

**Northeast Community College**

**Handbook for  
F-1 Visa Students**

# **Northeast Community College Handbook for F-1 Visa Students**

*Welcome to Northeast Community College!* We are glad you chose Northeast for your educational experience.

This handbook is designed to give you important information about being a student in the United States and how to maintain your immigration status. As an F-1 visa holder, it is your responsibility to maintain your status and notify the International Student Advisor of any changes in your academic or personal life that could affect your immigration status. This information is to be used only as a guide. You are encouraged to read the federal regulations for more detailed information.

Your International Student Advisor will be available to assist you throughout your time here. Congratulations and good luck!

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## **Basic Information: Where Am I?**

### **About Northeast Community College**

Northeast Community College was established in 1973 as a comprehensive community college offering vocational/technical, liberal arts, college transfer, and continuing education. It is a two-year college located at the edge of Norfolk, Nebraska and serves the 162,500 residents of a 20-county area in Northeast Nebraska.

Northeast boasts over 60 programs of study, many of which easily transfer to four-year institutions. Class sizes are small and students work closely with instructors.

Northeast offers a variety of social and extracurricular activities for you to participate in at your leisure. Contact the Student Activities Office for more information at 844-7159.

### **About Norfolk**

Norfolk is located in Northeast Nebraska in the Elkhorn River Valley of Madison County. Norfolk is 112 miles northwest of Omaha and 121 miles north of Lincoln. Norfolk's population is 23,878 and is the 7<sup>th</sup> largest city in Nebraska.

The history of Norfolk begins on July 17, 1866, when 44 German families from Wisconsin arrived at the junction of the Elkhorn and North Fork Valleys, where the rich land open for settlement attracted them. These pioneers were soon joined by others and formed the community that later became Norfolk.

You may hear native Norfolk Nebraskans pronounce the city name as “Nor-fork”, rather than “Nor-folk” as it is spelled. In 1881, the village of Norfolk was organized. The settlers proclaimed “North Fork” to be their permanent post office address, named after the river, but suggested “Norfork” as the name because it was the simplest compounding of “North Fork”. Postal authorities, thinking the word had been misspelled, changed the spelling to “Norfolk”.

Contact the Chamber of Commerce and the Madison County Convention & Visitors Bureau for a Welcome to Norfolk packet of information at 371-4862.

## **About Nebraska**

“The State of Nebraska lies at the geographic heart of the United States in an area called the Great Plains. The state’s culture has been shaped by its early population of several indigenous peoples, the arrival of pioneers, and immigrants from diverse cultures. Nebraska’s history, especially its reliance on agriculture, has served to encourage a strong work ethic, respect for achievement, support for one’s neighbor, and unquenchable optimism.”----Tony Hancock, University of Nebraska

## **Contact People**

**Academic Advisor** – All students at Northeast Community College are assigned an academic advisor who is an instructor in the student’s program of study. Your advisor will assist you with class registrations, academic transfer issues, and course scheduling.

**Designated School Officials** – These individuals are designated to act on behalf of the F-1 student program at Northeast Community College and serve as the official representatives. These individuals interact with SEVIS and deal with other immigration and program administration matters. They are all located in the Student Services office at NECC.

**International Student Advisor** – this person is available to assist you with your adjustment to the United States and college. It is important to meet with the ISA before you travel out of the country, seek employment or practical training, change your major, drop classes, change your address, or wish to change your visa. This is the person who will assist you in managing the immigration laws.

## **Adjustment to the United States**

The definition of **culture** is: (n) enlightenment and excellent taste resulting from intellectual development; (n) the total product of human creativity and intellect at a particular time; (n) something immaterial, as a style of philosophy, that is passed from one generation to another.

The definition of **shock** is : (v) to affect with a strong feeling or moral aversion; (v) to inflict mental injury or distress; (v) to cause to experience a sudden momentary shock; (v) to deprive of courage or the power to act as a result of fear, anxiety, or disgust; (n) something that jars the mind or emotions.

The definition of **culture shock** is: (n) a condition of confusion or anxiety affecting a person suddenly exposed to an alien culture or milieu.

Everyone deals with culture shock in different ways and it is important to keep in mind it is an important part of the adjustment process. Adjustment to any new situation or culture is not accomplished in just a few days but is an ongoing process.

## The Cultural Adjustment Cycle

1. **Pre-Departure Anticipation** – While planning and packing, you may feel exhilarated and nervous; you might lose interest in current activities. You may have some trouble sleeping.
2. **Post-Arrival Exhilaration** – You may have a heightened sense of enthusiasm; changes in routine are exciting. Some insomnia and stomach queasiness is normal. Most people begin their new assignment with great expectations. Anything new is intriguing and exciting. You might be especially impressed with the similarities between your country and theirs.
3. **Early Sojourn Frustration** – You might feel impatient or disenchanted with life in your host country or you might feel restless and irritable. Sleep patterns may be disrupted. You may suffer from indigestion and lack of appetite. You might rely on familiar activities and foreign friends and start to question your own values and those of your host country. Some minor health problems are normal. Gradually, your focus shifts from the similarities to the differences between the two countries.
4. **Mid-Sojourn Discouragement** – You may be quite homesick, discouraged, or disoriented and feel hostility towards local people and customs. Colds and headaches are common.
5. **Late Sojourn Assimilation** – You begin to reconcile who you are within the local culture, and to recognize changes in yourself, including changes in your values. You begin to relax in a new situation and to laugh at minor mistakes and misunderstandings. You experience a renewed interest in the host culture and have a more constructive attitude. You feel adapted to, and in equilibrium with, the host country. This more relaxed state of being occurs after you have made some friends, learned to manage your surroundings, understand your studies, and begin to perform well on exams. Your health is “normal.”
6. **The Home Stage** - You find yourself in this stage when you are able to retain allegiance to your home culture, but also "feel at home" in the United States. You have successfully adjusted to the norms and standards of the College and you are beginning to understand what is important to Americans. Although you may still be homesick occasionally, you are well adjusted. You have developed the ability to live successfully in two cultures.

## Coping Mechanisms

How can you adjust to the new culture and experiences of the United States and Norfolk, Nebraska? If you find that you are experiencing difficulties, take note of the following suggestions:

**Maintain your perspective.** Try to remember that other people like you have come to the United States and Northeast Community College from other countries and have survived the experience.

**Learn about “culture-shock”.** Understand that your feelings are part of a response to learning about this new culture. Consider this a positive sign.

**Evaluate your expectations.** If you find yourself feeling confused or disappointed, ask yourself, "What did I expect? Why? Was my expectation reasonable?"

**Keep an open mind.** People in the U.S. are acting according to their own set of values, not yours. Do not evaluate their behavior using the standards you would use in your own country.

**Learn from your experience.** Moving to the United States can be the most fascinating and educational experience of your life. You can explore an entirely new way of living and compare it to your own. There is no better way to become aware of your own values and attitudes and to broaden your point of view than by closely observing your new surroundings.

**Keep in touch.** Communicate with family and friends. Write letters, call, or send email. Remember that those at home may not know that “culture-shock” is a normal experience. Let them know that it is a temporary phase of adjusting to a new culture.

**Be a helper and role model.** Help someone from your home culture who has recently arrived. You will be surprised at how much you have learned and can share with this new arrival. It may help you feel like the “expert” at a time when it seems everything is new.

**Seek out others.** Find others from your culture and spend time together talking about home, eating, and sharing experiences. Interacting with someone who “knows what you are going through” can be helpful in the adjustment process.

**Visit your International Student Advisor.** Your advisor can help you achieve a useful perspective on adjustment and can also help you gain awareness of the many possibilities for experience and growth that adjustment entails.

