

GUIDE FOR STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN STUDY USA

STUDY USA 2024-2025

Thursday 08 February 2024

STUDENT HANDBOOK

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DEAR STUDENT,

Congratulations, you will shortly be embarking on a year of study in the United States of America.

Study USA began in 1994 when nineteen students left Northern Ireland to study at eleven US colleges and universities. The programme was established by the Northern Ireland Training & Employment Agency - now known as the Department for the Economy. The British Council Northern Ireland assumed management of the programme in 2006. Since the programme began over 2000 students from Northern Ireland have participated.

This handbook provides a wealth of information relating to your time on the Study USA programme and your preparation for spending an academic year at an American college or university.

It is our hope that this handbook will be a helpful guide at various points throughout your year, whether you have a query about a programme requirement, need some help navigating the new academic system, or are thinking about ways to travel on a limited budget.

In addition to this resource, you will be able to access support in the form of a designated International Advisor on your respective US College/University, the Study USA team at The British Council Northern Ireland and US Student Support Advisor Dr Erin Hinson.

STUDY USA CONTACT DETAILS:

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SECTION ONE - TERMS OF PARTICIPATION

STUDY USA AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

Embarking on a year of study in the USA is an exciting prospect. It is important that you are fully aware of what is required of a participating student and what the aims and objectives of Study USA are before you commence the programme.

The main aim of Study USA is:

“To provide students from Northern Ireland with an external perspective, prepare them for a career in local business and enhance their prospects of securing full-time employment.”

“Successful Completion” will occur upon your return to final-year studies in Northern Ireland, after you have completed or achieved the following:

- A minimum 3.0 Grade Point Average (GPA) over the course of the year
- Thirty credits (12 credits related to your own subject, 12 leadership/communication/business related credits, and six elective credits)
- A business-related project to be supervised by a member of your home institution (where applicable)
- Five presentations on Northern Ireland (including economic, cultural and political aspects)
- A Personal Development Portfolio outlining your experiences during your time in the USA.

Failure to achieve “Successful Completion” as outlined above will mean that you will not receive the Certificate of Successful Completion or be invited to attend the Study USA Graduation Event.

Other Outcomes of *Study USA* are that students:

- Complete voluntary/community service whilst in the USA
- Promote a positive image of Northern Ireland in the United States - through responsible behaviour and good personal conduct.
- Raise the economic, cultural and political awareness of Northern Ireland in the USA
- Are provided with an outward-looking, international experience which will help in their personal growth and development.

FUNDING

Study USA is managed and administered by the British Council and funded by:

- The Department for the Economy
- USA Church-affiliated Universities through the waiver of tuition fees

A placement on Study USA represents a scholarship of approximately £35,000. Please keep in mind that this is a considerable investment on the part of the US institutions and DfE.

How the funding works

Your US Institution will waive your tuition fees (approximately £25,000). DfE provides, through the British Council, the following funding:

- Round Trip Flight to the USA
- Room and Board
- Books – (\$1100 allowance)
- Other core costs as specified by US Institution (application fees, activity costs etc.)

Your Financial Contribution

You will be responsible for the following costs:

- Visa application fee
- SEVIS fee
- Travel and medical insurance (It is your responsibility to purchase a policy which provides adequate cover for the year).
- Arrangements for holiday periods - Fall Break, Thanksgiving Break, Winter Break, Spring Break.
- Any extracurricular costs, e.g. art classes, music lessons, sports equipment.
- Any damage to dorm room.
- Lost key, replacement I.D. cards, parking, fines, etc.

Participant Fee

Those participants who currently do not receive a maintenance grant from Student Finance NI will be required to pay a £1,500 programme participant fee. This fee is waived for students who are in receipt of a maintenance grant for the current year.

Note: you will not be eligible to receive a student loan whilst in the USA.

Travel to and from the USA

The British Council will purchase one return flight to the USA, departing in August-September, returning the following April-June. The British Council's travel provider will provide you with your itinerary and log in information. You are advised to **check your flight departure times on your online itinerary** as flight schedules can change.

You may change the date of your flight home if desired. Please note that you are responsible for paying any charges associated with this direct to the travel provider.

Room and Board

Room and Board will be provided by your US Institution during term time. For participants this will mean living on campus in a shared dorm room, and, where possible, sharing with a US student of the same sex. As part of your Room & Board you will receive a weekly meal plan, this varies from college to college so please check with the US institution what is included within the plan before you arrive.

If you should decide to change your accommodation or meal plan whilst on campus **you are responsible for any extra costs incurred**. The British Council cannot provide additional funds to individual students for upgrades or personal trips and expenses.

You will be responsible for budgeting for your own meal plan and issued with a Meal Plan card or similar. We strongly advise that you do not use your Meal Plan card to purchase additional drinks/snacks.

During holidays, the majority of dorms on campus will close and it is important that you have sufficient funds to cover accommodation, food and other living expenses during these periods, or that you have made alternative arrangements. The British Council **does not** provide funding for food and accommodation outside term time.

We advise you to save sufficient funds before embarking on the year abroad to fund optional trips and excursions whilst in the USA.

Book Allowance

An allowance of \$1100 is paid directly to your US Institution, to contribute to your book costs for **both fall and spring semesters** throughout the academic year.

With regards to your book purchases, we recommend that you buy only essential textbooks and make full use of the library on campus. The British Council cannot increase the book allowance and you will need to prioritise and budget carefully.

The book allowance is for books only and does not automatically cover any additional materials such as Computer Equipment/Software, Stationary, Snacks, Clothing or any purchases required for elective classes/private tuition such as piano/guitar lessons, art supplies etc. If in doubt or where you feel an exception to this policy should be made for a mandatory item related to a class please contact a member of the Study USA team.

Visas, Part-Time Work Restrictions & Internships

You will be issued with either an F1 or J1 visa. An F1 visa permits paid employment **on campus only**, up to a maximum of 20 hours per week. If you wish to work over the summer in the USA, you will need to talk to your international student advisor at the US Institution about the possibility of **Optional Practical Training (OPT)**. OPT can permit you to obtain paid employment off campus for the summer provided it is related to your area of study. This must first be authorised at a campus level by your institution's International Student Advisor before going to USCIS for further approval. Please note that not all institutions will approve OPT requests due to interpretation of the visa legislation. OPT is not required where the internship is unpaid and can be completed within the 60-day grace period, provided no form of payment or benefit (accommodation, food, travel allowance) is being received.

Some students will be issued with a **J1** visa. Please note that the J1 student visa is not the same as J1 visas in different categories which are used to facilitate summer work programmes e.g. Camp America, or summer internships. With a J1 student visa paid employment is permitted **on campus only**, up to a maximum of 20 hours per week. Only in circumstances where a J1 student visa holder can demonstrate financial hardship would permission be granted via USCIS to source employment off campus. To complete an internship following completion of studies, permission must be sought from the International Student Advisor at your US institution before undertaking an internship in the form of Academic Training.

Travel and Medical Insurance

Each student is responsible for purchasing their own insurance for their year in the USA. We recommend that you purchase a Study Abroad/Gap Year policy which will meet the specific needs of your year abroad in a US Institution.

The policy that you purchase must be fully comprehensive to cover every possible emergency during your year in the USA, providing comprehensive cover for all travel arrangements (cancellation, curtailment, lost baggage, delayed departure, lost passport) as well as medical and dental cover whilst in the USA, (injury, illness, hospital confinement, personal accident, personal liability, legal expenses, death, repatriation of body/ashes). The policy must offer multi-trip cover.

The US Consulate offers information on appropriate travel insurance for students – we advise that you follow the link below to make sure the policy you chose is appropriate:

<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-22/chapter-I/subchapter-G/part-62/subpart-A/section-62.14>

Further information will be provided by the British Council.

Early Termination on the grounds of Extenuating Circumstances

Every year, some students withdraw from the placement due to Extenuating Circumstances. In the event of early termination of the placement, proof of Extenuating Circumstances must be provided to the British Council.

In situations where the British Council makes a judgment, at its absolute discretion, that no Extenuating Circumstances exist; the British Council will require you to reimburse the **total cost of your round trip flights which we purchase on your behalf**, payable within 30 days of your Exit Interview with the Study USA team.

The requirement to reimburse the cost of flights where no extenuating circumstances exist comes into effect following the Pre-departure orientation session.

GUIDANCE, SUPPORT AND MANAGING YOUR WELLBEING

Spending a year studying abroad is an exciting prospect and naturally students have high expectations of the experience. Many students report that they are surprised by the difference in culture between the USA and Northern Ireland and experience difficulties in adjusting to their new environment. Have a look on the Student Minds website for some tips on preparing for your year away - <https://www.studentminds.org.uk/yearabroad.html>

In our Pre-Departure Orientation we will also provide training in what to expect and how to deal with any initial problems. At the Orientation you will meet Dr Erin Hinson who is based in Pittsburgh and is the Study USA Student Support Advisor. Erin will be happy to take your call, respond to your email, chat to you online, or even arrange to visit you if necessary.

You will also be assigned an International Advisor on campus. You should aim to maintain weekly contact with your international advisor as they will be able to give you practical advice as well as moral support on campus.

