



VALPARAISO  
UNIVERSITY

# INTERNATIONAL STUDENT HANDBOOK

Office of International Programs

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# Office of International Programs Staff



(From Left to Right)

**JANICE LIN, INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADVISOR**

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Advises international students and scholars on immigration issues and cross-cultural adjustment.

**MONINDER "HOLLY" SINGH, DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS**

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Manages international students and scholars, maintains immigration compliance and coordinates cross-cultural programming. Advises the Valparaiso International Student Association (VISA).

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Manages study abroad programs, coordinates exchange agreements and assists with hiring international faculty and staff.

**LADONNA TRAPP, ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT**

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Provides administrative support to the Office of International Programs and assists the university community with questions and services related to international programs.

## Welcome Letter

Dear Student,


Welcome to Valparaiso University. I and my staff would like to welcome you to our campus. We are excited that you have chosen to study at Valparaiso University. We look forward to the beginning of your Valpo experience and hope that we can contribute to that experience in any way possible. We are here to meet the needs of all international students on campus. The beginning of that service started from the moment that you applied and will continue even when you are a VU alumni.

This handbook is one way in which we hope to improve your experience at VU. Enclosed in this handbook is everything that you will need to know to have a successful beginning here, both at the University and in the area surrounding the campus. We expect this to be of great benefit to you. However, if you ever feel that you have questions or concerns you can come and visit us in our office: 209 Harre Union.

Please feel free to come into our office and ask us for assistance at any time. We are always here to help, whether by phone, email or in person. Additionally, our office is a popular gathering place for students, so please feel free to stop by, even if you do not have any specific questions or needs. We enjoy the company of students and hope to do our part to enrich your stay here. Again, welcome to Valparaiso University and the United States, and we know that you will have an amazing journey.

Sincerely,

**Moninder 'Holly' Singh**  
Director of International Students & Scholars  
Office of International Programs



**F-1 & J-1 Students**

# Maintaining Your Legal Status

International students need to maintain status while they are in U.S. The following are points that students need to keep in mind :

## General Guidelines

- Do not let your I-20 expire.
- Keep your passport valid and un-expired at all time.
- Report to the Office of International Program to have your SEVIS record registered in SEVIS immediately upon your arrival to VU.
- If you are a transfer student from another U.S. institution, you must complete the transfer procedures with 15 days from the start date of your VU I-20.
- If you are transferring to another U.S. institution, you need to inform OIP.
- Report a new address within 10 days of the change.
- Never work off-campus without authorization from our office and USCIS.
- Limit on-campus employment to 20 hours during the semester. On-campus employment includes assistantship, working for VU departments, bookstores, cafeteria, etc. On-campus employment means your employer is VU and your pay check must be issued by VU.

## Course of Study

- Enroll full-time and pursue a full course of study during fall and spring semesters.
- Undergraduate: 12 credit hours
- Graduate: 9 credit hours
- MBA: 8 credit hours
- LLM/SJD: 8 credit hours
- J.D.: 12 credit hours
- If for any reason you need to drop below full time, you must see an advisor at the Office of International Programs (OIP) before dropping your class. There are a few exceptions to the full time requirement but it must be approved by an advisor at OIP in advance.
- Notify OIP if there is a change in your major or level of study. We will update your I-20 accordingly.
- Only one online course may be counted towards the full course of study requirement each semester. If there is only one course left to complete the degree requirements, that course may not be an online or distance learning course.

**If you violate any of the above, you will be OUT OF STATUS. You may lose immigration benefits such as CPT, OPT, H1-B and Permanent Residency. You may be denied a future visa and face deportation.**

## General Health and Safety Information

The practice of medicine in the United States can be very different from other countries. In this brochure, we hope to provide you with some information that will help you in your efforts to find medical attention.

### Medical insurance

All international students are required to buy medical insurance with at least \$50,000 worth of coverage, repatriation of remains in the amount of \$7,500, and expenses associated with medical evacuation in the amount of \$10,000. This insurance is offered through Valparaiso University or you may choose to buy insurance through a separate provider. Either way, proof of your insurance must be presented to the OIP (Office of International Programs) by the first day of classes. It is strongly recommended that you purchase the insurance that is offered through Valparaiso University.

### Insurance Providers

Below is a list of major health care providers in the United States:

**Anthem Blue Cross / Blue Shield:** [www.anthem.com/](http://www.anthem.com/)

**Aetna:** [www.aetna.com/](http://www.aetna.com/)

**Humana One:** [www.humana-one.com/](http://www.humana-one.com/)

**UniCare:** [www.unicare.com/](http://www.unicare.com/)

**United Health One:** [www.goldenrule.com/](http://www.goldenrule.com/)

You can compare rates and plans among these companies to see which is better for you. However, make sure that you choose a plan that meets the federal requirements and be sure to come in to the OIP to provide your proof of insurance to us within 2 weeks of arrival.

### Claims Procedure

If you have the VU student insurance plan and have paid the fee for the Student Health Center, then they will help you file your claim. However, if you have a commercial plan or if you have not paid the Student Health Center fee, then you must file your claims on your own. To file a claim you will need to submit a claim form to your insurance that includes the bill that was sent to you by your doctor. You should always keep a copy of all of your medical bills. Each company has a different claim procedure and you can find out that procedure by visiting the company's website or calling the customer service number on your insurance card.

### Nearby Doctors

Franciscan Express Care (Accepts Walk-Ins):  
2307 LaPorte Ave, Suite B (219) 476-9389

Dr. Faleh Atassi:  
808 Lincolnway (219) 462-4446

Dr. Arjun Gupta:  
2031 Roosevelt Road (219) 464-8007

Dr. Eugene Lin:  
2421 LaPorte Ave. (219) 462-4167

\*In most cases, the Health Center can provide the services that you would receive at these doctors. However, if you still feel the need to see a private physician, we have listed them here. Be sure to call the doctor before you visit him. Ask if he has any appointment times in the near future and be sure to ask if he accepts your insurance plan.

## General Health and Safety Information Continued

### Urgent vs. Emergency condition

#### Urgent condition:

An urgent condition is an illness or injury that won't cause further disability or death if not treated immediately, but requires professional attention to prevent it from developing into a greater threat. In these circumstances, you should go to the Health Center.

