



International Student Handbook



The Flathead Valley Community College does not discriminate in admission or access to programs, or in employment policies on the basis of race, sex, national origin or ancestry, marital status, creed, religion, color, sexual preference, political ideas, age, or mental or physical disability. FVCC accepts applications from in-state, out-of-state, domestic and foreign students. The school is authorized, under Federal law, to enroll non-immigrant alien students.



Welcome to Flathead Valley Community College!

Thank you for choosing FVCC! We wish to extend a warm welcome to each new and returning student and scholar. During your stay here, we hope you will attain your educational goals and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills. We also encourage you to take full advantage of the many opportunities provided by the Flathead Valley Community College and surrounding area to enrich your life and develop lasting friendships.

Adjusting to life in another country can be challenging. This handbook has been prepared in order to facilitate adjustment to your new environment. It consists of information and advice on academic matters, available services, social relations and immigration rules. Preparation of this booklet has been greatly facilitated by resource people on this campus and other partner campuses who offered constructive comments and provided valuable information. The Handbook does not attempt to answer specific questions or cover all situations you may encounter. Your academic adviser, college staff, professors, fellow students and colleagues, and the staff of the International Student Office also are available to assist you in various aspects of your life here.

Our best wishes for a successful educational experience at Flathead Valley Community College!

Sincerely,

Gerda Reeb

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I. CAMPUS LIFE

About FVCC

Founded in 1967, the Flathead Valley Community College is a public college, offering the first two years of a Bachelor degree in one of the most stunning college settings. FVCC students transfer with ease to all Montana partner universities. FVCC credits are accepted nationally and internationally. FVCC is accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities.

Academic Affairs

Since there is no pre-set order of classes for any program, students select their own classes from general education, the major department, and elective offerings. Each semester students plan their class schedules in consultation with the International Student Program Coordinator.

The following suggestions may help you understand what is generally expected of you. You will find answers to more specific questions (regarding registration, dropping/adding courses, withdrawals, pass/fail options, degree requirements and graduation) in the FVCC Catalog.

Students are expected to be active participants in the educational process. Course work consists of class meetings, reading of texts, writing papers, laboratory work, and often computer-related research. Academic progress is generally based on a combination of examinations, written papers, and oral contributions. Great emphasis is put on class attendance and participation.

Individual instructors have their own personal styles of teaching, and course expectations will vary from instructor to instructor. For example, one may give multiple choice tests (where students choose the most correct answer out of 4-5 given answers to a question), another may prefer short or long essay tests; and others may favor research papers. Usually there will be a final examination or a paper due at the end of the semester. In all cases the safest study method is to keep up with lectures and reading on a daily basis. Do not put all your effort into the final examination only. Foreign students accustomed to doing course work at their own leisure and preparing for fewer, more comprehensive examinations may find adjustment to these requirements among the most difficult to make.

If you are having problems, you should talk with your professor and adviser as soon as possible. Do not wait to seek help from them until the end of the semester. Your professors may expect you to make appointments to see them during their office hours to consult on any questions connected with their courses. Try to get acquainted with your teachers, especially those in your department or school. This can be of great help when you seek letters of recommendation from them in the future.

Academic honesty is strictly enforced in the classrooms, and the consequences of cheating are usually very severe. Students who are caught cheating can be suspended from school. In the case of foreign students, this may mean termination of their studies in the United States, as they will not be able to maintain their student status. Be sure to read the section on "Plagiarism" in the FVCC Catalog, under Student Rights and Responsibilities.

To some students, the "credit system" may be completely new. FVCC and the US university system use credits to measure a student's progress and to assess fees. The number of credits in a course can vary. Usually you earn one credit for every hour of class you attend per week. Therefore, when a course is offered three times a week, that course generally is worth 3 credits. Some courses may cover more material and therefore are worth more credits than others. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) requires you to be a "full-time student" in order to keep your F-1 or J-1 student status, which means that you must carry at least the minimum number of credits each semester. The minimum is 12 credits.

Grading is based on a point system: A=4 points, B=3, C=2, D=1, F=0. Grades for all courses are averaged each semester to determine the overall level of work done by the student. This overall level is known as the grade point average (GPA). Professors have the option of using the following modification to the grading system: A=4 points, A-=3.67, B+=3.33, B=3, B-=2.67, C+=2.33, C=2, C-=1.67, D+=1.33, D=1, D-=.67, and F=0. Your academic advisor can help you learn how to calculate your GPA.

The minimum cumulative GPA you should maintain is 2.00. You can receive a report of your grades at the end of each semester. You may print a non-official transcript from your FVCC Student Portal. You may request an official transcript from the Registrar's Office for a fee.

II. CAMPUS SERVICES

International Student Program Coordinator

This office located in the Learning Resource Center, room 139. Its main function is to help foreign students gain maximum benefit from their stay at FVCC and in the community. The office assists students in maintaining their legal immigration status, and is the coordinator of all the campus and community services and resources available to foreign students. To ease the transition to a new academic and social environment, the Coordinator, Gerda Reeb, provides special orientation sessions and academic advising to all foreign students.

Gerda's office should be one of the first and frequent stops you make when you arrive at FVCC, and the place to go when you have any question or problem. If the International Student Coordinator cannot help you with the particular issue, you will be directed to the appropriate person, and procedures will be explained. Gerda will be able to give you information about what alternatives are open to you, where to go, and what to do.

Books

You can purchase your textbooks at the Bookstore in the FVCC Bookstore, or online at various websites (Amazon, Abe Books, Textbooks.com). In the Bookstore, the books are found in the textbook section, and are arranged alphabetically by department.