The Study USA team are also available to lend support. Sometimes it helps simply to hear a familiar accent, so please do not hesitate to email and we will arrange a call. If you find that you are unhappy, homesick, struggling to settle in or having difficulties keeping up with the academic requirements, we have a support system which you can draw upon for help.

If you are having difficulties in your US Institution please take the following steps in order, as necessary:

1. Contact your **International Advisor**, inform them of the circumstances, and discuss steps to overcome any problems/issues.
2. If necessary, book an appointment with the **Student Counsellor** on campus.
3. Contact **Erin Hinson** to discuss the circumstances, and measures to overcome any problems/issues.
4. Contact the **Study USA Team** at the British Council in Belfast.

REVIEW AND MONITORING

The British Council, together with your home university/college, requires you to achieve a 3.0 Grade Point Average (GPA) or above, with 30 credits, from your completed year of study in the USA.

The British Council will review and monitor academic progress throughout the academic year and at set intervals (mid-term and semester end) request academic feedback directly from your US Institution.

Whilst the British Council will review and monitor all students' academic progress throughout the two semesters, it is important to note that each student has a responsibility to monitor and maintain their own personal academic progress. If you are struggling to reach the required GPA in the Fall or Spring Semesters, you should contact the British Council **and** your International advisor to discuss ways to improve your performance.

The following procedure will be enacted in the event of a student's GPA falling below a 3.0:

If you are not able to provide a valid reason for a low score you will be withdrawn from the programme and must return home to Northern Ireland when results become known. Individual circumstances will be identified and the decision taken at the British Council's discretion.

Please remember, students whose overall score is less than 3.0 at the end of the academic year will not graduate from Study USA. Course requirements in US Institutions and universities have led former participants to report that to achieve the required GPA you must attend all classes and submit all assignments on time. You must work steadily and consistently throughout both semesters and it is useful to keep in mind that participation in class, timely submission of assignments, and quality of work submitted all count towards the final mark and Grade Point Average.

STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

All participants have read, and committed to adhere to, the terms and conditions of participation, agreeing to:

- Successfully complete the academic year in the US Institution in which they have been placed
- Reimburse the British Council the cost of their round trip flight to the USA in the event of an early return to the UK for any reasons except *Extenuating Circumstances*
- Conform to the agreed "standards of conduct" for participants
- Return to Northern Ireland and enter the final year of their studies at their home institution

In entering into this Agreement, participants confirm that they understand that breaches of conduct as listed below will lead to their being withdrawn from the programme at the discretion of their US Institution and/or the British Council.

- Breach of your US or NI Institution's own Code of Conduct
- Failure to achieve a 3.0 GPA at the end of Fall and/or Spring semester (without Extenuating Circumstances)
- Breach of your NI university/college individual placement guidelines
- USA Institution reporting absenteeism to the British Council, which is deemed to be excessive
- Excessive alcoholic intoxication and/or failure to observe the USA Legal Drinking Age (21)
- Dishonest conduct
- Abusive or aggressive behaviour
- Use of Illegal substances
- Breach of Institution Safety and Hygiene rules
- Conduct that brings Study USA, the British Council and associated NI institutions and organisations into disrepute

Participants acknowledge that the British Council cannot be held responsible for any inappropriate behaviour exhibited on their part whilst on personal vacations, institution-led trips, or in terms of inappropriate material posted on any social networking websites such as Facebook and Instagram, or on personal blogs. Such inappropriate behaviour may also result in the termination of a student's placement at the discretion of the British Council.

Definition of Terms

- **US Institution reporting absenteeism to the British Council which is deemed to be excessive.**
 - Our partner schools regard class participation as essential to the learning process therefore attendance at every class is required of all students.
 - Attendance policies are generally set on a class-by-class basis but in the USA in most cases no more than two consecutive unexcused absences will go unnoticed. At this stage a deduction may be made on the student's GPA.
 - It is the student's responsibility to ask the Professor of the class for his/her attendance policy.
 - The British Council will receive an update on student attendance at the mid-term point and end point of the Fall & Spring Semesters.
 - If a US Institution reports that a student has been absent from class to a level deemed excessive by that Institution or its staff then this contract will have been broken and the British Council may withdraw the student from the programme at its discretion.

- **“Hazardous drinking” and/or failure to observe the USA Legal Drinking Age (21)**
 - The minimum legal drinking age in the USA is 21. Any student under the age of 21 found to have broken this law will be withdrawn from the programme at the discretion of the British Council and/or the US Institution.
 - Where students are placed on a dry campus any student found to have broken this campus restriction regardless of age will be withdrawn from the programme at the discretion of the British Council and/or the US Institution.
 - Acting as a participant in the Study USA programme means acting as an ambassador for Northern Ireland, the British Council, the relevant Home Institution, NI University and the US Host college or university. Excessive alcoholic intoxication can serve to damage the reputation of the aforementioned and therefore any student who has failed to drink responsibly and as a result of “hazardous drinking” or drunken behaviour has brought the above into disrepute may be withdrawn from the programme at the discretion of the British Council.
 - **Hazardous Drinking**, as defined by the NHS, is “when a person drinks over the recommended weekly limit of alcohol (21 units for men and 14 units for women).”
 - It is also possible to drink hazardously by binge drinking, even if you are within your weekly limit. Binge drinking involves drinking a large amount of alcohol in a short space of time (eight units in a day for men, six units in a day for women). If you are drinking hazardously, you may not yet have any health problems related to alcohol, but you are increasing your risk of experiencing problems in the future. Hazardous drinking, particularly binge drinking, carries additional risks such as:
 - Being involved in an accident resulting in personal injury or injury to others
 - Becoming involved in a verbal/physical argument or fight
 - Taking part in risky or illegal behaviour when drunk, such as drink-driving.

- **Dishonest Conduct**
 - Any participant who is found to have been dishonest regarding academic performance or financial matters in relation to the Study USA scholarship, personal bursary or initial programme application process may be withdrawn from the programme at the discretion of the British Council and/or the USA Institution.
- **Abusive or Aggressive Behaviour**
 - Abusive or aggressive behaviour, be it racial, sexual, verbal, written or physical, towards any individual whilst participating in the programme may result in withdrawal from the programme at the discretion of the British Council.
 - Abusive or aggressive behaviour in particular towards US Institution staff/students or British Council staff may result in withdrawal from the programme.
- **Use of Illegal Substances**
 - Any participant found to be in possession of or who has been found to have been using any illegal substance will be withdrawn from the programme at the discretion of the British Council and/or the US Institution.
- **Breach of US Institution Safety and Hygiene Rules**
 - Each US Institution will have its own safety and hygiene rules which must be adhered to by all students at that Institution.
 - Any participant found to have broken those rules may be withdrawn from the programme at the discretion of the British Council and/or the US Institution.
- **Inappropriate Behaviour**
 - Any behaviour that brings the British Council & its staff, the Study USA programme or the participant's US Institution into disrepute. This also includes any failure to observe the standards of conduct outlined above.
 - Any audio, visual or written statement on the internet including any social networking sites that may bring disrepute and/or be deemed as offensive to the British Council & its staff, the Study USA programme or the participant's US Institution.

GRADE POINT AVERAGE

The Grade Point Average (GPA) system is the standard grading system used in the American education system from Middle School through to Postgraduate Level.

The majority of colleges & universities on the Study USA programme operate the GPA system which ranges from 0.0 – 4.0 GPA. Upon arrival it is your responsibility to check with your International Advisor or Institution Registrar's Office to verify the GPA scale used at your campus. Students on Study USA must maintain a **3.0 GPA** during their time at their US Institution.

The grade conversion chart below will help you compare the GPA system to our own UK Honours grading system. A student's GPA is calculated by taking the number of grade points a student earned in a given period of time divided by the total number of credits taken. The number of grade points earned will correspond to the letter grade achieved in each class.

| American Letter Grade | American GPA (Grade Point Average) | UK Numerical Mark | UK Honours Class |
|-----------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| A | 4.0 | 70+ | I |
| | | 66-69 | Iii |
| A- | 3.7 | 63-65 | |
| B+ | 3.3 | 60-62 | |
| B | 3.0 | 57-59 | Iiii |
| B- | 2.7 | 53-56 | |
| C+ | 2.3 | 50-52 | |
| C | 2.0 | 45-49 | |
| C- | 1.7 | 43-44 | III |
| D | 1.0 | 40-42 | |
| F | 0 | 0-39 | |

The following procedure will be taken in the event of a student's GPA falling below a 3.0:

Students who have not achieved the required 3.0 GPA at the end of Fall Semester will be withdrawn from the programme and will not return to the United States to continue studies in the spring.

The only exception to this rule is where there are extenuating circumstances which are judged to have impacted significantly on the student's grades. In such cases, individual circumstances will be identified, and the decision taken, at the British Council's absolute discretion.

It should be noted that extenuating circumstances will be considered and assessed by the British Council **only** for those with a GPA of 2.5 or higher. For any student with a GPA lower than 2.5, no extenuating circumstances will be considered, and the student will not return to the United States for Spring Semester.

The following procedure will be taken for students whose GPA is below 3.0:

They will be withdrawn from the programme and must return home to Northern Ireland when results become known. They will be required to refund the cost of their return flights.

EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCES

Extenuating circumstances, for the purposes of the Study USA programme, are defined as unforeseen factors, or factors outside a student's control which have a negative impact on his or her ability to achieve the criteria required for successful completion of the programme. Pre-existing conditions for which students have received support and reasonable adjustments do not constitute extenuating circumstances, though a worsening of a condition may do so.

The following table provides a few examples of extenuating circumstances. It is a guide and is

not meant to be prescriptive. The British Council Team will use their own judgement and discretion when deciding if a participant's circumstances are extenuating on the basis of the facts presented.

Please inform us immediately if you are experiencing any of the circumstances below - **it is very difficult for us to take these into account after a decision on continuing participation has been made.**

| | Extenuating Circumstances - Normally Acceptable | Notes |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | Death of a close relative or friend | 'Close' means parent or guardian; partner or spouse; child or sibling. |
| 2 | Serious illness of student | An incapacitating illness or an on-going illness or medical condition. This includes breaks and serious sprains of the normal writing hand/arm. <i>Medical certification must be obtained, self-certification is not acceptable.</i> |
| 3 | Serious illness of a close relative | See notes at 1 above for definition of 'close' |
| 4 | Hospitalisation | A medical letter/certificate from the relevant hospital confirming the nature and severity of the student's circumstances and the likely impact upon the student's ability to undertake formal assessment will be required. |
| 5 | Acute Personal/ Emotional Circumstances *Please note, letters from a medical professional cannot be considered in retrospect | The following will be required: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A medical certificate or letter* from the appropriate medical professional; or • A letter from the University/College Counselling Service (or equivalent) confirming the nature and severity of the student's circumstances and the likely impact upon the student's ability to perform as required. |
| 6 | Victim of Crime | A written statement of events, which is supported by written evidence from the police and/or appropriate medical professional or a letter from the University/College Counselling Service (or equivalent), will be required. |
| 7 | Financial Problems due to crime. | Stress brought on by financial concerns which are a direct result of a crime. |
| 8 | Serious personal disruption | Divorce; fire; burglary; serious assault; jury service, serious childcare difficulties. Corroborating evidence must be produced. |
| 9 | Pregnancy | A medical report from the student's doctor or midwife must be provided in support of such grounds. This also includes the stages following childbirth. Pregnancy of a wife/partner would be acceptable in appropriate circumstances. |

| | Not Acceptable | |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | Social activities, part-time work commitments or self-induced financial difficulty. | Hectic social life; parties; visits to/from friends. Working part time rather than completing assignments/studying. Overspending & failure to budget personal spending money, book allowance etc. |
| 2 | Temporary self-induced medical conditions | Hangover; drug taking (excluding prescribed medication). |
| 3 | Minor ailments | Coughs; colds; sprains (other than in the writing hand/arm). |
| 4 | Non-serious personal and domestic disruptions which could have been anticipated or planned | Moving house; weddings; holidays; failed transport arrangements. |

SECTION TWO – THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Preparation for the year ahead is essential to maximising the Study USA experience. The more that you can do before you leave to familiarise yourself with the programme requirements, the American Higher Education system, financial commitments, US Culture etc., the better.

Participants who are well prepared will hit the ground running and have more time to enjoy the experience of living in a new country than those who did not prepare and are struggling to make sense of *GPA*s, *credits* and *electives*.

FINAL TO-DO LIST

Before departure

- Liaise with your US college and choose classes for the Fall Semester.
- Email your US College Advisor and confirm your date of arrival, airport pick-up plans and how you will access your dorm room when you arrive on campus.
- **Go to your doctor and get any vaccinations required for US enrolment.** Possible vaccinations: Hepatitis B, TB, MMR, Diphtheria & chest X-rays. Any costs for vaccinations will be your own responsibility
- Make appointments at the Dentist, Optician, Hairdressers, etc.
- Consider your bank account preferences. Change money into US dollars
- Check your airline for information on luggage allowance, check-in etc.

In your suitcase

- Consider bringing some gifts for your counterparts in the US, especially if you are staying with a host family.
- Bring any cultural souvenirs, e.g. Northern Ireland brochures, maps, postcards, music. These may be useful for international events on campus.
- Remember to pack some photographs from home or anything else that may make your dorm feel more welcoming.
- Remember any medication that you require and plan ahead to ensure you have enough prescriptions for your time in the US.
- Do not forget US Plug Adapters.
- Check what clothes will be suitable for your new climate. You should pack one smart outfit/shoes for presentations or formal events in the US.

In your hand luggage

Prescription medications

- Prescription medications in original containers
- Written prescriptions from home doctor with chemical name of medications (i.e. not brand name, medical brand names may differ between the US and the UK).

Important Documentation

- Passport
- I-20 or DS2019
- Copy of passport and visa paperwork (packed separately from your passport)
- Copy of Travel Itinerary (remember your itinerary may change throughout the year) - leave a copy with your family
- Copy of the front and back of your credit cards (packed separately from your credit cards)
- Arrival information and phone number of International Advisor / person collecting you from the airport
- Address and phone number of your college
- Phone numbers for US Advisor Erin Hinson and Study USA Team
- Driving License (both parts) if you are considering driving in the USA
- Insurance policy – leave a copy with your family in case of emergency

Other Items

- Change of clothing
- Small supply of toiletries in case your luggage is lost
- Pen (you will need this in-flight to write on your landing card)

CULTURE SHOCK

What is Culture Shock?

By studying in the USA, you have the opportunity to live in a place with such diverse regional cultures that one coast can feel like the polar opposite from the other (and not just weather-wise!). Each region of the country has its own unique lifestyle. Whether you love to fish and barbecue, or surf and bike, or experience the arts and regional cuisine, there is definitely something for everyone.

After the initial excitement of arriving in the US, you may begin to feel some form of homesickness and/or culture shock. While you will share the same language as those around you, there will be many differences both in language and in culture. Feelings of loneliness and being upset about minor issues are normal, so while some other Study USA students may not experience homesickness (or at least, say they do not!), don't worry if you do.

“Culture shock” describes the impact of moving from a familiar culture to one which is unfamiliar. It can affect anyone. It includes the shock of a new environment, meeting lots of new people and learning the ways of a different country. It also includes the shock of being separated from the important people in your life, maybe family, friends, and colleagues: people you would normally talk to at times of uncertainty, people who give you support and guidance. When familiar sights, sounds, smells or tastes are no longer there you can miss them very much. If you are tired and jet-lagged when you arrive, small things can be upsetting and out of all proportion to their real significance.

The following are some of the elements that contribute to culture shock:

- **Climate:** Many people find that the change in climate affects them a lot. Try to find out about the weather in the area you are going to be located, to prepare yourself mentally. Clothing is often cheaper in America, so it may be better to buy some of what you need while over there.

- Food: You may find American food strange. It may taste different, or be cooked differently, or it may seem bland or sweet compared to what you are used to. If you have any food-related allergies or requirements, the college will be able to facilitate your needs.
- Language: When going to another English-speaking country we tend to assume that the language is more or less the same. It may come as a shock to find that many of the subtleties of the language are very different. We all make assumptions about other cultures and ways of life, and often we only become aware of these when we encounter them personally – so be prepared for a few surprises. Take your cue from the locals and check out with others whether you are making yourself understood.
- 'Rules' of behaviour: As well as the obvious things that hit you immediately when you arrive, such as sights, sounds, smells and tastes, every culture has unspoken rules which affect the way people treat each other. These may be less obvious but sooner or later you will probably encounter them and once again the effect may be disorientating. For example there will be differences in the ways people decide what is important, how tasks are allocated and how time is observed. In business and academic life, keeping to time is important. You should always be on time for meetings and class. If you are going to be late, do try to let whoever you are meeting know.
- Social life and the expectations of others may be different too – particularly around the consumption of alcohol and/or drugs. Check this out with locals and past participants of the programme if you are unsure.

Coping with Culture Shock and managing your wellbeing

The key to dealing with culture shock is to remember that this is a natural process that accompanies being in a new country. In the experience of most, the heightened emotionality felt fades as you become more accustomed to being in the US. The most important things are to give yourself time to adjust to your new surroundings, to remain positive, and not to be discouraged.

Though culture shock is normally a temporary phase, it is important to know there are things you can do to help so that some of these worrying effects can be minimised. Do not feel “this isn't going to happen to me”. Culture shock can hit you whatever culture you come from and however experienced or well-travelled you are.

- Keep in touch with home. There are several ways you may be able to do this: for example Facetime/Skype, telephone, letters, social media, email.
- Have familiar things around you that have personal meaning, such as photographs or ornaments.
- Find a supplier of familiar food if you can. Eat a healthy and balanced diet.
- Explore the new culture, keep up with current events, discover how the government works, and find out what you can particularly relate to.
- Keep a personal journal, or scrapbook, as a record of your stay and as an emotional outlet. This could include photographs or newspaper cuttings.
- Make friends with international students, whether from your own culture or from others, as they will understand what you are feeling and, if possible, make friends with the locals so you can learn more about each other's culture.
- Use the university or college services, where there will be professional and experienced staff. For example: the health service, the counselling service, the International Office or hall wardens will provide a friendly face and a listening ear. Even if at home you wouldn't consider such steps, in America it is quite normal and they may help when your familiar helpers are missing.
- Linking with a church / faith community will give you an authentic taste of the local culture, as well as a new network of friends and contacts in the area.
- Be prepared to have your beliefs and values challenged. Maintain a strong sense of self, and of your roots. Remember to be proud of your home culture and heritage, without feeling superior to others'.

