

# International Student Handbook



## **Life at Fisk University: Information for the New International Student**



## **About the International Education, Enrichment and Exchange Center (IEEEEC)**

The International Education, Enrichment and Exchange Center acts as an advocate for international students, and assists students with orientation and adjustment to life at Fisk. The staff of IEEEEC helps international students with The Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services (INS) documents and processes including applications for program extension, optional practical training, re-entry signatures for travel outside the U.S., etc. ***Additionally, the IEEEEC staff administers the University Tutoring Program and the Fisk University Study Abroad and Domestic Exchange programs.***

Here are the names of the International Education, Enrichment and Exchange Center Staff:

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## General Information

All first year students (international and non-international) will live in dormitories on-campus with his/her assigned roommates. This is a good opportunity to make friends and to learn about American culture. There are four dormitories on Campus. Living in University residence halls is a requirement of all undergraduate students who are unmarried and financially dependent upon parental support. The Vice President of Student Life may make exceptions when the student is a legal resident of Davidson County, or when there is a temporary shortage of residence hall space, or due to personal circumstances.

During the winter vacation (mid-December to early January) and the summer vacation (mid-April – mid-August) **all dormitories will be closed**. You must plan to return home or visit friends during this time. Therefore, it is important that you plan your schedule ahead. Some international students like to take the opportunity during these vacations to travel around the U.S, while some choose to return home.

## Community Information

Fisk University is located in Nashville, Tennessee. With over 570,000 residents, Nashville is the capital of Tennessee and is the cultural and economic center of the mid-south. The city of Nashville is named “Music City, USA” because it has served as the home of the Grand Ole Opry since 1925 as well as the Country Music Hall of Fame. However, the name originated when Queen Victoria congratulated and honored Fisk’s Jubilee Singers during their first tour of England in the 1870’s. Currently, Nashville does serve as the headquarters of country music performance, recording, and broadcasting. In fact, all types of music are produced in Nashville, including jazz, blues, gospel and alternative. Nashville is also known as the “Athens of the South.” Nashville contains 16 institutions of higher education offering a complete range of curricula from medicine and law to automobile mechanics.

Nashville also has its own NFL football team, the Tennessee Titans, and minor league baseball team, the Nashville Sounds. Home games take place in Downtown Nashville and they provide great entertainment for area sports fans.

Students in the U.S sometimes get discounts for movies, parks, concerts and other entertainment. Always ask about student discounts when you pay for any entrance fees or tickets and be prepared to show your Fisk Student Identification Card. Check out the Office of Student Activities for brochures on tourist spots near Nashville.

For more information about the city and its attractions, visit the Nashville Convention and Visitors Bureau's website [www.nashvillecvb.com](http://www.nashvillecvb.com), or [www.nashville.citysearch.com](http://www.nashville.citysearch.com).

**There are four seasons: Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter.**

- In Spring, the temperature can range from 40° to 70° Fahrenheit
- In Summer, the temperature can range from 70° to 100° F
- During Fall, the temperature can vary between 50° and 60° F (Winter is our most interesting season, because the temperature can vary between the Spring and Summer range, and sometimes can go lower than 30° F. Typical winter temperatures include temperature ranges of 20 to 40° F.

If you do not have proper clothing for the changes in the varying temperatures, please be prepared to purchase these necessary items. The International Education, Enrichment and Exchange Center and other international students can offer advice and assist you with shopping for winter clothes.

**Shopping and Entertainment**

Shopping of every variety is available to you! Food stores are available within a 5 to 10 minute drive. There are several shopping malls located about 15-25 minutes from Fisk. They contain clothing stores, shoe stores, bookstores, stores for a variety of household and personal items. Movie theaters and restaurants are also available within a 10 to 15 minute drive.

## Cultural Adjustment Stages

As an international student, you will bring diversity to Fisk and become representative of your culture to America. Your culture and American culture are both important and deserve respect. Please make an effort to share your experiences and be willing to learn from others also.

### Common symptoms of culture shock phase:

1. Extreme homesickness
2. Desire to avoid social settings, which seem threatening or unpleasant
3. Physical fatigue and sleep disturbances
4. Depression and feelings of helplessness
5. Difficulty with school work and concentration
6. Loss of your sense of humor
7. Boredom
8. Hostility towards the host (U.S) culture

Needless to say, time and active engagement in the Fisk community are the best cures for culture shock. As time goes by, you will better understand your new environment. However, you can quicken the process by actually searching for appropriate explanations and responses. When you encounter a problem that might arise due to a cultural difference, try the following:

1. Observe how others act in the same situation.
2. Describe the situation, what it meant to you, and your response to it.
3. Ask a local resident how they would have handled the situation and what it means within the American culture.
4. Plan how you might act in the future if a similar situation happens again.
5. Test your new behavior and evaluate how well it worked.
6. Decide how you can apply what you have learned next time you find yourself in a similar situation.
7. Test theories when you interact with others.

Culture shock can be alleviated by participating in various Campus activities. The more actively you engage in campus life, you will learn quickly the nuances of US culture and the more rapidly you will feel competent in negotiating cultural differences.

## **Culture Shock or Culture Fatigue**

There are ways to keep culture shock to a minimum and remain happy often. Keep these six things in mind:

- Take care of your physical health. Keep a good diet, exercise and get plenty of rest.
- Maintain good attitudes. Keep your sense of humor and don't be afraid to make mistakes.
- Learn as much as you can about U.S. culture. Be curious and interested. It will help you understand why Americans do what they do.
- Make at least one American friend - this is important. It will increase your English ability, help you understand the U.S., and make you feel a part of the community quickly.
- Be non-judgmental, open-minded, and tolerant of cultural differences. Remember that cultural practices evolve as part of a system. There can be parts of a culture that you dislike but, they are part of a broader social system.
- Remember, there will always be someone to talk to when you are homesick - a friend or another international student who has been here for a while and can help you interpret the situation, or a staff person in International Education, Enrichment and Exchange Center, Religious Life or Student Life. Remember also that the cross-cultural lessons you learn now will be with you all your life.

