



Illinois Eastern Community Colleges

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International Student Program

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENT HANDBOOK

**Frontier Community College (FCC)**

**Lincoln Trail College (LTC)**

**Olney Central College (OCC)**

**Wabash Valley College (WVC)**

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## INTRODUCTIONS

**Welcome to Illinois Eastern Community Colleges!** We're excited you're here and want to make your experience enriching, enjoyable, and successful. This handbook is intended as a general guide for information and reference purposes only. Additional information can be found in the [Academic Catalog](#) and [Student Handbooks](#).

We're eager to get to know you and would like to introduce you to our college district, our four campuses, the welcoming communities you'll call home, and, of course, our International Student Program.

### **About IECC**

Illinois Eastern Community College District #529 (IECC) is located in a 3,000-square-mile (7,800 km<sup>2</sup>) area of Southeastern Illinois near the Illinois-Indiana border. The multi-campus District includes **Frontier Community College (FCC)** at Fairfield, **Lincoln Trail College (LTC)** at Robinson, **Olney Central College (OCC)** at Olney, and **Wabash Valley College (WVC)** at Mt. Carmel.

Bordered on the east by the Wabash River, the District is located in a scenic section of the state, with wooded areas, golf courses, and recreational lakes scattered throughout the region. The District includes all or parts of 12 counties and has a total population of 111,000.

### **About FCC, LTC, OCC and WVC**

Each campus is located in a small-town setting, with convenient access to larger cities in Illinois and Indiana. The campuses serve as centers for educational and cultural excellence. The campuses offer a wide variety of transfer, occupational, continuing education, ESL, and community service programs. Small class sizes ensure students receive one-on-one instruction from faculty members dedicated to their success. All four facilities have received state and national recognition for educational excellence.

Students have access to a vibrant array of clubs and organizations offering numerous opportunities to get involved, connect with peers, and enrich their campus experience. The campus-sponsored student groups allow you to explore your interests, develop leadership skills, and make lasting memories. [Visit the website](#) to learn more about student organizations available on each campus.

As a proud NJCAA Division I institution and a member of the Great Rivers Athletic Conference, thrilling year-round athletic events bring together students,

staff, and community members. Don't miss the excitement, follow your favorite team and sport at [www.iecc.edu/athletics](http://www.iecc.edu/athletics).

If you're passionate about arts and culture, you'll find plenty to enjoy here! Whether you'd like to participate or simply attend, [keep an eye on our website](#) for upcoming performances, exhibitions, and events. Don't miss out on the chance to experience and celebrate creativity on the campuses.

### **About the International Student Program**

The International Student Program (ISP) advocates for and advises the international student population on U.S. immigration and visa-related issues. In addition to federally required immigration services, the ISP provides information, resources, immigration guidance, tips, and advice that can help our international students succeed. The ISP promotes and celebrates individuals in an intercultural environment.

The ISP is a center where international students can seek advice on the intersection of academic and U.S. immigration regulations, as well as social and acculturation issues. In addition, the ISP provides orientations and workshops on topics of interest, such as immigration requirements, employment, and cross-cultural communication.

Finally, the ISP exposes the college and local communities to the international population through sponsored programs and events on and off campus. Our overall vision is to foster global awareness throughout the college district.

### ISP Contact Information

Primary Mailing Address (WVC)  
2200 College Drive  
Mt. Carmel, IL 62863-2699

ISP Website:  
<https://www.iecc.edu/isp>

Levi J. Johnson  
Program Director  
P: 618-262-8641 Ext. 3166  
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Student Liaison, **WVC/FCC**  
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Rhoda Shugars  
Coordinator, International  
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Rachel Greenwood  
Student Liaison, **LTC/OCC**  
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### **F-1/J-1 Visa Regulations**

Maintaining legal status is extremely important. Falling out of status will make your student visa invalid, legally stop you from continuing your study, and make you ineligible for other F-1 or J-1 benefits, such as CPT or OPT.

To maintain legal status in the U.S., international students must follow these federal regulations, state regulations, and IECC policies. You are responsible to know and follow these rules and regulations. International Student Program staff is here to assist and advise students, but **your visa status during your program is your responsibility.**

#### **As an F-1/ J-1 international student, you must:**

1. Attend the institution listed on your I-20/ DS-2019.
2. Check in with the International Student Program upon arrival at your campus to register your SEVIS record. This alerts the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) that you are an active student. You must report to the ISP within 15 days of the start of each semester. Failure to check-in with the ISP could result in delays with class registration, possible loss of legal status, and possible termination of SEVIS record.
3. Maintain full-time enrollment in a course of study in each academic term. The minimum per semester is: 12 credit hours (fall and spring – summer is optional).