- Investigate the Students' Union and its societies. There may be an opportunity to learn a new sport or activity, or to continue an interest from home. A further advantage is that these societies bring together students from different courses and countries with a shared interest.
- Above all find someone to talk to who will listen uncritically and with understanding, rather than isolating yourself.
- Getting involved with the international office can help you make friends, visit local tourist attractions and plan day trips to nearby places of interest to help you get to know the local area. Sharing your pictures and experiences with friends and family back home can help ease your homesickness. Emailing and Skyping with friends back home can help maintain a connection. However, doing this to the detriment of making new friends and gathering new experiences will only increase your homesickness. Set up regular meetings with family and friends each week, rather than constant instant or text messaging. This will allow you to keep in contact with home while still building a new social life at your college.
- Email want to hear a familiar accent!
- Finally... It is important to stress that culture shock is entirely normal, usually unavoidable and not a sign that you have made a mistake or that you won't manage. In fact, culture shock has many positive aspects. It can be a significant learning experience, making you more aware of aspects of your own culture as well as the new culture you have entered. It will give you valuable skills that will serve you in many ways both now and in the future, all of which add to the benefits of an international education.

ACADEMIC DIFFERENCES

Classroom differences

The classroom environment in the US is often very different to what UK students are accustomed to. One consistent trait of the US classroom experience, however, is the emphasis on student participation. The liberal arts philosophy is based on the development of well-rounded knowledge through discussion and critical thinking.

Professors expect students to display their knowledge actively and to engage in lectures. Participating in classroom discussion is how to demonstrate to the professor that you grasp the course material. Attendance and class participation are expected, and both will count toward your final mark.

Here are a few tips for success in a US classroom:

- Attend every class
- If you are unable to attend, email the professor to explain your absence, apologise, and ask a friend to share his/her notes with you
- Read and take notes on all of the assigned material before class
- As you read, make a list of questions to ask
- Be prepared to ask questions as well as answer questions the professor poses
- Personally introduce yourself to the professor and take advantage of their office hours for some valuable one-on-one time
- Actively listen to the lecture and take notes.
- Sit close to the front of the classroom

- Check with your professor about using British or American English in essays and referencing style.
- Take the opportunity and develop a working relationship with your professors

Academic Workload

In addition to classroom participation, another key difference in the US is amount and frequency of coursework. Professors will expect you to be engaged in their classes and will begin grading you within the first few weeks of class.

You might find that exams are at an easier level to those you would take at university in the UK, depending on the institution you attend and the courses you pick. However, the week-to-week workload is likely to be more intense. You will soon gather what is expected of you and how to manage this; if in doubt, consult your International or Academic Advisor for guidance on how to manage your timetable efficiently.

Email etiquette

If you ever wish to forewarn your professor of an absence from class, clarify a question about an assignment, or arrange an appointment to discuss lecture material, you will need to send your professor an e-mail. As long as you write in a concise manner, state your purpose clearly, and sign off politely, you can't go wrong.

1. Make sure you are sending the email from your academic e-mail account: Your school address has a better chance of allowing your professor to identify you and avoiding spam filters than another personal account.
2. Use a concise but informative subject line: Include the title or course code of your class, and let the professor know what you are going to talk about in the e-mail. Subject lines like "HIST201 Question about research sources for project" or "BIOL211 Absence next week" should suffice.
3. Read the course syllabus: Read the material your professor provided you with at the beginning of the course carefully. The syllabus might include specific guidelines for e-mail etiquette – rules regarding content may restrict the length of your e-mail. Also, the answer to the question you plan on asking might already be in the syllabus, which would save both time and effort on your part as well as that of your professor.
4. Address your professor formally, introduce yourself briefly, and try to be as specific and to-the-point as you possibly can: Professors get a lot of e-mails every day, and it can be frustrating to comb through a long-winded ramble to decipher what a student is actually trying to say. In the content of your e-mail, only give as much information as is absolutely relevant to the situation. If your e-mail is longer than four or five lines, you may want to request an appointment to further discuss your situation with them in person.
5. Be polite and use formal language: Avoid slang, casual language, or contractions. At the end of your e-mail, thank your professor for his or her time and consideration, and sign your full name.

School spirit

Students love the school that they attend, and they're never too shy to show their pride. Whether it's attending all the sporting events, wearing school colours, or putting a logo sticker on your laptop, they're always finding ways to prove their school spirit! Competitions or giveaways are often held to encourage school pride, and it creates a great sense of community and identity both on and off campus. Spotting other people in your school's gear when you're out and about is fun, and there's nothing like getting discount or free stuff from local businesses when they see you're from the local college.

CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

While you may not think it at first, there are numerous cultural differences between the US and the UK that you will likely encounter. There are language differences between the US and UK, there are even differences in customs, attitudes, opinions, and reactions within the US. The US encompasses many different cultures and regions, so the information here is simply a general guide and may not be valid everywhere. However, it can be a great way to get familiar with your new home before you arrive

Politics

Political beliefs and views are often a source of controversy and can often prompt a lot of discussion. US political discussion can often be dominated by “single issues” such as gun control, abortion, etc.

On either side of these debates will be Conservatives and Liberals, the Right and the Left, Republicans and Democrats. Over the next year you will hear many references to different political viewpoints in the USA. Whilst college campuses are often home to a wide range of viewpoints, the geographical location can often determine the beliefs held by the majority of people in the surrounding community.

As a broad generalisation urban locations and states along the Western/Eastern seaboard and to the North East of the country are typically considered to be quite ‘Liberal.’ Southern States, the Midwest and rural communities would often be labelled ‘Conservative.’

Whatever your personal views remember at all times that you are a visitor in the USA and be sensitive to the opinions of others.

Patriotism

Many Americans are deeply patriotic. This is a positive thing. Don’t take it personally when Americans say things like “America’s the best country in the world.” Your fellow students may not have learned a lot of international history, so don’t be offended if they don’t know much about Northern Ireland, the UK, or Europe.

Humour

The sense of humour differs from one side of the Atlantic to the other. Americans tend to be less dry or sarcastic; do not be surprised if your subtlety is not understood at first! Some Americans may feel offended if they do not understand your humour, but after a brief explanation they will be laughing along with you. Similarly, absurd, and nonsensical humour is not typical and may not translate at first.

Tipping

As you may already know, tipping is a common practice in the US. It is the general rule to tip your waiter or waitress at restaurants 15-20% on top of the price of bill, as a service charge is not usually automatically charged. Not tipping your server is considered really rude, and even if the service is poor, Americans will still tend to tip something (10% of the service is poor, 15% if it is good and 20% if it is excellent). In addition to servers, it is generally expected to tip other customer service providers:

- Cab drivers – 5-10%
- Bartenders – One or two dollars every time you order
- Hairdressers – 10%
- Luggage carriers at airports/hotels – \$3-5. If you have lots of suitcases you might want to be a bit more generous

Please keep in mind that often a large part of these workers' salaries are made in tips, so if they did a good job, be sure to show your appreciation.

Time Keeping

Americans also tend to care much more for punctuality than their UK peers. Everything from classes to a lunch date will be expected to start right on time. Along with punctuality, much of the US moves at a faster pace to the UK.

Identification Cards

In America, a valid official photo Identification card or document is very important. In fact, it is necessary at most places. First thing anyone asks for verification is your photo ID. It can be Driver's license, State ID, or Passport from home country. To avoid carrying your passport around with you (and potentially losing it), it is a good idea to apply for a State ID. It looks in fact very similar to driving license ID. State ID is accepted at every single place where your license or passport is accepted. It is your official ID. If you lose one, you can always get one by paying fees. It is very simple for replacement, unlike a passport. Speak to your advisor about arranging a visit to the government office which supplies these.

Alcohol

You must be at least 21 years old to buy or drink any alcoholic beverages in the US. This law is strictly enforced and has serious consequences both legally and within the campus judicial system. Often drinking is a violation of school policy as well, especially if it is on campus. It has happened that students have been punished for breaking campus rules based on photos online.

It's very important to check whether or not your university is 'dry.' If you're on a 'dry' campus, you can still be cautioned or arrested for consuming alcohol, or having an open container of alcohol, even if you're over the legal drinking age of 21.

When you enter a bar or try to purchase alcohol in a store or restaurant, you will be asked to produce photo identification to prove that you are above the legal drinking age.

In some places, alcohol is a less integral part of the campus culture in the US than perhaps it is in the UK. The drinking age in the US is 21, so many university events are dry (no alcohol allowed). If a campus is known as a dry campus, this means there are no on-campus bars and that no alcohol is permitted on campus grounds.

Public transport

Public transport will be extremely limited and mostly unavailable in rural and semi-rural areas. This is a shock to most international students, but most become accustomed to getting lifts from their US friends. For important reasons to get off campus, i.e., getting to the airport, your international advisor will be able to assist you.

Health Care & Insurance

Federal and state laws require that international students maintain adequate health insurance while attending US institutions. While many other countries bear the expense of health care for their residents (like the UK), individuals in the United States are responsible for these expenses themselves. A single day of hospitalization can cost thousands of dollars. A good insurance policy gives you access to excellent medical facilities and provides protection against the enormous costs of health care.