## **Cross-Cultural Adaptation**

Living in a second culture is an adventure and a challenge! You might be fascinated at some of the differences between peoples' behavior and thinking in America in comparison to your home country. At the same time, dealing with different surroundings, customs, languages everyday can be extremely stressful. In the U.S., people lend considerable space between themselves and others. If a person backs away during a close conversation, the person is likely trying to reestablish a comfortable personal distance. People in the U.S. are concerned with personal cleanliness, bathing frequently and using a lot of soap and deodorant, with light amounts of cologne. Although this might seem exaggerated from other cultural standpoints, attention to personal hygiene is important for business and social success in the U.S. Patterns of communication differ. Behaviors, values and beliefs also differ, and you may sometimes feel that people do not understand you. Work hard to understand others, so that you also may be understood.

## **“Will I Forget My Own Culture?”**

Sometimes students worry about “forgetting their culture” if they become too well adapted to American culture. Don't worry, it is practically impossible to forget or lose the culture in which you were raised. On the contrary, learning about a new culture often increases appreciation of your original background. You will be happy to see that you have become bi-cultural. You will be able to function competently in two cultural environments.

### **Openness, Friendliness, Informality**

U.S. Americans are generally quite friendly and informal. This may also be due to our history - we are egalitarian, and because we often move from one place to another, we learn to make casual friendships quickly. You may find that it is easy to find a “friendly” person to talk to, but it is much harder to find a true friend. The openness of people to discuss some topics can be deceiving; it may seem they are acting like a close friend on one occasion, but later act more distant. This is probably because many Americans are raised to be friendly with everyone, but of course people cannot be truly close friends with everyone they meet. Most Americans have a few close friends, and many casual friends. They prize their privacy and share their feelings only after a close, trusting relationship has developed with another person.

### **Task/Time Orientation**

You will find that U.S. Americans generally put the task at hand ahead of their relationships with people. In business, work, and school settings, people may engage in slight, short conversation to be friendly and then focus all attention on their work. Related to this is an orientation to time. Punctuality is highly valued in U.S. culture. U.S. Americans feel time is valuable, should be made useful, and not “wasted.” People are expected to be on time for virtually any formal or semi-formal activity. Private parties such as get-togethers with friends, and dances are more flexible. However, if a friend says, “I'll meet you at six o'clock in front of the library,” he or she might be very impatient if you arrive more than a few minutes late (and if you do, an explanation is expected). If you accept an invitation for a function and you cannot make it, let your host or hostess know as soon as possible. This includes appointments made with faculty and staff.

### **Being Active on Campus**

You can organize virtually any kind of activity on campus (provided it is a legal activity). During the academic year of 2007-2008 there were “regular” organizations like culture clubs, sports clubs, and Greek organizations established. In addition, if you want to increase your knowledge in a certain academic field, you are welcome to approach a professor to see if they need assistants conducting research. Perhaps you can publish your own journal!

## Dating

Relationships between students range from simple, casual friendships to strong emotional relations. As your friendships develop past acquaintance, you may not always understand what your partners expect of you. Whatever the relationship, the best policy is honesty. Although sometimes embarrassing, it is best to express your feelings and intentions so that you can avoid misunderstandings and even greater discomfort. If your date appears interested in a sexual relationship but you are not, it is very important that you say so clearly. If someone seems to be saying no to you, you must listen and respect their feelings. Unwanted sexual attention is a very serious matter in the United States. Do not interpret the acceptance of a date as anything more than an agreement to meet and spend some time together.

If you are in doubt about the correct behavior, talk with American friends, University counselors or staff at IEEEC. **Be aware that alcohol and dating can be a problematic mix, particularly in a cross-cultural setting.**

## Alcohol and Smoking

In the U.S., alcohol consumption is quite popular during gatherings and parties. Nevertheless, please be aware that **Tennessee law states that it is illegal for anyone under the age of 21 to purchase or consume alcoholic beverages.** Laws regarding alcohol vary from state to state. In Tennessee, it is illegal to walk or drive along the street with an open container of alcohol.

The legal age to purchase cigarettes in Tennessee is 18. Americans are generally considerate and don't smoke with non-smokers around. An easy rule to remember is that indoor areas are non-smoking areas.

Fisk itself also has policies restricting smoking and drinking on campus. These two activities are prohibited in all campus buildings and most dormitories. Please refer to the campus safety policy booklet for further information.

## Academic Life at Fisk University Your Goal: Graduate (and learn in the process!)

Fisk University awards students with a Bachelor of Arts Degree (BA) after completing normal studies for four (4) years. However, international students are required to enroll a minimum of 12 credit hours for undergraduate and 9 credit hours for graduate school each semester. The Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services requires all international students to maintain full-time enrollment and maintain a good academic standing in order to legally stay in the U.S.

Most regular classes comprise lectures, homework (sets of problems and/or papers), quizzes, midterms (tests), and final exams. The professor of a class has the authority to determine how the final grades of the class are determined. Some professors don't give too much weight to homework, while others prefer papers to exams. Some might even offer "extra credit" opportunities so that students can boost their grades.

The atmosphere in classroom differs widely from one to another. In some classes the professors rely on a traditional lecture method of instruction with little involvement by students. However, the majority of professors encourage more active ways of teaching. They may encourage more group discussions and interactive exercises. It is important that you attend all of your scheduled classes unless you are sick or have an emergency. Come to class prepared to listen, take notes on the lecture and ask thoughtful questions. These guidelines can help you stay focused and perform well.