#### Emergency condition:

Emergency condition is what an average person believes could threaten life, limb or eyesight without immediate treatment. If the situation requires immediate medical treatment, or there are painful symptoms requiring immediate attention to relieve suffering, the situation is an emergency. Only in these circumstances should you go to the emergency room at the hospital.

#### Helpful Links:

Use these links to help you decide where to go for medical assistance.

**Student Health Center:** [www.valpo.edu/healthcenter](http://www.valpo.edu/healthcenter)

**Franciscan Express Care:** <http://www.smmhc.com/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabid=477>

**Counseling Center:** <http://www.valpo.edu/counseling/scdc/index.php>

**Porter County Family Counseling Center:** <http://www.pcfcc.org/>

**Office of International Programs:** [www.valpo.edu/international](http://www.valpo.edu/international)

# Student Employment

As an international student in the United States your primary reason for being here is to obtain an education. However, for many different reasons, international students find that they need to work while they pursue their education. If you find yourself needing employment while in the United States, the Office of International Programs (OIP) is the office that will provide you with the information to keep you in legal status.

## On-Campus Employment

The most common form of employment for international students is on-campus employment, this means any employment where you receive a check directly from Valparaiso University. The first step is for the student to find a department that will hire him/her. That can be done a few different ways. The student can go to individual departments to ask if they are looking to hire anyone. Or, the student can check the Financial Aid website for student employment:

<http://www.valpo.edu/financialaid/studentemployment/oncampus/>

Once the student has a department that will hire him/her then the student should come to the OIP. Our office will give the student an employment packet. The first paper in the packet is a letter that must be signed by the hiring department.

Once the letter is signed, it must be returned to the Office of International Programs. Our office will then generate a letter that the student will take to the Social Security Administration to obtain a Social Security Number (SSN). After the student has acquired an SSN, then they should return to OIP to finish their paperwork for Human Resources.

## Internships & Cooperative Programs

F-1 students who wish to participate in an off-campus training program that is "an integral part of an established curriculum" must first obtain work authorization for Curriculum Practical Training (CPT). The training must be directly related to the student's major field of study, which is defined as "alternate work/study, internship, cooperative education, or any other type of required internship or practicum which is offered by sponsoring employers through cooperative agreements with the school" (federal regulation 8CFR214.2(f)(10)). This cooperative agreement is formalized through an Internship/Practicum/Co-Op course in which the student enrolls.

To pursue CPT, please set up an appointment with an advisor in the Office of International Programs (OIP). Additional information is also available on OIP's website.

J-1 students, please see an OIP advisor for more information on off-campus internship authorization (Academic Training).

## Work After Graduation

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is designed to provide a student in F-1 status with an opportunity to gain actual employment experience in the student's field of study, as listed on the I-20. OPT is different from CPT in the following ways:

- A job offer is not needed before applying for OPT
- US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), not OIP, authorizes the training
- It takes 3-4 months to receive authorization
- Student may work for one or more employers, change jobs, or look for work (up to 90 days) during OPT
- OPT is limited to 12 months per degree level (exception for some STEM majors); it does NOT mean 12 months after each undergraduate degree or each masters degree, if you do multiple undergraduate degrees or multiple masters degree. (See an international student advisor at OIP for details)

## H1 Work Visa

The Office of International Programs does not handle H1 work visas for students. For more information about this and other work visas please visit the Department of State's website at the following URL:

[http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types\\_1271.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1271.html)

Additionally, you can visit the following U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) page and go to the link "Working in the US":

<http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/>

## Travel Outside the U.S.

### Travel Procedures

1. Obtain travel signature from Office of International Program. Bring your I-20 into OIP and sign the travel log. Please allow five working days to process your request.
2. If your F-1 visa stamp expired, you will need to apply for a new visa stamp to reenter the U.S. Extra time is needed if we need to issue a new I-20 to reflect a new major, new educational level, new dependent information, or new funding source. Please provide us with any new information and supporting document. You will carry your old I-20, new I-20, passport, official transcript, and new financial document to apply for a new F-1 visa at the U.S. Consulate. See “What Items Do Returning Students Need” at [http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types\\_1268.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1268.html)

### Travel to Canada, Mexico or the Caribbean

F-1 students may re-enter the U.S. with an expired visa if you travel to Canada, Mexico, or the Caribbean for less than 30 days (a travel signature from OIP is still required). However, automatic visa revalidation ([http://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel/faq\\_f2.htm#Toc81222014](http://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel/faq_f2.htm#Toc81222014)) is not available for all students. Please check with an OIP advisor for details.

**Check and see if you need a visitor’s visa to enter Canada:** (<http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/visit/visas.asp>)

**Information to apply for a Canadian visa:** ([http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/washington/imm/visa\\_temp.aspx?lang=eng#EQUIREMENTSUS](http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/washington/imm/visa_temp.aspx?lang=eng#EQUIREMENTSUS))

**Check and see if you need a visitor’s visa to enter Mexico:** (<http://portal.sre.gob.mx/usa/index.php?option=displaypage&Itemid=111&op=page&SubMenu=>)

### Canadian Consulate in Chicago:

2 Prudential Plaza, 180 N Stetson AV., Suite 2400, Chicago, IL 60601. Tel: 312-616-1860

### Mexican Consulate in Chicago:

204 S. Ashland Ave., Chicago, IL 60607. Tel: 312-855-1380 Fax: 312-855-9257

# Social Security Number

## What is a Social Security Number?

A Social Security number is intended to accurately record your earnings in the United States. Most employees are required to pay a certain percentage of their earnings to the Social Security System through the Federal Insurance Compensation Act (FICA tax). However, most F-1 and J-1 employees are usually exempt from the FICA tax.

## Do You Need a Social Security Number?

You must have a Social Security number in order to work in the United States. However, having a Social Security Card does **NOT** give your authorization to work.

