

Lone Star College System

International Student Handbook

2011-2012

International Programs and Services (IPS)

www.Lonestar.edu/ips

Lone Star College System

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT HANDBOOK

Dear International Student:

Welcome to the Lone Star College System (LSCS). We are comprised of **five** colleges and **seven** centers. We are a fully accredited public institution and offer two-year degrees; specialty certificates and lower division transfer programs to four-year colleges and universities. We are an "open admission" system and do not charge an application fee or mandate specific qualifications for admission. We do not require the TOEFL test. All locations are primarily on the north and northwest quadrant of the city and/or the metropolitan area of Houston, Texas. (Please see maps on the last page.)

The purpose of this handbook is to provide you, the international student, with some basic information. More detailed information and forms can be obtained at our website, www.LoneStar.edu/ips. In addition, the international advisor at the campus location you select will provide a special welcome and mandatory orientation session. A list of the advisors at the various campus locations are can be found here: <http://www.lonestar.edu/international-student-advising.htm>

Immigration and Visa Information

International students can enter and stay in the United States during their studies. They are expected to be full time students and be in good status with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Service. Students are expected to leave the U.S. once they complete their studies.

To attend our institution, **you must have an F1 visa.** You can apply for an F1 visa in your native country from the U.S. Embassy or Consulate, **or** you can apply for or change your current visa to an F1 visa in this country by contacting the international advisor at the campus location of your choice.

To obtain an F1 visa in your native country or in the U.S., you will need to provide the following:

- Proof of sufficient financial support for at least one year
- Permanent foreign address (also local address if available)
- List of dependents (if any), birth date, citizenship country, birth country, gender
- High School or College transcript and/or diploma (in English)
- Sevis Form F901 Fee Receipt
- International Student Application
- Completed I-20 form (prepared by the International advisor after review of the above documents)
- College admission letter (prepared by the International advisor after review of the above documents))

To transfer your F1 visa from another institution, you will need to provide the following:

- Copy of your current I-20 and past I-20s (if any)
- Completion of our college transfer form
- Proof of financial support (if more than one year old, new support documents)
- High School or College transcript and/or diploma (in English)

- International Student Application
- Copy of your passport
- Copy of your I-94
- Copy of your visa

Coming to America

Houston, Texas, is one of the largest cities in the United States. It has a population around 3 million people and is approximately 100 miles across and growing. It is a port city famous for its petrochemical industry, its diverse population, and its world famous medical center.

The **weather** is mostly hot and humid, (90+ degrees) with sporadic rain, for about nine months per year. Our winters are mild with occasional days/nights just above freezing. Please bring appropriate **clothing and personal effects**.

Bring enough **money** to cover your living expenses for at least one month, including housing, food, transportation, incidentals and money for tuition/fees, books and supplies. Make sure you have arrangements to get additional funds as necessary. You must have enough money to cover at least one year of your living and educational costs. We have many international banks to assist you with money transfer or other banking needs. (Also see page 4)

Houston has two **airports**: The George Bush Houston Intercontinental Airport (Bush Airport) is the closest airport to our locations. (See map on last page.) You will most likely fly to that airport. If you must arrange temporary accommodations, you may wish to select housing near the campus of your choice. Public transportation is sometimes limited.

Transportation from Bush Airport to your temporary or permanent housing and/or your campus location may be limited. There is an airport shuttle service to certain areas of town and taxi service. The Houston bus system (Metro) does not service the airport but may be available once you have entered their service area. Your best solution is to have friends or relatives pick you up at the airport. (Also see page 4)

American culture can be surprising and shocking. Try to do some research on the American culture and specifically on the area where your campus is located (Texas, Houston...) before you arrive. If you currently have friends or relatives in this area, you should seek their advice as well. (Also see page 6)

The United States, and specifically Houston, Texas, can be a long way from home. You may feel **“homesick” and lonely**. The best way to minimize this is to **socialize** with other students and/or contact your international advisor who can help you with campus and off campus activities and student mentors. (Also see pages 5,6)

If you have an **F2 spouse**, he/she may not attend school or work. However, your spouse may qualify to change his/her visa to allow for work. Generally, your **F2 child** can attend public school up through the 12th grade or high school graduation, but he/she cannot attend college without changing his/her F2 visa to an F1 visa. In addition, an F2 child must change his F2 status when he/she reaches 21 years of age.