**Keep a sense of humor.** All too often, we take ourselves much too seriously. Everyone makes mistakes in new situations. It is important to remember that making mistakes is all part of the learning process. Keep smiling and try to look for the funny side of things. Your first week may very well provide you with a semester's worth of humorous moments.

## **Communicating Across Cultures**

There are a number of skills and guidelines that can be used to communicate successfully across cultures. The following are some suggestions to assist you:

- Don't assume that what you said was understood as you intended. Ask questions to determine if your meaning was interpreted correctly.
- Don't assume that what you understood was what the speaker intended. If you are uncertain, ask.
- Acronyms, abbreviations, and slang may make it difficult to understand the intent of the conversation. Ask for clarification when necessary.
- Look for facial expressions, gestures, and other indications that what you have said has been understood.
- Write things down, gesture, or draw pictures to assist you in your communication.
- Politely ask someone to verify that they understood by repeating it back to you.
- “Slower not louder” is a good rule to follow.
- Keep your sense of humor.

## **American Culture**

**Pace of Life and Time Consciousness** -- One of the first things you will notice when you arrive is that Americans always seem to be rushing. Time is valuable and the achievement of goals depends on productive use of time. As a result, it is extremely important not to be late for appointments and meetings. In order to function effectively in an American community and build a good reputation, you must be punctual for all appointments. Make every effort to arrive at prearranged meeting places at the time agreed upon by everyone in the group. This cultural value results in efficiency and progress, often at the expense of interpersonal relationships.

**Materialism** -- Success in American society is often measured in monetary terms. Material goods are seen as rewards of hard work. A rich person is viewed as being successful, so some Americans display expensive items in an attempt to appear successful. As a result, Americans are sometimes seen as caring more for possessions than people.

**Competition and Free Enterprise** -- Americans generally believe that competition brings out the best in people and free enterprise produces the most progress and success. The fast pace of life in the United States and the emphasis placed on 'winning' and being successful can make this a very exhausting environment for those who are from nations where life is more relaxed.

**Personal control over the environment** -- Typically, Americans believe that people can and should control nature, their own environment, and destiny. Future is not left to fate. Americans are pro-active in their personal lives and work hard to meet their goals.

**Action and Work Orientation** -- Americans believe that work is morally right and that it is immoral to waste time. Change is seen as a positive event indicating progress, improvement and growth. This results in more emphasis on "doing" rather than "being". Also produces a pragmatic, no-nonsense attitude toward life.

**Consumerism** -- One of the things that may impress people from other countries is the abundance of consumer goods. Credit is very easy to obtain and students receive what may seem to be specially sent offers to purchase magazine subscriptions, music tapes and compact discs, and to apply for all kinds of credit cards. Be very careful if you decide to take up any of these offers. Read all the fine print very carefully before you make any decisions. The same goes for buying goods on sale or as part of a special offer.

The great advantage of living in a consumer society is that the consumer has many rights. In any reputable store, the customer's comments are heard. If you feel that you have been treated badly or been sold unsatisfactory merchandise, do not hesitate to discuss it with the store manager. Take extra care in discount stores and flea markets, since the chance of getting a good bargain must be balanced with the fact that returning unsatisfactory goods is virtually impossible. Although rare, it is not unlikely that someone may deliberately try to sell you goods of poor quality.

**Individualism** -- In the U.S., a person is generally seen as a separate individual rather than as a representative of a particular family, community, or group. Individuals are encouraged to be independent and self-reliant. Americans take pride in their own accomplishments, not in family name. Respect is given for achievements. This entails not only acting without first consulting others, but also being ready to voice an opinion on a wide variety of subjects. Even with older people and superiors, American students will be just as outspoken as when they are with their peers.

A result of this trait is that people carry out their daily activities with very little reference to others, as long as they believe that their actions will not result in anyone being harmed. This can sometimes result in Americans being seen as self-centered and isolated.

**Communication and Privacy** -- Americans communicate in a direct, open, and honest manner. Questions such as "Where do you work?," and "What are you studying?" are common and quite acceptable in America. Americans may be seen by some as blunt and even rude. In reality, these are questions that allow Americans to get to know each other.

Direct questions about money, age, and sex are normally considered unacceptable, as are trying to ascertain a person's views on politics or religion. Many Americans will volunteer much information about themselves with no prompting from you, but too many questions will be viewed as being "nosey."

**Friendship** -- As is probably true in your own culture, it takes time for close friendships to develop between Americans. Nevertheless, most Americans are very “friendly” and appear to be very open when you meet them. There are however, degrees for friendship.

Americans normally have a wide circle of acquaintances. They will refer to these people as “friends” even if the relationship is a quite new or casual one. In the United States people often say, "Hello, how are you?" and then not wait for an answer. This is a polite phrase, not really a question. You can respond by saying, “Fine, thanks.” Americans may appear to form friendships very quickly and easily.

**Equality** -- All individuals you meet should be and will expect to be treated with consideration and courtesy. North Americans expect that all people accept other individuals regardless of gender, race, occupation, handicap, political affiliation, or religion. Women play an active role in the United States and are considered equal to men in status and therefore deserve the same respect. In addition, people have equal opportunities and are important as individuals, for who they are, not from which family or religion they come.

**Use of Names and Titles** -- In informal introductions, first names are used and people shake hands. Out of respect for another person or a person of different social status, the title of "Mr." for a man and "Ms." for a woman is used. Most North American men and women will shake hands with people to whom they are introduced in both formal and informal situations. Often, the title of one's position is used when addressing a person, such as a president, dean, or professor.

**Dating** -- Relationships between men and women in the U.S. are very informal compared to other cultures, and there is a great deal of interaction between the sexes. This informality should not be misunderstood. Simply accepting an invitation to go out does not indicate an interest in further meetings, nor that sexual involvement is implied. Honesty and sensitivity are the best guides to help you through any romantic situations which may present themselves.

**Future Orientation/Optimism** -- Americans typically believe that regardless of past or present, the future will be better and happier. This results in less value on past and constant looking ahead to tomorrow.

**Will I Lose My Own Culture?** -- Sometimes students worry about "losing their culture" if they become too well adapted to the host culture. It is virtually impossible to lose the culture to which you were raised. In fact, learning about the new culture often increases your appreciation for, and understanding of, your culture. Don't resist the opportunity to become able to function competently in two cultural environments. Just as culture shock derives from the accumulation of cultural clashes, so an accumulation of small successes can lead to more effective interactions within the new culture. As you increase your ability to manage and understand the new social system, practices that recently seemed so strange will become less puzzling. Eventually you will adapt sufficiently to do your best in your studies and social life and to relax and fully enjoy the experience.

*Adapted from “Implicit Cultural Assumptions of Americans”, Developing Intercultural Awareness, Kohls, Rober. SIETAR, Washington, D.C. 1981, & The Wayne State College F-1 Student Handbook.*

## **Myths and Realities of Studying in America**

From your reading, from American films and TV and from talking with Americans in your country, you have probably formed some idea of life in the United States. Some of what you have seen and heard is

true and some is not. The following “myths” and their related explanations are designed to assist you learning about American culture.

**MYTH:** *Life is easy in the United States.*

**REALITY:** While it is true that the material standard of living in the United States is high, this has not resulted in a leisurely pace of life. Visitors to the United States are often surprised at how hard most Americans work, at their long work hours and short vacations, and at the fast pace of American life in general. Even leisure time is often devoted to activities such as sports, exercise, or other hobbies that involve intense activity and effort. Many Americans are uncomfortable with true leisure and feel guilty about doing nothing or spending long periods of time relaxing or talking with friends.

**MYTH:** *America is “the land of the free” so I can do whatever I want there.*

**REALITY:** Individual freedom is an important American value, but newcomers may find themselves overwhelmed by the legal and bureaucratic restrictions on their activities and confused by the complexities of social interaction.

