

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Cottey College and Nevada, Missouri! We are pleased to be a part of your education and hope to make your stay here as meaningful and rewarding as possible.

Cottey, known as “the College of World Friendship,” welcomed Helen Zau from China as Cottey’s first international student in 1899. Since that time, Cottey has enjoyed more than 103 years of international students living and learning on campus. International students comprise 12 to 15 percent of Cottey’s student body, with an average of 40 international students representing 15 to 18 countries. Cottey’s diverse student body, combined with an emphasis on the international and intercultural character of the global society, creates a stimulating environment for learning and growth for all members of the community.

Every year there are many opportunities for international students to share about their culture and learn from others. American and international students and members of the Cottey and Nevada community enjoy these special time of sharing and learning about the countries and cultures from where our students hail. Our international students often wear their traditional native clothing and share music, dance, customs, and artifacts that represent their culture. Be sure to bring a few items to share and your native dress to wear for special events. During special occasions, the official flags of countries representing current international students fly in the Blanche Hinman Dow International Flag Circle.

This handbook does not include everything you will need to know. Subjects covered by the [Cottey College Student Handbook](#) (which will be referred to as CCSH throughout the rest of this publication) are not included. Please read both handbooks and the [Cottey College Catalog](#) carefully. Some of the information in this book may not pertain to those of you who have lived in the United States before.

Thanks and credit for the publication of this booklet go to the staff members of Enrollment Management, Academic Affairs, and Student Life. We also express our deep appreciation for the privilege of working with Cottey’s many talented international students. We would also like to thank the University of Central Missouri and Princeton University whose international student guides provided information and a model for ours.

HOW TO GET HERE

Cottey is located in [Nevada, Missouri](#), 100 miles south of [Kansas City, Missouri](#). It is considered to be located in the Midwest. The [Kansas City International Airport](#) is about two hours from Nevada. Most international students fly into the Kansas City International Airport from other entry ports in the U.S. It is wise to plan your arrival and departure so that you can ride the chartered bus to and from the airport at the beginning and end of academic breaks. Tickets are \$25 each way and can be purchased in the Office of Student Life. Please refer to the [chartered bus schedule](#) when making your travel plans. You should plan to arrive at the airport at least one hour before your flight departs, and at least one hour before the Cottey chartered bus departs.

Bus service to and from the Kansas City International Airport and Cottey is also available through the KCI Express and Jefferson Lines Bus; however, the schedule is very limited, more expensive, and not at convenient travel times. In addition to public transportation, students also rely on each other to assist with rides to and from the airport. The Office of Student Life may be able to provide you with additional resources.

Freshmen arriving in August to begin [New Student Orientation](#) will be met at the airport by a member of the Enrollment Management staff and a student orientation leader. Be sure to provide the international student advisor with details of your travel including your airline, flight number, and arrival time by August 1.

WHO IS HERE TO HELP?

Cottey is known for its warm and caring atmosphere. From the Physical Plant to the President's Office and everywhere in between, you will find friendly and helpful faculty and staff who care about students and are here to help you be successful. We have highlighted a few offices that provide more specialized assistance to students.

ACADEMIC ADVISOR

Each student is assigned an academic advisor based on her academic interests. Faculty at Cottey serve as academic advisors. Your advisor is available to assist you with academic/career planning and is a good source of information regarding academic policies. Your advisor can also be a good source of support during your adjustment to life at Cottey and can assist you with referrals to other campus offices to meet your needs. Meeting regularly with your advisor and keeping him or her informed regarding your academic progress is a good way to begin your academic career at Cottey.

ACADEMIC ASSISTANCE CENTER

The staff of the Kolderie Academic Assistance Center, located in the Rubie Burton Academic Center, provide an array of assistance to students. The professional staff are available to assist students with selection of and changing academic advisors, selection of a transfer institution, college major and career planning, volunteer and internship placement, individual and group instruction in learning skills and tutoring. The center also has information regarding TOEFL, ACT, SAT, study abroad, scholarships, and financial aid.

INTERNATIONAL FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE

The International Friendship Circle (IFC) is a student organization dedicated to helping form the bonds of understanding among Cottey's international students as well as with interested U.S. students. (IFC works with Food Service to share their favorite international foods and cultural activities on special nights throughout the academic year.) IFC sponsors opportunities to discuss customs and ideas about the countries represented on campus. A member also serves as an associate senator on the Cottey College Student Government Association to provide an international perspective on services and policies affecting students.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICES

These services have been divided among the vice president for enrollment management and the director of financial aid, the vice president for student life, the student health office manager, and the coordinator of advising.

The vice president for enrollment management and the director of financial aid provide information and guidance on F-1 visa status issues. Their offices are located on the first floor of Main Hall. The coordinator of advising is available to explain academic procedures and to refer international students seeking information or assistance to the appropriate person(s). Her office is located in the Academic Assistance Center in the Rubie Burton Academic Center. The student health office manager can assist you with questions concerning health insurance. Her office is located on the second floor of Hinkhouse Center.