At the end of each semester, you may sell back your used books to the Bookstore (or various websites), at a percentage of the original cost. If you purchased your books on the web, the college bookstore will not be able to buy those back.

Financial Aid

Students are expected to have adequate financial resources to meet the cost of tuition, fees, books and living expenses. International students are not eligible for federal student aid.

For information about on-campus employment, see "Employment" under "Immigration Regulations" in this handbook.

Health Care

All international students must have full medical coverage while attending FVCC.

FVCC Student Health Center is located in the Broussard Center, room 136. Please call 406 756-4331 for more information.

Counseling and Psychological Services:

FVCC has a full time clinical and counseling psychologist on staff that can assist international students with issues of adjustment to life in a new culture.

If you are experiencing problems adjusting to life in the U.S.A., problems in your relationships, or personal problems, our counselor is available to assist you. Counseling services provides three sessions free of charge to FVCC students. All counseling services are strictly confidential.

Please call 406 756-3886 for more information.

Health Insurance:

Healthcare in the United States is largely a private (not a governmental) function. You are required to carry health insurance while a student at FVCC. Depending on what health insurance you have purchased, your provider may pay only a portion of the costs, with the student being responsible for their deduction and co-payment portion. Deductible is the amount of money you will have to pay for each illness and accident before the insurance policy begins to reimburse you.

Please take the time to read the brochure that accompanies your insurance so that you understand how your insurance contract works. In cases where the insurance does not cover all the costs, the student is responsible for payment. Your health insurance will typically also contain certain exclusions, meaning there are some services and treatments the insurance may not pay for. The exact insurance contract concerning coverage and exclusions varies from year to year, so be sure to be familiar with your contract.

Medical insurance coverage of dependents is strongly recommended as medical and hospitalization costs are very high in the United States. Foreign students who have their families with them should see the International Student Coordinator for information and application forms for medical insurance plan options for dependents.

Housing

FVCC has limited student housing. There may be a waiting list for those units. See International Student Coordinator for procedures to apply for student housing and also information about how to find a rental in the area.

Academic and Career Advising

FVCC's Learning Center (LRC 129) assists students in developing academic success plans, help you select courses and explore majors, provide you with transfer information, and help you choose viable career objectives and help you plan the steps necessary to attain those objectives. Career Services offers various services, including: the opportunity to meet with a career counselor; a career assessment program to help you choose a career; as well as internet career exploration.

Internship Services

Internship Services (LRC 122) provides students a means to integrate academic theories and principles with practical job experience through cooperative education and internships. Students can gain practical work experience related to their academic field, explore career options, gain valuable work-related skills and receive academic credit.

Disability Services for Students

Disability Services for Students (LRC 129) assures program access to FVCC for students with disabilities. It coordinates and provides reasonable accommodations, advocates for an accessible and hospitable learning environment, and promotes self-determination on the part of the students it serves.

Computer Labs

Campus computer labs are available for general campus use. Laptops and other media equipment can be checked out in the FVCC Media Center in LRC 117. You may also print in all those labs for free.

Copying

Coin-operated copy machines are located in various hallway locations on the FVCC campus.

III. SOCIAL LIFE/ CAMPUS ACTIVITIES

Social Customs

Customs differ from country to country. The process of attempting to understand what is observed and finding a comfortable way to live in a new environment can be perplexing for a foreign student. Moreover, the wide variety of customs and manners and the constant change that characterizes American society makes it difficult to provide a "guide" to social life. Some general American customs will be mentioned to illustrate some things you might find strange and new. Awareness of these customs can help you adjust to the new environment. If there is anything you want to know or don't understand, just ask. You will find that most people try to be helpful and are ready to provide explanations.

First names are used more readily here than in many other countries. Don't be surprised if other students and even professors call you by your first name and expect you to call them by their first name. It is generally appropriate to use first names from the time of introduction if you are approximately the same age as person to whom you are introduced; or when an older person requests that you call them by their first name.

An older woman is addressed as Mrs., Miss, Ms. or Dr. until she asks to be called by her first name. It is the custom to use Mr., Mrs., Dr., etc., with the last name rather than with the first one. In many societies older people are often addressed by such terms as "old man" or "old lady" to convey respect. In the United States, however, such terms are considered derogatory and should be avoided.

Friendship patterns also tend to be casual. When Americans seem warm and open with new acquaintances, this does not mean that close friendships are forming. At social gatherings Americans readily welcome new people and the warmth expressed can be genuine and sincere but confined to that occasion and may not always continue. Close friendships develop as a result of repeated interactions and shared interest between individuals.

Expressions like "see you later," "be seeing you soon," "drop over sometime," "come again," are not to be considered as actual invitations or promises for future invitations. They are used when people part company instead of saying, "good-bye."

In contrast to other countries, dating usually takes place between two people rather than with a large group of people. Students on a date generally go to have coffee or dinner, or to a movie, concert, or party. Dating is not to be taken as indicative of serious feelings or that intimacies are acceptable. Americans do not draw a very distinct line between a date and going out with a friend; unless dating is "steady," that is, exclusively with one person over a period of time.

In general, Americans get involved in many activities, and live more or less by the clock. "Doing" is considered important and "wasting time" in unproductive activities is discouraged. As someone observed, "When people are not busy working, they are busy relaxing."

Social Invitations and Business Appointments

Some Flathead Valley residents may want to entertain foreign students during the year. They will usually extend invitations by phone or written note giving specific time and place. These should be answered promptly and honestly. If you cannot accept or don't want to go, you should say that you cannot attend. Be sure you understand the name of the person who invites you and don't hesitate to ask him/her to spell it for you. If you do accept an invitation, remember the time and have the phone number of your host in case you cannot attend or will be late. Never accept an invitation and then fail to go unless you are ill or another emergency arises. A written "thank you" note or telephone call expressing thanks to your host after a dinner or party is considered courteous. Flowers or gifts for your hosts are not necessary, but are generally appreciated.