### **Common terms used in class:**

*Quizzes* - short tests given based on assigned material

*Pop quizzes* - unannounced quizzes (given when the professors want to verify if the students are keeping up with their reading assignments)

*Midterms* - exams based on several chapters of materials lectured in class, usually given on after every 4 weeks of class

*Final exams* - comprehensive exam given on the last day of the semester, which covers the entire materials from class

*Homework* - home works can be in forms of reading assignments, problem sets, and research

*Plagiarism* - use of another source's words or ideas, without the acknowledgment of the source itself. In other words, plagiarism is when you copy down entire paragraphs of Hamlet's title character's monologue without writing down the source of the paragraphs. If you "borrow" a main idea from any published source including the internet without citing the source, it is plagiarism. Plagiarism is severely punished at Fisk.

### **Academic Advising**

Many of you have already mapped out the classes you will take in order to achieve your academic goal. However, it is inevitable during your college experience that you will face challenges you cannot solve alone. Here is where academic advising helps.

You will register for your classes for both Fall and Spring semesters, at an assigned time, through a computer system called "Banner". Before doing so, you will need to get a password from your academic advisor. This also gives you a chance to meet each other and make sure you are on the right track.

Fisk strongly recommends that students seek academic advising from faculty and the proper administration staff. This is very important because each major has unique requirements. Academic advising is especially important for majors that are divided into different concentrations, which demand that you take classes from separate academic departments. The situation can be made even more complex when you have to complete your Core requirements at the same time. One advantage of a small school like Fisk is that students can work closely with professors on academic advancement. It is not uncommon for professors and students to conduct research together. This is especially valuable for science majors, who can gain experiences from first-hand experiments. Usually students who work with, or for professors can be paid or receive grants.

During the first two weeks of each semester you may “add” or “drop” certain classes, if you find another course that works better for your schedule.

Academic advising doesn't end after registration is over. Throughout the whole school year, you are encouraged to keep in contact with your professors. Almost all professors hold regular office hours during which students can visit. In addition to this, some professors are also available by appointment. Don't think that visiting a professor is a shameful thing to do. As a matter of fact, many professors like students to show up during office hours in order to discuss homework assignments before they are due. This is not only helpful for your grades, but also conducive to building good relationships with your mentors.

### **College is more than just studying...**

In this section, we would like to introduce to you something that every Fisk student should know about, but is not always included in official brochures or catalogs: an overview of on-campus organizations in which students can participate. We believe students should know what is happening on campus. We also hope this section can give you an advantage as an international student who may want to develop your leadership skills while attending college. Always feel free to go to the Office of Student Life with any questions if you need further information about these organizations!

Every organization has a hierarchy. The highest authority of all student organizations at Fisk is: The Student Government Association.

Fisk is famous for its cultural diversity. There is a long list of culture clubs on campus, such as the African Student Association, International Student Association and the Caribbean Student Union. For those of you, who are interested in bringing more diversity to Fisk, be sure to check out these organizations.

To many colleges and universities in the U.S., Greek organizations are very important. Greek refers to Greek-letter fraternities and sororities. Members of these organizations swear brotherhood or sisterhood among themselves. In some schools on the East Coast, more than 70% of the student population are members of the Greek system. At Fisk, Greek organizations play an important role in organizing activities and doing community services. If you want to know more about the Greek system, you can contact ***the Vice President of Student Life.***

### **Athletics- intercollegiate and intramural**

Fisk University is a member of the Great South Athletic (GSAC), and is affiliated with the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) Division III. Student athletes compete in fifteen sports, seven for men (basketball, baseball, soccer, tennis, cross-country, track, and golf) and eight for women (basketball, softball, volleyball, cross-country, tennis, track, soccer, and golf). The University also provides a variety of intramural sports for those students not participating in NCAA competition.

The Athletic Department consists of: Athletic Director, Sports Information Director, Certified Athletic Trainer, and capable coaches for all sports. These individuals provide leadership and help promote student development through athletics.

Fisk University views intercollegiate athletics as an integral part of its mission. The aim of the department is to assist the student athlete in obtaining the physical, mental, social, and moral benefits through competing in athletic programs. Individuals participating in athletics are charged with the same responsibilities as other students. Student athletes are neither unduly rewarded nor penalized because of their athletic participation. If you plan to play competitive sports, there are some rules and regulations that restrict the participation of international students. If you have any questions regarding these rules, please contact the Athletic Department.

### **The Religious Life Program**

Different religious backgrounds are represented at Fisk, and in many regions of the world religious preference is a valuable part of one's culture. If you have any questions or need assistance finding a place to celebrate your religious heritage, contact the International Education, Enrichment and Exchange Center, or the Director of Religious Life. An extensive list of churches, temples and mosques (Catholic, Episcopal, Baptist, Methodist, Jewish, Islamic and others) can be found in the local telephone book under "Churches." The University has through the years maintained an atmosphere of intelligent religious idealism, which constantly manifests itself in social action.

A central part of the formal religious program of the University is the worship service of the Fisk Union Church, which meets each Sunday morning in the Fisk Memorial Chapel.

## Bookstore

The Fisk University Bookstore provides the students, staff, and faculty with textbooks, general books, supplies, clothing, and a variety of gift items. It's their one stop shopping area for all their needs, conveniently on campus. In addition to textbooks, the bookstore carries supplemental educational aides, current fiction and non-fiction books of special and general interest, and a good supply of professional reference books. A complete selection of school and office supplies is conveniently available. At the end of the semester, you may sell books you do not need to the Bookstore (they must be unmarked, however).

## Planning for Costs at Fisk

**Your First Year:** The amount of money set aside for your school year (and indicated on your I-20) may seem very large. However, it is a good idea at the beginning of your stay to carefully *plan a budget* for your first semester and first year. List the actual amounts of your costs (some must be estimated), deduct your fixed costs (initial one-time costs and periodic costs that do not vary from month to month), and this will tell you how much you have left to spend on a monthly basis. Expenses that you will have include tuition, books, health insurance, housing, food, communication (mail and telephone), transportation (local transportation? a car? holiday travel?), clothing, personal expenses, and recreation.