The **International Advisor** at your selected campus is your best resource. Please also refer to the numerous internet links referenced throughout this handbook. If you have any questions or concerns contact the international advisor immediately. Please personally see the international advisor as soon as possible after your arrival. You may also have the immigration officer contact the advisor if you are experiencing any difficulties entering the United States.

Living Requirements

We encourage students to arrive in Houston several days before their program start date in order to locate off-campus in-district housing. Normally, thirty days before your report date on your I-20 is the earliest time you can arrive in the United States. Temporary housing is available at a number of hotels and extended stay motels in the area of your chosen campus. Many times temporary housing is the best alternative until you get settled and decide which campus you will be attending. These are common and local accommodations:

Best Western	Ph: 1-800-780-7234	www.bestwestern.com
Holiday Inn	Ph: 1-800-HOLIDAY	www.holidayinn.com
Choice Hotels	Ph: 1-800-4-CHOICE	www.choicehotels.com
Amerisuites	Ph: 1-800-833-1516	www.amerisuites.com
Lodges of America	Ph: 1-800-951-7829	www.lodgeamerica.com

The type of housing you seek whether it be temporary housing or long term may depend on how long you plan to be here. If you only plan to stay a few days or one or two weeks, you will probably want to stay in a motel or hotel. If you are staying for a few weeks or few months, you may wish to consider a corporate apartment or suite. Most regular apartments have one-year leases, but some offer six- or nine-month leases. A few apartments will offer month-to-month leases, but you will probably have to pay extra for it. You probably will not want to consider buying a house, condominium or townhouse unless you will be here at least more than one year.

Lease - Regardless of which option is chosen, there should be a written lease defining exactly what is included in the rent and who is responsible for what in the arrangement. Verbal agreements or arrangements are difficult to enforce in U.S. courts. Also, American courts will generally rule in favor of what is in a written agreement over verbal promises implied or inferred from the landlord. ***READ YOUR LEASE CAREFULLY AND COMPLETELY BEFORE SIGNING IT!***

Application for Rental - Many apartment complexes require that you fill out an application for rental and pay an application fee before you actually sign the lease. Only take this step if you actually intend to live in a specific apartment because it is sometimes difficult to get this fee refunded. If the landlord rejects your application, (s)he is required to return the deposit, but may not return it if you reject the apartment. Make a copy of the application, and get a receipt for the application

Things to Consider - In general, there are many things to consider when choosing a place to live in Houston. Among the factors you may wish to consider are: *closeness to the college, cost of the housing, neighborhood characteristics, resources for children, and length of stay recommendation of friends and International Advisor.*

Ways to Find Housing - One of the best ways to find information and advice about off-campus housing is to ask friends and other off-campus renters. They can share information about the place that they live, and provide the pros and cons of a particular area. When you find a place that interests you, it is also a good idea to ask residents or the complex/area how they like living there. Other ways of finding housing include: ***Newspapers***, the *Houston Chronicle* is the city of Houston's newspaper. They have ads in the classified section and advertising elsewhere in the paper. Their website is <http://www.houstonchronicle.com/> or <http://www.chron.com/>, ***Greensheet*** is a free "newspaper" consisting entirely of classified ads, and is found in grocery stores and other businesses around town. It has sections devoted to housing, furniture, cars and other things for sale, and ads concerning other items and services, ***Locator Services***. There are a number of apartment locator services in Houston. Locators usually offer their services free; their fees are paid by the apartment complexes. If you decide to enlist the assistance of an apartment locator, make sure you understand what their service entails. Apartment locators in Houston include:

Houston Apartment Finders

Apartment Locators

Apartments.com

Houston Association of Realtors

<http://www.apartmentfinderhouston.com/>

<http://www.apartmentlocators.com/>

<http://www.apartments.com/>

<http://www.har.com/>.

This organization can help you find a realtor if you are interested in buying a house or condominium.

Local Utility Information

Most apartments require that you pay some of your *utility bills/costs* and make arrangements for starting the service. Make arrangements for connection in advance, as some utilities (electric, gas, water, garbage) take several days to connect or install. You can prevent problems with your bills by simply reading your own meter to check the amount of utilities consumed. Each city provides a brochure explaining rates and billing procedures. Check for local agencies in the telephone yellow pages.

www.yellowpages.com

Houston School Districts

Attendance in *public* schools is based on the area in which you live, and their quality varies. *Private* schools usually are more costly and do not have geographic requirements, but you must decide how you will get the child to school and how that fits into your commute. Check with your local school districts for more school information. Also, some private schools have a "wait" list.