For business appointment, it is important to be prompt and reliable (always do what you say you are going to do). Dentist and doctor appointments, counselor, professor, banker and business appointments begin at the minute named with no possibility of being "early" or "late."

In social affairs there is more flexibility. If you go to dinner in a home, it is wise to arrive no later than 10 minutes after the hour stated, but not before either. In America, it is usually the guest who takes the initiative in leaving. If you are invited for a meal, plan to stay no more than 2 hours after the meal is finished unless you are urged to stay longer. Because most hosts and hostesses do their own work, it is customary for guests to ask if they may assist in any way.

Many social events, other than dinners, give a range of time within which you are expected. Receptions, cocktail parties, picnics, and "open houses" are such events. For large informal events or formal occasions, the letters R.S.V.P. (which mean a reply is requested) may appear on written invitations; you must then phone or write either your acceptance or refusal.

When a group of people get together for a "pot luck" dinner, each person or family brings one dish of food.

When you invite friends to visit you, do not feel you must conform to American customs or serve American refreshments. This is an opportunity for your friends to learn something about your style of entertaining and your manner of preparing foods.

Social Activities

Academic work at FVCC should be supplemented with a variety of cultural, social and athletic activities. Dances, lectures, entertainment and exchanges are part of campus life, which will not only provide recreation but enrich your education as well. Try to join in wherever possible as such activities can be of great value to your total educational experience.

Holidays

The following legal holidays are observed throughout the United States:

New Year's Day, January 1
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Third Monday in January
President's Day, Third Monday in February
Memorial Day, Last Monday in May
Independence Day, July 4
Labor Day, 1st Monday in September
Veterans' Day, November 11
Thanksgiving Day, 4th Thursday in November
Christmas Day, December 25

Thanksgiving is a national holiday comparable to harvest festivals held in other countries. Thanksgiving is probably one of the most important celebrations in the U.S., with families often traveling long distances to be together. A typical Thanksgiving observance consists of an elaborate dinner featuring turkey, many different side dishes, and pumpkin pie.

Halloween (October 31) is a uniquely American celebration. Originally, this was All Hallows' Eve, the night before All Saint's Day, when it was believed that the dead returned to roam the earth as ghosts. Now, children dress in costumes and visit their neighbors for sweets. This custom is called "trick or treat." Adults also dress up for Halloween costume parties, carve pumpkins for display and decorate their home with scary props.

St. Valentine's Day (February 14) is the day for telling someone that you care about him or her. Children generally exchange cards with their classmates. It is an occasion where friends and loved ones exchange cards, sweets and /or flowers.

Birthdays. Adults often observe their birthdays with a small party, a birthday cake and gifts or by going out to dinner with friends. Children often celebrate the day of their birth with a party at home. They invite a few friends; have refreshments (including a cake with candles to represent each year of the child's life) and games. Each guest brings an inexpensive gift for the child. In some elementary schools there is an observance of the birthday in the classroom where parents provide the refreshments.

CAMPUS ACTIVITIES:

Please contact Intramurals at 756-3893 for more information, or stop by Blake Hall 155 to get a list of activities.

IV. IMMIGRATION REGULATIONS

Always consult the International Student Coordinator on immigration matters. Immigration regulations are complex and subject to change.

Documents

Passport: Your passport is issued by your government, and is your official international identification. Your passport must be valid at all times during your stay in this country. You should keep copies of your passport in your home country and in the U.S.. If you lose your passport, you should immediately notify the Kalispell Police Department and file an official report.

Visa: A United States visa can only be obtained outside the U.S., and is only used to enter the United States. Some visas are marked "1"; this means that the bearer of the passport can use the visa to enter the U.S. only one time. With "M" stamped on a visa, a person can leave and re-enter the country as many times as wished, as long as the date on the visa is still valid. Many people become worried when they note that the validity date on their visa has expired. As long as you remain in status and in the United States, the expiration date on the visa is not important.

I-94: (Arrival/Departure Record). The I-94 is a white card that is issued by the immigration inspector and stapled into your passport at the U.S. port of entry. The I-94 is proof that you entered the U.S. legally, and states how long you are allowed to remain. Usually, for student (F-1 or J-1) visas, it is stamped with "D/S." This means that you are allowed to be in the U.S. as long as you maintain your visa status, which is directly related to your Form I-20 or DS-2019. When you leave the United States, you will give your I-94 to the airline as you depart. This is proof that you left the United States.

Duration of Status (D/S): Duration of status is the period of time which a student is pursuing a full course of study, any periods of practical training, and includes limited time after the completion of a program to depart the US.

****D/S is always on condition that the passport is valid at all times while in the U.S****

I-20: (Certificate of Eligibility for Non-Immigrant Student [F-1] Status). The Form I-20 is the document that states what school you are eligible to attend, your intended academic program, dates of attendance, and financial information. The I-20 is required by the U.S. Consulate when you apply for a visa. If you plan to leave the U.S. temporarily, you must have your I-20 signed by a designated school official (DSO) – either Gerda Reeb or Brenda Hanson. If there are any changes that occur in your program, you must request a new Form I-20 from the International Student Coordinator.

If a student remains in the U.S. beyond the 60-day grace period after program completion, the student is no longer in valid F-1 status.