OFFICE OF ENROLLMENT MANAGEMENT

The Office of Enrollment Management is located on the first floor of Main Hall. The friendly staff is always available to assist students with information, support, and referral to areas of the College for more specific assistance.

The Office of Financial Aid is located in the Office of Enrollment Management and is responsible for student campus employment and work. International students often work on campus.

P.E.O. SISTERHOOD

Cottey College is owned and supported by the P.E.O. Sisterhood. This organization has more than a quarter of a million members in chapters throughout the United States and Canada. They have taken an active role in the promotion of educational opportunities for women. Many of Cottey's institutional grants are funded through the generosity of the P.E.O. Sisterhood.

It is common for suites and individual students to receive care packages containing food, stationery, and other gift items from P.E.O. chapters. Students are strongly encouraged to practice good etiquette and to send written thank-you notes or letters promptly to P.E.O. chapters or individuals who send gifts. If you do not have an address for the chapter, you may take your thank-you note with the postage paid to the Office of P.E.O. Relations (located in Main Hall), and they will mail it for you.

Please be advised that Cottey College policy prohibits Cottey students from soliciting, seeking, or asking for additional financial support in any manner from P.E.O.s. This includes asking for money for any reason, including participation in College events, such as the international trip, or to fund tuition or other expenses at transfer institutions.

RESIDENCE HALL STAFF AND P.E.P. MEMBERS

The residence hall staff is there to help meet your needs. Your residence hall director lives in an apartment in your hall and is available to assist you with information and support. Each hall has three student resident assistants (R.A.s) who are dedicated to serving students. They can provide you with information about residence hall policies and are a great source of support for students. Each hall also has members of the Peer Empowerment Program (PEP), students who have been selected and trained as peer listeners. Their services are free and confidential.

STUDENT DISABILITY SERVICES

Cottey College is committed to ensuring that all qualified individuals with disabilities have the opportunity to take part in educational programs and services on an equal basis. The aim is to provide this opportunity in an integrated setting that fosters independence and meets the guidelines of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Reasonable accommodations are made on an individual and flexible basis. It is the responsibility of individuals with disabilities to make their needs known and to provide proper documentation of a disability. Students seeking physical or academic accommodations for a disability should contact the coordinator for student disability services. Students will meet personally with the coordinator to arrange accommodations. Contact with the coordinator should be initiated prior to your first semester at the College to arrange accommodations. The coordinator for student disability services is in the Counseling Office, located on the second floor of Hinkhouse Center.

STUDENT HEALTH AND COUNSELING SERVICES

A \$100 per semester student health fee allows Cottey students unlimited access to health care services on campus. Our student health office manager and three local physicians staff this office with services available each weekday for up to an hour. Students receive a number of services that might otherwise be performed for a fee in a doctor's office or in the hospital. The physicians give examinations, write prescriptions, provide health counseling, and refer students for specialized medical help when needed. It is not necessary to schedule an appointment. Students needing to see the physician are asked to arrive at 8:30 a.m. on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, and at 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday.

The Counseling Office provides free counseling services and programs to assist students in realizing their potential in all aspects of college life. Two professionally-trained counselors are available to provide counseling services including confidential short-term individual or group counseling for students experiencing personal, academic, or adjustment problems. The counseling staff is experienced in assisting international students with their adjustment to campus life and American culture. Students experiencing severe or prolonged

emotional distress related to their adjustment are encouraged to contact the Counseling Office to schedule an appointment. Counseling appointments can be scheduled by calling the student health office manager at extension 2157. The Health Services Office and the Counseling Office are located on the second floor of Hinkhouse Center.

STUDENT LIFE CENTER

The Student Life Center, located on the second floor of Hinkhouse Center, offers a variety of services to students. The **Offices of Housing, Health Services, Counseling, Student Disability Services, Spiritual Life, Campus Activities, Athletics, and the Vice President for Student Life** can be found in the Student Life Center. The staff welcome your suggestions to assist our international students and to enhance your educational experience.

WHAT TO EXPECT AT COTTEY AND IN NEVADA

ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

You must be 21 years old to buy or consume alcoholic beverages in Missouri. A word of caution: Missouri has very strict laws concerning liquor. Cottey's campus is a "dry campus." No alcohol is allowed on campus. Please refer to the CCSH for a complete list of rules, regulations, and penalties.

BANKS AND BANKING SERVICES

There are several banks in Nevada that offer the same basic services: checking accounts, savings accounts, and loans.

Two basic types of accounts students usually open are savings and/or checking accounts. The difference is in the availability of your money, and in the interest your money can earn. Most Cottey students prefer a checking account.