4. If you are unable to maintain full-time status due to extenuating medical or academic circumstances, you must receive approval for a Reduced Course Load from your academic advisor and authorization in SEVIS from the ISP before dropping below full-time or take a leave of absence.
5. Make satisfactory progress toward completion of your program and always keep your I-20/DS-2019 valid during your study.
6. If you plan to graduate early or cannot complete your program by the end date listed on your I-20/DS-2019, you must consult the International Student Program at least 30 days before this end date to determine if you are eligible for an I-20/DS-2019 date adjustment.
7. Report any of the following changes to ISP staff within 10 days of the change by submitting the Personal Information Update Form:
  - Name
  - Physical address
  - Phone number
  - Personal email
  - Emergency contact information
  - Major
  - Program level
  - Funding source

The ISP will use your IECC email for all immigration updates. ***It is your responsibility to check your IECC email frequently.***

Federal regulations require that F-1/J-1 students must report any changes of their personal information to the International Student Program within 10 days of the change. F-1/J-1 students must inform the ISP of any changes to the following information by submitting the **Personal Information Update Form**:

- Change of physical address
- Change of phone number
- Change of personal email
- Emergency contact information

Students must also update any change of name, funding source, or program end date to the ISP by email at johnsonl6@iecc.edu.

8. Keep your passport valid 6 months into the future. Contact your embassy to renew your passport well BEFORE the expiration date. For students returning to their home country to renew their visa, you will need: an official sealed transcript from IECC; a copy of your course schedule for the returning semester; and all old I-20s as well as your new I-20.

9. Never accept employment off campus without authorization from the International Student Program and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), even if it is unpaid or an internship. Contact the ISP to determine if you are eligible for off-campus employment authorization in your field of study. Students cannot work off-campus in their first semester.
10. Never work in an on-campus position for more than 20 hours per week while school is in session. Full-time (more than 20 hours per week) on-campus work is permitted during official IECC breaks.
11. Notify the ISP if you intend to transfer to another U.S. school. We assist with the process of transferring your visa to your new school.
12. Submit your I-20/DS-2019 to the ISP for a travel authorization at least 2 weeks before you leave the U.S. for vacation if you intend to return to continue your studies. Your I-20 must be signed for you to return.
13. Comply with all other U.S. federal and state laws, such as never driving while intoxicated and never carrying a weapon.
14. Comply with all other Illinois Eastern Community Colleges academic and conduct policies.
15. Enroll in the IECC provided international insurance plan. Certain students may be eligible to waive out of the IECC provided international insurance plan. See staff for more information.

### **Immigration Term Glossary**

There are many technical terms and abbreviations international students should be familiar with related to their immigration status. Below is a glossary of many of the common terms.

|                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| DSO (Designated School Official)        | An international advisor who has been approved by the U.S. government to grant certification of status for international students and to verify status on government forms.                                          |
| EAD (Employment Authorization Document) | A laminated government card bearing your photo you receive after successfully applying for permission to work on OPT. It lists start and end dates of your authorized employment.                                    |
| F-1 Visa                                | The class of visa that is issued to non-immigrants who are granted permission to enter the U.S to study at an approved school, also known as a Student Visa.                                                         |
| Form DS-2019                            | Three-page immigration document for J-1 students. It shows your field of study, start and end dates of study, and financial information. It is used to obtain your J-1 visa and for entry and re-entry into the U.S. |

|                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Form I-20                    | Three-page document for F-1 students. It shows your field of study, start and end dates of study, and financial information. It is used to obtain your F-1 visa and for entry and reentry into the U.S.                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| I-9                          | A form to prove employment eligibility by anyone being hired.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| I-94                         | Form I-94 is issued to students upon their arrival in the U.S. by an Immigration officer. The I-94 is an electronic record updated by the Immigration officer at the port of entry each time a student enters the U.S. It is recommended that students obtain their I-94 from this website <a href="https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov">https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov</a> each time they enter the country. |
| J-1 Visa                     | The class of visa that is issued to non-immigrants who are granted permission to enter the U.S. to study, do an internship, or be a visiting scholar at an approved school.                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| SEVIS                        | Student Exchange Visitor Information System. The government's database system that is used to track student records, employment status, and to issue student documents.                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| SSN (Social Security Number) | The Social Security Number is a permanent ID number issued by the U.S. government. A Social Security Number is required to receive compensation for work in the U.S. (F-1 on campus employment, paid internship, OPT).                                                                                                                                                                     |
| USCIS                        | United States Citizenship and Immigration Services is the government agency responsible for enforcing the regulations relevant to your entry into the U.S. and ability to remain in and return to the U.S.                                                                                                                                                                                 |

### **ISP Assistance**

The ISP provides a variety of services for F-1 and J-1 students and scholars. When you come to the ISP, depending on your inquiry, you will receive instructions on what to do or you will be asked to make an appointment with an ISP staff member. Some inquiries may involve complex processes, so you will be given instructions about which documents to bring to a personal appointment in the future. We can also provide several services by email. In all cases, please know we are happy to help you navigate the visa regulations and processes.

