/prospective_students/community/local_churches.cfm. Other students will be a good resource as well.

If you intend to claim the Southern Baptist (SBC) discount on your tuition, you must join a SBC church within the first semester of attendance and submit a completed Certification of Church membership form to the Registrar's Office (www.sebts.edu/current_students/registrar/index.cfm).

DRIVER'S LICENSE

If you have a valid driver's license from your country and an International Driving Permit, you may drive a car belonging to you or someone else for up to one year without getting a North Carolina Driver's License, as long as your license remains valid and the vehicle's insurance policy includes your name. The process of obtaining a North Carolina driver's license can take many weeks. Following are the steps you will need to take in order to obtain one.

- Go to the Driver License Center and take with you a social security card—or a letter from Social Security stating they denied you a Social Security card—and birth certificate or passport. You will be asked to take a computer test on the contents of the manual. If you answer the required questions correctly and pass the vision test, you will be issued either a temporary license or a learner’s permit. Finally, you will be required to take a practical driving test before you are issued a permanent license.

MEDICAL INFORMATION (in addition to that given in costs section)

Medical Records: Bring records of any noteworthy medical conditions with you to give to your U.S. family physician or primary care practitioner. Records required for school children are listed in the State or Public Schools section.

Health / Medical Insurance: The more extensive health insurance policy will be a more expensive policy but will allow more personal choices of doctors and specialist care. All Southeastern students are required by the seminary to provide proof of having health insurance.

SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

Social Security Card: The Social Security card identifies wage earners for tax purposes and this number is often used as a general ID number for opening new accounts and services. It is also the number used to track your credit history in the U.S. You must wait 10-14 days after arrival in the U.S. before you apply for the Social Security card. Visit the Social Security Administration's website at www.ssa.gov for more information.

You must take:

- Proof of age (such as birth certificate)
- I-20 or DS-2019
- Visa, I-94, Passport
- Letter from International Student Services Office stating your student status

STUDENT AND ACADEMIC LIFE

FINANCIAL AID

Southeastern's General Scholarship: The deadline to apply for a General Scholarship is April 15 for the following academic year. The amount of each award is discretionary and does not exceed the cost of tuition fees. It is given for tuition only; if part of the scholarship is not needed for tuition, it will not be given to the student for other expenses but returned to the scholarship fund. You must **REAPPLY EACH YEAR** for financial aid if you wish to receive it and it is not available for first year international students.

SOUTHEASTERN ACADEMICS

Full-time Status Required: International students who have entered the U.S. on an "F" visa must maintain full-time status. Undergraduate students must maintain 12 credit hours in each of the Fall and Spring semesters. International M.A., and M.Div. students must register each fall term and each spring term for courses totaling at least 9 credit hours. Th.M. D.Min., Ed.D. and Ph.D. students must maintain continuous enrollment.

Auditing Courses: International students may also wish to audit courses free of charge, in addition to those they are taking for official credit. To "audit" a course means regularly attending the class lectures without having any obligation to do reading, to write papers or to take examinations. Audited courses do not count toward either full-time status or degree requirements. A spouse of any full-time student may also audit courses free of charge.

ACADEMIC HONESTY

The honor system at Southeastern is a community agreement that all academic work will be done honestly, without cheating of any kind or using the ideas of others as if they were one's own, without appropriately crediting the source. All students are expected to uphold this system in their own work and are also required to report any violation of this policy by another student. Any confirmed or proven conscious violation of the honor system will result in automatic suspension from the Seminary. Please read the section on the honor system in the Catalog. If you have any questions, please see the Director of International Students or the International Student Advisor. Some cultures place a great value on helping a fellow student succeed, and this has sometimes led to violations of the honor system. As much as we appreciate students' mutual support, the honor code must be upheld. Be sure that you understand it well.