To open any type of account, go to the bank of your choice, and the bank will ask you to fill out forms. Make sure the bank knows that you are an international student, and have them explain the details. For your convenience, representatives from area banks will be available on campus during Orientation weekend. You should bring your passport and Cottey I.D. to meet with bank representatives. Please consult the Orientation schedule for the time and location.

Automated Teller Machines

A service offered by many banks is the automated teller machine (known as an ATM). An ATM allows you to deposit or withdraw money from your checking or savings account at any time of the day or night. To use an ATM, you must have a teller card that can be ordered from your bank. You will receive your card in the mail, and a four digit identification number will be sent separately (some banks allow the customer to choose his or her own number). It is very important that you memorize this number; you must type it into the ATM before you can conduct any transactions. If you lose your card, contact your bank immediately. Some banks do not offer an ATM service. The nearest ATM is located at Woods Supermarket, one block west of campus.

CAMPUS EMPLOYMENT

International students will learn about job assignments during the campus employment check-in at Orientation. Students work an average of nine hours per week and receive a monthly paycheck around the 15th of the month. Each semester, \$300 of your earnings may be applied to the balance due on your account. Approximately two-thirds of each paycheck will be applied to your student account balance, and the remaining one-third of your paycheck is given to you for your personal expenses. Once \$300 per semester has been applied to your account balance, you will receive the full paycheck. **International Students on a student visa are prohibited from being employed in any capacity other than through Cottey campus employment, including over the summer break.**

CLEANING

Standards of cleanliness vary from culture to culture. Housekeepers will clean the suite area and bathrooms each weekday, but you will be expected to do any necessary cleaning in your room. Some cleaners can be obtained by asking your housekeeper, including use of a vacuum cleaner.

CLOTHING

You should also be aware that Cottey does not have a dress code, except for Sunday brunch, when dressier slacks or dresses are appropriate. Some students dress nicely every day, but some are always seen in sweatpants or jeans and tennis shoes. You may wear the clothes that make you feel comfortable on most occasions. You will want to have a dress or skirt and a top for dressier occasions. It is also important to have a warm winter coat, hat, and gloves. Cottey hosts one formal dance, at which a dressy dress, formal, or costume from your country would be appropriate. On formal occasions, students who did not bring formal clothing often borrow clothing from other students.

When shopping in the United States, the most common problem international students face is purchasing clothing. The problem is not price or availability—it is size. American clothing manufacturers use a different sizing system than the rest of the world, and the numbers they use confuse many international students. Keep your store receipt. If you make a mistake in selection, or if you simply realize you do not like an article of clothing, you may return it to the store (providing it has never been worn, and the tags have not been removed).

“CULTURE SHOCK”

“Culture shock” is the term used to describe the psychological effects of being immersed in a new culture. Nevada is not like any place you have been before. The buildings look different, clothing is different, and trees and plants are different. And, most importantly, the people are different. They speak a different language, have different values, traditions, and religious practices, and they eat different foods. It will take time to adjust to this new environment.

To cope effectively with culture shock, you must realize that you are not alone; it happens to everyone. Every international student experiences the same feelings upon his or her arrival in the United States. Talk to other international students about your feelings. If the feelings of despair and dislocation do not grow weaker within two or three weeks, contact the Counseling Office at extension 2157 to schedule an appointment with a counselor. The staff members are trained to help students cope with a variety of problems, and adjustment to Nevada is one of them. Their services are free and confidential. Do not hesitate to call them.

EMPLOYMENT

International Students on a student visa are prohibited from being employed in any capacity other than through Cottey campus employment, including over the summer break.

FOOD

While at Cottey, all your meals during a housing contract period will be provided in Raney Dining Room, except for Sunday evening meals. Food or groceries can be purchased in a variety of stores, and sometimes the prices vary greatly. Some international students are disappointed with the selection of groceries available in Nevada stores. They do not always sell all the ingredients necessary to cook a non-American meal. A greater selection may be available at grocery stores in larger cities, such as Joplin or Kansas City.

HEALTH PRODUCTS

Beauty aids, bathroom supplies, over-the-counter medicines, and health supplements (like vitamins) are available in a variety of stores. They can be found in grocery stores, convenience stores, drug stores (or pharmacies), and discount stores such as Wal-Mart and Dollar General. Generally, these products are least expensive in stores like Wal-Mart and Dollar General. Some medicines, such as aspirin, are available without a prescription.

To obtain a prescription, you must first visit a doctor (available on Cottey's campus). Then take your prescription to a pharmacy to get the medicine. The closest pharmacy to Cottey is located within walking distance at Wood's Supermarket, one block west of campus. Community Pharmacy, located in the Nevada Medical Clinic, delivers prescriptions free of charge. Wilkinson's Pharmacy, located near the Nevada square, delivers to Cottey students for a small fee.