Throughout their 300-year history, Americans have been trying to balance the freedom of the individual with the well being of society, sometimes with odd results. International students are often shocked by the number of rules governing their behavior as foreigners, as students, as motorists, as bicyclists – any of the roles they may assume during their stay in the United States.

The rules of social behavior in the United States can be equally confusing. There is a strong dose of Puritanism mixed in with generally laissez-faire American attitude, which makes it difficult to predict how people will behave or react to others, which means that values may differ widely from one social group to another and from one individual to another. Sometimes it may seem that no rules apply and that “anything goes”, but a newcomer should be wary of making assumptions about what is acceptable.

**MYTH:** *Americans are racist/Americans are tolerant.*

**REALITY:** The contradictory stereotypes exist side by side, and both have elements of truth. In general you need not fear that you will encounter overt racism in the United States, particularly within the university or college community.

In regions where there are many immigrants you may find yourself blending in and suffering more from indifference than intolerance. In other, more isolated and homogeneous areas, you may be an object of curiosity, noticed and welcomed, but perhaps not always understood. Because of American’s relative geographical isolation, many Americans are quite ignorant about the rest of the world and have a sense of national superiority. This can be irritating but you will find that hostility towards foreigners is rare.

Racial and ethnic prejudice is unfortunately a reality in the United States and occasionally a foreign student experiences hostility of this nature. It would be wise to be aware of the tensions that may exist in the communities you visit in the United States, but do not fear that this will be a common or frequent problem. Pay attention to the news, listen to the advice of friends, and perhaps take a class on race relations in the United States. This is a complex issue that reflects many of the paradoxes of American history.

Be aware also that you may have been influenced by racial stereotyping in American films. Visitors to the United States are sometimes surprised to find that the African Americans they meet in the United States have nothing in common with the violent stereotypes so often projected in the movies.

**MYTH:** *The United States has a classless society.*

**REALITY:** Although the United States does not have a history or tradition of rigidly defined social classes, distinctions among economic classes in the United States results in a sort of classification. Although the majority of Americans can be considered to belong to the middle class, there is a small, wealthy upper class and a growing underclass. Still the American ideal of equal educational opportunity, and the belief that hard work and ability should be rewarded make for a society in which upward mobility is still common.

**MYTH:** *Americans are rude and loud.*

**REALITY:** This is the image of the “ugly American” who, when abroad, demands in loud English to be understood. Although you may find examples of this stereotype on your campus, they will probably be few. It is true that Americans are often less inhibited socially than people from some other cultures. It is equally true that directness, or saying what one thinks, is acceptable behavior. Americans value honesty and frankness. They are generally not embarrassed or angered by being told they are wrong, as long as the criticism is stated in a friendly and respectful way. They would generally prefer an honest argument or refusal to polite but insincere agreement.

The definition of “rudeness” varies widely from one culture to another. Do not jump to hasty conclusions about the intention behind someone’s words or behavior that may seem very rude to you. Someone who tells you that you have done something wrong, including your professor, is probably trying to help you, not embarrass or hurt you.

**MYTH:** *All Americans are rich and drive fast cars.*

**REALITY:** In the United States, as in any country, there is a wide spectrum of economic status. You may be surprised to find American students at your university who come from very modest means and who struggle daily with money issues. Many American students go deeply into debt to obtain a university degree.

Some of the students you meet will, in fact, be rich, but you may find it hard at first to tell the rich from the poor. Even “poor” American students own a lot of things. Material goods are easy to acquire in a consumer-orientated, credit-driven society, but they do not necessarily indicate great wealth. A car may be a practical necessity for a student who works long hours after classes or who lives with his or her family in another town.

**MYTH:** *American students are less prepared academically than students from my country and I will not have to work very hard in class.*

**REALITY:** Some American students are less prepared academically than others. While it may be tempting to think that you will not have much competition in the classroom, rest assured that there are many, many academically prepared and highly competitive American students. In general, American students have a lot of experience in test taking and at expressing their opinions in class. You may come from an academic system that does not emphasize those skills.

**MYTH:** *American professors are casual, sometimes even asking students to address them by their first names.*

**REALITY:** It is true that your American professors may ask you to address them by their first names, but this does not mean they do not expect your respect. The ways in which courtesy and respect are shown to an American professor may differ from how they are expressed in your country. Respect in a U.S. classroom includes a willingness to participate in class debate and to ask questions when you do not understand something that has been said. Spend time watching how your American classmates interact with the professors. You will catch on quickly to the unique mix of formality and structure.

**MYTH:** *American students use illegal drugs.*

**REALITY:** Some do, most do not.

*Adapted from "American Culture: Myths & Realities" Educational Programs USA.*

## **Academics**

In many ways, you will probably find U.S. higher education different from that in your own country. You are expected to familiarize yourself with the requirements of the college in which you are enrolled and its major departments. For any of the academic requirements, you should consult the College Catalog of the year in which you first enroll at Northeast. This catalog will be your guide throughout your academic career here unless you change majors, at which time, a new catalog may be applicable. All students receive catalogs at Orientation/Registration. Catalogs are also available on the Northeast web site.

### **Basic Classroom Rules**

Classroom behavior differs from culture to culture. Some classes are very formal, while others are more relaxed. If you are to succeed academically, it is important that you know how to fulfill the expectations of your instructors. Higher education institutions in the United States have expectations of their students that you will want to become familiar with:

- ❑ Arrive on time and be seated before the scheduled starting time of class.
- ❑ Listen attentively and take careful notes.
- ❑ Attend class from the first scheduled day. Never miss a class!
- ❑ If you are ill and miss a class, always check with the instructor to see what work you have missed and how it can be made up. The instructor may request to see a doctor's note if there is a long absence.
- ❑ Prepare each assignment before the next class.
- ❑ Tests and quizzes are given frequently in U.S. colleges, so study regularly.
- ❑ Ask questions and express your opinions, instructors count on this! Do not be afraid to express a different viewpoint than your professor. You bring a unique perspective to the classroom and your input will enhance the material being taught.
- ❑ If you do not understand any assignment or material, talk to your instructor. Make an appointment to see him/her during office hours or simply talk to them after class. It is important to take initiative in solving difficulties you are experiencing in class. Your instructor will be able to suggest ways to improve the situation.
- ❑ Understand and be able to use the material from the classroom instead of merely memorizing it.

- ❑ Become familiar with the library. Depending on your program of study, many of your assignments may involve writing and research. There is a library orientation course (LIBR 1310) you can register for to assist you in learning more about the library.
- ❑ Careful records of source material are essential. Always give credit to the source from which you borrow information to avoid plagiarism (instructors want your opinion!).

### **Classification of Students**

**By Work Load (Full or part-time).** At Northeast Community College, a student must take 12 credit hours to be considered a full-time student. F-1 students are required to maintain a full-time schedule to be considered “in status” for immigration purposes. **If a student drops below 12 credit hours without prior approval, they are considered to be “out of status.”**

The U.S. Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Service (BCIS) requires that you be enrolled full-time. You are officially permitted, with prior approval from the International Student Advisor, to take fewer credits only for one of the following reasons:

- illness
- difficulty with the English language
- unfamiliarity with American teaching methods or reading requirements
- placement at an improper course level
- during your final semester of study

If you drop below the required credit load for any other reason, you put yourself out-of-status, which affects your employment and practical training eligibility, and you will need to be reinstated to proper immigration status. Please discuss any course load reduction with your International Student Advisor.

**By Year (number of credit hours completed).** At Northeast Community College, a student is classified as either freshman or sophomore depending on the number of credits that the student has completed in the course of studies leading to an Associate Degree. Students must earn a total of 60 credit hours in an approved program of study to be eligible for graduation from Northeast.