Though one would hope that intentional falsehood would not occur in this environment, it does. Frequently these situations involve international students. Very often these incidents arise as sinful responses to the tremendous pressure on students to do well and to look good in the eyes of those who support them. The complications of financial loss, church involvement, family, and life calling are severe, especially in the case of international students who must leave the country upon loss of their full-time student status. Intentional falsehood or plagiarism can be avoided if you set your mind on pleasing the Lord alone.

PLAGIARISM

"You plagiarize when, intentionally or not, you use someone else's words or ideas but fail to credit that person. You plagiarize even when you do credit the author but use his exact words without so indicating with quotation marks or block indentation. You also plagiarize when you use words so

close to those in your source, that if you placed your work next to the source, you would see that you could not have written what you did without the source at your elbow.”¹

“It is trickier to define plagiarism when you summarize and a paraphrase. They are not the same, but they blend so seamlessly that you may not even be aware when you are drifting from summary into paraphrase, then cross the line into plagiarism. No matter your intention, close paraphrase may count as plagiarism, even when you cite the source.”²

IMMEDIATELY UPON ARRIVAL

At The Airport: Getting through U.S. Immigration and Customs can be a challenging experience. Allow approximately two hours for the process, though the time could vary. Make contact with us ahead of time so that we can be of help when you get to the Wake Forest area and can pray for you as you travel.

From The Airport To The Seminary: Upon arrival in the U.S., your first problem will be to get to the campus. If you fly into **Raleigh/Durham International Airport**, which is about a 45- minute drive from Southeastern, there are a number of transportation options available. Renting a car is not recommended. A taxi is convenient, but extremely expensive. By far, the best method is to arrange with the seminary to have someone meet you at the airport. This will most likely be the International Student Worker. You will receive information and be contacted by this Student Worker while you are still in your home country if you have e-mail. Southeastern can also provide this service if you notify the International Student Office (weekdays 8:30 a.m.–5 p.m.), **at least two weeks in advance of your arrival**, telling us your airline, flight number, and arrival date and time.

Accommodations: Make arrangements for your immediate requirements at least one month in advance of your arrival, if possible. You may need temporary housing and transportation to acquire basic necessities, such as food, upon your arrival. The Seminary is open during business hours (8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m.) on weekdays. Plan to arrive during those times if possible. If you will be arriving on a weekend or evening, be sure to make advance arrangements with International Student Services. The International Student Worker will be available to assist you in finding housing.

¹ Wayne Booth, Gregory Colomb & Joseph Williams, *The Craft of Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 167.

² *Ibid*, 169.

GETTING TO KNOW AMERICANS

International students who wished to pass on their observations contributed most of the following material. Certainly these subjects will be of varying benefit to others, depending upon culture of origin, life situation (single or married), etc. American culture is not at all homogeneous, so you will find much variety among American individuals and groups.

U.S. CULTURE AND VALUES

Venture out of your own cultural group. **Don't let a weakness in English keep you from seeking out friendships.** Participate if you want to do so. Be flexible and don't be discouraged.

Social Customs: Americans are like people everywhere: they are intrigued by differences, yet they feel most comfortable when they are around people who behave the way they do. Like people in your culture, Americans have ways of acting, speaking, and taking care of themselves that are important to them. Their customs vary a great deal, but there are some commonalities. Though you do not need to change your identity, it will be helpful to be aware of these American patterns and what Americans expect of each other in their relationships.

“Personal Space”: Americans, as a rule, do not like crowds very much. They feel comfortable with space around them. When speaking, they usually stay about two to three feet (one meter) away from each other. They do not feel comfortable when people get closer than one foot to them. Try to remember not to stand too close, and to form lines to wait for things.

Personal Hygiene: Americans have a saying: “Cleanliness is next to godliness.” *Great* value is placed on a clean appearance, and a lack of strong body odors. Americans, like many other cultural groups, generally bathe or shower daily, brush their teeth at least twice a day, and use deodorant. They usually put on fresh clothes daily. They tend to keep their homes, and particularly their bathrooms, clean. Although it may seem strange, differences in habits of personal hygiene can be a major obstacle for some foreign students in getting to know Americans.