Please review the common ISP assistance below and anticipated timelines:

| <b>Procedure</b>                      | <b>When to Ask for Assistance</b>        | <b>Expected Process/Timeline</b>                     | <b>Additional Information</b>        |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Travel Signature                      | 2 weeks prior to travel                  | Drop off I-20, ready for pickup in 1-2 business days | Must have most current I-20/DS-2019. |
| Invitation or Full-Time Status Letter | Anytime                                  | 3-5 business days                                    | N/A                                  |
| SSN Letter                            | Anytime (if employment has been secured) | 3-5 business days                                    | N/A                                  |

|                                     |                                                                                    |                                                                                                                    |                                                                                               |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Curricular Practical Training (CPT) | At least 2 weeks prior to start date (if enrolled in internship course)            | 3-5 business days once all documentation Received                                                                  | Need employer offer letter, Internship form, and CPT form.                                    |
| Less than full-time enrollment      | Before you drop any course, you need permission from ISP to determine if eligible. | Complete request for less than full-time enrollment and attach evidence (ex. medical diagnosis), 5-7 business days | You must prove you are eligible for a reduced course load to be enrolled less than full-time. |
| Leave of absence                    | Immediately                                                                        | Appointment required, 5-7 business days                                                                            | Must complete Registrar's process first.                                                      |
| Transfer to another school          | Within 60 days after end of final term/or prior to add/drop deadline of term       | Drop off new school's acceptance letter and transfer form' 3-5 business days                                       | Must complete Registrar's withdrawal process first.                                           |

## **Travel Documents**

### **Passport**

F-1/ J-1 students must always keep their passport valid for 6 months into the future. Students requiring a renewal must apply well in advance of the expiration date of their passport.

### **Visa**

F-1/J-1 students are admitted to the U.S. for a fixed period of time based on the length of a student's program of study. As long as a student's I-20/DS-2019 is valid, they may remain in the U.S. with an expired F-1/J-1 visa. However, if the student has plans to travel internationally, they must apply for a renewal of their F-1/J-1 visa from a U.S. Consulate or Embassy.

### **Travel Signature on I-20/DS-2019**

F-1/J-1 students are required to present an unexpired I-20/DS-2019 with a valid travel signature at the port of entry when returning to the U.S. from a trip outside of the country. Travel signatures refer to the list of signatures on the second page of the I-20/DS-2019. The travel signature must be provided by a DSO in the International Student Program.

Travel signatures are valid for one year while the student maintains enrollment in IECC.

**ISP Provided Travel**

All international students are assessed a minimum transportation fee per semester. This fee includes transfers to/from the Evansville, Indiana airport at the beginning and end of each semester, as well as other transportation during the semester. Further information about ISP provided travel is contained in the ISP Transportation Guidelines.

## ACADEMICS

### **Academic Advisement**

Students at each campus are assigned an academic advisor who can provide advice on course selection and help plan your program of study. Your academic advisor will assist you in selecting classes, arranging your course schedule, and identifying resources to solve problems or meet specific academic needs.

You will meet your academic advisor after you have taken the Accuplacer ESL test and after you have reviewed and signed the *Information Sheet for Advisement of International Students* with ISP staff.

There are some schedule changes that require the approval of ISP staff prior to requesting changes from your academic advisor. These include:

- Withdrawing from a course.
- Participating in curricular practical training (CPT).

### **Grading System**

Grades are awarded to reflect the quality of student performance. Grade values are assigned on a 4.0 scale from A to F.

More specific information about grades and the grading system at IECC [can be found on the website](#).

### **Academic Differences**

As an international student, studying in an American classroom can be a life-changing experience. You will be able to express yourself freely, make friends, build your confidence, and challenge your friends and professors on topics in class. Many international students find very noticeable differences between classroom culture in the U.S. and in their home countries.

#### **1. CLASSROOM PROCEDURES**

During the first week of classes, the instructor will hand out a **syllabus**, or make the syllabus available online. The syllabus will outline the course objectives, required textbooks, chapters to be covered, due dates for assignments, attendance policy, and the grading policy. The syllabus will include the instructor's office location and contact information. One major difference noted by international students is that grades are based on weekly assignments, papers, and projects rather than solely on examinations.

## 2. *EXAMINATIONS & ASSIGNMENTS*

The number and types of examinations and assignments throughout the semester differ from one course to another. The instructor will tell you how many examinations and assignments to expect in the course and the material that each will cover. If you are unfamiliar with any of the types of exams or assignments requested by the course you are taking, please contact your professor for clarification. Some classes do not have a final exam but require instead the completion of a project or lengthy writing assignment. Make sure you review the class syllabus carefully to understand the instructor's exact requirements for the course, how assignments are graded, and when assignments are due.

## 3. *DIVERSE TEACHING STYLES*

Instructors may use lecture, class discussion, or both. Most classes meet on a regular schedule once, twice, or three times a week. The teaching style of the professor can determine the amount of student participation in each class. Some instructors prefer a more formal style of lecture with a possible question and answer period at the end. Others prefer a more conversational style and encourage interaction throughout the class.