### **Course Numbers and Their Meanings**

- Courses below the 1000 level are considered to be developmental in nature and are designed to assist students in skill building. They do not count toward graduation and generally do not transfer.
- Courses in the 1000 series are primarily entry-level courses.
- Courses in the 2000 series are considered “upper-level” courses and may require additional knowledge, skills and reasoning. Some 2000 level classes have a “pre-requisite” class at the 1000 level that must be met in order to enroll in the 2000 level course.

### **Possible Academic Problems and Solutions**

**Poor Test Results:** Study regularly. Tests in U.S. colleges are given frequently, it is important to study on a daily basis. As a general guideline, you should study two to three hours outside class for every hour you are in class. Find the study method that works best for you. You may prefer to study alone, or may get more benefit from a study group. Keep in mind that doing poorly in the first examination is always a

shock, but need not be disastrous if you act quickly, and honestly appraise your study techniques. Follow these outlined steps:

**First:** Go see your instructor. He/she would be happy to talk to you about what you did wrong, what the correct answers are, and how you might improve the situation. Proofread your work carefully before submitting it.

**Second:** Evaluate your options, including a revision of your study habits. Have you been attending class? Have you been spending two to three hours of studying for every hour of class?

***Change your Study Habits.*** You can improve if you are willing to change your study habits. Sit in the front row of the classroom, be on time for every class. Take notes and record your lecture if necessary (always ask the instructor if he/she minds before taping a lecture). Seek outside help sessions. Peer tutoring is a service provided by Northeast to students who would like assistance in a particular subject. Sign up for a peer tutor in Maclay, room 180.

***Course Withdrawal.*** If you and your instructor decide that you should consider withdrawing from the course, be aware that this is a decision to be made carefully. Check with the International Student Advisor before withdrawing from any class, as this could affect your visa status!

**Third:** Put the examination behind you. After you have decided on one of the two options, act positively. Don't let one examination defeat you. Face the problem professionally and rationally. A failure in the classroom in no way reflects on you as a person. If you continue to have problems academically, speak to your academic advisor about your class load and study habits.

**Poor Attendance:** Please review the attendance policy for each course you take. Each instructor will discuss the penalties for non-attendance and for missed quizzes and examinations. It is important and expected that you attend class from the first scheduled day. Never miss a class unless you are ill. Chronic absence is seen as a lack of a serious attitude toward the course. If you are ill and miss a class, always check with the instructor to see what work you have missed and how it is to be made up.

**Unprepared for Class:** Learn to take concise and meaningful notes, both while preparing assignments or attending lectures. Keep a step ahead. Read the assignment before the lecture, and review notes from the previous lecture. In a discussion class, ask questions and express your opinions. Instructors count on this!

**Late to Class:** Arriving late to class is discourteous and demonstrates a lack of regard for the professor and the material he/she is trying to teach you. Be on time! If you have a problem managing your time, investigate ways you can improve your time management skills

**Culture Shock:** "Culture Shock" is a non-academic problem you may encounter that can adversely affect your academic performance. You may not be able to avoid experiencing culture shock; however, understanding why you're feeling a certain way may help you to work through it, consequently lessening its impact. Refer to the section "Adjustment to the United States" for more information.

**Northeast offers a College Success Skills course (LNSK 1100) to assist students in areas such as these.**

## **Survival Tips**

### **Managing Money**

Managing your finances can be a challenging part of your academic study in the United States. Dealing with a new currency and cost of living can be difficult initially. Pay attention to the exchange rate between your country's currency and the U.S. dollar. Learn to think in dollars!

When handling American currency, it is important to look closely at the paper money, as much of it looks alike. Coins can present difficulties too. The five-cent piece is known as the nickel, ten-cent as the dime, and 25-cent as the quarter. The dime is smaller than the nickel, even though it is worth more.

The United States is becoming a "cashless" society, meaning that rather than carry large sums of money on their person, people find it more convenient and safer to make purchases by check, charge account, or credit card. It is advisable for you to open a checking or savings account at a local bank and deposit any large sums of money you have in a bank. A visit with a banker at a local bank can clarify for you the variety of checking and savings accounts available and determine which type best suits your needs.

### **Social Security Numbers**

A Social Security Number is a number assigned by the U.S. Federal Government to all U.S. citizens and temporary residents who apply for one. International students are not required by Immigration or by the College to have a number; however, a Social Security number is required to work on or off campus, obtain a driver's license, and to open an account at most banks.

If you wish to obtain a Social Security Number, please see the International Student Advisor for a letter to take with you to the Social Security Office, located at 208 N. 5<sup>th</sup> Street. The letter indicates that you are enrolled at Northeast Community College as a full-time student on an F-1 visa. You will also want to take with you your passport, I-94, and I-20 when you apply.

### **Weather Issues**

The weather in Nebraska can change rapidly from one extreme to the next and throughout the year cycles through several different temperatures.

Winter can arrive in Nebraska as early as October or November and last through March or April. Snow, ice, and sleet are common weather occurrences in the winter and require some extra precautions on your part. Warm coats and clothing, rubber-soled shoes and snow boots, mittens or gloves, hats, and scarves are necessary for any outdoor activity in Nebraska. Even something as limited as walking from class to class can be dangerous and uncomfortable without proper clothing. Driving on snow and ice requires special techniques. Learn them and proceed with caution.

Spring may begin as early as March and continues through the first day of summer, which is June 21<sup>st</sup>. Spring brings with it a melting of snow, warming temperatures, and rain. Spring in Nebraska is characterized by planting season for agricultural operations and gardeners alike.

Spring may bring with it thunderstorms and tornados due to volatile changes in the weather at this time of the year. A severe thunderstorm watch means that conditions are favorable for thunderstorms to produce wind gusts to 58 mph or stronger or hail to 3/4 inch or larger in the watch area. These watches are issued for 4 to 6 hours at a time and for a number of counties. Stay informed, watch the sky, and take cover if a severe thunderstorm approaches you.

A severe thunderstorm warning means that a severe thunderstorm has been detected by radar, or by a trained spotter. Take cover if you are near the severe thunderstorm.

According to the *Glossary of Meteorology* (AMS 2000), a tornado is *"a violently rotating column of air, pendant from a cumuliform cloud or underneath a cumuliform cloud, and often (but not always) visible as a funnel cloud."*

If a tornado **"watch"** is issued for your area, it means that a tornado is "possible." If a tornado **"warning"** is issued, it means that a tornado has actually been spotted, or is strongly indicated on radar, and it is time to **go to a safe shelter immediately**.

Become familiar with the storm policy for your place of residence. During severe thunderstorms and tornados, people in Nebraska retreat to a basement, lower level, or reinforced structure such as a bathroom or interior area. Norfolk is equipped with an emergency siren that will sound when the area is under a "tornado warning".

The summer months are characterized by mild to hot temperatures and fluctuating humidity. Take care to drink generous amounts of water during this time to stay well hydrated. If you are fair skinned, be sure to wear sunscreen or protective clothing if you will be out in the sun for an extended period of time.

### **Practicing your Religion**

The United States is a multicultural society founded on tolerance and mutual respect. People are encouraged to seek out opportunities to practice their religious beliefs. There are usually a variety of denominations and religious groups in every community.

Although America has a higher rate of church attendance than most other western societies, many Americans are uncomfortable discussing religion. If you are in a religious situation or discussion in which you are uncomfortable, it is acceptable to excuse yourself or explain your perspective.