DS-2019: (Certificate of Eligibility for Exchange Visitor [J-1] Status). A DS-2019 is issued by your sponsor for applying for a U.S. visa and to enter or re-enter the United States. It must be replaced by a new Form DS-2019 for extension of stay or a change of program sponsors.

An exchange visitor (J visa) with a D/S on their I-94, is considered to be in valid program status as long as s/he has a valid Form DS-2019. If the exchange visitor remains in the U.S. beyond the 30-

day period following the expiration date of the Form DS-2019, the exchange visitor is no longer in valid J-1 status.

WHEN YOU TRAVEL INSIDE THE UNITED STATES, YOU MUST ALWAYS CARRY YOUR FORM I-94, I-20 OR DS-2019 AND PASSPORT.

Maintaining Proper Status

Each student and scholar is responsible for keeping his or her immigration status up-to-date. The International Student Coordinator only helps facilitate these matters.

To maintain their status, F-1 and J-1 visa holders must:

Report Changes of Address and Name within 10 Days directly to International Student Coordinator.

Obtain Prior Authorization from International Student Coordinator to Drop Below a Full Course of Study. During regular academic semesters (Fall and Spring) F-1 and J-1 visa holders must maintain a full course of study (12 credits). You must receive advance authorization from the International Student Coordinator to enroll for a reduced credit load, and only under very limited situations.

Report Departure Date and Reason to FSSS: If you have to leave FVCC unexpectedly, and/ or before your program end date on your Form I-20 or DS-2019, you are required to inform the International Student Coordinator. Some of these reasons include leave of absence, suspension or expulsion from school. You must also notify the International Student Coordinator 15 days before travelling outside the U.S. so that the Form I-20 or DS-2019 can be signed or a new form can be issued.

When Planning to Transfer to another Educational Institution: You must notify the International Student Coordinator of your intent to transfer to a particular school. Your SEVIS record will be transferred to the new school, and they will issue a new Form I-20 or DS-2019. You must report to the foreign student office at the new school within 15 days of the program start date listed on the Form I-20, or by the start date on the new Form DS-2019.

Inform the International Student Coordinator when changing your academic program (from one degree level to another, or one major/field of study to another) so you can obtain a new Form I-20 or DS-2019.

F-1s are allowed to work on campus up to 20 hours per week when school is in session:

Employment is highly regulated for both F-1 and J-1 students. To work off-campus F-1s must receive PRIOR authorization from the USCIS. Authorization is also required for Curricular Practical Training (internship) or Optional Practical Training.

J-1s are allowed to work on campus or off campus only with their J-1 program sponsor's

authorization. J-1s with a program sponsor other than UM should contact their program sponsor directly. Authorization for academic training before and/or after the program of study can also be secured from the program sponsor.

Notify the International Student Coordinator of any accompanying dependents on F-2 or J-2 status and provide immigration and biographical information regarding those dependents. Dates of any departures or arrivals of dependents must also be reported to the International Student Coordinator.

Overstay

A law that went into effect on April 1, 1997, states that anyone who is "unlawfully present" in the U.S., or violates the terms of his/her non-immigrant visa, will need to apply for a new visa for re-entry in the U.S., even if the dates on the current visa stamp remain valid. In addition, the new visa can only be obtained in one's country of nationality. *This ruling applies to anyone who overstays even by one day.* A person who has been illegally in the U.S. for six to twelve months, or over twelve months, will be barred from re-entry to the U.S. for three and ten years, respectively.

Reinstatement of Student Status

If a student becomes out of status for their F-1 or J-1 visas, it is possible to apply for reinstatement of student status. A student who has overstayed the authorized period of stay, or otherwise violated the conditions of student status, must make a written request to USCIS for reinstatement to student status, submit an application form, and pay a fee within five months. Please notify the International Student Coordinator for help if this situation arises.

Re-entry to the U.S. after a Temporary Absence

Before any trip abroad it is best to check with the Foreign Student/Scholar Adviser to make sure you have all the documents in order. Please don't wait for the last minute to come to the office, and don't forget to bring your passport, Form I-94, and I-20, or DS-2019.

Students and scholars from certain countries may need to go through Special Registration at the US port of entry or exit when they enter or leave the U.S.

A student/scholar who plans to visit Mexico, Canada, or adjacent islands (except Cuba) for less than 30 days is eligible to re-enter the U.S. even with an expired visa. In this situation, the student/scholar should not surrender their Form I-94 when they depart the U.S., as the student/scholar will need that form (along with valid passport and endorsed Form I-20 or DS-2019) for re-entry. For a stay of longer than 30 days, the student must surrender the form I-94 upon departing the U.S., and will need a valid visa for reentry.

Some students and scholars may need to apply for a visa to enter Canada. Check with the International Student Coordinator to determine whether you will need one, or visit the website for the Canadian Consulate: <http://www.canadainternational.gc.ca/seattle/index.aspx?lang=eng>

If you plan to visit Mexico, you should contact the Mexican Consulate in Salt Lake City (801) 521-8503 or Seattle (206) 448-3526 to find out whether you need a visa.

School Transfer for F-1

If you plan to transfer to a new school, first you must be accepted to the new school. Bring the acceptance letter from the new school to the International Student Coordinator to fill out a transfer form and to discuss details about your transfer in SEVIS.

If an F-1 student has transferred or intends to transfer between schools and has been issued an I-20 by the new school, the name of the new school does not have to be the same as the school listed on the student's visa to allow re-entry into the United States, as long as that visa is still valid. However, the new form I-20 must be properly endorsed by the new school.

Program Transfer for J-1

A transfer from one designated program to another designated program must occur through SEVIS while the exchange visitor is in valid program status, i.e., prior to the end date of the current Form DS-2019, or when the exchange visitor completes, graduates, concludes, or terminates the course of study or exchange program, whichever occurs sooner.