HOLIDAYS

The United States has moved many holidays to the Monday nearest the date of the original holiday. This was done to make as many three-day weekends (Saturday, Sunday, and Monday) as possible. Because Cottey is a private institution, the College may still be open despite a business or legal holiday. Please refer to the CCHS for detailed information about the academic calendar.

IDENTIFICATION DOCUMENTS AND ID/ KEYCARDS

The United States does not have a national identity card. You should, however, carry identification with you at all times. To cash a check or purchase goods with a check usually requires at least one form of identification. As an international student, you may use your passport and any other form of identification you have.

Many international students, if they do not have a driver's license, may be able to use their Cottey College ID/keycard issued during Orientation as an identification document. You should carry your ID/keycard at all times, as it provides you access to campus buildings when they are locked and on keycard. It is also necessary to show your ID/keycard for entrance into Raney Dining Room for meals. If you lose your ID/keycard, notify the student health office manager at extension 2157 immediately to prevent unauthorized persons from using it to enter College buildings. A temporary ID can be issued for use at meals. If you must replace your ID/keycard, there will be a \$10 fee.

MASS COMMUNICATION

The [*Nevada Daily Mail*](#), the [*Joplin Globe*](#), and the [*Kansas City Star*](#) are the best sources of local and regional information. The Cottey Library subscribes to many different newspapers. Internet news sources are available 24 hours daily in the residence hall computer suites.

Radio is another major source of news and entertainment. Each of the TV lounges receives "cable" TV. With cable, 20-plus channels are available for viewing. A television is also located in the parlor of each residence hall.

Although campus housing includes a telephone hookup, you will need to provide your own telephone. You will be provided with information about the campus phone and voice mail system when you check into your residence hall. While many students prefer to use cell phones, it is important to set up your campus phone and check your voice mail on a regular basis.

MEDICAL CARE AND INSURANCE OFF CAMPUS

The medical care system in the United States is different from those of most countries. Doctors, hospitals, and pharmacies charge the patient for the services performed. In many countries, the government provides these services. In this country, the patient is responsible for paying all medical bills.

In order to help pay for medical care, most people in the United States have health insurance. Insurance spreads the risk of the cost of medical care among all subscribers, and as a result, individuals pay less than they would for health care if they were not insured.

Cottey requires all international students to have health insurance approved by the College. Many health care providers will not treat you without proof of insurance coverage. Many will insist that you pay in cash when treated. Cottey international students are members of the Cottey group healthcare plan.

The Nevada Regional Medical Center is the closest hospital to Cottey, located about eight blocks southeast of campus. The hospital provides 24-hour emergency care. If you are in need of nonemergency medical care when the Cottey physicians are not on campus, there are a number of physicians listed in the Nevada phone directory. During the week, the student health office manager will assist you in obtaining medical care during those times of day that it is not available on campus.

MISSOURI WEATHER

Missouri is noted for its range of weather patterns. Summer temperatures above 100° Fahrenheit (37° Celsius), accompanied with high humidity, and winter temperatures below 0° Fahrenheit (-18° Celsius) are common. Perhaps most distressing about Missouri weather is the quickness with which conditions may change. A day that begins sunny and warm may be cold and rainy by noon.

Although very infrequent, most frightening to many international students is the phenomenon called a “tornado.” Tornadoes are powerful, twisting windstorms, which can be up to several hundred meters wide and produce winds of 500 k.p.h. These rare storms occur in the spring and early summer. When a tornado has been sighted and confirmed, a “tornado warning” is declared. Sirens will sound all over town, and most radio and television stations will announce the warning. You must seek shelter immediately. If you are in a building with a basement, go to the basement. For more information about tornadoes, refer to the CCSH. While there has been recent severe damage from tornadoes in neighboring towns, there has not been a tornado in Nevada since 1996.

RELIGION

Religion plays the same role in America it plays in many countries. There is no government-supported religion, and the US Constitution guarantees the right of residents to freely worship as they wish. Also, in general, people in the United States are private about their religious views. Typically, in conversation between strangers, religion is an issue that is avoided in order not to offend others who may not agree. Nevada has a large selection of churches. The majority of them are Christian. The Nevada phone directory contains a comprehensive listing of Nevada’s church community. A guide of Nevada churches may also be obtained from the Office of Student Life.

Many churches have a “host family” program in which families “adopt” a Cottey student. Host families often provide rides to church, friendship, home-cooked meals, shopping trips, and, in general, a “home away from home.”

For those non-Christian students, there may be opportunities to travel to Kansas City for temple, mosque, or other religious services. Contact the Office of Student Life for more information.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Many international students arrive in Nevada expecting it to resemble the violent and criminal parts of America they have seen on television. It is not. Major crimes (murder, rape, armed robbery, grand theft) are rare, but vandalism and petty theft can occur. It is wise, therefore, to take several precautions. If you park a bicycle outside, chain and lock it to a bicycle rack. Lock your bedroom door when you leave your suite. If you have any problems on campus, please refer to the CCSH. Emergency procedures are located on the first page, and Section 6 contains safety information. The Cottey Crisis Response Plan is also posted in each suite and in each building on campus.