## 4. *ATTENDANCE*

Your course instructor will inform you of the attendance policy at the beginning of the semester. Regular attendance is expected of all students. It is likely that attendance will affect your grade. Missing more than two classes or being excessively tardy could result in a lowering of your final course grade. If you must miss a class, email your professor before the class meets to let them know of your absence and arrange to make up any missed assignments.

## 5. *CLASS PARTICIPATION*

Many instructors encourage class participation and often expect it. In some courses, it is a part of the overall grade. If you feel hindered to participate because of your English proficiency, we strongly advise you to discuss this issue with the instructor, your academic advisor, or the staff in the ISP.

## 6. *OFFICE HOURS*

If a student is confused about something in a class, it is expected that they will talk to the instructor before or after class. If the issue requires a longer conversation, the student may make an appointment to see the instructor during office hours. Each instructor has different office hours, and these will typically be posted in the course syllabus and/or in Canvas – the IECC

Learning Management System. Students can make an appointment to meet with an instructor during their specific office hours.

In U.S. academic culture, there is no shame associated with not understanding something in the course, even if it has been presented in a class lecture. Instructors respect students who work hard towards fully understanding the material, so don't wait until just before the exam to seek clarification. Ask as soon as you realize that you don't completely understand the material.

#### 7. *ACADEMIC INTEGRITY*

Academic integrity is one of the most important concepts to understand in U.S. academic culture. Even innocent violations can have very serious effects on your academic career. The consequences for cheating, plagiarism or other academic misconduct can range from being given a failing grade on a paper, exam, or for the entire course, to being suspended from IECC, or worse yet, you could be asked to leave permanently. Keep in mind that failure to maintain your full-time student status impacts your immigration status, too.

More information about academics at IECC can be found in the IECC Academic Catalog or at [www.iecc.edu/academics](http://www.iecc.edu/academics).

### **Academic Resources on Campus**

#### **MylECC Student Portal**



MylECC is the point of entry to online resources at IECC, including: Entrata, Canvas (IECC's Learning Management System), Microsoft Office 365, and your IECC email.

To gain access to MyIECC, student accounts are generated during the application acceptance process and credentials are sent to the student by encrypted email to setup their MyIECC account. In some instances, student services personnel may directly issue credentials to create an account using a Generated ID and pin. For either process, the student must complete the account setup and set a new password.

## **Learning Commons**

Each IECC campus has a Learning Commons, with access to resources and services both on and off-campus. Learning Commons components consist of: Learning Resources, Tutoring/Wellness, Testing Services, and Disability Services. The Learning Commons website can be found at <https://iecc.libguides.com/IECCLibrary>.

### **Learning Resources**

Each Library has an open computer lab, a book and print magazine collection, a media collection in a variety of formats, and a variety of online resources and databases.

The IECC Libraries are all members of the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI). CARLI's I-Share program allows for access to over thirty-eight million items from eighty-eight participating libraries, including Eastern Illinois University, Southern Illinois University, and the University of Illinois. You can gain access to this vast collection of records via the online catalog search from the Library webpage (<https://iecc.libguides.com/IECCLibrary>).

Requests for materials can be made from member libraries and delivered to an IECC library Monday - Friday for free, convenient pick-up. To request a book via the online catalog, students use their IECC Entrata login information. Instructions on how to search the online catalog is available from Learning Commons personnel. You may also visit any I-Share library, borrow items onsite, and return via an IECC library.

Various material types (books, periodicals, DVDs, etc.) have specific loan periods and usage privileges determined by the lending library. Overdue fees by other college libraries may apply, depending on the lending libraries' policies. Contact your local library should you have any questions regarding emails or correspondence from other college libraries.

### **Tutoring/Wellness**

The Learning Commons is the place for you to connect with staff and resources to support your learning. In addition to tutoring, time management, and study skills, LC personnel can help you in accessing wellness resources.

### **Testing Services**

The Learning Commons serves as the hub for various tests such as make-up exams, ACCUPLACER, Pearson, and more. Non-native English-speaking students will take the Accuplacer ESL test, here in the Learning Commons Testing Centers, upon t to campus.

**Disability Services**

The Learning Commons is also where you'll find assistance if you'd like to request special academic accommodations due to a qualifying disability. To learn more, visit <https://iecc.edu/ada>.

**Learning Commons Locations on Campus**

**FCC – Clemence Elizabeth Cox Hall**

**LTC – North Hallway of the Student Union Building**

**OCC – 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of Wattleworth Hall**

**WVC – Science Building/Bauer Media Center**

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENT EMPLOYMENT

Employment is defined as any type of work performed or services provided in exchange for money, tuition, fees, books, supplies, room, food, or any other compensation. Students must not assume that they are automatically eligible to work in the United States. Work authorization of one type or another is needed for an international student to work in the U.S.