## You only need to apply for a Social Security Number if:

- you are applying for permission for on-campus employment, or
- you are applying for permission for practical training, or
- you have been offered a graduate assistantship or fellowship

## Social Security Numbers are NOT needed for:

- class registration
- opening a bank account, or cashing a check
- applying for a driver's license
- renting an apartment

## How Do You Apply for a Social Security Card?

The Social Security Administration now requires that all F-1 and J-1 students must show proof of employment *before* they can be issued a Social Security Number.

## Steps to Apply for a Social Security Number

### Step 1 - Get a Job

You must be employed or be starting a job in the near future. Obtain a letter of offer from your employer and take that letter to the Office of International Program (OIP). ([click here](#) to download a blank on-campus employment letter, your employer may copy it on their office letterhead before filling in the details.)

### Step 2 - Obtain a letter from Office of International Programs (OIP) to take to Social Security Administration

Call OIP at 464-5333 and make an appointment with an international advisor. Bring the following items to the appointment:

- your I-20 or DS-2019
- your valid passport and I-94 card
- your employment letter
- a completed [Social Security Card application](#)

## Social Security Continued

On number 2 (mailing address) of the application, put down:

*your name*

*c/o Valparaiso University*

*Office of International Programs*

*1509 Chapel Drive, 209 Harre Union*

*Valparaiso, IN 46383-7123*

### **Step 3 - Go to the Social Security Administration**

Take the special letter issued to you by the international advisor, your I-20 or DS-2019, passport, I-94 card, and employment letter to Social Security Administration located at:

3810 Calumet Avenue

Valparaiso, IN 46383

The office opens Monday through Friday 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Please arrive no later than 3:30 p.m.

### **Step 4 - Your Card**

It takes two weeks to process the card. You will be notified by email when your card arrives OIP. You must then come to OUR office to complete your employment paperwork before you may begin working. You are responsible for taking this paperwork to the Human Resources Office in Kretzmann Hall.

For more information on Social Security Administration, [click here](#).



# **General Information for Students**

## U.S. Tax Regulations

The following information is a *brief* summary of the U.S. tax requirements for international students. Please remember that many exceptions apply depending on particular tax treaties between the U.S. and other countries.

**Important: All F and J visa status holders (F-1, F-2, J-1 and J-2 including spouse and children) are required by U.S. law to file an annual income tax statement with the Internal Revenue Service (IRS),** even if they have not earned any income in the U.S. or are not required to pay any taxes. The tax year is from January 1 to December 31, but *the filing deadline is April 15 of the subsequent year.* For example, the 2010 tax return is due April 15, 2011. The Office of International Programs facilitates tax workshops around this time that will help you understand and fill out the necessary forms.

**If you have income from a U.S. source,** (including on- or off-campus employment, assistantships, fellowships, and/or scholarships) you must file a tax return by April 15. The Office of International Programs is usually able to arrange for general tax assistance for students (including the tax workshops).

**If you are employed in the U.S.,** your employer is required to withhold (deduct) taxes from your paycheck, unless you are exempt from income tax because of a tax treaty the U.S. has signed with your home country. If you are in F-1 or J-1 status, however, you may be exempt from Social Security taxes (FICA). Each January, your employer(s) will send you (or our office) a tax statement (Form W-2), which is an official report of your income earned and taxes withheld. You will be required to submit a copy of this form to the IRS with your annual tax return. If you have any questions regarding any of this information, please contact the staff in the OIP.

### Tax Treaties

**If you are from a country that has a tax treaty with the U.S.,** you may be exempt from paying U.S. taxes on part or all of your income. Also, while employed here, you are exempt from Social Security and Medicare taxes. If you have questions, contact the OIP or the Payroll Office in the basement of Kretzmann Hall.

# Transportation

Driving is the most common form of transportation in the United States. In this brochure we hope to provide you with tips that will keep you safe during your time in the United States. We will provide you with information about purchasing and driving your own car as well as utilizing the public transportation that is available in the area.

## Purchasing Your Own Car

Purchasing your own car is a big investment and should only be done after careful consideration. If you are unsure about any part of the process you should contact the Office of International Programs (OIP) or ask a friend who has already purchased a car to go with you. Remember that the state of Indiana will charge you a 7% sales tax which can possibly add hundreds of dollars to your purchase. Also, once you have purchased the car, you must go to the Indiana Bureau of Motor Vehicles (BMV) to title and register the vehicle. Remember, Indiana law requires that you have your car registration, proof of insurance and Driver's License (or Learner's Permit) with you at all times while driving. However, the title should always be left at home.

## Insurance

Insurance is a legal requirement in the state of Indiana before you operate a vehicle. There are several locations around the area where you may purchase insurance. You may also purchase insurance online. We have some links to local insurance agencies in our **Helpful Links** section on the back of the brochure.

## Learning to Drive

If you have never driven before or if you simply feel uncomfortable with the laws of driving in the United States, then it may be a good idea to attend a driving school before you begin driving. In our **Helpful Links** section, we have listed the two schools that are located in Valparaiso.

## Obtaining a Driver's License

To apply for a driver's license, all international students should bring the following documents to the Indiana BMV:

- I-20 or DS-2019 (Current)
- Passport & Visa
- Current I-94 (The card stapled to your Passport)
- 2 Proofs of Indiana Residency\*
- Social Security Card or Letter of Ineligibility\*\*

\*Acceptable examples are recent cell-phone and utility bills and bank statements with your correct address.

\*\*If you do not have a social security card, then please stop by OIP and we will help you obtain a Letter of Ineligibility. OIP will give you a signed document that you will take to the Social Security Administration to get the letter.

Bringing all of the proper documents is only the beginning of the BMV process. If you have a driver's license from your home country then you will be able to apply for an Indiana driver's license. You must bring either a translation of your license or bring your international driver's license if your license from your home country does not include English.

## Transportation Continued

Then you will be allowed to take a written test and, once this is passed, schedule a driver's test. When both of these tests have been passed, the BMV will send all of your documentation down to Indianapolis and you should typically receive your license in the mail within 30 days.