Houston Transit

Transportation - is an important factor in the deciding where you live and what college you attend within the Lone Star College System. Not all locations have a viable transit system that can be utilized. Check with your International Advisor to verify transportation options at the different college locations.

Metro - offers two kinds of bus service - Local and Commuter. Local - Serves mostly city streets, stopping at every other corner along its route. Almost all Local routes are identified with one and two-digit numbers (for example, the 2 Bellaire or 82 Westheimer). <http://www.ridemetro.org/>

Commuter - Weekday service for commuters headed Downtown and to other business districts. There are four Commuter fare zones, each of which is based on the distance the buses must travel from origin to destination. <http://www.ridemetro.org/>

Medical and Insurance

When moving to the United States it is vital that students get properly advised concerning the selection of medical insurance plans, property protection coverage, term life or critical illness coverage, personal accident, travel, dental or maternity plans offered by Professional Insurance Agencies. LSCS requires all F-1 students with a Lone Star College I-20 to purchase health insurance offered through the district. Students covered fully by their National Health Plan, Embassy, Employer, covered on an LSCS approved Exchange Program that is valid and recognized for medical benefits in the U.S. or covered on another plan in which insurance coverage is equivalent to, or better than, the district's mandatory policy may apply for an insurance waiver. Please check with your international advisor for more information regarding the plan or the waiver application process.

Banks and Financial Institutions

Banking Organization in USA, are here to help consumers search and shop for personal finance services including Banking, Mortgage and Loans, Insurance, Real Estate Home and Credit Card services. You are free to open a banking account at any bank of your choosing. In deciding on a bank, keep in mind that banks offer a variety of accounts. Some accounts require a minimum deposit, fees per check, monthly service fee, and some offer free automated banking. You can visit bank websites and/or call different banks to see which bank offers the best plans and has convenient locations. www.houston-banks.com or www.yellowpages.com

Legal Information

Free Legal Tax Services in the Houston Area:

Lone Star Legal Foundation
Houston Volunteer Lawyers Program
University of Houston Legal Aid Clinic
South Texas College of Law Legal Aid

phone: 713-652-0077
phone: 713-228-0732
phone: 713-743-2094
phone: 713-652-0009

Taxes

The Internal Revenue Service offers free advice and answers to international tax questions. Contact the IRS National Office Hotline at (202) 874-1460 for assistance. This is not a toll free number. Toll free, call 1-800-IRS-1040, or visit the IRS website www.irs.gov or ftp.irs.gov and ask for Publication 519, U.S. Tax Guide for Aliens (about 66 pages long). From a fax you can get the document faxed to you by calling 703-368-9694. This is a toll number.

Religious Affiliations

Today, virtually every denomination is active in Houston. The Houston 1994-1995 *Yellow Pages* has 17 pages of listings for churches and other places of worship, classified under 121 denominational or quasi-denominational headings.
www.yellowpages.com

Shopping and Grocery Retailers

The vast Houston area is a shopper's delight: everything from mega malls to swank centers to international neighborhoods bursting with shopping opportunities. If you're not familiar with the shopping landscape utilize this web-site to get started
www.houston-guide.com or www.yellowpages.com

Houston Museums & Galleries

Houston shows its devotion to the arts through a full complement of art museums and critically acclaimed galleries. Houston's Museum District offers a range of museums, galleries, and art and cultural institutions, including the City's major museums. Approximately 4 million people visit institutions in the Museum District every year. Spend a day in the Museum District and be inspired. Check the yellow pages for listings and information. www.yellowpages.com

Dining North Houston

www.houstonrestaurants.com

<http://houston.citysearch.com/?brand=sidewalk>

<http://www.chron.com/entertainment/dining/>

<http://www.houston.com/>

Cultural Activities

Houston's cultural diversity is manifest in a variety of culture-specific arts organizations: *Kuumba House*, founded in 1983, is a multi disciplinary, Multi cultural arts center serving inner city populations through dance, theatre, singing, experimental art performances, and classes. *Talento Bilingue de Houston*, created in 1977, provides cultural enrichment in the Hispanic community through educational programs and through bilingual (English-Spanish) productions of works by major Spanish-language writers and translations of more familiar works. *Multi cultural Education and Counseling through the Arts* (MECA), a center of arts education in the inner city, exposes youth to the arts through in-school, after-school,

and summer programs offering low-cost or free instruction in ballet, jazz, ethnic dance, vocal and instrumental music, and visual and theater arts. *The Ensemble Theatre* offers programs to aid in developing black theater professionals.