USCIS considers unauthorized employment to be the most serious violation of F-1/J-1 status. It is important that you understand the type of employment F-1/J-1 students are eligible for and how to apply, because unauthorized employment (even for one day) will violate your legal F-1/J-1 status in the U.S. and jeopardize your eligibility for change of status to a professional working visa like an H-1B in the future. You must consult the ISP and be authorized before accepting an offer and beginning to work.

### **On-Campus Employment**

While on-campus employment opportunities are limited, all F-1 students are permitted to work on-campus part-time while school is in session and full-time during the summer and official school breaks. On-campus employment is not guaranteed.

If you obtain paid on-campus employment, you must apply for a Social Security number prior to beginning work. You must also complete the necessary hiring paperwork with your campus's Administrative Office prior to beginning work.

Most departments will require you to submit an application online, including your resume and cover letter. Some positions may also include an interview.

### **Curricular Practical Training (CPT)**

Curricular Practical Training (CPT) is a type of employment authorization for experiential learning integral to your degree program, such as an internship. The F-1 visa was issued to you to be a full-time student; hence U.S. Immigration (USCIS) is very strict about employment on the F-1 visa. We can't stress enough that unauthorized or inappropriate employment, even for one day, is considered a serious violation of visa status and thus cause for deportation. It is the students' responsibility to understand the regulations regarding employment and to obtain the necessary employment authorization before you begin work.

**For any and all kinds of curricular practical training, paid or unpaid, you must have CPT authorization added to your I-20 prior to beginning work. Your employer will need this document before you can begin working.**

#### *ELIGIBILITY:*

- To be eligible to apply for CPT, an undergraduate student must have been lawfully enrolled on a full-time basis, while physically present in the U.S., for one academic year (2 semesters) unless your academic program requires immediate participation for all students.
- Students must not be on probation.
- Students must be enrolled in a full course load (12 credit hours including the internship course). The only exception for less than full-time enrollment is if you are in your final semester and have fewer credits remaining to complete your degree.
- You must be registered in Banner for the appropriate internship course (3 credits) before your I-20 will be created.

#### *RESTRICTIONS:*

- CPT must be part-time (20 hours or less per week) during the fall and spring terms. CPT can be full-time (more than 20 hours per week) during the summer session. However, please note that full-time CPT will be scrutinized by USCIS and may affect OPT, STEM OPT, and any future H1-B application.
- CPT is only allowed within the dates of the term that a student is enrolled in the internship course.
- CPT employment is employer and location-specific. There is a change in employers, the student must obtain a new job offer letter and a new authorization in SEVIS. CPT is not transferable from one job to the next.
- CPT is also required for internships that involve on-campus positions or research.

#### **Optional Practical Training (OPT)**

Post-Completion Optional Practical Training (OPT) is 12-months of temporary employment authorization for a student to engage in employment directly related to an F-1 student's major area of study. Students may apply up to 90 days prior to their program end date and up to 60 days past their program end date. Due to USCIS processing times, it is highly recommended that students apply early.

## **Academic Training (AT) For J-1 Students**

Academic training is the name the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program uses for employment training or practical experience related to your field of study. Academic training is available as part of your academic program, either while you are enrolled in school or after you complete your academic program, as long as you maintain valid J-1 status, visit the ISO if you have questions regarding AT.

## **Social Security Number**

All U.S. employers require employees to have a Social Security Number (SSN) for the purpose of reporting individual employee earnings for tax purposes. A Social Security Number (SSN) is required to receive compensation for work in the US (F-1 on-campus employment, fellowships, paid internship while authorized for Curricular Practical Training (CPT), Optional Practical Training (OPT)). The Social Security Number is a permanent ID number issued by the U.S. government. Keep this card and number safe, and be careful with whom you share this information, as it can be used for identity theft purposes.

### **Why do I need a Social Security Number?**

You must have an SSN if you will receive a salary or stipend from **FCC, LTC, OCC, WVC** or from your off-campus OPT or CPT employer.

If you were employed, you will need an SSN to file a U.S. income tax return for each calendar year in which you spent any period in the U.S.

SSNs are often used for a variety of unofficial purposes, such as opening phone, utility, or bank/credit card accounts. While having a SSN is convenient for these reasons, it is not required.

### **When can I apply for a Social Security Number?**

You may apply for a SSN only if you have received a job offer. You must have entered the U.S. at least 10 days prior to submitting your application and you may not apply more than 30 days before the start of your job.

### **How can I apply for a Social Security Number?**

The ISP staff can assist you with preparing and submitting the required documentation to apply for an SSN.

## **Taxes**

Everyone living in the United States, including F-1 and J-1 students, is expected to file federal and state income tax forms whether they earn money in the United States or not. You may be required to file Federal Form 8843, to exclude days living in the United States from income tax presence tests. You may also

need to file taxes using Form 1040NR, or the shorter Form 1040NREZ, if you meet its requirements.

The filing deadline for federal and most state taxes is April 15<sup>th</sup> each year for money earned in the prior year. If you believe your earnings from employment in the United States will complicate your tax situation in your home country, you should consider contacting an accountant. ISP staff cannot answer questions regarding your individual tax filing requirements. ISP staff can provide you with a list of local tax accountants who can assist you with filing the necessary documents.