SECTION THREE – ARRIVAL

AT THE AIRPORT

You should have the following documents which you may be asked for when going through immigration.

- Passport
- I20 or DS2019
- Printed copy of your return flight details
- Welcome letter or email from your college

A Customs and Border Protection officer will guide you through the inspection process. Have your travel documents ready. The officer will review your travel documents and ask you questions, such as why you are visiting and how long you will stay. The officer will scan your fingerprints and take your photograph and tell you when you have completed the process.

THINGS TO ORGANISE

To Do List for First Week in the USA

- Introduce yourself to your International Advisor, College President and staff in the Student Finance Office.
- Attend International Orientation.
- Email British Council with your new email address and contact details.
- Email British Council with your Fall class list and credits
- If you need one, open a US bank account
- Obtain a social security number if you want to get a job on campus.
- Obtain a state I.D. card
- Sign up to get involved in a club/society/volunteer programme
- Leave your dorm door open so that others can stop by and introduce themselves

Cell phones

Your UK phone should work in the US, but it is much more cost effective to buy an American phone or SIM plan, otherwise you will pay higher fees for roaming. If you plan to take your UK mobile abroad, ask your service provider before you go to see what the roaming charges are.

Please be aware that with some US cell phones, particularly those on pay-as-you-go contracts, there is a cost to both send and receive texts and calls. Some US network providers do not have coverage all over the USA. Check with your international advisor or your new friends which operator offers the best reception for your area. Relatively inexpensive handsets can be purchased from stores such as Wal-Mart, Target, or electronic stores, such as RadioShack or Best Buy.

American SIM cards may work with your phone from home but please check with your provider.

Bank Account

Most students will open a US bank account and obtain a US debit card although however most students will use their UK debit cards in the US at some point.

Most UK debit cards can be used at US ATMs (cashpoints). Before leaving home, ask your UK bank what fees will apply to withdrawals and purchases made abroad. Your bank may have agreements with certain US banks to allow you to withdraw cash without a fee, so be sure to ask for a list of affiliated US banks. Even if you are able to use your existing UK account, you may still want to open a US account to avoid fees.

You will also need to inform your bank of the dates you will be in the US so they do not block your account when you begin using your card. Some banks may require you to periodically call back to ensure against fraud. Explain if this is not possible and ask to extend the period you are abroad.

Debit and credit cards do not use a chip and pin system as in the UK, and you may be asked to sign a receipt instead. Remember to keep any US cards safe as this system is not as secure against fraud.

Keep in mind that unlike in the UK, you will be charged a fee (\$2 or \$3) to withdraw money from an ATM if you do not have an account there. You may also be charged by your UK bank if you use your home card in the US.

As an international student, you will find it difficult to obtain a credit card with an American bank. In order to be approved for a credit card, you will need to provide your source and amount of income, length of residency at the present address and bank information. You will find that most companies accept foreign credit cards, so if you plan to buy things on credit it is a good idea to bring your existing card from home to the US. Most banks will charge a foreign transaction fee, which may be up to 3-5% of the cost of the purchase; so many students opt to bring their UK/Irish credit cards for emergency use only.

Choosing a Bank

You should research several banks to determine which bank offers the best services for your needs. Most banks have main offices in the centre of a city or town. Smaller branches are sometimes found on campus. Your international advisor can suggest which banks are most convenient. Speak to previous Study USA students who attended your College/University previously as they will be able to offer some advice from their experience.

Charges: If you spend more money than you have in the bank, you create an "overdraft." US banks will charge a penalty fee for having an overdraft of even \$1, and do not make exceptions for students. The tricky thing is that if you are paying by debit card, you may still be able to withdraw the money but will incur a penalty for that withdrawal, so be sure to continually monitor your account.

Remember that you will need to close your bank account before you leave the US.

Transferring Money from the UK to the US

Think about the exchange rate and how to get your money into the US cheaply and speedily. Ask your bank for advice on the best transfer method and any potential transaction fees. If you are charged a set fee each time you make a transfer, it would be cheaper to transfer large amounts at once.

You may want to look into private companies such as Western Union or Travelex that arrange international money transfers.

Social Security Number

Social Security numbers generally are required for those who want to work in the United States. Social Security numbers are used to report your wages to the government and to determine eligibility for Social Security benefits. If you want to get a job on campus, you should contact your international advisor, who

can tell you if you are eligible to work on campus and give you information about available jobs. Your advisor will also be able to help arrange for you to get a social security number. The process is as follows:

1. Complete an Application for A Social Security Card (Form SS-5);
2. Show original documents proving your: Work-authorized immigration status; Age; Identity;
3. Take your completed application and original documents to your local Social Security office.

International/New Student Orientation

Orientation is designed to help international and first-year students comfortably transition into the University/College community before classes start. Activities range from helping new students set up a phone or bank account to understanding the academic culture and getting to know the campus and general area.

Orientation is a great way to integrate into the college quickly. Not only will you get to know the campus and find your way around before classes start, but you will also meet other new and international students.

People to meet

Introduce yourself to the following people during your first few weeks on campus

- President of the University/College: US Colleges waive tuition fees for Study USA students, usually around \$25,000 per academic year. Keeping this in mind, it would be a good idea to make yourself known to the President, thank them for their generosity and offer a small gift from home as a token of thanks.
- International Advisor: it is likely you will have had some contact with this person via email or telephone before you arrived in the US. Your advisor is there to guide you on class choices, settling in issues, and any other things you may need advice on.
- Finance Office: The finance office will be able to give you information on your text book bursary (\$1100) and your meal plan.

ACADEMICS

Class Requirements

US colleges work on a credit system where each class is worth a number of credits. Full time US students are required to successfully earn a certain amount of credits in order to complete their college courses. Similarly, as a Study USA participant, you are required to successfully earn credits in order to meet the requirements of the programme.

Study USA students are expected to **complete a minimum of 30 Credits** over Fall and Spring semester. Most students will complete 15 to 16 credits per semester. Classes are normally worth 3 or 4 credits but you may find that some elective classes are worth less or that you gain extra credits for taking part in extra-curricular activities. The minimum number of credits you must complete is 30. If you plan to take more than 30 credits please seek approval from the British Council.

Study USA has a business element to the programme, so a minimum of 12 of your credits must be leadership/communication/business-related classes. Of the remaining 18, 12 need to be related to your home subject and 6 can be in elective classes.

Leadership/communication/business-related classes

One of the aims of Study USA is to help develop business skills that can be brought back to help invigorate the Northern Irish economy so students must take a majority of leadership/communication/business-related classes. **Our interpretation of business is fairly wide** so if a class isn't with the school of Business (or even if your college does not have a business department) we hope there is ample choice.

Business classes can include:

- Management
- Finance
- Economics
- Communications
- Marketing and PR
- Human Resources
- Leadership
- Public Speaking
- Information Technology
- Foreign Languages

If you aren't sure if a class will count towards your leadership/communication/business-related classes credits, please check with the British Council.

The Study USA team MUST give final approval for all classes taken. Please note that if you are taking a language class we will check that it is appropriate to your previous experience.

Elective Classes

Elective classes are your opportunity to study something you are interested in. Some students choose to take a class related to their home degree and others will choose to try something new. Your elective class can be anything you like provided that your college allows it and you can manage it with your class timetable.

Some examples of elective classes are:

- Art and Design
- Sports
- Math and Sciences
- Humanities e.g., literature or history

Please note that we are unable to cover any additional fees associated with elective classes.

Choosing your classes

Choosing which classes you will be taking is very important in ensuring you have a successful and enjoyable year. Please be aware that the process of selecting your classes and creating your timetable will be very different than at your home institution. **It also differs from college to college and it is your responsibility to find out the process in your college.**

Some students will begin picking their classes in April/May and others will when they arrive on campus, please defer to your International Advisor for advice. Your international advisor will be aware that you should be taking leadership/communication/business-related classes and the requirements of the programme but **it is your responsibility to ensure that you enrolled in classes appropriate for you, and are proactive in finding out how this process works in your particular college.**

US Colleges courses are 4 years long; Freshman (first year), Sophomore (second year), Junior (third year) and Senior (fourth year). You will be enrolled as a Junior student but this does not mean you can only take junior level classes. Students at US colleges can take classes created for all 4 year groups.

When looking through your college academic catalogues you will most likely see that classes are designated to a level from 100 – 400 as follows:

- 100 – Freshman
- 200 – Sophomore
- 300 – Junior
- 400 – Senior

You can normally tell what level a course is by its course code. For instance, a Freshmen level business course might be called BUS101: Intro to Business.

Please read the course descriptions carefully and make sure it is an appropriate level for you.

A typical Study USA’s student’s class breakdown for one semester might look like this:

| Class Type | Class Name | Level | Credits |
|--------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------|----------------|
| Home Degree Class 1 | ECO101: Intro to Macro-economics | 100 | 3 |
| Home Degree Class 2 | ACC 105: Advanced Accounting | 300 | 3 |
| Business Related Class 1 | BUS106: Entrepreneurship Studies | 100 | 3 |
| Business Related Class 2 | BUS202: Women in Business | 200 | 3 |
| Elective | ART103: History of Art | 100 | 3 |
| TOTAL CREDITS | | | 15 |

Class Approval

Once you have selected your classes, the Study USA team will ask you to submit your classes to them for approval using an online form similar to the one found at the end of the handbook. Please ensure you submit your classes in good time so that if for any reason, your classes do not meet the programme requirements, you are still able to change them. The team is available to check that classes are suitable as you are choosing so please don’t hesitate to contact them if you have any questions.