## Bookstore

The Fisk University Bookstore provides the students, staff, and faculty with textbooks, general books, supplies, clothing, and a variety of gift items. It's their one stop shopping area for all their needs, conveniently on campus. In addition to textbooks, the bookstore carries supplemental educational aides, current fiction and non-fiction books of special and general interest, and a good supply of professional reference books. A complete selection of school and office supplies is conveniently available. At the end of the semester, you may sell books you do not need back to the Bookstore (they must be unmarked, however).

## Staying in Touch with Home

Decades ago, when communication between countries was just limited to mail, studying abroad was almost equivalent to losing touch with one's home country. Thanks to technological advancements, international students can maintain contact with relatives and friends, and also keep up with news and trends at home. Here are ways to communicate:

## Telephone

Every room in the dormitories has provisions for telephone service.

(615) is the **area code**.

329 is the **pre-fix**.

At the beginning of the semester you will have a chance to get a personal telephone for your room. There is a charge for long distance calling. If you like, you can use other alternatives, such as your own phone card or a cell phone.

A phone card is more suitable for international calls. We recommend you do some research on the Internet or through friends and find the lowest rate to call home.

### **E-mail**

At the time you register you will also register for a Fisk e-mail address ([yourname@fisk.edu](mailto:yourname@fisk.edu)) which you will use for four years. Internet access is provided by the school and is free of charge (it's fast too!). In addition to personal use, campus news and activities information will be sent through a campus-wide email system. Please check your e-mail regularly.

### **Mail**

You will be assigned a mailbox during the freshman student orientation. Just like your email address, you will keep your mailbox as long as you stay at Fisk.

**Beyond Your First Year:** Plan realistically for the costs of your entire stay at Fisk. Consider these possibilities:

- Be aware that there may be slight increases in tuition each year.
- Be aware also that books for general education courses are quite expensive. Books needed for upper-level or graduate courses may be even more expensive. It is not unusual for a semester's worth of books to cost \$300-\$700.
- You may move from a campus residence to an off-campus residence, or vice versa. This may change your living expense. (must meet qualifications and approval by the Vice president of Student Life)
- If you live off campus, you will probably need to purchase a car and automobile insurance, supply the car with gas, and maintain it.
  - If you are seeking a degree that holds classes, clinical hours, etc. off campus at satellite sites (e.g. in education, business, or some other disciplines), be prepared to buy a car, ride public transportation or seek rides with classmates.
  - Be aware that part-time, on-campus employment can assist with your costs, but probably cannot cover them all. International students are permitted to work part-time on campus for a maximum of 20 hours per week. Almost all departments and offices on campus require the help of student workers. Some examples of on campus offices would be: the Career Development Center, Campus Dining, and the Information

- Technology Services. Prerequisites and salaries for different jobs can vary widely, and some jobs are more competitive than others.
- For some jobs, priority is given to students on financial aid. Financial Aid from U.S. federal and state grants and scholarships are available only for U.S. citizens and Resident Aliens. Fisk University has limited scholarships, fellowships, or other aid for international students. (There are some limited private sources for international students. See HYPERLINK <http://www.nafsa.org> [www.nafsa.org](http://www.nafsa.org) for other sources). You are responsible for your costs for the duration of your stay at Fisk

## Financial Information

### Banks

The local banks provide many kinds of financial services, such as savings and checking accounts, cashier's checks, money orders, loans, inter-bank transfers, travelers' checks, and safe-deposit boxes for valuables.

### Savings Accounts

It is wise to open a savings account with the money you do not need to use immediately. The advantages of a savings account are:

- Your money can earn interest.
- It protects your money against potential loss due to theft or burglary.
- Savings accounts are protected by the Federal Depository Insurance Agency.

When you open a savings account, you are given a passbook, which is a record of deposits, withdrawals, and interest earned on your account.

It is a good idea to compare banks, and savings and loan associations as their rates for services differ. The interest rate depends on the time period you have the money in your account; this can vary from three (3) months to several years.

**Important Note on Interest:** Check with your home government; some do not allow their students to have accounts that earn interest.

### Checking Accounts

Money can be deposited into a checking account for convenience and safekeeping. Once you open an account, you will be provided with numbered checks imprinted with your name, address, and account number so that you may write checks against the balance in your account. Some banks require you to have a minimum balance and some may charge your account a fee for services. Please check with the bank that you choose to see if fees are charged to your account, or if a minimum balance is required.

Personal checks can be used for payment of rent, tuition, and for purchases in most stores and markets in the Nashville/Davidson County area. You will be required to present several pieces of identification to validate your check. A student ID card is sometimes sufficient. However, most area businesses will request a Driver's License or Tennessee State I.D card.

## Requirements for Opening Accounts

All banks have different requirements for opening accounts. However, all banking institutions require a picture identification (e.g., Driver's License, State ID or Passport), social security number, and proof of a local address.

**Important Note: It is not advisable to carry large amounts of money with you or keep it in your room or apartment. Also, if you have any valuable items such as jewelry that could be stolen, you might want to rent a safe deposit box at a bank.**

## Credit Cards

Your bank or another bank may offer you a credit card. It will be issued based on the applicant's credit history, or if there is no credit history in this country, it can be issued based on a relative's credit history.

Credit cards are very convenient, because you can charge items and pay later. However, credit cards can be very troublesome *because* you have to pay later! Some people get into trouble because they charge items freely, and then cannot repay the entire amount at the end of the month. For each month a balance (i.e., unpaid amount) is kept, interest is charged. Shop for a low-interest credit card (9-13%), and use it only when truly necessary. Beware of credit card offers that have a low interest rate (e.g. 4-6%) for a few months, and then change to a high interest rate (e.g., 18-20%).