### **International Student Athletes**

Any scholarship from IECC received by an international student may have tax implications. This is determined by the U.S. Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Non-qualified scholarship benefits (such as housing and meal plans) may be subject to a 14% withholding. The amount of any withholding depends on your tax status and whether your home country has a tax treaty with the U.S.

If a tax withholding is required, this amount will be deducted from your scholarship award. IECC is required to remit this tax withholding to the IRS on your behalf. A Form 1042-S will be issued to you by January 31 for any year in which you had withholdings remitted to the IRS on your behalf (2024 withholdings will be reported to you by January 31, 2025). The Form 1042-S will include the amount of your nonqualified scholarship benefits and the amount of any tax withholding paid on your behalf from those benefits. You can file a Form 1040NR-EZ or 1040NR with the IRS, which may result in a refund for part, or all of the amounts withheld from your non-qualified scholarship benefits.

ISP staff cannot answer questions regarding your individual tax filing requirements. ISP staff can provide you with a list of local tax accountants who can assist you with filing the necessary documents.

## UNITED STATES CULTURE

Many international students arrive in the U.S. already knowing a great deal about the U.S. and about Americans. However, living and studying in the U.S. can be very different from reading about the U.S. or visiting it with family members. In this section, a few of the most common U.S. cultural values are described so that students can begin to prepare themselves for how some of the cultural values may differ from or be the same as their own cultural values.

Everyone experiences some form of "culture shock" when confronted with new and unfamiliar people and situations. It's important to keep in mind that this is a common experience among new international students and that it is also temporary. While there may be unhappy moments, adjusting to a new culture will bring many long-lasting rewards.

### **American Cultural Values**

#### **Independence**

Americans strongly believe in the concept of individualism. They consider themselves to be separate individuals who are in control of their own lives, rather than members of a close-knit, interdependent family, religious group, tribe, nation, or other group.

#### **Directness**

Americans tend to value frankness and openness in their dealings with other people. They believe that conflicts and disagreements are best solved by means of forthright discussion among the people involved.

#### **Equality**

The American Declaration of Independence states that "all [people] are created equal," and this belief is deeply embedded in their cultural values. Americans believe that all people are of equal standing and are therefore uncomfortable with overt displays of respect such as being bowed to.

#### **Informality**

Don't be surprised if store clerks and waiters introduce themselves by their first names. Many people visiting the U.S. are surprised by the informality of American speech, dress, and posture. Don't mistake this for rudeness or irreverence. It's just a part of the culture!

#### **Importance of Time**

"Time is money," is a common expression in the U.S. One of the more difficult things for many students to adjust to in the U.S. is the notion that time must be used carefully and productively. Being "on time" (arriving at the stated time) for

class or meetings with advisors, professors, and even with friends is very important. It is considered rude to show up late for a scheduled meeting or appointment.

### **Following Rules**

In the U.S., many rules really are followed, and procedures are often not negotiable. Arguing or demanding to see someone "in charge" will not lead to success. It is more effective to explain exactly what you need and what kind of problem you have been having, and ask, "What do I do now?" or "Is there someone who could help me?"

### **Practical Matters**

#### **Calendar dates**

In the U.S., dates are written as month/day/year. This is the opposite of the British method, in which dates are written day/month/year.

#### **Dining**

Most Americans eat three meals a day: breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Breakfast is in the morning between 7:00-9:00 a.m., lunch usually is between 12:00-2:00 p.m., and dinner is typically between 6:00-8:00 p.m. Breakfast and lunch tend to be light meals, and dinner is the main meal.

If a friend, classmate, or host family invite you to eat a meal, this does not mean that they will pay for your meal. You should always plan to pay for and offer to pay for your meal when you eat at a restaurant, cafeteria, or fast-food establishment.

#### **Salutations**

American names are written and spoken with the given name first and the family name last. So, John Smith's family name is Smith, not John.

- In a formal setting, address men as "Mister" (abbreviated as "Mr."), married women as "Misses" (abbreviated as "Mrs."), and unmarried women as "Miss". Many women prefer to be addressed using the abbreviations "Ms." (pronounced "miz"). If the person has an M.D. or Ph.D., they will often be addressed as "Doctor" (abbreviated as "Dr."). Faculty are addressed as "Professor" (abbreviated as "Prof.") or "Instructor" (abbreviated as "Instr.>").
- In an informal situation, Americans will introduce each other by first name, without titles, and occasionally by just the last name. If you are introduced to somebody by first name, you can address him or her by first name the next time you meet. The only exception would be for someone who holds an important position, such as the IECC Chancellor or the President or

Dean of Instruction. Unless they tell you otherwise, faculty should be addressed using their title and last name (e.g., "Professor Smith").