If you do not have a driver's license in your home country, then you must first obtain an Indiana Learner's Permit. Bring all of your documentation to the Indiana BMV and inform them that you wish to take the written exam for the Learner's Permit, please arrive at least one hour before closing time. The BMV hours can be found on their website in the **Helpful Links** section. Once you have been issued the Learner's Permit, you may only drive when you have someone who has an Indiana Driver's License riding in the passenger's seat. Once you hold the Permit for 60 days, then you may begin the process to obtain a Driver's License.

### Rules of the Road

While you are driving, be sure to observe laws, including the posted signs. In addition, when you hear a siren, be sure to pull over to the side of the road. If your vehicle is pulled over by a police officer, remain calm and keep your hands on the steering wheel in plain sight. If you are involved in a car accident, be sure to call 911 right away and make sure that you exchange insurance information with the other person. For more tips on driving, you can either visit the Indiana BMV website or go to a local branch to pick up a driver's manual.

### Public Transportation

Valparaiso has an economically and environmentally friendly alternative to driving known as the V-Line. The V-Line is available to travel around the city of Valparaiso. In our Helpful Links section, we have included the website for the V-Line. Online you can access their schedules and routes.

In addition to the V-Line, many students find walking or riding a bike a viable option during most of the year. Many of the restaurants and stores, including the downtown area, are within walking distance from the campus. However, during the winter months, many students seek other forms of transportation.

### Helpful Links:

**Indiana BMV:** [www.in.gov/bmv](http://www.in.gov/bmv)

**Nationwide Insurance:** [www.nationwide.com](http://www.nationwide.com)

**Allstate Insurance:** [www.allstate.com](http://www.allstate.com)

**American Family Insurance:** [www.amfam.com](http://www.amfam.com)

**State Farm Insurance:** [www.statefarm.com](http://www.statefarm.com)

**Farm Bureau Insurance:** [www.infarmbureau.com](http://www.infarmbureau.com)

**V-Line:** [www.valpo.us/v-line](http://www.valpo.us/v-line)

**ChicaGo Dash:** [www.chicagodash.com](http://www.chicagodash.com)

**South Shore Train:** [www.nictd.com](http://www.nictd.com)

**Excel Driving:** [www.exceldriving.com](http://www.exceldriving.com)

**Valpo Driving:** <http://sites.google.com/site/digital82711/professionaldrivinginstruction>

**VUPD:** [www.valpo.edu/vupd](http://www.valpo.edu/vupd)

**OIP Website:** [www.valpo.edu/international](http://www.valpo.edu/international)

## Money & Banking

When opening a bank account, you have several options: most people open both a **savings account** and a **checking account**.

- **Savings Accounts:** money earns interest based on the bank's percentage rate. Banks generally allow you to have a certain number of transactions (deposits and withdrawals), after which a small fee is charged.
- **Checking Accounts:** money in this type of account generally does not earn interest, but it usually allows you more access to your money. Many checking accounts allow an unlimited number of transactions each month.

If you wish to open only one type of account, it is more helpful to have a checking account. You not only don't need to carry cash around, but you can also pay any bill sent to you through the mail *Never send cash through the mail!*

**When you open an account**, the banks normally require a **minimum deposit**. They also require some pieces of identification. Make sure that you pay attention to all the details that the Bank Representative tells you. The Representative will talk about specific information for each type of account, like the number of checks you can write without paying a fee, the regulations for withdrawing money from the Automated Teller Machines (ATMs), the different penalty charges for going below a minimum balance, etc.

Banks also normally provide you with a **regular monthly "bank statement"** summarizing all your transactions during that month so you can keep track of your account. You should reconcile the statement with your checkbook each month to identify any discrepancies. Make sure you keep the monthly statements for future reference.

**If you will be receiving money regularly from abroad**, you may find it more convenient to have an account in one of the national banks located in Valparaiso.

Many students choose to open accounts with Chase Bank, which has multiple locations in Valparaiso, thus making them quite convenient for on and off-campus students.

**Chase Bank**  
www.chase.com  
101 Easy Lincolnway  
(219) 465-9600

# Communication

## Mail Services

U.S. postal service is inexpensive and efficient. The campus mail center is located in the Harre Union on the first floor. Hours: 10 AM-7 PM. **Tel# (219)464-5259**. There are two off-campus post office locations: 460 Lincolnway- (219) 464-1637, and 2700 Valparaiso St.- (219)462-2180. You may buy stamps and money orders at both locations, as well as send letters and packages. Express mail service is also available.

## Telephone and Internet Access

New students will not have internet access in your dorm room or on campus until you activate your ID during orientation. If you wish to contact home immediately upon arrival, you may come to our office for assistance. For emergency contact, you may give our office number (011-219-464-5333) to your family.

Local telephone service is provided by the residence halls. To dial a local (within Porter County), off-campus number, dial "8" and then the number. To dial a campus number from another campus phone, just dial the last four digits. Pre-paid phone cards and Skype service can be purchased at Wal-Mart and Target.

You will receive information about setting up your VU email during orientation.

## Cell Phone Service

If you do not have a SSN, it will be necessary to make a deposit (from \$120 to \$500, depending on the company) in order to purchase regular cellular service or you may buy pre-paid service. The deposit will be returned in one year if you pay your bill on time each month of that year. Rates vary considerably; be sure to compare different services to find the one best for you. With a SSN, you may have more calling plan options. You can learn about service options online, but with or without an SSN, in most cases you will need to visit a store in person to purchase a cell phone and arrange service. Following is a listing of the major cell phone companies providing service in the Valparaiso area and their location in town.

### **Verizon** ([www.verizonwireless.com](http://www.verizonwireless.com))

2505 Laporte Avenue

Monday-Saturday: 9:00 a.m.-8:00 p.m.

Sunday: 11:00 a.m.-6:00 p.m. Telephone: (219)531-9029

### **AT&T** ([www.att.com](http://www.att.com))

2912 N Calumet

Monday-Friday: 9 a.m.-6 p.m.