### **Alcohol**

U.S. laws concerning the sale and consumption of alcohol may seem very liberal or very constraining to you, depending on your nationality. In the United States it is illegal to purchase and consume alcoholic drinks, including beer and wine, until you reach the age of 21. Laws governing alcohol can vary from state-to-state. Northeast Community College is a "dry campus" and does not allow alcohol on campus even if you are 21.

### **Smoking**

In many parts of the United States, all public buildings are designated "smoke free," meaning that you cannot smoke in any part of the building. Other buildings have designated spaces for smokers. Restaurants often have "smoking" and "nonsmoking" sections. If you are a guest in someone's home, room, or apartment, always ask permission before you smoke.

At Northeast Community College, our buildings are all smoke free. You can smoke outside the buildings, as ashtrays have been made available there for you.

## Metric Conversion Table

### Linear

1 inch = 2.54 centimeters  
1 foot (12 inches) = 30.48 centimeters  
1 yard (3 feet) = .91 meters  
1 mile (5,280 feet) = 1.61 kilometers  
1 centimeter = .39 inches  
1 meter = 39.37 inches, 1.1 yards  
1 kilometer = .62 or 5/8 mile

### Volume

1 quart (2 pints) dry = 1.10 liters  
1 quart liquid = .95 liters  
1 gallon (4 quarts) dry = 4.40 liters  
1 gallon liquid = 3.80 liters  
1 liter = .91 quarts dry; 1.06 quarts liquid

### Weights

1 ounce = 28.35 grams  
1 pound = .45 kilograms  
1 gram = .035 ounces  
1 kilogram = 2.2 pounds

### Temperature

Fahrenheit 100 = 37.8 Centigrade (Celsius)  
Fahrenheit 90 = 32.2 Centigrade  
Fahrenheit 80 = 26.7 Centigrade  
Fahrenheit 70 = 21.1 Centigrade  
Fahrenheit 60 = 15.6 Centigrade  
Fahrenheit 50 = 10 Centigrade  
Fahrenheit 40 = 4.4 Centigrade  
Fahrenheit 32 = 0 Centigrade  
Fahrenheit 0 = -17.8 Centigrade

### Boiling Point

212 Fahrenheit = 100 Centigrade

### Freezing Point

32 Fahrenheit = 0 Centigrade



## **F-1 Visa Student Immigration Issues**

Please see Appendix A for a complete listing of the federal regulations as they pertain to F-1 visa students. These are to be your guide as you complete your academic experience in the United States. **It is your responsibility to know and abide by the regulations.** Failure to follow the regulations can result in complications of status that may limit your ability to continue residing and studying in the United States.

### **Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS)**

SEVIS is a government, computerized system that maintains and manages data about foreign students and exchange visitors and their dependents during their stay in the United States of America. SEVIS allows for real-time interactive access to student information and helps students comply with the terms of their visas. Each student receiving an I-20 will receive an 11-digit SEVIS Identification number that is maintained as part of the student's record. Updates are made to the student's record on a regular basis. *Within 30 days of registering for classes*, schools are required to report the following about each F-1 student:

- Whether the student has enrolled at the school, dropped below a full course of study without prior authorization, or failed to enroll
- Current address
- Start date of student's next session, term, semester, trimester, or quarter

*Within 21 days changes* in the following must be reported:

- Any student who has failed to maintain status or complete his or her program
- A change in the student or dependent's legal name
- A change in the student or dependent's U.S. address
- Any disciplinary action taken by the school against the student as a result of the student being convicted of a crime
- Any other notification request made by SEVIS with respect to the current status of the student

**IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO NOTIFY THE INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADVISOR OF ANY CHANGES THAT MAY AFFECT YOUR STUDENT RECORD AND CONSEQUENTLY YOUR IMMIGRATION STATUS.**

### **Definition of F-1 Status**

An F-1 visa and F-1 student status may be granted to an alien "who is a bona fide student qualified to pursue a full course of study" at an academic or language Institution authorized to admit international students. When applying for an F-1 visa, the individual must prove to a U.S. consular official that he or she wishes to enter the United States temporarily and solely for the purpose of study and that the applicant has a permanent residence in a foreign country which he/she does not intend to abandon.

### **Duration of Status**

F-1 students are admitted to the U.S. for "**Duration of Status**," usually noted as "**D/S**" on your immigration documents. This means you are permitted to remain in this country as a full-time student for the period of time during which you are pursuing an educational program at one institution.

An F-1 student may be admitted for a period of up to 30 days before the start of the course of study. An F-1 student who has completed a course of study will be allowed an additional 60-day period to prepare for departure from the United States or transfer to a higher level at the same or another educational institution. A student authorized to withdraw from classes will be allowed an additional 15-day period for departure from the United States. An F-1 student who fails to maintain their status is not eligible for an additional period for departure.

Students who remain in an educational program longer than the time estimated on the Form I-20AB issued to begin that program must request a program extension in order to remain in the U.S. and continue their studies. Before the completion date on the I-20 expires, please check with the International Student Advisor if you know you will need a longer time to complete your program than originally estimated.

### **Required Documents for Admission to the United States in F-1 Status**

- **Form I-20:** Issued by the college or university to which the student has been admitted and used to obtain F-1 visa from a U.S. Consulate outside the U.S. Must be signed by the DSO and the student.
  - Dependents accompanying an F-1 student in F-2 status must each have their own I-20.
- **F-1 visa**, unless exempt from visa requirements as for Canadian citizens. For initial entries, the name of the school on the F-1 visa must match the name of the school on the Form I-20.
- **Passport** valid for at least six months.
- **Evidence of financial support**, including the same financial support information used to obtain the F-1 visa.

### **Visas**

A nonimmigrant visa stamped on or affixed to a page of a passport enables the passport bearer to ask an immigration officer at the port of entry for admission to the United States under the conditions specified for the type of visa the bearer holds. The stamp indicates the type of visa, the expiration date, and the number of entries to the United States that are permitted.

The earliest an F-1 visa can be granted is 90 days before the reporting date listed on the Form I-20, however, students cannot ENTER the U.S. earlier than 30 days before the I-20 report date.

If your F-1 visa stamp has expired, it can be renewed at a U.S. Consular Office “having jurisdiction over the alien’s place of residence.” It may be possible in some situations to apply for a visa at any other consular office that has agreed to process visa applications from “third country nationals.”

If you exit the country during your academic study in the United States with an expired visa, you must be prepared to demonstrate that you are not intending to be an immigrant (permanent resident of the U.S.) and that you have strong ties to your home country. Some Consulates may require students to submit a transcript to show that you have, in fact, been a full-time student throughout your stay in the U.S. You may wish to take along an official transcript and a letter from the International Student Advisor to indicate current enrollment and proper maintenance of status.

It is not necessary to renew your visa until you have left the U.S. and wish to re-enter. If you have any questions about departure and/or re-entry, check with the International Student Advisor before you leave.

## **Passports**

Most aliens seeking admission to the United States in nonimmigrant status must have a passport valid for at least six months, or they are ineligible to be admitted. The United States has agreements with many countries whereby passports are recognized as valid for return to the issuing country for a period of 6 months beyond the expiration date in the passport.

If you need to renew your passport, please consult the embassy or consulate office for your country to determine what procedures are required. It is wise to apply as far in advance as allowed by the home government in order to ensure a timely extension.

An official listing of foreign consular offices in the U.S. can be found at <http://www.state.gov/s/cpr/rls/fco/>. The Electronic Embassy web site provides information on each of the embassies in Washington D.C. <http://www.embassy.org/embassies>.