### **Tipping**

Restaurants in the U.S. do not include a service charge in the bill, so it is customary to tip the server approximately 20% of the total bill. If service was slow or particularly bad, some Americans will tip only 10-15%. Likewise, if service was particularly good, it is appropriate to tip more than 20%.

- If you are in doubt, ask whether it is appropriate to tip or whether a gratuity is included in the bill.
- Tipping is only appropriate in restaurants which offer table service. Tips are not expected when ordering from a fast-food restaurant or cafe with counter service.
- Taxi drivers, food delivery drivers, bartenders and hair stylists all expect to get a tip equal to about 15% of the total fare.

### **U.S. Laws and IECC Policy**

While on campus, students are expected to follow laws and policies that govern a variety of daily life and academic activities. There are different levels of laws in the U.S. including federal, state, and local community laws which will differ depending on the particular jurisdiction. Violating a U.S. law can have different consequences for an international student than for their American friends and can negatively impact their U.S. immigration status. It is the student's responsibility to know what is legal or not.

The following is a description of some of the laws that may affect international students. It is meant to introduce F-1/J-1 students to some of the laws that exist in the U.S. that may be different from other countries. Also provided is a link to the IECC policy related to each.

### **Alcohol**

Alcohol use in the U.S. is regulated by law. In every state in the U.S. including Illinois, alcohol may not be legally purchased or consumed by anyone under the age of 21 and may not be consumed while in public or in an automobile. It is illegal to have any open bottle, can, or container with an alcoholic beverage in public, even if the consumer is of legal drinking age. Driving while intoxicated is considered a serious crime, punishable by large fines, jail sentences, and the loss of driving privileges. It is also a serious crime to offer or provide alcohol to anyone under the age of 21. See IECC's policy and additional information at [www.iecc.edu/drugfree](http://www.iecc.edu/drugfree).

**Tobacco**

Smoking in public buildings, public transportation, and restaurants is prohibited by Illinois law. Smoking is generally allowed outdoors and in one's home. When in someone else's home, it is considered polite to step outside to smoke. Cigarettes, e-cigarettes, vaping products and other tobacco products may not be purchased or used by people under the age of 18.

All IECC campuses are tobacco-free and smoke-free. Smoking and the use of tobacco products is prohibited on all IECC campuses, both indoors and outdoors. The prohibition includes e-cigarettes and vaping devices. See IECC's policy and additional information at [www.iecc.edu/smokefree](http://www.iecc.edu/smokefree).

**Drugs and Medications**

The possession or use of marijuana is prohibited by federal law. Although the recreational use of marijuana is permitted in some states, it remains a federal crime to possess or consume marijuana and can have immigration consequences. Street drugs, such as cocaine, amphetamines, barbiturates, and other mood-altering substances that are not prescribed by a medical doctor, may not be possessed, or sold legally in Illinois. Strict laws and severe criminal penalties, including incarceration, apply.

Furthermore, at all IECC campuses, any illegal use, sale or distribution of drugs, and/or possession or supply of drugs, drug paraphernalia, narcotics and marijuana (including marijuana plants) will result in disciplinary action by IECC and/or criminal prosecution. See IECC's policy and additional information at [www.iecc.edu/drugfree](http://www.iecc.edu/drugfree).

## **SAFETY & CRIME PREVENTION**

### **Avoid Scams**

- **NEVER** pay money or give personal information to someone who threatens to deport you. Neither USCIS nor the Department of Homeland Security will call you to ask for money to avoid deportation. The International Student Program (ISP) at IECC is the only office to inform you about your immigration status and we will never threaten you with deportation. If you receive such a call, please HANG UP immediately and inform the ISP about the phone call.
- Never give out your credit card number, bank account number, or social security number unless to a reputable official/establishment such as IECC or your specific campus.

### **Personal Safety**

- Be aware of your surroundings and avoid dark, secluded areas. Don't walk alone at night.
- Emergency Blue Boxes are located around campus and can be used to get help in the event of an emergency.
- Keep your door locked when you are in or out of your room. Always ask who is at your door before you open it.
- Don't allow strangers into your room.
- Trust your instincts.

### **Protect Your Property**

- Keep wallets, purses, checkbooks, jewelry out of sight and locked away, if possible.
- Do not keep large sums of cash. Use credit/debit cards or local ATM machines.
- Keep track of debit and credit cards and report their loss immediately. It's a good idea to take a copy of all cards and ID documents (including your passport, visa, and I-20) in case they are lost or stolen.

## **Title IX & Sexual Misconduct**

Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 states: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance".

IECC is committed to maintaining a safe and healthy educational and employment environment that is free from discrimination, harassment, and other misconduct on the basis of sex, which includes sexual orientation and gender-related identity. IECC prohibits all forms of sex-based misconduct, including but not limited to sex discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual violence, domestic violence, dating violence and stalking.

For more information, and to view the IECC policy and procedure, visit:  
<https://www.iecc.edu/titleix>

**Commented [LB1]:** This policy changed again this month, so I updated accordingly.

## CAMPUS AND COMMUNITY RESOURCES

### **Student Services**

Student Services is your one stop location dedicated to assisting you with your student billing, financial aid, and registration questions.