Saturday: 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

Sunday: 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Telephone: (219)464-2571

### **Sprint** ([www.sprint.com](http://www.sprint.com))

Suite 300, 2310 Laporte Avenue

Telephone: (219)548-2882

### **T Mobile** ([www.t-mobile.com](http://www.t-mobile.com))

Service can be purchased at Wal-Mart or RadioShack in Valparaiso

Wal-Mart: (219)465-2779

RadioShack: (219)464-7859

## On-Campus Housing

If you are a new undergraduate student, you are probably living in a residence hall. Our office staff will bring you directly from the bus station to the residence hall. The dorms are open early to accommodate international students. Please note that there is no bedding provided upon arrival so please bring a minimum of \$30-\$50 US Dollar cash with you to purchase bedding, basic supplies and food for the first few nights in the dorm. For summer and fall arrivals, you can wait for a couple of months before purchasing a heavier blanket immediately.

The OIP recommends that international students live on campus for at least the first two years (undergraduate students) or one semester (graduate students) because it is the best way to meet American students and adjust to the U.S. Many students opt to live in Brandt Hall because it is open during break periods; however, you may live in another hall and find a friend's room to stay in during breaks. **Make sure you pay attention to the rules about the length of stay in residence halls and requirements for break housing, such as completing forms and picking up new keys BEFORE the deadline.** In general it is necessary to move out after your exams are finished. Your RA (resident assistant) will help to explain other rules, and the Office of Residential Life (in Kretzmann Hall, phone 464-5413) will also be happy to help you. You can also check their website for further details: <http://www.valpo.edu/reslife/>.

You may want to live off-campus for dietary or other reasons; however, if you are under 22, you must file a petition with the Housing Office to do so. Do not sign the off-campus 'lease' before you are 'released' from on campus by res-life. There are several apartment complexes around campus, and many houses are divided into apartments. When you seek an apartment, make sure it meets your needs and that you can meet your obligations for rent and damages.

# Off-campus Housing

## Searching for an Apartment

It is best to start by asking your friends if they know of an opening. Many times, other students are looking for roommates or renters. This “word-of-mouth” method is usually best. The Graduate School website maintains a list of apartments for rent: [www.valpo.edu/grad/assets/docs/housing.pdf](http://www.valpo.edu/grad/assets/docs/housing.pdf). The Times and The Torch newspapers also carry “classified” listings of places to rent. The phone book has agencies listed under “Apartments” (in the yellow pages), which rent apartments. Finally, you may see “For Rent” signs on houses near campus.

## Choosing an Apartment

When you find some good possibilities, call the landlord or rental agency and ask about the location and cost. If you find the rent to be reasonable, set up an appointment to see the apartment. Ask to see the actual apartment, not a “model”. Is the apartment clean and ready for immediate occupancy? Think of some questions you want to ask ahead of time, such as the cost of utilities and length of lease. Do not sign the lease right away-- give yourself some time to think about it.

## Questions to Ask

Here are some questions to ask the landlord and yourself:

- Is the apartment in good condition?
- How are the walls, the floors, the windows?
- Do the appliances work? (Try them to find out.)
- How is the hot water supply?
- Where can you do your laundry?
- What are the average utility costs?
- How many people can live in the apartment?
- Are pets allowed?
- How long is the lease? (Remember, you are responsible even if the lease extends beyond the school year.)

## The Lease

After asking about the length of the lease, find out when the rent is due and how it is to be paid. Ask about the security deposit (usually it is equal to one month’s rent), and find out what it covers and how much you will get back. Ask what the conditions are if you break the lease, or if your landlord breaks the lease. Remember, once you sign the lease, you are responsible for adhering to its terms, so take your time and get advice on it if needed. **DO NOT LEASE** apartments for friends, as they may back out and you will be stuck with the lease. Again, do not sign the off-campus ‘lease’ before you are ‘released’ from on campus by res-life.

## Insurance and Safety

Your landlord will most likely not have insurance to cover your personal belongings. It is not necessary to have renters insurance, but you may want to buy your own policy if you own expensive things (computer equipment, etc). Short of insurance, it is always a good policy to rent an apartment that is kept in good condition and can be secured with good locks. Use common sense in not overloading circuits with too many electrical appliances, turning them off when not in use, and remember to lock your door whenever you leave. It is useful to know your escape route in case of fire, and to keep a list of emergency numbers next to the phone. Prices range from \$100-\$150 for a year, depending on deductible, which over 12 months, is about \$8-\$12 a month.

## Other Responsibilities

Keep your apartment in good shape, and report any broken features to your manager right away. Try to keep it clean. Any change in tenants should be reported to the landlord, such as when you change roommates or sub-lease the apartment to someone else. Short-term visitors are okay. Be respectful of your neighbor’s rights to quiet, cleanliness, etc. Your American neighbors may not understand some of the things you do or may feel uncomfortable in approaching you. If you are patient and courteous, most problems between neighbors can be easily solved.

## Utility Services

If you decide to rent off-campus housing, utility services may or may not be included in your apartment lease. Before signing the lease, ask the apartment manager which utilities you are responsible to arrange yourself.

Most utility services will ask for a Social Security Number (SSN) as a requirement. In all cases, it is possible to obtain these services without an SSN, but you may need to explain that as non-working foreign citizen, you are not eligible for an SSN. If you have an SSN, you will be able to arrange most services for telephone during the hours of service listed.

If you do not have an SSN, we recommend that you visit the offices in person where possible. It is generally easier to present your passport and other required documents in person. If you require assistance in these matters, please speak to anyone in the OIP (Office of International Programs).

There are three main utility service in Porter County. Gas and electricity are provided by NIPSCO, water and trash are provided by Valparaiso City Utilities, and internet, cable, and phone service are usually provided by Comcast or DirecTV (though there are other providers for these services).

### **Electricity**

Electricity is used for heating and cooking in many apartment buildings, and you may be responsible to arrange and pay for your own electrical service, if it is not included in your rent payment.

**NIPSCO** ([www.nipsco.com](http://www.nipsco.com))

You can apply for electric and/or gas service by calling our 24-hour Customer Service Center at 1-800-4-NIPSCO (or 1-800-464-7726). We are here to assist you 24 hours a day, 7 day a week. Information you will need to complete the application process:

- Full name
- Birth date
- Social Security number
- Place of employment, address, and telephone number
- Address where service is located
- Landlord's name, address and telephone number

**Note:** NIPSCO may require deposits.

### **Water**

This also includes waste pick-up and storm-water drainage.