Add/drop period

You might find when you start a class that it covers material you have already studied or that the content is too challenging. If this is the case most colleges will allow you to swap classes in what is called the add/drop period. Typically this is for the first two weeks of the semester but every college will have different rules or regulations regarding this so please speak to your International Advisor for more information. Please remember to consult the Study USA Team for approval before changing any classes.

Accessing Course Material

On campus you will have access to your library and internet but one of the big differences you will notice is the way that classes are taught from textbooks or based around core texts.

You will be expected to have access to these texts and there are no excuses for not having a copy. They will be available from the bookstore on campus. Most of your homework will also come from this book.

For this reason we have provided you with a Book Bursary of \$1100. Your book bursary will be held in your Student Account on campus. **Different colleges will have different systems, so check with your international advisor when you arrive on campus.** Don't buy books you don't need, see if you could share with your roommate/classmate. Check to see if a previous SUSA student left you any books. Be careful, some Colleges won't let you sell books second-hand on campus!

SOCIAL LIFE

Clubs and Societies

Most universities will have many clubs available to join based on varying interests and passions. From department clubs that offer lectures or networking in your field and campus leadership opportunities through student government to sports you can watch or even compete in and volunteer service, there is something for everyone! Some clubs will incorporate trips into their programme of activities, and this is a great way to experience more of the USA.

Joining clubs is a great way to meet people and make friends—most clubs will also plan social gatherings and events based on a mutual interest.

Most universities also encourage you to form new clubs if one does not already exist to match your specific interest. Anything—from GAA to comic-book appreciation—that brings students together can be the foundation of a club!

Most universities will post on their websites the list of clubs available along with the individual clubs' websites. There may be an opportunity during orientation or within the first week of classes for you to see what clubs are available. Some organisations will post flyers or send alerts on Facebook for new-member meetings, so keep a lookout when you get to your campus.

You will quickly become acquainted with other students who live in your dormitory or attend the same classes. Clubs, faith groups, or international student organizations are also good ways to meet people.

If you see an American on campus who looks friendly, don't be afraid to start a conversation!

Sports participation

Many students are interested in taking part in sports at their college. The NCAA (The National Collegiate Athletic Association) and NAIA (The National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics) have a few key differences setting them apart.

NCAA: The NCAA was formed in 1906 and is a larger association representing bigger schools and universities. NCAA schools are organised into three divisions, D1, D2, and D3.

- Division 1 schools are typically the largest universities, and compete in a minimum of 14 sports for both males and females. These schools often have world-class facilities, attract the top athletes in the country, and receive the most media attention.
- Division 2 schools are smaller than D1 schools, and student athletes usually finance their education with a combination of athletic and educational scholarships.
- Division 3 schools are the smallest of the NCAA institutions. D3 schools are not allowed to offer athletic scholarships.

NAIA: The NAIA was established in 1937 and is a smaller association. It is made up of smaller 4-year colleges throughout the United States, and competitive levels are comparable to NCAA D2 schools.

Registration: Any college-bound student-athlete (incoming freshman or first-year) interested in enrolling at an NCAA/NAIA college or university and competing as a varsity student athlete on behalf of that NCAA school's intercollegiate athletics programme may have to apply for an academic and amateurism evaluation certification decision. If you are currently enrolled (or have previously been enrolled) as a full-time student at a university in a non-U.S. foreign country, you will be considered a transfer student-athlete during the process. Please get in touch with the coach at your institution before you arrive to arrange registration. You may also need to arrive early on campus due to training schedules.

Intramural: The Intramural Sports programme offers a variety of sport leagues and tournaments. Whether you are an experienced athlete or just looking to learn a new sport, intramurals provide participants enjoyable activities for all skill levels and interests. Intramural sports are free to all enrolled students.

Sharing a dorm room

You will share a dorm (or suite) with an American student (or students) during your year on Study USA. You should indicate a preference to be roomed with a local student to your International Advisor before you head out to the states. You may be housed with other international Students. If so, it will be up to you at that stage whether you want to request a move.

Remember that you are only there for one year and American students will have a pre-established group of friends, access to cars, furniture for your room, and may even welcome you to the family home during college break.

SECTION FOUR – YOUR YEAR

You've arrived in the US and after the first couple of weeks you are hopefully feeling settled in on campus, you've made a few friends and have got to know the local area a bit better.

The section looks at how you can make the most of your Study USA experience and provides information on programme requirements, internships, travel tips and representing your US College.

The key to a successful Study USA experience is making the most of every opportunity that is presented to you!

PROGRAMME REQUIREMENTS

In addition to maintaining your academic performance (3.0 GPA) there are a few additional pieces of work that you are required to complete during your time in the USA to successfully complete the programme.

Ambassadorial Presentations

- Every Study USA student is required to complete **five ambassadorial presentations**.
- These presentations are your chance to promote Northern Ireland in the US and change many of the misperceptions that you may encounter about life back home.
- In addition, this is a chance for you to refine and perfect your public speaking and communication Skills - valuable attributes that graduate employers will be looking for.
- Your presentations can be held either on or off campus.
- Some of your presentations should be formal in style, but some could also take a different format. Previous students have hosted panel discussions, sports coaching sessions, film screenings or cookery demonstrations.
- Some examples of groups you may be able to present to are student groups on and off campus, international clubs, at local schools, and to church and civic groups.
- You may find that some of your class assignments may also meet the requirements of the presentations. For instance, if you are required to present on a business case study you could choose to do this on a Northern Irish business.
- Your International Advisor may be able to help put you in contact with suitable groups and help you find relevant opportunities.

Recording Your Presentations

- Please keep a record of your presentations using the Presentation Record Sheet that can be found at the end of this handbook.
- Please inform your advisor once a presentation has taken place.
- At the end of the Spring semester you should ask your advisor to sign your presentation record sheet and then send it to the Study USA team.
- Please be aware that it is your responsibility to ensure that your International Advisor knows your presentations have taken place so that they are in a position to sign off your record sheet with confidence.

Personal Development Portfolio (PDP)

The PDP is your chance to document your wider experience of the programme in a way that fully conveys everything you have achieved, something that an academic transcript can't do! The PDP is a mandatory requirement and will carry a pass or fail. Each student must receive a pass for this portfolio in order to successfully complete and graduate from the Study USA programme.

This portfolio of work should be completed to a high standard so that it may be shared with your US College

President, US Programme Partners, and potential Graduate Employers.

All participants will be expected to submit the Personal Development Portfolio to the Study USA team in the British Council by no later than 31st May.

There are two elements to the PDP – a written personal report, and a video presentation.

Personal report

This should be a 2000-word report and should record student achievement, summarise key learnings and provide a measurement of how you have used your scholarship opportunity to the full. You should focus on aspirations before, during and after the experience.

In providing a comprehensive account of the year, consideration should be given to expectations and key academic, personal, professional, and cultural learning, highlighting personal development gained through participation. Try not to focus too heavily on one aspect. Areas of content you may wish to include in your report include:

- Academic, student life and US campus experience.
- Key events and personal experiences beyond the classroom.
- Employability skills development i.e., communication, teamwork, cultural awareness.
- Career development - new subjects, business knowledge, entrepreneurial spirit, internship.
- Impactful people you have met and growing your global network.
- Culture shock – what did it look like and how was it overcome?
- Challenges faced and how they were overcome.
- Key achievements, adventures, and most memorable experiences.
- How your experience will benefit/influence future career plans.

Video presentation

Alongside the written report, you must also submit a creative video illustration, showcasing a snapshot of your academic experience and personal development on the programme. This presentation can include both video and photo content and should also feature some spoken or written commentary. Students are encouraged to produce something that is creative and original – a piece that not only shows important stakeholders what Study USA involves for our participants, but a visual piece would also inspire future students to apply.

Please note, the video is to have a professional focus. **Travel and vacations/holidays should not be the focus, and parties should not be included in the presentation.** Content should be focused on classes, ambassadorial presentations, campus and community involvement, and your personal development through the year.

You are welcome to use any platform that you feel comfortable using to produce this. We can, however, recommend Canva as a free resource for producing engaging and eye-catching content.

Videos should be no more than two minutes long and can be uploaded to YouTube or emailed directly to us. If using YouTube, please make sure to use royalty-free music to ensure that your video is not blocked by the host website.

Students often express their thankfulness to those who made their year possible at the end of the video. If you wish to do this, please remember to include the Department for the Economy – the programme sponsor.

YouTube (Student Presentation): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRD1To8dFMY>

Business Project or Learning Log

Before you left for the US you should have received some communication from your College or University in Northern Ireland regarding the requirements, they have for your participation on Study USA.

A number of Northern Irish institutions ask that their students complete a project or learning journal during their time in the US to be submitted on their return to Northern Ireland.