## Debit Cards

Your bank may offer a debit card. You may use it instead of cash to pay for items; the cost of the item is taken directly out of your bank account, with no charge to you. This may be more convenient than carrying cash or writing checks. Just be sure to deduct the amount from your check register. Many grocery stores, drug stores, etc., permit the use of a debit card.

## IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICES GENERAL INFORMATION

This is a summary of eligibility requirements. If you are an **international student**, please read this information **carefully** since it will help you to keep your status. The International Education, Enrichment and Exchange Center will assist you with INS matters.

**Department of Homeland Security**, three Bureaus share immigration authority.

1. **USCIS:** The Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services is responsible for most of the application and petition adjudications that had been done by INS.
2. **ICE:** The Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement is responsible for immigration investigations, detention, removal, intelligence, and SEVIS.
3. **CBP:** The Bureau of Customs and Border Protection is responsible for immigration inspections at U.S. ports of entry, for the Border Patrol, and for the Customs Service.

### SEVIS Reporting on International Students and Exchange Visitors

#### New Legislation

Recently enacted laws and regulations on immigration reform, border security, and the threat of terrorism require educational institutions to record and report more information about international students and exchange visitors. The Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) is a joint venture of the Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the Department of State, and the Department of Education to improve tracking and reporting of “Non-immigrant” students (F-1 and M-1 visas) and exchange visitors (J-1 visas).

The Institution is required by law to collect record and/or report the following data:

- I-20/IAP-66 form information
- Name, place and date of birth, country of citizenship, current
- Status (full-time or part-time)
- Date of commencement of studies
- Number of credits completed each year
- Degree and program of study
- Practical training (begin/end dates)
- Termination date and reason, if known
- Date of issuance of visa and classification
- Current academic and program status of alien

- Any disciplinary actions taken against the alien because of criminal conviction
- Information on the date of entry and the port of entry.

**To maintain F-1 status, students must:**

**The student is solely responsible for maintaining legal status.**

1. Maintain a valid passport. Most international students, scholars, and their dependents must have a valid, current passport to enter the U.S. Passports must remain valid at all times. Passport revalidation or reissuance is offered by most foreign embassies and consulates in the U.S. For contact information, please visit [www.embassy.org](http://www.embassy.org)  
VISA - Many people confuse the terms "visa," "status," and "I-94". A visa is a stamp in a passport. This visa stamp is obtained from a U.S. consulate or embassy and is shown to an immigration officer at the U.S. port of entry. Status refers to a person's legal status in the U.S. (F-1, F-1, J-1, and J-2). The I-94 is the white or green Arrival/Departure Record typically stapled into the passport. A visa is valid for the indicated number of entries into the U.S. until its date of expiration. The visa is permitted to expire while in the U.S. However, in most cases, a valid visa is required for reentry to the U.S.
2. Attend the school you are authorized to attend.
3. Pursue a full course of study and make normal progress towards the completion of the course of study. If additional time is needed to complete a course of study at Fisk University, the student must apply for an extension of stay with appropriate extension recommendations from the academic adviser or department head. A full course of study is defined in the regulations as follows:
  - Undergraduate student: at least 12 credit hours per term.
  - Graduate student: at least 9 credit hours per term.
  - Students in postsecondary language (ESL), liberal arts, fine arts, or other non-vocational program which confers associate or other degrees: at least 18 clock hours of instruction a week.
4. Apply for extensions of program at least 30 days before the completion date on the current I-20. The student is responsible for knowing the expiration date of the following items: passport, student visa, I-94, and I-20. Students should seek extensions as necessary.
5. Follow USCIS procedures for changing from one program or education level to another (e.g., from BA degree to MA degree; see IEEEC for details).
6. Follow USCIS procedures for transferring from one school to another (see IEEEC for details).
7. Limit on-campus employment to 20 hours a week while school is in session (full-time on-campus employment is permitted during vacation

- periods such as summer, as long as the student was enrolled full-time the prior term and intends to be full-time the following term).
8. Refrain from off-campus employment without authorization. Limit off-campus employment (with authorization through economic hardship or part-time practical training) to 20 hours per week while school is in session.
  9. Make required address reports.
  10. Obey state and federal laws.
  11. Depart from the U.S. in a timely manner.

### **Employment for International Students**

To maintain legal status, students should follow the procedures outlined here. Unauthorized employment is illegal and punishable by deportation. Students should not expect to finance their studies by working in the U.S. (other than on-campus teaching or research assistant positions). Note: Employment (including assistantships) generates taxable income. Nonimmigrants in F or J status are required by law to file an income tax statement at the end of each year, regardless of the source or amount of income.

**On-Campus Employment** is defined as employment on the school's premises, but it can be with an on-location commercial firm providing on-campus services for the school's students. On campus employment at the graduate level can also be at an off campus location educationally affiliated with the school.

1. Employment is limited to 20 hours per week while school is in session; full-time employment is permitted during official school breaks (i.e., when school is not in session) and during the student's annual vacation.
2. The student must be pursuing a full course of study, or, if employed during annual vacation, intend to register for the next academic term at the school.
3. Employment may begin no sooner than 30 days prior to the start of classes for new students with initial entry to a new program.
4. Transfer student employment can only occur at the school responsible for the student's SEVIS record. However, before the release date, he/she can only work at the transfer-out-school; after the release date, he/she can only work at the transfer-in-school.

### **Jobs that qualify as on-campus employment**

**Employment by the university** – On campus employment performed for the school is usually acceptable, whether the employment is in the library, the computer center, or an office. Also, employment required for scholarships, fellowships, and assistantships is considered on-campus employment.

**Other employment on the school's premises** – Employment on-campus also includes employment with private or commercial firms that provide services directly to students. This could include a bookstore, a cafeteria or a copy center. However, employment with a construction company contracted to build a housing unit, for example, is not acceptable as on-campus employment since the construction company does not provide services directly to students.