SALES TAXES

Nearly every item you buy will have a sales tax added to its price. In Nevada, that tax is approximately six percent. If a bottle of shampoo costs one dollar, the sales tax on it will be six cents, equaling a total cost of \$1.06. If a stereo costs \$500, the tax on it will be \$30, equaling a total cost of \$530. This tax is added almost everywhere in the United States, but the amount varies from place to place.

SHOPPING

The large volume of goods available in America amazes many international students. Prices in American stores are fixed. The shopper does not bargain with store employees for a lower price. Most stores operate on a “self-service” basis. Shoppers select the goods they want and take them to a “check-out” stand where a cashier totals the amount and adds sales tax. Some shoppers wrongly attempt to take merchandise from the store without paying for it. This is “shoplifting” and is a criminal offense. Shoplifters will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law, and the sentence may involve both a fine and a jail term. One shoplifting offense may affect your immigration status, and repeated offenses will result in deportation.

Wood’s Supermarket and the Dollar General store are located one block west of campus and provide easy access for students to variety of grocery and other items. Additional shopping can be found on the Nevada square, a nice walk from campus. The Wal-Mart Super Center is located on the east end of town, and personnel with the Physical Plant provide limited transportation on Saturday afternoons. The Campus Activities Office offers occasional shopping trips to major malls located in Joplin and Kansas City.

When buying anything other than food, it is wise to keep the sales receipt as a record of your purchase. If the item is defective, you may return it to the store at which you bought it with the receipt.

TRANSFERRING TO ANOTHER COLLEGE

For international students planning on completing their baccalaureate degree in the United States, it is very important to work closely with their academic advisor, faculty, and the transfer/career counselor to identify and apply to transfer institutions. Not all colleges provide international students with as generous financial aid packages as Cottey does. International students often apply to many colleges. The transfer/career counselor is available to assist you with the [transfer process](#).

TRANSPORTATION

Nevada has no mass transit system. Students must depend on their walking, bicycles, and cars to get around town. A taxi service is available for a fee. Hitchhiking is not common in America. It is illegal in many states and is a dangerous way to travel. Friends and suitemates often assist each other with transportation needs.

The College does offer chartered bus service to the Kansas City International Airport at the beginning and end of each break and at Thanksgiving. The cost is \$25 each way, and tickets may be purchased in the Office of Student Life at any time during the academic year.

U.S. CURRENCY

The standard of American currency is the dollar, which is divided into 100 “cents.” The value of the dollar remains relatively stable here in the United States.

Coins (also known as “change”) represent fractions of one dollar, and their value is defined in “cents.” There are six denominations of coins, but unfortunately, their sizes are not consistent to their value.

The penny (or cent) is worth one cent. It is the only copper coin. The nickel is worth five cents. It is silver and slightly larger than a penny. The dime is worth ten cents. It is silver and is the smallest coin. The quarter is worth 25 cents. It is also silver and larger than a nickel.

All American paper currency is the same size and color, so be careful. The denominations used most often are \$1, \$5, \$10, \$20. There are larger bills; however, some businesses will not take large bills (\$50 or \$100).

It is not wise to keep large amounts of currency (or “cash”) in your wallet or purse, or to keep it in your room; the chances of losing it or having it stolen are too great. Instead, you should deposit excess money in a bank.

ACADEMICS AT COTTEY

ACADEMIC ADVISING

Every student is assigned an academic advisor. It is the responsibility of both the student and her academic advisor to participate in the advising process equally. The academic advisor serves as a resource for course/career planning and academic progress review and as a referral source to other campus services, as necessary. Students meet at least once per semester with their academic advisor prior to registration. After consultation with her academic advisor, it is ultimately the student's responsibility to choose and implement her academic program.

AMERICAN EDUCATION

Foremost in your mind may be the nature of American education and what you must do to succeed academically in the United States. Most internationals are among the best students in their homelands and are terrified by the prospect of being no better than average in the United States. Like American students, each international student is different and comes with different academic strengths. Help with academics is available from the faculty and from the Academic Assistance Center. We have found that many international students are among our top students at Cottey.

COTTEY'S ACADEMIC PROGRAM

Cottey is on a "semester" system. Each semester is 16 weeks long and separated by a three-week break from mid-December to early January. During early March, there are no classes to observe a two-week spring break. During each of these breaks, and during summer, Cottey's residence halls close and residents must make other arrangements for housing and meals.

Classes are measured in terms of "credit hours." These numbers, ranging from one to four, represent the number of hours per week the student spends in class. Lab classes are worth one or two credits, but you spend two to four hours in the lab per week. You will need 62 credit hours to graduate with your A.A. or A.S. degree.