If you are unsure of these requirements, please contact the relevant member of staff within your home institution. The Study USA team at British Council can't advise on the requirements or assessment of this piece of work.

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR YEAR

Your academic studies must always take first priority, but you should be looking for opportunities to get involved in as many aspects of campus life and your local community as you can.

Playing on sports teams, joining clubs and societies and volunteering are all enjoyable activities but they are always great ways to make friends and meet new people. Regularly speak to your International Advisor, Campus Activities Staff and Residence Life Teams to keep up to speed with upcoming events and opportunities to help out around campus.

You never know what opportunities might be presented to you to represent your College when you are seen to be someone who is willing to get involved and give back to campus life.

Dean's List Award

Many of the US Colleges and Universities that we work with will have a "Dean's List" or "Academic Achievement" award. This award is presented to those students who obtain above a certain GPA in a given semester or academic year.

The GPA required to obtain the award will differ from one institution to the next but typically you need to achieve a 3.5 or higher.

The College will often host a dinner or reception for students who obtain the award.

Study USA Student of the Year Award

Every year at the programme Graduation ceremony we award one student from the cohort with the accolade of "Student of the Year." The competition is open to those students who secure a cumulative 4.0 GPA during their time in the US.

These students are invited to write an essay outlining how their Study USA experience has made them more employable.

Internship

Securing an internship during your Study USA experience is a fantastic way to put the business skills you are learning in the classroom into practice in a real-life environment. In addition, gaining work experience in an international context will look great on your CV when you return to Northern Ireland.

Taking on an internship is not a mandatory part of the programme however we recommend that you consider this option and make the most of the opportunity to secure valuable professional experience in the USA.

If it is something you are interested in, then we suggest that you begin to weigh up your options as early as possible.

There are two types of internships that you may wish to consider:

- **Academic Internship**
A number of Colleges and Universities will offer "internship classes" that will enable you to complete an internship during term time and receive academic credit. This would count as one of your four leadership/communication/business-related classes per semester. In addition to the time spent with the local employer

you will often complete a weekly catch-up class on campus. Coursework for the class will be based on the work you are completing on your internship.

- **Summer Internship**
Another option is to undertake a summer internship in the US after the completion of your studies and before you return home.

There are a number of visa considerations with this option, however it does give you greater flexibility in terms of the number of opportunities available to you and geographical location of your internship.

The first step in securing a summer internship is speaking to your international advisor to determine your visa eligibility. Depending on whether you are on an F1 or J1 visa there are different visa considerations.

- For F1 visas, students will have to activate the Optional Practical Training clause (OPT). This can be applied for up to 90 days before the end date of Spring semester. There is also a \$380 charge related to this. There is a risk that your OPT application would be unsuccessful; therefore it is extremely important that you discuss this option with your advisor and seek their guidance on the application process.
- For J1 visas, students need to liaise with their advisor and request that practical training is authorized as an add-on to their current visa. The practical training element enables J1 students to complete an internship that relates to their current course of study, which in your case will be "Business Studies".

Once you have discussed the visa considerations you will want to research available opportunities.

If it all comes together and you are able to secure an internship then you will just need to sort out your accommodation (see travel tips section relating to booking self-catering accommodation), check the dates of your insurance policy and re-schedule the date of your return flight home.

Campus Breaks and Travel Opportunities

Over the course of the next nine months there will be a number of breaks in the College calendar that will give you a chance to explore other parts of the US.

Each institution will have its own term dates which you will find on their website in the "Academic Calendar" section but generally speaking college holidays are as follows

- Labor Day – 1st Monday of September
- Veterans Day – 11th November
- Fall Break – 2nd weekend October usually no class Fri & Mon
- Thanksgiving – Last Thurs in November, usually Thurs & Fri off
- Martin Luther King Jr. Day – 3rd Monday in Jan
- Spring Break – around 1st week of March

During Thanksgiving, Winter Break and Spring Break it is likely that your campus will be closed, and all students will be required to leave. This means that you will need to make alternative accommodation plans in advance as there will be no access to dorms or the College cafeteria.

No doubt some of your new American friends will invite you to spend some of the holidays with their families wherever "home" is for them. Perhaps you have family of your own in the US that you can visit. Maybe you will want to use the holidays as a chance to travel and explore with other international students from your College or meet up with other students on the programme.

While there may be many options, the key to making the most of breaks is early planning, as the cost of accommodation and travel around US public holidays can tend to become increasingly expensive.

Visa Considerations for Travel

When travelling over the course of the year it's important to keep in a mind a number of visa considerations:

- If at any point in the year you will be leaving the US either to come home or travel to another country (including Mexico & Canada) it is essential that you inform your International Advisor and ask that the Designated School Official (DSO) on campus signs off your I-20 (F1 Visa) or DS-2019 (J1 Visa) document. You will notice on the back page of these documents space for signatures of the DSO. This must be signed for every time you will be "re-entering" the US. Failure to have the document signed could result in you being refused re-entry at US Homeland Security Border Patrol.
- If you are travelling throughout the US, it is important to remember that both your I-20 or DS2019 document and the visa stamped in your passport work hand in hand to form your "visa". In addition, when you first arrived in the US an I-94 card will have been stapled into your passport. If asked for photo I.D as a deposit for a bike rental, hostel room etc. never leave your passport, leave your University student card, US State ID, or your driver license card instead.
- Look after your passport and travel documents and if you must leave them in a hotel etc., please ensure they are safely secured.

SECTION FIVE – PREPARING TO COME HOME

It's the beginning of April and your academic year is beginning to draw to a close. Perhaps you plan to remain in the US for a while longer when you finish up at your College or maybe you are ready to head straight home.

Whatever your summer plans are before you leave your College campus there are a number of important things you should do before you say your goodbyes.

FINANCES

Before you come home you need to get your finances in order as these issues are much easier to sort out when you are there in person.

Student Account

- We will request a copy of your student account along with your Spring transcript.
- Any charges that fall outside of the items covered in your Study USA scholarship will be your personal responsibility. This would include things like college trips, room change fees, sports equipment, fines, additional printing charges etc. that have been added to your account.
- If there are items that you need to pay for, please arrange this with the Student Finance Office on campus before you leave.
- Any outstanding debts to the College will prevent you from successfully completing the programme and attending Graduation.

US Bank Account

- Before you leave the US, you should ensure to close your bank account on a \$0.00 balance.
- In the past students have retained their accounts only to find out 2-3 years down the line that they have been incurring interest on overdraft fees or late payment fees.
- Although it may seem like a good idea to have access to a US account for future trips to America it is often more hassle than it's worth to keep it open.

Contracts and Accounts

- Over the course of the year, you may have set up contracts or subscriptions linked to your US bank account e.g., cell phone, iTunes, Spotify, Netflix etc.
- Before you close your bank account you should make sure to discontinue any subscriptions to avoid charges down the line.
- Please note that sometimes these online subscriptions are country specific, and you might encounter difficulty using them back home.

LEAVING CAMPUS

Packing Up

Your dorm room will have been your home from home for the past year and packing up can initially seem like a mammoth task. Chances are you will have accumulated a lot more "stuff" than you left home with at the beginning of the year.

If you are planning to travel in the summer, you will need to consider how many suitcases you want to have with you and the cost of bringing extra bags on the flight home. If you are bringing home extra luggage you will need to add this to your reservation either on the airline website or by calling the airline reservation hotline.

Remember you can also look into mailing boxes home instead of bringing belongings as luggage on your flight.

Checking out of your Dorm Room

When you leave your room, it will be checked over by Residence Life staff for damage, cleanliness and any belongings that have been left behind.

It is important that when you think you have everything ready to go that you get someone from residence life to do a preliminary check before you go. Often you will be required to sign out when the final check is done or when you are leaving.

To avoid any surprise fines, you should make the residence life team aware of any damage, get the room as clean as possible and don't leave any of your belongings behind. You will need to agree this with your roommate as well to make sure you leave your room as close to the way it was when you moved in as possible.

Saying Goodbye

Before you leave campus, you should set a final meeting with your international advisor, and the College President, if possible, to thank them for their support and the opportunity to study at their institution.

If you are really organised you may even want to share your Personal Development Portfolio with staff at your College to show them how you have made the most of your experience.

Visa Grace Period

From the expiry date on your visa you have a certain number of days grace before you must leave the US. The number of days is dependent on visa type. F1 Visa holders have a 60 day grace period, J1 visa holders have a 30 day grace period.

To avoid any hassle you are advised to book travel out of the US 1-2 days before the end of the grace period to avoid any complications if you encountered a travel delay. Overstaying the grace period will show up on your USCIS record and may affect your ability to enter the US at a later stage.

Changing your Flight

If you wish to stay in the US for travel or an internship after you finish your studies you will most likely need to change the date of your return flight. You are responsible for covering any associated charges for changing your flights. If you wish to change your flights please contact the British Council travel agent directly, providing the details of your current booking, and the change being requested.

SECTION SIX – BACK HOME

Coming home from a year abroad can sometimes take a bit of adjustment. This section will help you get to grips with reverse culture shock, something that many students face, and provide tips on how to make your Study USA experience work for you in terms of your employability and joining our growing network of Alumni.