Employment for F-1 Students

NOTE: Employment is highly regulated and strictly enforced. F-1 Students who are discovered working illegally will be required to leave the United States. If you have questions regarding employment, ask the International Student Coordinator BEFORE you begin to work.

On-Campus Employment

F-1 Students are allowed to work on campus 20 hours per week (or less) while school is in session. An F-1 student may, however, work on-campus full-time when school is not in session or during the annual vacation. Authorization for on-campus employment is obtained from the International Student Coordinator.

There are two types of student employment on campus: work study and non-work study. Foreign students are eligible for non-work study positions only.

Off-Campus Employment

F-1 students are only authorized to work off-campus for three reasons: Curricular Practical Training (internship), Optional Practical Training (employment after you complete your program), and Economic Hardship. The student may be authorized after having been in F-1 status for one full academic year (with some exceptions for graduate students). Inquire with the International Student Coordinator if you have questions regarding off-campus employment. Except for CPT, to engage in off-campus employment a student must first secure an Employment Authorization Document (EAD) from USCIS.

Optional Practical Training (OPT)

Optional Practical Training (OPT) is a benefit of the F-1 visa that allows a student to remain and work in their field of study for one year after completing their academic program. A student is eligible for this benefit once for each academic level.

It is not necessary to have employment prior to applying for OPT, however there are limits on the amount of time a student can be unemployed during that year.

In order to apply for OPT, the student must meet with the International Student Coordinator to discuss their plans, review their application, and receive an endorsement on their I-20. The application must be received before the student's 60-day grace period is completed, and it takes approximately 90 days for processing.

For more information about OPT, contact the International Student Coordinator.

F-2 Dependents (Spouses and Children of F-1 Students)

An F-2 Dependent is directly tied to the status of the F-1 Student. F-2 visa holders are **not** permitted to work, and study is limited to K-12 studies for dependent children.

In order to apply for an F-2 visa, the student must first request an I-20 from the International Student Coordinator. They must prove financial support for the dependent (\$3000 for spouse, \$1500 for each child), and provide biographical information such as name, age, country of birth, country of citizenship, and relation to the student.

Employment for J-1 Students/Scholars

****** NOTE**** Do not accept employment unless you have a properly authorized work permit. The Department of Homeland Security strictly enforces employment regulations. People on non-immigrant visas who are detected as working without proper authorization are required to leave the United States.**

J-1 Students

J-1 student employment is limited to 20 hours per week, except during school breaks and vacation, unless authorized for economic necessity.

There are two types of employment authorizations available for students on the J-visa: student employment and academic training. The difference between the two is that student employment occurs on-campus unless there is economic necessity; and, academic training is related to the student's field of study and in most cases occurs off-campus and for a specified period of time.

Spouses and Children of J-1 Visa Holders

J-2 visa holders (spouses and children of J-1 students/scholars) may work only with permission from USCIS and must show evidence of financial need for themselves alone.

J-1 and Their Dependents

J-1 students or scholars who wish to bring dependents to the United States must obtain from their program sponsor a new Form DS-2019 issued for that purpose.

Access to adequate health care for exchange visitors and their families is a major concern for sponsors. To ensure such access, the U.S. government has made health insurance a requirement for participation in the program. Minimum coverage must provide \$50,000 per accident or illness; at

least \$10,000 for medical evacuation to the home country; at least \$7,500 for repatriation of remains; and a deductible not to exceed \$500 per accident or illness.

J Visa: The Two-Year Home Residence Requirement

Exchange visitors who enter the United States on a J visa may be subject to the two-year home residence requirement for one or more of the following reasons:

- They received funding from the United States Government, their own government, or an international organization in connection with their participation in the Exchange Visitor Program;
- The education, skill or training they are pursuing in this country appears on the Exchange Visitor Skills List for their country;
- They acquired J-1 status on or after January 10, 1977 for the purpose of receiving graduate medical education or training.

Exchange visitors who are subject to this requirement may, under certain circumstances, apply for a waiver of that requirement from USCIS, after the request has been reviewed and approved by the Department of State.

V. GENERAL INFORMATION

I. Welcome to Kalispell

A. Population

In the Salish Indian language Kalispell means “flat and above the lake.” Kalispell is a city of over 20,000 people, with a total of over 90,000 in the Flathead County. Beautifully situated in the Rocky Mountains of Western Montana, Kalispell is a small and very friendly town with great access to the great outdoors and recreation. Skiers have access to [Whitefish Mountain Resort](#) on Big Mountain and [Blacktail Mountain Ski Area](#) each 17 miles (27 km) away. [Flathead Lake](#) is 7 miles (11 km) away. Kalispell is at only 31 miles (50 km) from [Glacier National Park](#) and 22 miles (35 km) from [Hungry Horse Dam](#). The opportunities for outdoor enthusiasts are endless

B. Weather

Kalispell and surrounding areas enjoy a moderate continental climate at an elevation of around 3,000 feet and mild temperatures (for a northern location). Summer temperatures average 80 F (27 C), and winter temperatures average 30 F (-1 C). Snowfalls begin in October in the mountains, and in the city from November to March. April marks the beginning of warm weather; June is generally rainy. Hot summer months, July and August, are followed by pleasant, mild weather in September and October.