Students are assigned academic advisors through the Academic Assistance Center. You will meet with your academic advisor to register for each semester. They are very knowledgeable about graduation requirements for your intended area of study.

If you find yourself in a class in which you continue to struggle in spite of assistance that you are receiving, consult with the professor and your academic advisor about the option of dropping the course. You can drop a course either with no notation on your transcript or with an indication of withdraw passing or failing, depending on the date, and your grade point average will not be affected. Please refer to the Cottey Catalog for more detailed information regarding academic policies.

REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Your first semester may be an especially difficult time. You will have many adjustments, and these adjustments can affect your scholastic performance. To make this period of transition a bit easier, do not take a heavy class load during your first semester. Fifteen credit hours should be your maximum. You should also mix the difficulty of your classes.

STUDYING EFFECTIVELY

To maintain a high GPA you must study effectively. This does not mean you must spend every waking moment bent over a desk; it means you must make the most of the time you set aside for study. Use the syllabus you receive from each professor to plan your study time. Most of your study will be reading assignments from the textbook for the next day's lecture. Do not postpone these assignments until later.

TAKING NOTES

Since most professors use the lecture form of instruction, it is extremely important that you learn to take notes effectively. As the professor speaks on a topic, you write down the important points he or she makes. If you have a professor who talks too fast for you to keep up, ask permission to tape-record the lectures. Most professors will allow this, but make sure you ask first. Listen to the tape when you get home.

TALKING TO YOUR PROFESSORS

In many educational systems around the world, the role of the student is simple: memorize the things that are already known, and do not question the source of this information. At Cottey, your professors will expect you to attend class, ask questions, and be active participants in your learning both inside and outside of the classroom.

Many international students come from educational systems where speaking to the professor during or after class is not acceptable. This is not the case in most universities in the United States, and it is certainly not the case at Cottey. There is much more interaction between teachers and students in classrooms in the United States than in most classrooms worldwide. Many instructors include class participation when determining grades and will reduce your grade if you do not participate in class. Ask questions and participate in class discussions. Silence is often interpreted by professors as an “I do not care” attitude.

Instructors at Cottey also have “office hours,” a regular time when they are available in their offices to talk with students. You should take advantage of these times to visit your instructors even if you are doing well in class. Most teachers enjoy talking with students in a relaxed atmosphere, and they will know from your visit that you are interested in their course. If you are having trouble in a class, talk with the professor; most will be willing to help you in any way they can.

TERM PAPERS

Perhaps the most frightening part of education in the United States is the writing of term papers. If you are assigned a paper, make an appointment with your instructor to clarify a number of points. Ask how long the paper should be, how many sources should be used, and the style of citation that should be used. Most instructors will give you a list of topics to choose from, but if they do not, ask for suggestions. You may also seek assistance from the Academic Assistance Center, located in the Rubie Burton Academic Center.

TESTING

Exams are much more frequent in the United States than in many universities around the world. At Cottey, you may have classes which give an exam every week. Most of the tests you take (and virtually all the quizzes) are “objective.” They measure your knowledge of a topic by asking questions which have specific answers. Many of you will also face “subjective” tests. These exams, as you may know, provide you a question (or choice of questions) to which you respond with a short answer or an essay. Many professors will ask you to write your essays in a “bluebook.” A bluebook is a twelve-page exam booklet that can be purchased at the Bookstore for \$0.25 each.

TEXTBOOKS

When you arrive at Cottey and enroll in classes, you will go to the Bookstore and purchase the textbooks that are needed for your classes. The Bookstore is located on the lower level of Main Hall. Used and new books may be available. Used books will help reduce the overall cost if they are available for your classes. You should plan on spending \$300 to \$400 each semester for books and supplies. You have two options for payment of books; pay for them at the time you pick them up, or charge them and make three monthly payments.

UTILIZING STUDY GROUPS

Engaging with other students in study and discussion of your subjects is a good learning tool. The more you discuss and use information, in addition to hearing the information from a variety of perspectives, the easier it becomes for you to integrate it into knowledge that you already have. Many professors utilize collaborative learning and projects in their courses. If you have any questions about whether collaborating with other students is appropriate, consult the instructor.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES AND SOCIAL CUSTOMS

AMERICAN CULTURE

Because of its history, the United States is a society with many different classes, groups, races, and lifestyles. Within each of these segments, individual members are also quite different from one another. No one behaves exactly like anyone else. There are, however, several general characteristics which most Americans have in common. Remember, these are general characteristics; many people you meet will not fit these patterns.

What Americans Believe

All people are equal and deserve an equal opportunity in life. They should all be treated fairly and with the same level of respect. This is one of the most basic principles of American philosophy. This can be seen in such common practices as “waiting in line.” When you go to the doctor’s office, to a store, or to another type of office, you will be asked to wait in line. This same equality can also be seen in the classroom. All students are the same in the eyes of the professors, and many professors view students (particularly graduate students) as their equals.