**FCC** – located at the front of campus next to Adult Education

**LTC** – located in Williams Hall

**OCC** – located in Wattleworth Hall

**WVC** – located in Main Hall

### **Tuition Payments**

- Tuition and fees are determined for each academic semester and are subject to change by action of the Board of Trustees.
- Tuition bills will be available after registering for courses. Online billing statements are available on **Entrata**.
- Payment options are available through **Nelnet**. Unless payment arrangements are made through Nelnet, all student bills are due by midterm of the semester. After midterm, a late fee is assessed to unpaid student accounts (except those using Nelnet payment options). For more information: <https://www.iecc.edu/payments>

### **Calendars**

#### **Academic Calendar**

The IECC academic calendar provides information about the first day of classes, date of midterm, dates of final exams, and last day of classes for each academic semester. In addition, the calendar provides the dates that the college campuses are closed, and no classes are in session. See the calendar at [www.iecc.edu/academiccalendar](http://www.iecc.edu/academiccalendar).

#### **Semester Dates and Deadlines**

While the Academic Calendar identifies the milestone dates of a full 16-week semester, the [Semester Dates and Deadlines webpage](#) also provides information for shorter terms within a semester.

#### **ISP Events Calendar**

In addition to the academic calendar, the ISP maintains a calendar of cultural trips and cultural activities that our international students are invited to participate in. Please see the ISP office for our calendar of events.

## **Food Service Information by Campus**

**FCC** – Located in West Hall is a micro market where food can be purchased any time campus is open.

**LTC** – Located in the Student Union is a micro market where food can be purchased any time campus is open.

**OCC** – The Knight Kafe is open for breakfast and lunch from 8:00 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. Monday through Friday.

**WVC** – Located in the David L. Hart Student Center is a micro market where food can be purchased any time campus is open.

## **Meal Plans**

Students have the option to purchase meal plans at **OCC**. Meal plans must be paid in full at the time of purchase.

- Meal plans may be purchased in Student Services.
- Meal plans are only redeemable at the campus where they are purchased.
- Report lost or stolen meal plan cards to Student Services IMMEDIATELY.
- Any unused value on the meal plan at the end of the academic year does NOT carry forward to the following academic school year.

For more information: <https://www.iecc.edu/mealplans>

## **Points of Interest by Campus**

### **Frontier Community College (FCC)**

FCC is located approximately 1½ miles from the Fairfield public golf course which is a 10-hole golf course, city park, and outdoor basketball courts. The Bobcat Den, which houses the bookstore, fitness center, and Frontier Perks coffeehouse is a great place to meet up with friends.

### **Lincoln Trail College (LTC)**

LTC has the Statesmen Park where the soccer and baseball fields are, the Sport Center where you'll find volleyball and basketball games and the Crawford County Recreation Center, LTC's indoor pool and gym facility. They also have the Robinson City Park where the softball team currently plays. Additionally, LTC has the Athletic Performance Center, also known as "The Barn," which is an indoor facility. The center includes a weight room and cardio equipment as well as an indoor facility that can be used by the baseball, softball, soccer, and golf teams for indoor training. Miller Lake is on campus and offers a picturesque setting to take a walk.

### **Olney Central College (OCC)**

OCC is housed right across from the city park where, if you're lucky, you may see the locally famous white squirrels. Outdoor activities are close by, with the Drey Pickleball Complex and Musgrove Park and Aquatic Center just 1.4 miles away. The campus is approximately 2 miles from East Fork Trails, which is a great place for hikers and mountain bikers. There are also 3 lakes in and around Olney.

### **Wabash Valley College (WVC)**

If tennis is your game of choice, WVC has tennis courts on campus. Just a half mile away is the West Berwick 18-hole golf course, pickle ball courts, city park, and outdoor basketball courts.

WVC's Brubeck Arts Center is comprised of two elements: the Brubeck Arts Center Theatre and the Brubeck Arts Center Gallery. Since its opening, nearly half a million people have attended events at the Brubeck Arts Center. The WVC Arts Council has generously donated tickets so that international students can attend performances at the Brubeck Arts Center at no cost. Please see the ISP staff for tickets.

### **Important Phone Numbers**

- Emergency Number from any phone is 9-1-1 (used for fire, police, and ambulance)
- **Frontier Community College** switchboard is 1-618-842-3711
- **Lincoln Trail College** switchboard is 618-544-8657
- **Olney Central College** switchboard is 1-618-395-7777
- **Wabash Valley College** switchboard is 1-618-262-8641.

### **WE ARE HERE FOR YOU!**

The International Student Program at IECC is a great resource for you throughout your time here. Please contact us with any questions, concerns, or ideas.

Once again, welcome to **Frontier Community College**, **Lincoln Trail College**, **Olney Central College**, and **Wabash Valley College** - Illinois Eastern Community Colleges!