REVERSE CULTURE SHOCK

You may experience “reverse culture shock” upon your return to the UK. You will most likely experience the same feelings you had during your first few weeks in the US as you realize that both you and your home country have changed while you were away. Eventually of course you will begin to integrate your Study USA experiences into your home life and realise the impact of the experience abroad and the importance of being home.

Tips to combat reverse culture shock

- Keep a diary, journal, or scrapbook. You might feel that your experiences abroad are so incredible that you could never forget them, but you may. Put them down on paper while they are fresh in your mind and it will be a priceless treasure to have years down the road.
- Seek out other students at your university who have studied abroad. When you return to the UK, you will want to share your experiences and tell stories of your time abroad to everyone. Finding other people who can relate to that will be a great comfort.

GRADUATION

The British Council will host a small graduation ceremony for students who have successfully completed the programme. This will be held in September and will be an opportunity for you to receive your participation certificates, and to announce the winner of the Study USA Student of Year competition.

Alumni Network

The Alumni Association serves all alumni of the Study USA & Business Education Initiative (BEI) programmes. The Alumni Association organise annual networking events, volunteer and fundraising opportunities and are responsible for maintaining the Alumni presence on social media.

Connecting with Alumni Association enables you to expand your professional network and retain a connection to the programme. Search for the “BEI & Study USA Students and Alumni” group on Facebook and LinkedIn to keep up to date on all events and opportunities coordinated via the Alumni Association.

FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

- Study and work abroad is the British Council’s webpage for international opportunities for young people and professionals from all over the UK.
[Study and work abroad | British Council](#)

GLOSSARY OF US HIGHER-ED TERMS

Academic Adviser: A counsellor or instructional faculty member who helps you select your classes and helps you identify your career and/or transfer interests.

Academic Regulations: Academic Regulations are the official policies and rules of the institution which apply to faculty, staff and students concerning matters which directly affect academic standards. Includes such topics as academic standards, grading system and standards, registration, and withdrawal from classes, choosing and/or changing your curriculum, petition, and appeal, and much more. Your College's Academic Regulations may be available online. If not, ask your academic advisor for a copy.

Academic Suspension: A student whose GPA falls below a certain number will be placed on academic restriction. This will vary from college to college.

Advising: Shorthand for "academic advising" -- assistance with the process of planning what courses need to be taken in what sequence in order to reach your academic goal.

Closed Class: A course for which the maximum number of students is already enrolled. A student cannot enrol in such a class unless someone drops, and a seat becomes available.

Corequisite: A course that must be taken at the same time as another course.

Course Number: The number assigned to a particular course (for example, EN 101).

Credit: A measure of the total instructional content of each course, usually related to the total hours of instruction. The term "credits" is relatively modern shorthand for the phrase "credit hours". As an example, a History course which meets for three one-hour sessions a week over a traditional 15-week semester, would be identified as a 3-credit course.

Counselling: The catch-all name for professional guidance in just about any area that might be related to your College success. Could mean anything from development of better study skills to assistance with serious personal issues. "Counsellors" are the faculty and staff with professional credentials in this field. Can overlap with academic "advising."

Drop: To remove oneself from a particular class section during the schedule adjustment period.

Elective: A course in which the student has some choice or selection -- as distinct from a course that is absolutely required in a particular curriculum.

Good Academic Standing: Usually a student with a cumulative GPA of 2.0 or better. This will vary for each college.

GPA: Shorthand for "grade point average". The standard measure for determining overall academic standing. Most Colleges use the scale A=4, B=3, C=2, D=1 and F=0. Grade points for each course are multiplied by the number of credits assigned to that course, these values are summed, and that total is finally divided by the total number of credits for these courses to arrive at the GPA.

Independent Study: Academic work chosen or designed by the student with the approval of the department concerned, under an instructor's supervision, and usually undertaken outside the regular classroom structure.

Orientation: A programme of activities for new students designed to introduce them to some of the essential knowledge and skills for a successful College experience. May include topics ranging from selection of courses to childcare and parking.

Pre-requisite: A requirement that certain courses must be successfully completed before others may be attempted. Sometimes requires a grade of C or better in the earlier course -- if so this will be stated explicitly in the course description for the later course..

Student Services: Services provided by a College that are not explicitly "academic". e.g., Bookstores, Counselling, Career Centres, Childcare, Dining Facilities, Financial Aid, Internship programs, Parking, Placement Centres, Security Assistance, etc.

Syllabus: A summary document prepared by the instructor that states basic information about plans for a particular course in a particular semester. Can include such things as textbook lists, office hours, test dates, required assignments, chapters to be covered, learning objectives, etc.

Transcript: A formal record of grades received in all courses you have taken, and whether any degrees or certificates have been successfully completed.

Vice President and Provost: The chief academic officer on campus.

Withdraw: The act of filing paperwork to remove yourself from the official class roster, either for a single course or for an entire semester. If done early enough in the semester the course (or courses) will not appear on your transcript at all. Exact dates for these withdraw periods are published in the Semester Calendar for each semester. Terminating your class participation without completing the "withdraw" paperwork can lead to a grade of F on your record.

Work-Study Student: A student employee receiving financial aid.

END OF YEAR CHECKLIST

| TO DO | COMPLETED? |
|--|------------|
| Presentation Record Sheet signed by International Advisor and returned to Study USA Team | |
| Request a final transcript be sent to the Study USA team | |
| Outstanding charges on student account paid off (see pg 33) | |
| Dorm room cleared and cleaned (see pg 34) | |
| US bank account closed | |
| Other US accounts closed | |
| Visited college staff (international advisor, president etc.) to say thank you | |
| Personal Development Portfolio completed by 31 st May | |
| Complete any assignments required by your home university | |

Study USA – Ambassadorial Presentation Record Sheet

Every Study USA student is required to complete five ambassadorial presentations on Northern Ireland during their year at a US college. These presentations are your chance to promote Northern Ireland in the US and change many of the misperceptions that you may encounter about life back home. In addition this is a chance for you to refine and perfect your public speaking and communication skills.

Your presentations can be held either on or off campus. Some of your presentations should be formal in style, but some could also take a different format. Previous students have hosted panel discussions, sports coaching sessions, film screenings or cookery demonstrations. You may have opportunities to speak to classes or other student groups on and off campus, the International club, local schools, and church and civic groups. Your International Advisor may be able to help put you in contact with suitable groups. There should be a variety of presentations completed. Presentations should not be duplicated.

It is your responsibility to inform your International Student Advisor of presentations that have taken place. When your presentations are completed towards the end of your final semester please submit this record sheet it to you International Advisor and ask that they sign it and email to the Study USA team: study.usa@britishcouncil.org.

Please submit this record before you leave campus.

Student Name:

US College:

| Date | Venue | Audience (inc. number who attended) | Summary of Content of Presentation | Supervised By? |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|--|---|-----------------------|
| e.g. Tues 18 th Oct | Local High School | School Children and Teachers | Northern Irish History | Professor Brown |
| 1. | | | | |
| 2. | | | | |
| 3. | | | | |
| 4. | | | | |
| 5. | | | | |

International Advisor Name:

International Advisor Signature:

Date:

Study USA Arrival Information and Fall class choices.

US CONTACT DETAILS

| | |
|---|--|
| Name | |
| US College | |
| Dorm Telephone Number & Extension | |
| US Cell Phone Number | |
| US College Email Address | |
| Name of International Advisor/Study USA contact | |
| US International Advisor Email Address | |
| UK Course of Study (Degree/Course Title) | |

Please comment on your first impressions of campus and tell us about any issues or problems you have encountered so far. We may be able to help!:

CLASSES - FALL SEMESTER

Please remember you must take 30 credits over the course of the year, with a total of 12 credits in leadership/communication/business-related classes, 12 associated with your home degree, and 6 credits in elective classes.

| | Course Code & Class Title | Level (100-400) | Credits | Brief Description (taken from course catalogue) |
|---------------------------|---|-----------------|----------|---|
| <i>EXAMPLE</i> | <i>ECO201 - Macroeconomics Analysis</i> | <i>200</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>An investigation of the economic factors determining the level of national income, prices, unemployment, and the rate of economic growth utilizing a number of different theoretical perspectives.</i> |
| Home Degree Class 1 | | | | |
| Home Degree Class 2 | | | | |
| Business Class 1 | | | | |
| Business Class 2 | | | | |
| Elective Class | | | | |
| TOTAL FALL CREDITS | | | | |

Study USA Spring Class Choices

Please remember you must take 30 credits over the course of the year, with a total of 12 credits in leadership/communication/business-related classes, 12 associated with your home degree, and 6 credits in elective classes.

Name:

US College:

UK Course of Study:

| | Course Code & Class Title | Level (100-400) | Credits | Brief Description (taken from course catalogue) |
|-----------------------------|---|-----------------|----------|---|
| <i>EXAMPLE</i> | <i>ECO201 - Macroeconomics Analysis</i> | <i>200</i> | <i>3</i> | <i>An investigation of the economic factors determining the level of national income, prices, unemployment, and the rate of economic growth utilizing a number of different theoretical perspectives.</i> |
| Home Degree Class 1 | | | | |
| Home Degree Class 2 | | | | |
| Business Class 1 | | | | |
| Business Class 2 | | | | |
| Elective Class | | | | |
| TOTAL SPRING CREDITS | | | | |