Other Multi cultural arts groups include Ancestral Films, Community Artists' Collective, Community Music Center of Houston, Festival Chicano, Houston Caribbean Festival, and Jazz Education, Inc. For information on Multi cultural groups, contact the Cultural Arts Council of Houston/Harris County at 713-527-9330. www.houstonculture.org

College Requirements

Registration

As an International student you will be assigned an international student advisor. Advisors' responsibilities include providing assistance on immigration matters, assisting the student in fulfilling their academic goals and coordinating all campus and community services available to international students.

When you arrive at LSCS you will be required to take a placement test. There are two types of tests available at LSCS. The first is an English as a Second Language test which measures English proficiency; the second is a college placement test which measures skills in math, reading and writing. The results of these tests will tell the advisor which courses are best for you. Everyone will be required to take a test and the international student advisor is the authority who determines which test is best for the student.

Once testing is complete the advisor will help you choose classes based on what you need in the **catalog** and what is available in the **schedule**. A catalog is a book that explains the policies and procedures of the college or university, the descriptions of courses offered and prerequisite requirements and what courses the student needs to graduate. A schedule is a booklet that is published each semester that lists the courses that are being offered that semester as well as the days and times the courses are offered. Some courses are offered only on the computer, they are called Distance Learning. International students are restricted to one Distance Learning course per semester.

After you choose your classes you must register for them. This is done on the computer and your advisor will help you. Once registration is complete you will receive a bill for the courses. You will be charged based on the number of credit hours you are taking. F1 visa students are required to take a minimum of 12 credit hours during the fall and spring semesters and pay international rates. The summer semester is optional. The bill will be paid in the business office. A payment plan is available. After the bill is paid you must go to the bookstore and buy your books and supplies. These should be purchased from the campus bookstore where your classes are taken. Federal financial aid is not available to international students; however private scholarships may be available at your campus. Contact the international advisor for information.

Orientation

All International students are required to attend an orientation session at the campus of their choice. The purpose of the orientation is to make you aware of the services available throughout the college system and community-at-large. Also the orientation will help you learn and understand your responsibilities as an international student and visitor of the United States. Please contact your advisor for the day and time of orientation.

Academic Expectations

The educational philosophy in the United States is different from most countries in the world. We believe that the student becomes a more creative thinker and problem solver if that person studies a wide range of courses including English, math history, science, art, and humanities. There are 3 types of courses in an American Liberal Arts education:

Core Courses: These courses encompass a breadth of classes including humanities, art, history and science.

Major Courses: These courses are specific to what you choose to study; for example business or engineering.

Elective Courses: These courses are classes you choose because they interest you.

Remember: Core Courses are your **breadth** of knowledge
 Major Courses are your **depth** of knowledge.
 Electives are your **choice** of knowledge.

In the United States, students are expected to attend each class and participate in discussions. For every hour you spend in class you are expected to spend 2 hours outside of class reading, studying and preparing for the next class. Some professors choose to take attendance others do not. Your education is your responsibility.

Students who do not maintain the minimum GPA required by LSCS, (which is usually a "C" average) will be placed on **academic warning, academic probation or academic suspension**. There are many resources at LSCS if you are placed into one of the above academic standings or to help you avoid this. Counselors, tutors and mentors are all available and free at LSCS for its students. You will be expected to utilize these resources to assist you in maintaining your academic level. Failure to do so may cause termination of your F1 status. Academic policies will be covered in detail during orientation.

University Transcript

If you attended a university in your home country, or received a degree in your home country, you may be able to have your transcript evaluated and coursework transferred to LSCS. Please talk with your international advisor to see if this option is going to be available and/or beneficial to you.

Campus Activities

There are many campus organizations and activities available at LSCS. When you pay your tuition and fees one of those fees is an activity fee. This fee pays for fun and entertainment at LSCS. It also helps fund student organizations. These include student government, intellectual organizations, service organizations, sports, and career organizations. You may be as active as you choose. The more you participate in campus life the less homesick you will become.

Transferring to Another College or University

It is important to keep your international advisor informed about your educational goals. Your international advisor can be the best resource for issues relating to transferring to another university. These issues include, among others, choosing the proper classes, meeting admissions deadlines, and applying for scholarships.

WARNING: Unfortunately, there are dishonest people who may offer to help you obtain admission to our institution for a fee. Please contact us directly if this happens. We do not charge a fee for your application or admission.

GENERALLY, your best resource for information is the international advisor at your selected campus, the various web links indicated in this handbook, but most importantly, the required orientation for new international students that will be given at your campus.

Texas Map