**Employment Off-Campus that Qualifies as On-Campus** - The regulations allow employment off-campus to be considered on-campus employment if (1) the location is educationally affiliated with the school, (2) the educational affiliation is associated with the school's established curriculum or is related to a graduate level research project which the school has contracted to perform, and (3) the employment is an integral part of the student's program of study. Documentation is required from the academic adviser or the department head certifying the appropriate points.

**Off-Campus Employment** - authorization, based on economic necessity, may be granted if on-campus work is not available. F-1 students apply for off-campus work authorization through BCIS with proper certification from IEEEC. Employment must not interfere with studies or unduly delay degree completion.

### **Practical Training**

Practical training provides F-1 students the opportunity to gain work experience related to their field of study.

### **CPT: Curricular Practical Training**

- For F-1 students who have been enrolled full-time for at least 9 months and have not completed studies
- Must be for academic credit or degree requirement
- Requires a firm job offer and authorization from an IEEEC International Student staff adviser
- No fee (allow 2 weeks to process)
- Students must apply two weeks in advance of the anticipated start date

American companies and employers greatly consider internships when evaluating their applicants. Internships are available on and off campus, please contact the professors or instructors in your field of study for more information about internships. Visit the Career Center and IEEEC to discuss your status concerning any internship or curricular practical training programs which interest you.

## **OPT: Optional Practice Training**

- For F-1 students who have been enrolled full-time for at least 9 months
- Must directly relate to student's field of study
- Up to 12 months of full-time employment
- No firm job offer required
- Student must receive the Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from BCIS before beginning work
- Student may apply up to 120 days prior to the completion of studies
- \$175 fee (Allow 3-4 months to process)

F-1 students who have maintained valid status have the opportunity to work in the U.S. twelve months during your program or after completion of studies. If you have not used up your 12-month quota of OPT before graduation, you may use the full year afterward to work. This called post-completion OPT. This is a great opportunity to utilize the Fisk degree for which you will have worked so hard.

**CAUTION! Employment without proper authorization is a violation of your status and can lead to serious consequences. Before you start any kind of employment off campus, you should first consult IEEEC.**

## **Social Security Card/Number**

The social Security Number is the most widely used identification number in the U.S. The integrity of Social Security numbers is of great importance. Students must apply in person at the Social Security Administration Office (4527 Nolensville Road, phone: 781-5800) and present their original passport, I-20 form, and I-94 card.

## **On –Campus Employment**

An F-1 student requesting a SSN for on-campus employment must now prove he or she has (or has been offered) an on-campus job, and must show evidence of that employment or a SSN will not be assigned.

The following two documents are required as evidence of F-1 student on-campus employment only (it is not required for F-1 students for curricular practical training (CPT) or those students who have an employment authorization document (EAD) from DHS):

1. A letter – typed or handwritten – on school letterhead from the designated school official (DSO)
2. A recently issued pay slip or pay stub from the F-1 student's employer. If the student does not have a pay slip or stub, the student must provide a letter from the employer on the employer's letterhead that provides employment verification namely: Identity of student employee
3. Nature of job the student is, or will be, engaged in

4. Anticipated or actual employment start date
5. Number of hours the student is expected to work
6. Employer identification number (EIN)
7. Employer contact information, including the telephone number and the name of the F-1 student's immediately supervisor
8. Original signature and signatory's title
9. Date

An F-1 student may work while the social security number application is being processed.

## **Taxes**

A nonimmigrant in F or J status must file paperwork with the Internal Revenue Services (IRS), even if there is no U.S. source of income.

It is very important to remain in strict compliance with U.S. tax regulations. Individuals in F-1 or J-1 status who receive a U.S. source of income that is subject to withholding, must file annually by April 15<sup>th</sup>; others must file by June 15<sup>th</sup>. Records should be kept for five years. International students (with the exception of permanent residents, resident aliens for tax purposes, or those married to U.S. citizens) must file a 1040 –NR Form for Non-Residents. Non – resident aliens should not file forms 1040, 1040A or 1040-EZ. IEEEC does not offer tax assistance. Tax laws are subject to change. Therefore, students should check each year to know the current legal requirements.

## **Tax terms to know**

*Non-immigrant:* an individual with a permanent residency abroad and are staying in the U.S temporarily, as in the case of an international student.

*Non-resident:* an individual staying in the U.S temporarily (usually less than six years). Although required to file an annual federal income tax return, non-resident aliens pay tax only on income that is from U.S. sources.

*Resident:* an individual who is a U.S. citizen, a U.S. permanent resident, or a non-immigrant who has been in the U.S sufficiently long to be considered a resident. Residency is determined by the Substantial Presence Test.

*Social Security*: a term used to describe an agency, a card, and two types of taxes. The Social Security Administration (SSA) is an agency under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The card bears a unique nine-digit identification number and is issued to qualified individuals primarily to determine eligibility for social benefits earned through various forms of employment. The number on the card is also used by the Internal Revenue Service for data collection and record keeping.

*Substantial Presence Test*: a formula devised by the IRS to determine whether an alien is a resident or non-resident for tax purposes. All F-1 students do not take the test during their first five calendar years in the U.S. After this period, individuals who spend 183 days a year or more in the U.S. become “residents for tax purposes” for that year.

*Tax treaty*: an agreement between the U.S and another country to determine how the country’s nationals will be taxed when temporarily staying in the U.S. A treaty can confer certain tax benefits. However, not all residents of a tax-treaty country qualify for tax benefits.

*Withholding*: deduction of a given amount of an individual’s salary for purposes of meeting that individual’s income tax obligation. Amounts are deducted by the employer and paid directly to the U.S. Treasury on the individual’s behalf.