**Valparaiso City Utilities** ([www.valparaisoutilities.org](http://www.valparaisoutilities.org))

<http://www.valparaisoutilities.org/water/service/service-on.htm>

205 Billings Street

Valparaiso, IN 46383

(219) 462-6174

There are two ways to begin service with the water company and the website provided lists them both in detail.

### **Cable and Internet**

Cable television and high-speed internet, as well as land-line phone service, can be purchased through Comcast. The best way to get your service set up is to visit their website ([www.comcast.com](http://www.comcast.com)). There, you will find many different types of packages, from basic internet and cable, to premium cable channels and high-speed internet. Also on their website is a "contact us" section. This section will describe to you in detail how to contact a Comcast representative.

## Entertainment

To find out what's going on in Valparaiso and the surrounding area, check out these publications:

**Post-Tribune of Northwest Indiana:** Valparaiso's daily newspaper, also available online at [www.post-trib.com](http://www.post-trib.com). Click on "Entertainment".

**Northwest Indiana Times:** Another local publication which can also be found online at [www.nwitimes.com](http://www.nwitimes.com).

### Annual Events and Places of Entertainment

Make sure to check out these fun events and places around Valparaiso. Take your friends!

**Popcorn Festival** (September 11, 2010). Located in downtown Valparaiso, the Popcorn Festival offers fun activities, good fun, live music, and many other exciting things. Check the Valparaiso Events website (<http://www.valparaisoevents.com/>) for other scheduled events in the area!

**49er Drive-In Movie Theater:** One of Valparaiso's most awesome attractions. Take some friends and relax in your own car while watching a double feature! 675 N. Calumet Avenue, Valparaiso, IN 46383. For movie times, call: (219) 462-6122

**Zao Island:** At Zao Island, you and your friends can enjoy a game of mini golf, go-karts, the game room, and the batting cages. They also have a restaurant with great pizza and more. 1050 Horse Prairie Avenue, Valparaiso, IN 46385. Call: (219) 462-1194 for more information.

**Inman's Fun and Party Center:** If you like to bowl, Inman's is the place to do it! They also have an arcade and outside attractions. 3201 East Evans Avenue, Valparaiso, IN 46383. Call (219) 462-1300 for more information.

Make sure to stay in touch with the Office of International Programs and the Valparaiso International Student Association. Both offer many on-campus events that provide a great chance to get involved and meet new people.

## Shopping & Dining

There are many places in Valparaiso to get what you need for the upcoming year. On-campus and off-campus students will need different things though, so if you have questions about these things, please do not hesitate to ask one of the OIP staff.

**Wal-Mart:**

2400 Morthland Drive  
(219) 465-2799

**Target:**

2420 Laporte Avenue  
(219) 531-6448

**Wiseway Grocery:**

2800 Calumet Avenue  
(219) 464-3571  
2168 West US Highway 30  
(219) 462-5147

**Westfield-Southlake Shopping Center:**

2109 Southlake Mall  
Merrillville, IN 46410  
(219) 738-2260

**Dining**

There are many places to dine in Valparaiso, ranging from fast food to fine dining restaurants, as well as many ethnic restaurants. Explore the town and find everything that Valparaiso has to offer! Don't forget to travel to Merrillville, as well. They have a much more diverse selection of restaurants.

**Shopping Note:** "Sales Tax"- In the state of Indiana, you will be charged a tax of 7% on every purchase except essential grocery items. This tax is calculated at the register and is not included in the price marked on the product.

## Religion

Valparaiso and the surrounding area have many organizations for the practice of most major world religions. Contact the organization directly for worship schedules. If the religion you practice is not listed, you may try finding a place of worship in Chicago.

### **Protestant:**

Chapel of the Resurrection (VU)    [www.valpo.edu/chapel/](http://www.valpo.edu/chapel/)

Immanuel Lutheran Church  
1700 Monticello Drive    [www.immanuelvalpo.org/](http://www.immanuelvalpo.org/)

New Song Fellowship  
Lincolnway Drive    [www.newsongvalpo.com/](http://www.newsongvalpo.com/)

First United Methodist  
103 N. Franklin Street    [www.valpofumc.org](http://www.valpofumc.org)

Calvary Church  
1325 Evans Avenue    [www.calvaryweb.net/](http://www.calvaryweb.net/)

Good Shepherd Presbyterian  
1901 Evan Avenue    [www.goodshepherdpc.net/](http://www.goodshepherdpc.net/)

### **Catholic:**

St. Teresa of Avila's  
1411 LaPorte Avenue    <http://saint.com/Welcome.html>

### **Jewish Synagogue**

Temple Israel of Porter County  
Evans Avenue    (219)464-0159

### **Messianic Synagogue**

Hope of Israel Congregation  
504 Lincolnway    (219)548-0659

### **Mosque**

Northwestern Indiana Islamic Center  
9803 Colorado Street  
Merrillville, IN 46411    (219)756-7622

### **Islamic Center of Michigan City**

5000 East Brown Road  
Michigan City, IN 46360  
(219)879-9667

### **Greek Orthodox**

St. Iakovos Greek Orthodox Church    [www.saintiakovos.org/](http://www.saintiakovos.org/)  
At the corners of Campbell and Chicago Streets in Valparaiso

### **Serbian Orthodox**

St. Elijah Serbian Orthodox Cathedral  
8700 Taft Street  
Merrillville, IN 46410  
(219)736-7727    [www.stelijah.org/contact.html](http://www.stelijah.org/contact.html)

# American Culture & Culture Shock

Living in a foreign country is challenging, but also a great learning experience. By learning to understand and navigate the culture of another country, we become more open-minded and accepting individuals. While you are here in the United States, consider cross-cultural learning an important aspect of your education.

If you come from a cultural background that differs greatly from that of the United States, the behavior of Americans may be very strange, annoying, or even upsetting to you at first. Following is a guide to American cultural traits and values which will help you to understand the meanings and intentions of the things Americans say and do.