C. Popular Flathead Valley and Montana links

The Daily Interlake (local newspaper)

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

Kalispell Chamber of Commerce

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

Missoula Independent (weekly newspaper)

www.MissoulaNews.com

State of Montana

<http://www.state.mt.us/>

Glacier National Park

<http://www.nps.gov/glac/>

Yellowstone National Park

<http://www.nps.gov/yell/>

II. Transportation

A. Bicycles

Many people in Kalispell and surrounding towns enjoy riding on bicycles as a means of transportation, especially when the weather is mild. Bicycles can be purchased at various places in town, and the price varies depending on the type of bicycle. Wearing a helmet is highly recommended. Bicycles must follow same traffic rules as automobiles.

B. Bus

City buses operated by Kalispell City Bus operate frequently Monday through Friday. Cash is required for the fare (\$ 1 each way).

Eagle Transit bus services connect Kalispell and the FVCC campus with surrounding towns Monday through Friday. Please be aware that these buses only have few commuting times during those days.

C. Taxi

Taxicabs are available upon request. You need to call the company and arrange the pick-up and must pay in cash when you get off. Checks, debit cards, or credit cards are not accepted. It is customary that a passenger pays about 15% of the fare for a tip.

Kalispell Taxi and Airport Shuttle: 406-752-4022
Drive 4 U.: 406-212-7361 or 406-730-2879

D. Automobile

An automobile can be very expensive. The cost of maintenance, insurance, license plates, major repairs and operating costs far exceed the actual cost of the car itself. If you have to purchase a car, be sure to go with someone who knows about automobiles and their standard prices.

1) Driver's License

A valid driver's license is required to operate an automobile in Montana. In order to obtain State of Montana driver's license, you must pass a written, a vision and a driving test.

- a. You first need to obtain "Montana Driver's License Manual" at <http://www.doj.state.mt.us/driving/driverlicensing.asp> and study thoroughly. When you go to take a written test at DMV, you must provide 1) a valid passport to prove your ID; and 2) two documents, such as letters with your current address in Kalispell or surrounding towns, to prove Montana residency (note: the residency here differs from your immigration status and college status.).
- b. Once you pass the written and vision tests, you will be issued a traffic education learner license ("learner's permit") to practice driving an automobile. A learner's permit entitles you to operate an automobile only when accompanied by an approved instructor or a licensed driver and may be restricted to specific times or areas.
- c. When you have mastered the habits, rules and signs of the roads, and feel confident in driving, you can go to DMV and take a driving test. You must have an individual who can drive you to DMV and let you use the car (with valid car insurance) for the

driving test. Once you pass the driving test, the driver's license will be mailed to you within two weeks.

2) **International Driver's License & Foreign Driver's License**

In Montana, an International Driver's License (or a driver's license from a foreign country) is only valid for 120 days after your arrival. These licenses are not transferable to a Montana driver's license; therefore you must apply and take the examinations for a Montana license if you wish to drive after 120 days of your arrival. For more information, call DMV at 406-257-2127, or visit the office at 1325 Hwy 2 W Suite E.

3) **Vehicle Registrations and Insurance**

To operate an automobile, your motor vehicle must be titled and registered at the county's treasures office in the Kalispell County Courthouse at 9351st Ave W 2nd floor (406-758-5690). You must pay all taxes and fees at that time. Fees vary based upon the size and age of the vehicle. Once your title process is completed, you will be issued a license plate.

State law requires that all motor vehicles carry adequate liability insurance at all times. You need to purchase the insurance from an insurance company. Different companies offer different rates and coverage, depending on your age, gender, and driving history. Consult the telephone directory's Yellow Pages under "Insurance" for a list of companies.

4) **Maintenance**

Each fall you will have to "winterize" your car by adding sufficient antifreeze to the radiator and window washer in order to prevent freezing and engine damage; replacing motor oil; and installing snow tires.

5) **Driver's Responsibility**

In Montana, it is the driver's responsibility to ensure that all passengers use the seatbelts. Also state law requires child safety restraint systems for children under the age of 6 or weighing less than 60 pounds. It means that, if you have such children, a motor vehicle must be equipped with one child safety restraint (i.e. child seat) for each child, in the back seat of the vehicle, and each child must be properly restrained. For further information regarding driving in Montana, go to <http://www.doj.state.mt.us/driving/default.asp> .

E. Flights/Air Travel

Several major and local airlines serve the Glacier International Airport. For more flight information, go to <http://www.iflyglacier.com/airline-carriers.php>

F. Train

Amtrak serves northern Montana, and is the only available passenger train in the state. The route called "Empire Builder" serves stations in Montana, connecting Chicago, Illinois and Seattle, Washington or Portland, Oregon. For more information, go to <http://www.amtrak.com/index.html> .

III. Mailing Services

In the United States, there are several mailing services available for sending letters and shipping parcels domestically and internationally. Different companies offer different rates based upon the packages' size, weight, and the shipping speed you request. You can go to the Shipping Express in the University Center and consult the staff what is the best shipping option for you. Shipping Express offers services from the United States Postal Service (USPS), FedEx, and UPS.

A. Shipping Tips

- When you address an envelope in the US, your name, address, and zip code are placed upper left-hand corner of the envelope. The name, address, and zip code of the person to whom you are sending the letter are placed in the middle.
- When a letter is to be mailed outside the U.S., the last line of the address must be the name of the country, spelled out completely in block letters (i.e., CANADA). Remember to write "Air Mail" on the envelope.

For Example:

Your Name 1234 Kalispell, MT 59901 USA	
<u>AIRMAIL</u>	XYZ 6789 ABC Street Foreign City Zip code FOREIGN COUNTRY

- Do send cash through the mail! Within the United States, send either a personal check, or a U.S. money order (available at a bank or Post Office) not
- If you are shipping books, use the special "Book Rate," which is much cheaper than regular parcel post rates. The weight limitation is usually 11 pounds. There are also special rates for printed material, and the weight limit is 4 pounds. Be sure to check with the main Post Office if you have any questions.