## **Important Documents for Daily Life**

### **Health Insurance Identification Card**

All international students and their dependents residing in the U.S. must purchase Fisk University’s international student health insurance plan. Students may select an alternate plan if IEEEC staff determines that adequate coverage is provided. To request a waiver, students must present to IEEEC documents translated into English that outline the benefits of the alternate insurance plan. If the benefits do not equal or exceed the ones listed in Fisk’s insurance plan, or if the student fails to request a waiver, the student will be enrolled in the Fisk University insurance plan. Note: Health care in the U.S. is not subsidized or paid for by the U.S. government. Non-immigrant students are not eligible for public assistance programs such as Medicaid or TennCare.

### **Student Identification Card**

You will obtain a Fisk University student ID. This identification card has your picture, your date of birth, and your social security number (the University will issue you a temporary number until you receive a social security number).

## State of Tennessee Identification Card

Since the state no longer issues state ID card for students, students, who do not drive still need identification. Carrying a passport around is not the best idea. Please refer to this site to get a student ID card.

[www.statravel.com/statravel/cards/cards\\_ISIC](http://www.statravel.com/statravel/cards/cards_ISIC)

## Transportation Information

### Transportation Needs at Fisk

Access to public transportation can be very limited near Fisk. If you intend to live off campus, please be prepared to provide your own transportation to and from campus. In most cases, this will mean purchasing a car. Freshmen are discouraged from bringing vehicles. Students are responsible for their own transportation for personal use.

### Buses

The Metro Transit Authority (MTA) operates approximately 35 bus routes. For MTA information, maps, and schedules, phone 862-5950 or visit [www.nashvillemta.org](http://www.nashvillemta.org). Taxi service is available for local transportation needs. See the Yellow pages phone book for taxi listings. An airport taxi is \$25-\$30 on average. Airport shuttle service is available from InShuttle Transportation, Inc. to Fisk University and area hotels. Average cost: \$12 one-way, \$24 roundtrip. For reservation, please visit website [www.incaretransportation.com](http://www.incaretransportation.com) or call local number 615-255-4032 or email: [info@incaretransportation.com](mailto:info@incaretransportation.com) for more information.

### Driver's License

*Tennessee's new driver license law went into effect on October 1st. In addition to eliminating the driving certificate, it created a temporary driver license for foreign nationals with a "specified period of authorized stay." The public chapter can be read here: <http://www.legislature.state.tn.us/bills/currentqa/Chapter/PC0194.pdf>*

*The intent of the new law, as gleaned from legislative debate, was that all noncitizens who are lawfully present could obtain either a full or temporary license. For those eligible for only a temporary license, it would be valid for the period of authorized presence, but not less than one year.*

**Question:** Why did Tennessee's driver license policy change?

**Answer:** Tennessee's new driver license policy reflects the need to provide the highest level of safety to its citizens, both in homeland security and public safety.

By requiring proof of U.S. citizenship or lawful permanent residency, the state lessens the ability to fraudulently obtain a Tennessee driver license.

**Question:** Who is a U.S. Citizen?

**Answer:** A person is a U.S. citizen either by birth or through naturalization.

**Question:** What does lawful permanent residency mean?

**Answer:** A lawful permanent resident is an individual who has been granted permission by the United States government to reside permanently in the country.

**Question:** When did the U.S. citizenship or lawful permanent residency requirement go into effect in Tennessee?

**Answer:** May 29, 2004. Anyone applying for a Tennessee driver license as of May 29, 2004 must show proof of either U.S. citizenship or lawful permanent residency.

**Question:** What do I need to bring to the driver license station when I apply for a Tennessee driver license?

**Answer:** In addition to proof of either U.S. citizenship or lawful permanent residency, all original issue applicants, new and returning residents must provide two forms of <http://www.tennessee.gov/safety/driverlicense/dlidentify.htm> [proof of identity](#) and two forms of <http://www.tennessee.gov/safety/driverlicense/dlproof.htm> [Tennessee residency](#) (click links for a list of acceptable documents for each requirement). Also, anyone issued an initial Tennessee driver license since January 2001 must meet U.S. citizenship or lawful permanent residency requirements upon their first renewal.

- Passport (Valid)
- Passports, not issued in English, must be translated and accompanied by a Certificate of Accurate Translation. Passports are not acceptable if expired.
- Immigration Naturalization Service documentation
- *Certificate of Naturalization* N-550, N-570, N-578
- *Certificate of Citizenship* N-560, N-561, N-645 Northern Mariana Card, American Indian Card
- U.S. Citizen Identification Card (I-179, I-197) Temporary Resident Identification Card (I-688)
- *Travel Documents* - Record of Arrival and Departure (I-94)

- I-551
- U.S. Re-entry Permit (I-327)
- Employment Authorization card (I-688A, I-688-B, I-766)
- *Refugee I-94* Record of Arrival and Departure stamped "Refugee", not likely to be in a foreign passport
- Refugee Travel Document (I-571)

**Question:** When applying for a driver license in Tennessee, who is required to show proof of U.S. citizenship or lawful permanent residency?

**Answer:**

- Original Issue Applicants : Any person applying for a driver license in Tennessee for the first time including those who may currently hold a "photo identification only" license.
- New Residents : Individuals moving to Tennessee from another state, even if they have a valid driver license issued from the other state.
- Returning Residents : Former licensed drivers in Tennessee moving back to the state.
- Anyone issued an initial Tennessee driver license since January 1, 2001 upon their first renewal

Tennessee's new law requires that anyone issued a Tennessee driver's license since January 1, 2001, as well as first-time applicants, be required to provide documentation they are either a U.S. citizen or a lawful permanent resident at the time of their first renewal. In these instances, you may not renew by mail or by the internet; you will be required to visit a Driver License Station.

**Question:** My Tennessee driver license has been issued since January 1, 2001. Why do I have to show proof of U.S. citizenship or lawful permanent residency?