## **Self-Sufficiency**

Americans have a very high regard for those who are self-sufficient. It is an important aspect of American culture. However, you will also find that Americans are very willing to help someone in need— they will just expect you to ask for help before they do so. It will rarely be assumed that you need help if you don't ask for it.

## **Attention to Time**

Americans tend to dislike the idea of wasting time. For many Americans, each part of the day has a purpose and free time is often lacking. They can also seem quite obsessed with being on time (although many Americans are often late). Being late for an appointment with an American can be taken as a personal offence because it indicates disrespect.

## **Independence**

Independence is a very strong cultural value in the U.S. Young people look forward to moving out of their parent's home so they can be independent from them, and parents generally *want* them to do so. Parents feel that teaching their child independence is an important part of their upbringing and is considered a positive thing.

## **Equality**

America's history of racism and segregation has largely been replaced with the idea of "equal opportunity". Most Americans feel that each person should have the same opportunities regardless of race, gender, or religion. The notion of equality extends to Americans' general disregard for social or economic status. Being wealthy or having connections to powerful people does not automatically command respect from Americans, and it will generally not entitle a person to special treatment or privileges.

## **Informality**

Newcomers to the United States are often shocked by the informality of Americans. People dress very casually, call superiors by their first names, and eat just about anywhere. This is related to Americans' idea of equality. If we are all social equals, then we can be informal in just about any situation.

## **Directness and Openness**

Americans often say exactly what they think, even if the information is unpleasant or bad news. In some cultures this is considered rude. However, Americans feel that acting any other way would be dishonest or even disrespectful. Americans often find it confusing when visitors from other cultures do not say exactly what they want, think, or need.

## **Privacy and Personal Space**

Americans covet their own personal space, and generally do not like that space to be invaded. They find it uncomfortable when others stand too close, and will unconsciously move away. In addition, Americans have a strong sense of privacy, and feel everyone is entitled to that. They do not like to be asked their age, weight, or salary. Conversations about personal family matters, political opinions, or religion are reserved for later stages of friendship.

# American Social Customs

Everywhere you go in the world, social customs are different. What is polite in one country can be considered rude in another. Here is a guide to American social customs. You will probably find a lot of differences *and* similarities with your own culture.

## Meeting People

- Shake hands firmly, and shake hands with people of the opposite gender. To Americans, how you shake hands is a measure of your character.
- Always look people in the eye when shaking hands or conversing. Lack of eye contact is interpreted as lack of honesty in the U.S.

## Out in Public

- Hold the door open for people walking behind you.
- Wait in line patiently.
- Treat people in service positions (servers, drivers, etc) as equals.
- Give tips in restaurants, hotels, hair salons, taxi cabs, and to anyone who helps you carry your luggage.

## Dining

- Don't eat fast— savor the food to show you enjoy it and take time to make conversation.
- Put your napkin in your lap.
- When you need assistance in a restaurant, raise your hand and say, "Excuse me, please!" Other methods used in other countries may not be understood or liked in the U.S.
- Learn which food are "finger-foods" and which require silverware.
- When eating out with friends, each person usually pays for themselves unless someone clearly states they will pay. Always assume you will pay for yourself. This is called "going Dutch".

## Driving

- Follow the traffic rules and mind the red lights.
- Allow pedestrians to have the right of way.
- Give a little wave if someone lets you merge.
- If you are driving slower than most people, use the right lane.

## Friendship with Americans

Americans spend their lives moving frequently to new cities, new jobs, and new activities. For this reason, Americans tend to be very friendly— they will start conversations with fellow passengers on the bus, invite a new acquaintance to lunch or a birthday party, or smile and say hello to strangers they pass in the street. Americans find it easy to make casual friends. This habit has helped them adapt to the many changes that occur during their lifetimes.

However this also means that Americans don't have a lot of life-long friends. Children don't keep the same classmates throughout their school years. Neighbors and family members move away. There are fewer opportunities to form deep friendships. Americans treasure the close friends they do make. But it can be difficult for a new acquaintances to move into this level of friendship.

This aspect of American culture can be confusing and frustrating for visitors from cultures that value a very tight friendship network. Actions that Americans may consider to be casual friendliness can be interpreted as a sign of deeper friendship by others.

# Dealing with Culture Shock

## The Adjustment Process in a New Culture

Understanding the cultural adjustment process can help you in coping with the often intense feelings that you may experience as you begin your life in the U.S. Each stage in the process is characterized by “symptoms” or outward signs typifying certain kinds of behavior.

1. **“Honeymoon” period:** Initially, many people are fascinated and excited by everything new. The visitor is elated to be in a new culture.
2. **“Culture Shock”:** The individual is immersed in new problems: housing, transportation, shopping, and language. Mental fatigue results from continuous straining to comprehend the new language.
3. **Initial Adjustment:** Everyday activities such as housing and shopping are no longer major problems. Although the visitor may not yet be fluent in the language spoken, basic ideas and feelings in the second language can be expressed.
4. **Mental Isolation:** Individuals have been away from their family and friends for a long period of time and may feel lonely. Many still feel they cannot express themselves as well as they can in their native language. Frustration and sometimes a loss of self-confidence result.
5. **Acceptance and Integration:** A routine (e.g., work, business, or school) has been established. The visitor has accepted the habits, customs, foods, and characteristics of the people in the new culture. The visitor feels comfortable with friends, associates, and the language of the country.

[**Note:** This cycle may repeat itself throughout your stay in a new culture. **AND these feelings are normal.** Note also that upon returning home you may experience some of these same feelings as you did when you first arrived in the new culture. This is called “reverse culture shock”.]