IV. Money and Banking

A. US Currency

In the United States, the currency is called the Dollar (\$), and follows the decimal system. Well-circulated coins are: penny (1 cent = 0.01 dollar), nickel (5 cents = 0.05 dollar), dime (10 cents = 0.1 dollar), quarter (25 cents = 0.25dollar). Dollar bills are available in: 1, 5, 10, 20, 50 and 100 dollar increments.

B. Banking

1) Checking Accounts and Savings Accounts

A safe, convenient means for paying bills is provided through bank checking accounts. A checking account is opened with a deposit of money in a bank. To pay bills, you can write personal checks (from a checkbook provided by your bank and imprinted with your individual account number, name, address, and telephone number) against the balance in your account. When you pay by check in stores, the cashiers will ask you to show them an identification card.

You must have money in your checking account to write checks or pay with a "debit" card. If you write a "bad check" (when your account does not have enough money to cover the amount of the check), you will be required to pay the amount of the check plus an additional fee. A warrant may be issued for your arrest if you ignore this requirement. Poor money management and irresponsibility in payment of bills can lead to many unpleasant situations

Money not needed for monthly expenses can be placed in a savings account which will earn interest.

Checking and savings accounts may be opened at any of Missoula's banks. You will need to show your passport and other forms of personal identification to open accounts.

2) Automated Teller Machines (ATMs) and Check/Debit Card

When you have checking or savings accounts at a bank, you can withdraw or deposit money anytime at the bank's ATMs with a check card (also known as a debit card), ATMs are often located at banks, grocery stores, or shopping centers. Some banks honor the other banks' check cards with additional charge of a few dollars.

In addition, in many stores there are small computerized machines that read check (or credit) cards at cashiers' counters. You may choose to purchase things by swiping your card on this machine instead of using cash.

C. Traveler's Checks and Money Orders

Traveler's checks are often used when people travel in and outside of the United States. This is because traveling with a lot of cash is not safe, and often regular checks are not accepted out-of-

state. Furthermore, traveler's checks can be replaced if lost or stolen.

To purchase traveler's check at a bank, you need to pay the amount you wish to purchase (e.g. \$500) with a small handling fee (e.g. \$5), and receive the traveler's check (\$500). Certain banks may have traveler's checks in foreign currency. Be sure to sign the appropriate section on the check as soon as you receive it. You may cash it at a bank or may use it like cash at stores.

Money orders are purchased at any post office (USPS) in the United States as alternative to sending cash through the regular mail. They can be used domestically and internationally, but are generally not recommended because the CANNOT be tracked.

For more information about sending money internationally, go to:

<http://www.usps.com/money/sendingmoney/sendmoneyinternationally.htm>

D. Dates

When writing dates, unless specified otherwise, always write the month first. August 31, 2013 or 8/31/2013.

E. Taxes

1) **Income Tax**

All the F and J visa holders who are present in the US are also required to file a tax return, even if there are no wages or scholarships received.

2) **Sales Tax**

State of Montana is one of the few states in the United States that does not have sales tax. In other states where there is sales tax, you will be charged 5-10 % as a tax of the total sale price of your purchase.

V. Social Security Number

If you are employed, you will need a Social Security Number. To obtain the number you must first obtain a letter from the International Student Coordinator then apply in person with your passport, I-94, I-20 (F-1 status) or DS-2019 (J status).

To fill out an application for a Social Security card, follow this link:

<http://www.ssa.gov/online/ss-5.pdf>

VI. Medical Care

A. Health Insurance

It is very important that you have an adequate health insurance in the United States, because there is no nationalized health care system as in some other countries. Therefore, if you do not have health insurance and become ill, it is your responsibility to pay all the medical expenses. In the United States, medical treatment costs are expensive. Having health insurance eases the financial burden of unexpected medical costs.

All J-1 visitors and their J-2 dependents are required to carry an adequate health insurance during their stay in the United States.

For F-1 students, it is the University policy that they purchase the student insurance plan that CHC provides, or prove that they carry another insurance policy which is equivalent to the student insurance plan.

B. Hospitals/Clinics.

There are hospitals in Kalispell (KRMC = Kalispell Regional Medical Center) and in Whitefish (NVH = North Valley Hospital). Emergency room visits may be very costly and should be reserved for emergencies only. There are several urgent care/ walk in clinics available in the area. Please make sure to familiarize yourselves with the ones closest to your residence.

C. Medications

- *Prescription Medications*
To purchase prescription medication, a patient must have a doctor's prescription. You can take this prescription to a drug store, and a pharmacist prepares the medication based on the prescription.
- *Over-the-counter Medications*
Over-the-counter medication allows a patient to choose medication that treats a minor illness without a doctor's prescription. The medications that customers can purchase at drug stores or grocery stores are all over-the-counter medications.

D. Emergency

For a life-threatening emergency or a severe accident, you can call emergency **at 9-1-1** from any phone for free. However, please note that the emergency room is usually the most expensive medical provider.

VII. Communications

A. Cellular Phone

Purchasing a cellular phone instead of a residential phone line is another option. Different cellular phone companies offer different packages. For more information, go to “Cellular” section on the yellow pages of the phone directory.

B. Telephone

Telephone numbers in the United States contain ten digits: a three-digit area code, a three-digit number for the local exchange, and a four-digit number for the individual. For example, the office phone number for the office of the International Student Coordinator: (406)-756-3889 [(area code in Montana)-local exchange-subscriber number].

You must purchase your own phone. Telephones may be purchased in many specialty and department stores.