**Answer:** The events of September 11, 2001 have forever changed the world, and especially in the United States. It was hoped that the federal government would take the initiative to strengthen the positive identification of our fellow citizens and lawful visitors. When it became obvious this was not going to happen, it became our responsibility to ensure that our citizens were properly identified and accounted.

**Question:** If I'm not a U.S. citizen or a lawful permanent resident can I still drive in Tennessee?

**Answer:** Yes, persons not meeting the requirements for a driver license may apply for a Certificate for Driving beginning July 1, 2004. A Certificate for Driving allows only qualified individuals to operate a motor vehicle in Tennessee and enhances safety on Tennessee's roadways by verifying all drivers know the rules of the road.

**Question:** Who is eligible for a Certificate for Driving?

**Answer:**

- Persons who have temporary, legal documents from the U.S. government (work visas, educational visas, etc.)
- Persons who do not meet the eligibility requirement for a Tennessee driver license, but can provide proof of identity and residence in Tennessee.

**Question:** What is required to obtain a Certificate for Driving?

**Answer:** Two forms of proof of identity and Tennessee residency are required to get a Certificate for Driving. A list of acceptable documents showing positive proof of identity and proof Tennessee residency is found in the <http://www.tennessee.gov/safety/dlhandbook/menu.htm> [Tennessee Driver Handbook](#). (NOTE: Due to the large file size of the handbook, download time may be slow. As an alternative, please visit our HTML chart of acceptable documents that may be used as <http://www.tennessee.gov/safety/driverlicense/dlidentify.htm> [proof of identity](#) and <http://www.tennessee.gov/safety/driverlicense/dlproof.htm> [proof of Tennessee residency](#)

**Question:** Can I use a Certificate for Driving as a means of identification?

**Answer:** A Certificate for Driving may not be used as a form of identification. It cannot be used to board a plane, purchase a gun, rent a vehicle or any other activity that requires identification.

**Question:** When can I get a Certificate for Driving?

**Answer:** The Tennessee Department of Safety began issuing Certificates for Driving on July 1, 2004 at all <http://www.tennessee.gov/safety/driverlicense/dllocation.htm> [driver license testing stations](#).

**Question:** Will other states accept a Certificate for Driving as a valid document for operating a vehicle in its state?

**Answer:** Yes. A Certificate for Driving simply ensures a person has been properly tested and understands how to operate a motor vehicle.

**Question:** What steps has the Department of Safety taken since the new driver license policy took effect?

**Answer:** TDOS has instructed its driver license examiners on the new qualifications required to obtain a license. In addition to instruction of acceptable documents, all frontline employees have received training on how to spot potentially fraudulent documents. Driver license employees also greet driver

license customers and will check to make sure they have the required documents before they get in line for services.

**Question:** What can I do if I have additional questions?

**Answer:** Please call the department toll free at 1-866-368-6335 or send an e-mail to <mailto:cfid.help@state.tn.us?subject=Certificate%20for%20Driving%20Question>  
[cfid.help@state.tn.us](mailto:cfid.help@state.tn.us).

Tennessee Secretary of State web site: <http://www.state.tn.us/safety>  
[www.state.tn.us/safety](http://www.state.tn.us/safety).

### **Car Registration**

New or used vehicles must be registered in the state of Tennessee with the Davidson County Clerk, phone 862-6050. Registration requires title of ownership and the inspection Certificate. All vehicles must pass an annual emission inspection before registration. For locations and requirements of inspection centers, phone 399-8995 or visit <http://www.state.tn.us/safety/new.htm>  
[www.state.tn.us/safety/new.htm](http://www.state.tn.us/safety/new.htm).

### **Driving Regulations**

Laws of vehicle registration, licensing of drivers, and traffic regulations are written and enforced by each individual state. Drunk driver's laws are strictly enforced in the state of Tennessee. If a police officer finds that a driver has even a relatively small amount of alcohol in the blood, the driver may be charged with Driving Under the Influence (DUI). The minimum sentence for a first offense includes a mandatory 48-hour jail sentence and a stiff fine. **DO NOT DRINK AND DRIVE.**

### **Automobile Insurance**

Freshmen are discouraged from bringing vehicles. If you choose to purchase an automobile during your stay, please be aware that in the U.S., an automobile owner is **FULLY** responsible for any damages or injury from an accident involving your car or vehicle. This is true even if another person is driving your car. Accidents can happen at any time. If you own and drive a car, Tennessee law states that you must buy automobile insurance. Note: Before you buy automobile insurance, call several companies to compare their prices. You may do some initial investigation of automobile insurance costs by looking on the Internet or in the Yellow pages phone book under "Insurance".

### **Going Back Home**

Going home after spending several months in the U.S. might feel awkward. After adapting to the American culture and language, you will face a sudden shift in your own tradition and language. If you stay in the U.S. long enough, the shock of returning home can be as powerful as the shock of your first few months in the U.S.

Upon leaving the U.S., the I-94 is taken at the point of departure. In order to re-enter the U.S. in F or J status, the following must be presented to an immigration officer at the port of entry: a current I-20 (appropriately endorsed for travel), a valid passport, and an appropriate valid visa. F-1 students participating in optional practical training must also show their employment authorization document (EAD). Most nonimmigrant in F or J status traveling to Canada, Mexico, or a contiguous territory (excluding Cuba) for less than 30 days will have their visa automatically revalidated provided they have maintained lawful status. Aside from the situation described above, a visa needs to be valid for entry purposes. Expired visas must be renewed for reentry. Nonimmigrant in F or J status must obtain a new visa from a U.S. consulate or embassy overseas. A new I-94, stamped "D/S" (for Duration of Status) is issued when re-entering the U.S. Any family member entering the U.S. separately needs an I-20 of his or her own.

When traveling to a country other than the home country, the student may need an entry visa to enter that country. For a list of embassy/consulate websites, visit <http://www.embassy.org>.