### The following are some tips to help you deal with culture shock:

- **Go out:** Don’t sit in your apartment or the library every day. Find some campus activities that sound interesting to you. By getting out and into social settings, you will begin to become more comfortable with new customs.
- **Get exercise:** Exercise has been shown to reduce stress and fight depression. Take a walk downtown or join an intramural sports team. Find some fellow students who want to get active, and schedule a regular activity.
- **Make friends:** Make an effort to become friends with both Americans and with other international students. The international students will be able to relate to your feelings and may be able to offer advice and support. American friends can answer general questions you have about life in the U.S. By making new friends, you will reduce feelings of loneliness and will begin to form bonds with your new surroundings.
- **Learn about the new culture:** Resist the urge to judge behaviors or practices that are different from your own as being “bad” or “unintelligent”. Instead, try to learn the reason behind the behavior. While you may not agree with the practice, you will have a better understanding of how to respond when faced with it.
- **Seek assistance:** If you find that you cannot seem to adjust to the new culture, make an appointment to speak with one of the staff in the Office of International Programs. If you find that you are very depressed, make an appointment with the Counseling Center. In both cases, your meeting will be completely confidential.
- **Be patient:** Most people require several weeks or more to feel comfortable in a new culture. Give yourself time to adjust. Focus on the positive experiences, and try to view negative experiences as learning opportunities.

## United States Holidays

As a nation, the United States celebrates a number of official holidays. The following holidays are “Federal Holidays” on which many places of business-- such as banks and stores— are closed, including university offices.

July 4	Independence Day
September 4	Labor Day
October 9	Columbus Day
November 11	Veterans’ Day
November 25	Thanksgiving Day
December 25	Christmas Day
January 1	New Year’s Day
January 15	Martin Luther King Jr. Day
February 19	Presidents’ Day
May 28	Memorial Day

### Daylight Savings Time

Most places in the United States observe “Daylight Savings Time”. In the spring, all clocks are moved forward one hour, and in the fall they are moved back again. The historical purpose of this practice was to give more daylight time to agriculture workers in the summer. Nowadays, Americans find that they just enjoy more daylight hours for summer recreational activities!

March 14, 2010: Move your clocks back one hour.

November 7, 2010: Move your clocks forward one hour.

Each year Daylight Savings Time starts on the second Sunday in March and ends on the first Sunday in November.

# Conversions

## **Currency Conversion**

When you arrive in the United States, and specifically when you arrive in Valparaiso, you will want to exchange your country's currency to U.S. dollars, or withdraw U.S. dollars from your international bank account. Use these websites to figure out the currency conversions.

<http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>

<http://www.xe.com/ucc/>

## **Temperature Conversion**

You will notice that the United States does not use degrees Celsius to tell the temperature. Here, we use degrees Fahrenheit. Listed below are a few websites that will help you convert the two.

<http://www.onlineconversion.com/temperature.htm>

<http://www.temperatureworld.com/tempcon.htm>

## **Other Useful Conversion Sites**

<http://www.metric-conversions.org/length/kilometers-to-miles.htm>

<http://www.thecalculatorsite.com/conversions/liquidvolume.php>

# Academic Resources

## Academic Success Center

The Academic Success Center supports all VU students in achieving academic success. Currently, the ASC serves as a referral system for campus-wide academic support services and resources including: tutoring, help sessions, study group sessions, academic advisement, learning assistance, learning enrichment workshops, career planning, student support groups, and disability support services.

<http://www.valpo.edu/academicsuccess/index.php>

*Tricia White (Coordinator) - [Academic.Success@valpo.edu](mailto:Academic.Success@valpo.edu)*

## Graduate School

Founded in 1859, Valparaiso University has been known for the integration of its outstanding liberal arts education and professional programs. It belongs to a distinctive group of institutions of higher education that consistently receives national recognition for quality educational programs. The graduate programs at Valparaiso extend this tradition of excellence to include a number of areas of advanced study. Our programs are deliberately limited to the kinds of graduate study that fit our larger mission of both service and scholarship, that blend liberal and professional education, and that we know we can do exceptionally well.

*Jennifer Guziewicz (Coordinator Academic Services) – [Jennifer.Guziewicz@valpo.edu](mailto:Jennifer.Guziewicz@valpo.edu)*

## Writing Center

As you know, the more you speak, the more fluent you become! Come in often for help with short assignments or questions about vocabulary or grammar. For example, you could plan for two half-hour appointments per week with the same consultant. Also, come to other activities like Conversation Group and our workshops. Our consultants are always ready to talk with you. Interlink students may sign up for appointments when they are enrolled in a Valpo course.

<http://www.valpo.edu/writingcenter/>

## International Conversation Group

The Writing Center invites you to come to International Conversation Group this semester! Valpo students get together weekly for games and other activities to share cultures and have fun with the English language. Interlink students are welcome at Conversation Group.

<http://blogs.valpo.edu/writingcenter/international-students/>

## Peer Tutors (<http://www.valpo.edu/academicsuccess/peertutoring.php>)

Are you interested in receiving academic assistance from another VU student who has successfully completed a course that you are currently taking this semester? Are you looking for a help session or study group for a particular course? If so, tutoring services are available in a variety of forms and venues across campus.

Students who would like to receive the assistance of a peer tutor may apply through the ASC by completing the Peer Tutoring Request form: <http://www.valpo.edu/academicsuccess/peertutoringform.php>

## Academic Resources Continued

### Graduate Tutoring Lab

The Graduate Tutoring Center is designed to provide assistance to graduate students for a variety of needs. Whether it be formatting papers, review of homework, or more specialized topic specific tutoring. Tutors are graduate students from a variety of programs, but primarily English Studies and Communication.

<http://www.valpo.edu/grad/international/academicsupport.ph>  
[graduate.tutor@valpo.edu](mailto:graduate.tutor@valpo.edu)

### SMART Scholars (Freshman Students)

This program consists of a 'select' group of VU students chosen to be S.M.A.R.T. Scholar Peer Mentors to new, incoming students. Peer Mentor Scholars are trained to work with their student mentee(s) throughout the year. Mentoring has been proven to benefit students

<http://www.valpo.edu/multicultural/schandintern/smart.php>

### Strategies For Academic Success Course - GS100 (Fall & Spring Semesters)

Strategies for Academic Success is a seminar designed to offer insight into learning strategies and study skills that complement individual learning styles and promote students' academic achievement. Through focused discussion on course materials, peer interaction, skill development, self-assessment, and other activities, students will explore competencies important to development as a college student. Students will discover how they learn best and what hinders their learning. With increased understanding about their learning styles and preferences, students will identify the best practices for improving academic performance and achieving their college goals.

<http://www.valpo.edu/academicsuccess/strategies.php>



**OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL  
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