Time: International students are often surprised at the degree of scheduling of appointments or visits done in the U.S. When invited to a person's home it is generally expected that a guest will come at the time indicated, or within ten minutes. If the appointment is a business or other meeting, one is expected at the time set, not more than five minutes late. If one knows that they will be late, it is considered polite to call to let the host know when you will arrive, or if you are unable to be at the set appointment.

Holidays

American holidays can be confusing for a visitor. Some are days when most schools and businesses are closed (here referred to as “official holidays”); others are celebrations or occasions noted by decorations or special greetings. Southeastern does not close for all “official holidays”.

Legal Holidays Observed at Southeastern: Make sure to check the academic calendar available at campusnet.sebts.edu to confirm when offices are closed or classes are not held.

- Christmas Eve, Dec. 24
- Christmas Day, Dec. 25
- New Year's Day, Jan. 1
- Good Friday, the Friday before Easter
- Memorial Day, the last Monday in May

- Independence Day, July 4
- Labor Day, first Monday in September
- Thanksgiving Day, 4th Thursday in November

Primary holidays celebrated in the U.S. (*Official holidays are marked with an **):

- ***New Year's Day, January 1**, is an official holiday when most Americans relax or watch major football competitions. Many think about changes they'd like to make during the coming year, and make "New Year's Resolutions."
- ***Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday, January 15**, observed the third Monday in January, honors the leader of the civil-rights movement in America during the 1960's.
- **Valentine's Day, February 14**, honors sweethearts and romance.
- **Good Friday** afternoon some businesses close and churches have services.
- **Easter Sunday** varies in date from late March to late April. Many churches have a "Sunrise Service" early in the morning. Families celebrate with worship and Easter egg hunts for children.
- **Mother's Day, the second Sunday in May**, is for honoring moms. Many get cards or gifts and are given the day off from cooking and cleaning up.
- ***Memorial Day, the fourth Monday in May**, Americans remember those who have died in military service to their country.
- **Father's Day, the third Sunday in June**, is for honoring dads, usually with cards and gifts.
- ***Independence Day, the Fourth of July**, commemorates the day the Declaration of Independence was signed in Philadelphia on July 4, 1776. Usually considered the birthday of the nation, it is celebrated all over the country with picnics, community events, and fireworks displays.
- ***Labor Day, the first Monday in September**, recognizes the labor movement's contribution to the productivity of the country. It usually signals the end of summer, and is celebrated with picnics and barbecues.
- ***Thanksgiving Day, the fourth Thursday in November**, was declared a national day of thanks by President Abraham Lincoln. The first "Thanksgiving Day" was when the Pilgrims at Plymouth Colony in Massachusetts in 1621 gave thanks for a bountiful harvest and God's mercy in helping them survive in the wilderness. Americans get together with family and friends to eat a feast that usually consists of food such as roast turkey, cranberry sauce, sweet potatoes, and pumpkin pie. Schools and offices are closed on Thanksgiving Day, and many are closed the Friday following Thanksgiving.
- **Christmas Eve, December 24**, most businesses close at noon so that people can travel or prepare for the celebration of Christmas. Americans from some cultural backgrounds exchange gifts with family members on Christmas Eve, and many churches have a Christmas Eve worship service in the evening.
- ***Christmas Day, December 25**, is celebrated by most Americans whether or not they are Christians. Schools generally close for a two-week period, approximately a week before and a week after Christmas. Almost all businesses are closed on Christmas Day.
- **New Year's Eve, December 31**, is celebrated as a time to welcome the New Year. Many businesses close at noon. In the evening, churches may have a time of worship and gathering. Many Americans have parties or gatherings where guests stay until after midnight, to "see in the New Year" together.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

The process of transitioning to life in the U.S. is an exciting one and not one to approach with fear. Careful planning and contact with the International Student Services staff will help to make your move to the U.S. and introduction into American life as smooth as possible. While you are likely to encounter some bumps along the way, these difficulties are normal, and our staff is dedicated to providing whatever assistance is possible.