Everyone is free to be an individual. Americans do not believe in conforming to a general ideology or behavior. Individuality and self-expression are encouraged. Most people in the United States believe that the ideal individual is independent and self-reliant, and most perceive themselves this way. Americans do not generally see themselves as representatives of their families or communities or social class. Rather, they see themselves as autonomous beings. This American characteristic can be seen in the classroom as well. Teachers will emphasize the development of independent, individualistic thought in students. Some internationals may see this attitude as “selfish.”

Competition brings out the best in people and in businesses. Competition is another of the basic principles of American philosophy.

Material goods are a measure of a person’s success. Success in the United States is often measured in monetary terms. Since this is so, people in the United States are as conscious of money and material possessions as they are of time. As a result, some people may seem to ignore the more important things in life, like love and friendship. This is not, however, true of most people. You are responsible for taking control of your own life and determining your own future. Americans do not believe in luck or fate. They are very proud of their individual achievements.

Change is good and necessary. It brings about progress and improvement. Tradition is not as valued in America as it is in other cultures.

It is best to be honest and direct. In many cultures, it is considered impolite to speak too frankly or directly about a subject. Americans prefer to speak openly, even when giving a negative opinion or delivering bad news.

Being punctual is important and respectful of others. People in the United States tend to organize their activities around schedules, and many people place a great deal of emphasis on punctuality. In the United States, it is important to be on time; being late is considered rude. If you cannot be on time to an appointment, let the person(s) involved know in advance. Classes at Cottey begin at exactly the time they are listed on the schedule.

Rationality is more important than emotion when making a decision. Americans are often most interested in “the bottom line.” In other words, the best decision is the one that has the most productive outcome, usually measured in dollars and cents.

Individuals should give back to others through community service. Serving one’s community is a value embraced by many. It not only provides assistance to those in need, but can also be an important source of personal satisfaction through acts of goodness. People are often involved in community service through their church, schools, or community government, or through service agencies like Habitat for Humanity, the American Red Cross, Girl Scouts and Boy Scouts, the YMCA, and the United Way.

What Americans Love

Their country. Americans are very patriotic. They are very proud of their country and their way of life. They also have great respect for those who serve or have served in the armed forces.

Their free time. Americans may not have much free time compared to people in some countries, but they value what they have. They will spend that time doing something for themselves, their family, or their community. Weekends and vacations are always full of activities.

The outdoors. The United States government protects large sections of land from development and preserves them for the enjoyment of all. Americans enjoy outdoor activities all year round. Depending on the region, popular activities include sailing, hiking, mountain climbing, camping, and skiing.

Sports. The United States probably has more professional athletes participating in a greater number of professional sports than any other country. Americans love to watch sports, either live or on television. They also love to participate in sports, and there are countless leagues for players of all ages and skill levels.

SOCIAL CUSTOMS

While Americans will vary in their customs, here are some common social customs you can expect.

Meeting Someone

When meeting someone for the first time, it is customary to shake hands, both for men and for women. Hugs are only exchanged between close friends. Kissing is not common, and men generally never kiss other men.

Americans will usually introduce themselves by their first name and last name (such as “hello, I’m John Smith”), or, if the setting is very casual, by their first name only (“hi, I’m John”). The common response when someone is introduced to you is “pleased to meet you.” Unless someone is introduced to you with their title and last name (such as Mister Smith or Miss Johnson), you may address them by their first name. Americans normally address everyone they meet in a social or business setting by their first name. However, you should always address your college professors by their title and last name (such as Dr. Adams or Professor Jones), unless they ask you to do otherwise.

Structure of Conversation

People in the United States have very few “ritualistic” exchanges in conversations, but you need to be aware of a few. “How are you?” and “how’s it going?” are usually greetings, not questions about your life. “See you later,” or “see you soon,” are ways of saying good-bye and not appointments.

Style of Conversation

Most people in the United States like their conversations to be moderate in volume with few and restrained hand gestures. Do not speak too loudly or too quietly, and keep your hands under control.

Depth of Conversation

Most people in the United States prefer not to become too involved with the personal lives of their conversation partners. This emotional distance does not mean people dislike one another; it is simply the way things are done here. Personal lives are generally discussed only with close friends and family.

Preferred Topics

In casual conversation, people in the United States prefer “small talk”—topics such as sports, weather, jobs, people they both know, or past experiences. Most feel uncomfortable talking about religion, politics, or personal feelings with people they do not know well.

Nonverbal Communication

When we speak of communication difficulties for international students, we usually are referring to spoken and written language. Many of the most significant differences between people from the United States and international students are in nonverbal communication, or body language.

Eye Contact

During a conversation, the speaker often looks briefly into the listener’s eyes, then briefly away, and then back at the listener’s eyes again. The listener looks at the speaker’s eyes constantly. If you do not look into the eyes of your conversation partner, you will give the impression you are not listening.