## **I-94 Card**

Every nonimmigrant entering the United States temporarily (with a few exceptions) is issued a small white card called the Form I-94. The immigration official at the port of entry retains the upper “Arrival Record” portion and stamps and returns to the student the lower “Departure Record” part of the I-94. This portion is often simply referred to as the I-94 and is often stapled in the passport. What the immigration official at the port of entry stamps and writes on the I-94 is extremely important. **It is important to retain this document, as it is a key document for many immigration functions.**

## **Full Course Of Study**

All F-1 students must pursue a “full course of study” which, successfully completed, leads to the attainment of a specific educational or professional objective. Undergraduate students at Northeast Community College must complete 12 hours each semester to be considered to be pursuing a full course of study, unless fewer credits are needed to complete the program in the final term or study. Students in the final semester of their degree program who do not need to register for a full course of study must see the International Student Advisor. Students do not need to pursue a full course of study during annual vacations, such as summer or between terms.

**No more than the equivalent of one on-line or telecourse class, or three credits per session may be counted towards the “full course of study” requirement.** Once the 12 credit hours of enrollment have been met, other online classes and telecourses may be added to the student’s schedule. This does not limit the number of distance education classes that can be taken but rather the number of such credits that can be used to satisfy the “full course of study” requirement. If the student’s course of study is in a language study program, no on-line or distance education classes may be counted toward the requirement.

Other exceptions to the full course of study requirement that may apply to Northeast students include:

- Illness of medical condition

- Initial difficulty with the English language
- Initial difficulty with reading requirements
- Unfamiliarity with American teaching methods
- Improper course level placement

*Please see the International Student Advisor to discuss further.*

It is your responsibility to be full-time students throughout your stay in the U.S. A student who drops below a full course of study without prior approval of the DSO will be considered out of status.

### **Change of Major**

When a student changes degree levels or majors but remains at the same institution, the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services must be notified. When you change your program of study (major) at Northeast Community College, the International Student Advisor needs to be informed so that SEVIS can be updated and a new Form I-20 can be issued.

A new financial verification statement must be submitted for the new program prior to issuance of a new I-20 reflecting the change of major.

Students changing from English Language training to a degree-seeking program of study must also follow the same procedure.

### **Program Extension**

F-1 students are admitted to the United States for “duration of status” or “D/S” and must complete their academic program by the completion date on the I-20 or apply for a program extension. Program extensions can be granted to students who have continually maintained status if the delay was caused by “compelling academic or medical reasons.” Documentation is required for medical and academic delays. Please see the International Student Advisor for more information.

Failure to apply for a program extension can result in you being “out of status” and will require completion of the reinstatement process.

Academic probation or suspension are not acceptable reasons for a program extension.

### **Reporting Your Address**

U.S. law requires all persons who are not citizens of the United States to report their addresses to the government. Please notify the International Student Advisor within ten days of a change of address. Failure to do so can jeopardize your status.

### **Transfer of Schools**

An F-1 student who is maintaining status may transfer from one Service approved school to another through a process of notification to the BCIS and the former school. Students are not permitted to remain in the United States when transferring between schools or programs unless the student will begin classes

at the transfer school or program within 5 months of transferring out of the current school or within 5 months of the program completion date on the I-20, whichever is earlier.

**Students are eligible to transfer through the end of the post-completion date 60-day grace period.**

F-1 students who wish to transfer to another institution either in the same degree program or to begin a new educational program should inform the International Student Advisor. Please inform your current school (transfer out school) of the full name of the school to which you are transferring and that date that your record should be released to the new school in SEVIS. When the release date has been reached, the new school (transfer in school) will be able to access your record so that the transfer information can be entered and a new I-20 issued. Students are required to report to the DSO within 15 days of the program start date listed on the I-20 so that the SEVIS registration can be completed.

**Leaving the U.S. and returning to Northeast Community College**

Before you leave the United States, the International Student Advisor or his or her designee must sign page 3 of your I-20 form to allow you to travel. Failure to do so can result in difficulty returning to the United States and Northeast Community College.

When you depart the United States, you are obligated to surrender your Departure Record (Form I-94), which is the small white paper stapled into your passport upon arrival to the U.S., to authorized personnel in airports or at border crossings. If you are planning to visit Canada for less than 30 days and return directly to the U.S., you should not surrender your Form I-94 because the Canadian authorities need to see that you are lawfully entitled to return to the U.S.

F-1 students who intend to transfer to another institution may re-enter to attend the new institution with the documents outlined in the preceding paragraph, except that a complete new Form I-20 from the new school must be presented.

**NEVER SURRENDER YOUR FORM I-20 WHEN YOU LEAVE THE U.S.**

**To Enter Other Countries**

Like the United States, other countries have rules and restrictions on who can enter their country and how. F-1 students who wish to visit their country of citizenship or permanent residence generally will be allowed to enter that country if they hold a valid passport or other travel documents issued by that country. If you are thinking about entering a certain country, you should inquire in advance from the Embassy of that country as to (a) if you need a visa to visit that country, (b) what the application procedures, forms and fee are for obtaining a visa, (c) whether you need to apply for a visa in person, (d) how much time it takes before you receive your passport with the visa imprinted by the Embassy and (e) how long you might visit with a tourist visa.

**To Return to the U.S.**

You will need:

1. A valid passport.
2. A valid F-1 visa.
3. Either a properly endorsed I-20 or new I-20 if anything has changed.

## **Unlawful/Lawful Presence**

Individuals who were admitted for duration of status (D/S) must depart or extend their visas types according to the regulations governing their visa types. There are **SERIOUS consequences** for non-immigrants, including students, who violate immigration rules even in minor ways, particularly for those who stay in the U.S. beyond the authorized period of stay.

The U.S. entry visa of any individuals who over stay BY EVEN ONE DAY will be canceled, even if the visa is for multiple entry and valid many years into the future. These individuals will be unable to obtain a new visa except by applying at a U.S. Consulate in their home country prior to returning to the U.S.

F-1 students must extend their stay at least 30 days before the expiration of their I- 20, or depart no later than 60 days after the completion of their education program or after their I-20 expires (see item 5 on the I-20), whichever comes first.

A provision of immigration law, which took effect on April 1, 1997, bars admission or re-entry to the U.S. to anyone who was previously unlawfully present in the U.S., either by entering illegally OR by staying beyond the authorized date on his or her visa documents beyond a certain period of time. There is a **three-year bar** for anyone unlawfully present for more than 180 days but less than one year. There is a **ten-year bar** for anyone unlawfully present in the U.S. one year or more. There are some limited exceptions, which are expected to be difficult to obtain.

## **International Student Employment Opportunities**

**Please read the federal regulations (Appendix A) pertaining to employment very carefully, as unauthorized work is a serious violation of your visa status and could negatively impact your ability to stay in the United States. *WORKING WITHOUT A PERMIT IS ILLEGAL.***

Students with the F-1 visa may apply for any job on the campus as long as they maintain a full course of study and do not displace a U.S. worker. Students with the F-1 visa may not work off-campus without employment authorization from Immigration or permission from the International Student Advisor to engage in practical training. Family members with the F-2 visa may not accept any employment under any circumstances.

Permission to be employed ceases at the conclusion of a program of study or at the expiration of the period of lawful stay, whichever is earlier, or at the expiration of employment authorization as noted by BCIS. Employment may continue in certain F-1 Instances pending BCIS approval of a timely request for extension of stay or the replacement of a document on which employment authorization was noted.

F-1 students with permission to work are not required to pay Social Security taxes, but are subject to income tax withholding and must file an income tax return before April 15th of each year. It is important that you retain your W-2 Forms (tax withholding statements from the previous year issued by employers each January). You will need your W-2 Forms when leaving the country.

### **On-Campus Employment**

Employment on-campus at the school the student is authorized to attend, as noted on Form I-20, is permitted for F-1 students with no prior approval required. The employment may not exceed a total of 20 hours per week while school is in session and unrestricted during school vacations. The student must continue to be enrolled full-time and not displace a U.S. citizen.