- **On-Campus**

To call somebody off campus from campus, dial 8 first and 7 digits. For toll-free numbers (1-800, 888, 877, or 866: these numbers are free to call), dial 8 first and 1-800 plus the 7 digits.

VIII. Living in the Kalispell area

There are many housing options in the Kalispell and surrounding area, from large houses to apartments and rooms in private homes. Rentals are available through various rental agencies and/or on Craigslist: <http://kalispell.craigslist.org/apa/>

1. **Lease Agreements and Rental Contracts**

A lease agreement or rental contract will list the terms of the monthly rent, payment dates (including deposits), and how to terminate the agreement.

2. **Utilities**

If you are renting a house or apartment, you may be responsible for utilities. Utilities include water, electricity and gas (used for heating and sometimes cooking), garbage, and cable. The landlord or rental agency will tell you whether these will be included in the rent, or if you must contact the companies directly. They will also tell you which companies provide service in your area. You will need to call those companies to have service put in your name. A deposit may be required.

Ask the landlord for an estimate of your utility bill, or with his/her permission, contact the utility offices to look up the previous year's bill. In most areas around Kalispell electricity and gas service is provided by Northwestern Energy: 1-888-467-2669, electricity by Flathead Electric Cooperative: 406-751- 4483. For water/

garbage service, residents in Kalispell contact City of Kalispell Public Works: 406-758-7720.

A. Shopping

Most shops in the US are open from 10:00 am to 6:00 pm, but supermarkets are generally open longer, some even 24 hours per day.

Department stores carry clothing items, household linens, cooking wares and some furniture. An excellent way to save money is to buy when stores have "sales" seasonal, end-of-the-month, price mark-downs. Another way to save is to buy used clothing or furniture at "second-hand" stores (check the "yellow" pages in the telephone book) and from "garage sales" (advertised in the Daily Interlake, particularly on Fridays and Saturdays, and on Craigslist).

Drugstores sell many things besides medical drugs, such as cosmetics, toys, magazines, gifts. In the United States, almost all drugs (except for aspirin and cold remedies) are sold by a physician's prescription only.

B. Tipping

Waiters and waitresses at restaurants and hotels, taxi drivers, and barbers/beauticians expect tips. Fifteen percent (15%) of the bill is the usual figure for a tip. You do not tip gas station attendants, people who carry packages in stores, or restroom attendants in stores.

C. Solicitors

Beware! If door-to-door salespeople ("solicitors") come to your house to sell you items or to ask you to subscribe to magazines, it is best to exercise caution before buying.

D. Restaurants

There are many restaurants in the Kalispell area. There are two main types: full service restaurants and fast food.

- **Food**

Usual meal times as well as FVCC cafeteria times are: (check!!!)

Breakfast 6:30 am to 10:00 am

Lunch 11:30 am to 2:00 pm

Dinner 4:30 pm to 7:00 pm

- **Water and Ice**

Water from public sources is meant to be used for human consumption. Tap water in Missoula is usually very safe. Any cold beverage you order will be served with ice unless you request otherwise.

F. Hunting and Fishing Licenses

Licenses are required for anyone over 14 years of age. You may buy licenses at sporting goods stores. Information about regulations and on hunting and fishing locations are also available there.

G. Political Activity

It is the policy of FVCC to encourage the free expression of ideas and the free participation of all students and scholars, including activities involving political or social questions. International students have the same rights to freedom of expression as all other students. They are encouraged to use these rights responsibly.

H. Time

The United States is divided into 4 time zones: Eastern, Central, Mountain and Pacific. Montana belongs to the Mountain Time zone. In the middle of March the country goes on "Daylight Savings Time" which means the clock is set one hour forward. The clock is set back again on the last Sunday in October. In the States the day is divided into:

a.m. (ante meridian) - from 12 midnight to 12 noon

p.m. (post meridian) - from 12 noon to 12 midnight.

VII. WEIGHTS AND MEASURES

Temperature

Fahrenheit		Celsius
32	(freezing)	0
41		5
50		10
68		20
86		30
104		40
212	(boiling)	100

- To change Fahrenheit to Celsius, use: $C = (F-32) \times 5/9$
- To change Celsius to Fahrenheit, use: $F = (C \times 9/5) + 32$

Weight

US Measure		Metric
0.035 ounces	=	1.0 gram (1g.)
1.0 ounce (1 oz.)	=	28.57 g.
16oz. = 1 pound (1 lb.)	=	457.12 g.
2.2 lb.	=	1.0 kg.
2000 lb. = 1 ton (1 t.)	=	909.09 kg

- To change kilograms to pounds, multiply the number by 2.2.

Distance

US Measure		Metric
0.39 inches	=	1 centimeter (1 cm.)
1.0 inch (1 in. or 1")	=	2.54 cm.
12 in. = 1 foot (1 ft. or 1')	=	30.48 cm.
36 in. = 3 ft. = 1 yard (1yd.)	=	91.44 cm.
39.37 in. = 3.28 ft. = 1.09 yds	=	1 meter (1 m.)
0.625 miles	=	1 kilometer (1 km.)
5.280 ft. = 1 mile (1mi.)	=	1.61 km.

- To change kilometers to miles, multiply by .62.

Volume

US Measure		Metric
1 cup = 8 ounces (oz)	=	.24 liters
2 cups = 16oz. = 1 pint (1pt.)	=	.4732 liters
32 oz. = 2 pts. = 1 quart (1 qt.)	=	.946 liters
1.05 qt.	=	1 liter
4 qts. = 1 gallon (1 gal.)	=	3.7853 liters

VIII. EMERGENCY NUMBERS

In an emergency situation, dial 911 for Police, Ambulance, or Fire.