Touching

Men are especially bothered when touched by another man. Women who are good friends may be seen walking arm in arm, but only rarely. You do not, however, have to touch people from the United States to make them nervous. People in the United States expect others to stand or sit at least an arm’s length away from them. If you get closer than this, you may notice people from the United States moving away from you: They do not necessarily dislike you; you are in “their space.” In addition, you will frequently hear people say, “excuse me,” though they have not actually touched anyone. No matter where you are, give people from the United States plenty of space.

Speaking on the Telephone

Americans normally answer the telephone by simply saying “hello.” If you are calling a business, the person answering the phone will give the name of the business and usually his or her own name as well. If the person you would like to speak to has answered the phone, you should say hello and state your name. If not, you should ask for that person politely: “May I please speak with Alice Brown?”

The majority of Americans have answering machines in their homes. Also, the majority of businesses have voice mail accounts for their employees. When leaving a message, state your name clearly, and leave a telephone number where you can be reached. Telephone messages should be brief and to the point.

Common Misjudgments

International students often conclude from conversations that people from the United States are incapable of deep conversation or thought. Many people are able to think and talk deeply; they are just reluctant to do so with strangers.

People from the United States often conclude that international students that speak rarely or quietly are too shy, too formal, or less intelligent.

Vigorous arguing may alarm some people in the United States. They expect violence or long-lasting anger to follow such encounters.

OTHER GUIDELINES

Americans have no taboo associated with the left hand; they are as likely to touch you or to hand you objects with the left hand as with the right hand.

Americans have no negative association with the soles of the feet or the bottom of the shoes.

A common way to greet children is to pat them on their heads.

People often point with their index finger to make a point during conversation.

Americans show respect for someone by looking him or her in the face, not by looking down.

Relaxed postures, whether sitting or standing are very common in America.

Americans are often uncomfortable with silence.

In the United States, the doors of rooms are usually left open unless there is a specific reason to close them.

HYGIENE

Compared to some of the world, the United States may seem obsessed with cleanliness. Television commercials for soap, perfume, cologne, deodorant, antiperspirant, toothpaste, mouthwash, breath mints, etc., are shown very frequently, and this is an accurate indication of what individuals are expected to do with and to their bodies. Bad breath and natural body odor are considered quite offensive in the United States, but the topic of these odors is so offensive that most people from the United States will not tell another person he or she has bad breath or body odor. You do not have to cover yourself with perfumes and chew gum constantly; a shower and deodorant each day and good dental care is acceptable hygiene.

SMOKING

Smoking is not as common in America as in many other countries. Generally, Americans smoke less than Europeans and Asians. It is a practice that is becoming less and less socially acceptable.

Smoking is prohibited in many places. Smoking is not permitted inside any buildings on the Cottey campus. Smoking is also prohibited near the entrances to all campus buildings. It is not allowed in any public buildings, on any public transportation (including airplane flights within the United States), in shops, movie theaters, schools, and office buildings. The general rule is: if you are indoors, then you probably are not allowed to smoke. The exceptions are bars, nightclubs, and some restaurants. If a restaurant does allow smoking, it will only be in an area that is designated for smokers. If you are with someone, even outdoors, it is polite to ask if they mind before you start smoking.

The legal smoking age in America is 18. If you are buying cigarettes (or another tobacco product) and you look young, the store clerk is required by law to ask you for proof of legal age. You should be prepared to provide identification.

CROSS-CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT

Here are some suggestions to make your experience a happier one.

Listen and observe. Since there are new rules, norms, and cues that may be unfamiliar, you need to listen to words and to observe nonverbal communication carefully, trying to put them into proper context.

Ask questions. You cannot assume that you always know what is going on, or that you always understand a particular communication. Most Americans will be very helpful if you need an explanation of something. You may need to rephrase a question, check the meaning of something, or repeat what you have said in order to be clearly understood.

Try not to judge. You will see many things that are different from your own culture. Do not label anything as “good” or “bad” in comparison to your own culture. Most customs, habits, and ideas are simply different from the ones you are familiar with. You may also misunderstand some things; do not make judgments until you have more complete information.

Try to empathize. Try to put yourself in the other person’s place and look at the situation from his or her perspective. Cultural perspectives can cause very different interpretations of the same situation.

Be open and curious. Try new things, and try to find out how and why certain things are done. The more you explore, the more you will learn.

Do not be afraid to laugh at yourself. It is likely that you will make mistakes as you explore a new culture. Laughing at your mistakes will encourage others to respond to you in a friendly manner and help you learn from them.

Try to accept frustration. Learning to function in a new culture is not easy, and it is natural to feel anxious and frustrated at times. These feelings are a normal part of the experience.

Get involved. The more you put into the experience, the more you will learn from it. Make an effort to meet people, form friendships, get involved in activities, and learn about the people and their culture.

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