The work must occur on the school premises, but can be with an on-location commercial firm providing services for students on campus, such as the Northeast Community College cafeteria.

In order to qualify, the student must be registered full-time or intend to register for the subsequent academic term at the school whose I-20 he or she is on or at a new school for which the student has an I-20 admission for the next term. Upon initial entry to begin a new course of study, an F-1 student may not begin on-campus employment more than 30 days prior to the actual start of classes.

The completion date on the I-20 serves as the expiration of on-campus work authorization. Students may not continue to work on-campus past that date or they are considered out of status. Employment eligibility ends whenever a student fails to maintain status.

If a student plans to transfer, he or she may only engage in on-campus employment at the school having jurisdiction over the student's SEVIS record.

Students awaiting approval to change their status to F-1 may not work until the change of status has been approved.

If you are interested in working on campus, you must have a social security number **prior to beginning** your employment. Please see the international student advisor for information on how to obtain a social security number.

#### Off-Campus Employment

Employment off-campus is permitted after the completion of one full academic year. Off-campus employment may occur through **Curricular Practical Training (CPT), Optional Practical Training (OPT) or Severe Economic Hardship**.

In no instance may an individual accept employment until he or she holds a visa classification permitting such employment and, where appropriate, such permission has been duly authorized. Employers may be cited, fined and/or imprisoned for hiring a person ineligible for employment or maintaining an employee who is no longer authorized to be employed.

#### ***Curricular Practical Training***

The Immigration Service defines **Curricular Practical Training (CPT)** as employment which is an integral part of an established curriculum, including: "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." [8 CFR 214.2(f)(10)(i)]. Students in English Language Training programs are not eligible for CPT.

Curricular Practical Training for F-1 students is intended to provide hands-on practical experience in situations where the work serves as an integral part of a student's academic program, prior to completion of that program. For Northeast Community College students, this applies to all technical and some non-technical programs that require internships, usually known as "Cooperative Internship" courses. Please refer to the College catalog for your program requirements. CPT can also be granted in programs that do not specifically outline internships as part of the program and do not offer credit, as long as the experience is an "integral part of the student's academic program."

To be eligible for CPT a student must have been enrolled full-time for one academic year. CPT is available only prior to the completion of your degree program and you must have a job offer at the time of application.

The employment authorization is granted by a Designated School Official and does not require application to BCIS. The CPT authorization will be displayed on page 3 of your I-20.

Employment for 20 hours or less per week while you are also enrolled for classes is considered "**part-time**" CPT. You must be careful to limit your work to no more than the 20 hours per week. There is no limitation upon the length of time you may participate in part-time CPT, but you must be simultaneously enrolled full-time in school in order to maintain lawful F-1 status.

Employment for more than 20 hours per week is considered "**full-time**" CPT. Although authorized part-time curricular training employment is permitted with no penalties until completion of a degree, students who have received one year or more of full-time curricular practical training are ineligible for optional practical training at the same educational level.

### ***CPT Application Procedure***

The International Student Advisor must approve CPT once the appropriate paperwork has been completed. Please see the ISA for more information **prior to** beginning a paid internship.

Please complete the following steps:

- Complete "Curricular Practical Training Recommendation Form" (available from International Student Advisor)
- Obtain a letter of hire from an employer on letterhead with employment location and dates (from-to), and job description

The International Student Advisor will review your application and if approved, process the information in SEVIS. You will receive a new copy of your I-20 with the employment authorization information on page 3. You must end your employment by the date indicated on the I-20 employment authorization or you will be considered out of status. Should you require an extension or additional CPT, you must reapply through the above method.

Students may not engage in CPT before receiving the endorsed I-20 from the ISA.

### ***Optional Practical Training (OPT)***

**Optional Practical Training** is defined as "temporary employment for practical training directly related to the student's major area of study." OPT is available for F-1 students who have been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis for one academic year. OPT is available both before and after completion of the educational objective. An eligible F-1 student may request employment authorization for practical training in a position that is directly related to his or her major area of study and commensurate with the student's education level.

OPT permits, upon the recommendation of the International Student Advisor, up to 12 months full-time employment directly related to the student's major field, commensurate with the student's educational level, in the following instances:

- during a student's vacation periods,
- while school is in session, provided it does not exceed 20 hours per week,
- after completion of all coursework for a degree
- after completion of the course of study

A student who still has coursework remaining in his or her degree program is limited to 20 hours per week of Optional Practical Training while school is in session. The student could, however, apply for full-time authorization during his or her annual vacation and during other official school breaks.

An F-1 student may be authorized to engage in a total of 12 months optional practical training per education level. You become eligible for another 12 months of OPT when you change to a higher educational level.

F-1 students must complete their post-completion practical training within 14 months following the completion of their program of study.

You do not have to have a job or job offer to apply for optional practical training. An Employment Authorization Document (EAD) is required.

Authorization to engage in practical training employment is automatically terminated when the student transfers to another school.

### ***OPT Application Procedure***

BCIS, not the International Student Advisor, grants Optional Practical Training. Please see the ISA for more information about the following application process.

Applications for OPT must be completed and your SEVIS record updated before the completion date is reached on your I-20.

#### **Part 1:**

- Complete and sign I-538 and submit it to DSO
- Complete OPT request form.
- Copy all previous I-20 forms.
- Submit documentation from current academic advisor indicating the current academic status and expected completion date of studies.
- Complete Form I-765, Application for Employment Authorization
  - In item #16 on the form I-765 indicate the appropriate code for the type of eligibility category: **( c ) ( 3 ) ( i ) F-1 Optional Practical Training**

Students are responsible for the following items and should have them ready to send to the BCIS Service Center having jurisdiction over the student's place of residence (copies should also be made for the International Advisor to place in the student's file):

- Required processing fee (see BCIS web site for most current fee schedule <http://www.immigration.gov/graphics/index.htm>)
- Copy of I-20 endorsed by DSO
- Copy of both sides of I-94
- Copies of all former I-20's
- 2 ADIT style photos
- Copy of passport identification pages
- Photocopy of prior EAD (if applicable)
- I-765 -- item #16 marked "(c) (3) (i)"

### ***Special OPT Notes***

1. BCIS Photo Specification (show these specifications to the photographer to ensure accurate photos)  
Two photos with a white background taken no earlier than 30 days before the submission to the BCIS. They should be unmounted; printed on thin paper; and glossy. The photos should show a 3/4 front profile of the right side of the face, with the right ear visible. The applicant's head should be bare unless the person is wearing a headdress as required by a religious order to which he/she belongs. The photo should not be larger than 1 1/2 X 1 1/2 inches, with the distance from the top of the head to just below the chin about 1 1/4 inches. Lightly print the applicant's name and I-94 number, on the back of each photo with a pencil. The photos should be placed in an envelope or plastic bag and stapled to the application so they are not lost, but **DO NOT** staple the photographs themselves.
2. You may not begin working until you have obtained the Employment Authorization Document from BCIS and the date is reached when the EAD authorizes employment to begin. The BCIS is authorized to begin counting post-completion OPT from either the program completion date or the date the EAD is issued, whichever is later. The last date to which your OPT can be authorized is 14 months after completion.
3. If you have completed your program of study, it is recommended that you not travel outside the United States while your OPT application is being processed. You may encounter difficulties in trying to re-enter without your EAD card. You may also encounter difficulties if you have not secured employment. While in Optional Practical Training, you are still in F-1 status. Therefore, for re-entry into the U.S. during OPT, you will need your EAD and I-20. Have your I-20 endorsed by the International Student Advisor if the last signature on the back of your I-20 was from more than 5 months ago. You must also have a valid (unexpired) F-1 visa in your passport to return to the United States after traveling abroad. If your F-1 visa has expired, you will have to apply for a new one outside the U.S.
4. It is very difficult to cancel your practical training once you have received the EAD from BCIS. Cancellation requests to BCIS are usually denied. The time granted will be counted regardless of your actual employment.

### ***Severe Economic Hardship Employment***

BCIS considers **severe economic hardship** to be situations that are unforeseen and beyond your control and occurred after obtaining F-1 status. These may include loss of financial aid or on-campus employment that is not your fault, a significant devaluation of your home currency, inordinate increases in tuition, or unexpected changes in the financial condition of your main source of support, medical bills, and other unexpected expenses.

This type of work permission is often hard to obtain. If the BCIS denies your request, you will be told why but you may not appeal the decision.

### ***You are eligible for employment based on severe economic hardship if:***

- 1) You are in good academic standing and are taking a full course load;
- 2) You can demonstrate unforeseen severe economic hardship;
- 3) You have made a "good faith" effort and employment is not available or is insufficient on-campus;
- 4) You have been in F-1 status for one full academic year; and
- 5) Employment will not interfere with your studies.

You may not begin employment until you have received an Employment Authorization Document (EAD). Your work permission will be noted on the EAD. Employment will be granted in one year

increments up to the time you are expected to complete your studies if you demonstrate severe economic hardship caused by unforeseen circumstances beyond your control. Your work permission can only be renewed by BCIS and only if you continue to meet the eligibility requirements.

For more information, please contact the International Student Advisor.

### **Tips for Staying in Status**

- Report to the DSO within 15 days of the report date on your I-20.
- Keep your passport valid at all times.
- Carry your I-94 at all times.
- Have a full time enrollment by the 10<sup>th</sup> day of classes every semester.
- Maintain and complete a full course of study each semester, excluding summer.
- Do not take more than one distance education or on-line course (maximum of 3 hours) per semester to fulfill full-time enrollment requirements.
- Obtain approval from a DSO prior to withdrawing from a course that places you below full time for an allowable academic or medical reason.
- Get a new SEVIS I-20 for any change in program or degree level prior to the effective date of change.
- Report any change of name or address to the International Student Advisor and the Registrar's Office within 10 days of the change.
- Never work more than 20 hours per week on campus except during the summer or periods when school is not in session.
- Never work off-campus without prior approval from the International Student Advisor or BCIS.
- Have your I-20 signed by a DSO (or request a new SEVIS I-20 if there has been a substantive change) before traveling out of the U.S. if you plan to return to continue your program at NECC.
- You must have a valid SEVIS I-20 if you are applying for a new visa.
- Don't let your I-20 expire (expiration date is in #5 of the I-20) if you have not yet completed your program.
- Keep all of your old original I-20s for your records.

There are almost always exceptions to the rules. See an International Student Advisor if you have ANY questions BEFORE you do something different.

**REMEMBER ---- It is always easier to stay in status than to get back in status!**

## **Income Taxation for International Students**

Everyone in the United States, regardless of his or her immigration status, is responsible each year for submitting an income-tax statement to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Americans call the process "filing a tax return." Foreign students, whether they work or earn income in the United States or not, **must** file an appropriate return each year.

Sources of U.S. income may include on-campus employment, scholarships, fellowships, practical or academic training, and any compensation received for labor.

**Taxation of income in the U.S. is very complex and each person's situation is unique. Consequently, we are unable to provide tax advice to individuals. If you have further questions, seek the advice of a professional tax consultant.**

It is your responsibility to know and follow U.S. tax laws on the taxation of income. **April 15<sup>th</sup>** is the day most Americans must pay their taxes. Don't miss the deadline; you will be penalized if you are late.

Every person who files a nonresident income tax return, including dependents and those who earned no money, must provide either a Social Security Number or a Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN).

If you are employed, taxes will probably be "withheld" from your wages and paid directly by your employer to the tax authorities. You may be entitled to a refund of some or all of this amount but you have to claim it.

Form 1040NR-EZ (along with Form 8843) can be used by most international students and visiting scholars who are nonresident taxpayers and who earned income from a source in the U.S. last year. It is short and easy to complete. Other nonresident taxpayers who earned income in the U.S. last year must use Form 1040NR (along with Form 8843).

**Every individual who is classified as a nonresident alien is required to file Form 8843, even if no income was earned in the U.S. last year.**

For free federal income taxation assistance please contact the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) for Form 1040NR-EZ and the instructions for Form 1040NR-EZ, Form 1040NR and the instructions for Form 1040NR, the free Publication 519 (U.S. Tax Guide for Aliens), the free Publication 901 (U.S. Tax Treaties) and free expert advice. The IRS office can be called toll-free at 1-800-829-1040. Questions also may be answered on the IRS web site (<http://www.irs.ustreas.gov>). IRS forms and publications may be requested free by phone at 1-800-829-3676 or may be downloaded from the IRS web site.

Individuals required to file federal income tax returns (either Form 1040NR-EZ or 1040 NR) are also required to file State of Nebraska income tax returns. Nebraska state income tax laws generally follow the federal laws but there are exceptions. Individuals should review the instructions in the Nebraska Income Tax Booklet. Forms and booklets are available at the State Office Building, 301 Centennial Mall South, and in the lobbies of many local banks.

F visa holders who earned any income from a source in the U.S., including scholarships and fellowships, also must file a state income tax return in each state in which they lived last year, except in states that do not have state income taxes.

**Items Needed**

***For Individuals who Earned Income from a Source in the U.S.***

A. Two copies of Form 1040NR-EZ or Form 1040NR, one for a working copy and one to submit to the IRS. (The instructions for these forms may be helpful.)

B. Forms W-2 sent in January by employers to all persons employed during the previous year. (The employers have reported the income to the IRS.) One copy of each Form W-2 must be submitted to the IRS with Form 1040NR-EZ or Form 1040NR and another copy must be submitted with the Nebraska State income tax return.

C. Letters of award and receipts or canceled checks documenting scholarships and fellowships, qualified educational expenses, contributions to charity and other allowable deductions.

D. Documentation of other income such as refunds of last year's state taxes, sales of property, certain types of interest or dividends.

E. Form 1099 reporting interest from a bank, savings and loan or credit union (if filing Form 1040NR).

F. Form 8843

***For Individuals who Did Not Earn Income from a Source in the U.S.***

Form 8843 (with or without a Social Security Number or a TIN)

The U.S. has concluded tax treaty agreements affecting nonresident taxpayers in about 50 countries. They take precedence over other federal tax regulations. Details are available in IRS Publications 519 and 901.

You will need copies of all federal tax returns you have filed to obtain a Certificate of Tax Compliance ("sailing permit") before you leave the U.S. The IRS also selects a certain number of tax returns to review in detail. Having your own copy will prepare you for this discussion. You also should keep a copy of the Nebraska Individual Income Tax Return. The Philadelphia IRS office will send you a stamped copy of the Form 8843 you submitted.

There are a variety of other taxes which are not related to income: for example, state and city sales taxes, personal property tax (on automobiles, boats, etc.) and real estate taxes.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Since each person's situation is unique, an individual might consider obtaining expert advice before completing and filing income tax returns. As indicated earlier, the IRS will provide expert advice for free, either in person or by telephone. A professional tax consultant will probably charge a fee for such advice.

If you would like further tax assistance, you can request the U.S. Federal Tax Guide for International Students and Scholars from NAFSA at 1-800-836-4994. The guide offers step-by-step filing instructions, accompanied by a generous selection of sample forms.

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*The University of Nebraska – Lincoln International Affairs web site and the "Brief Guide to Income Taxation for International Students and Scholars at UNL for Earned Income in 2002".*

The University of Kansas International Student & Scholar Services web site.