



**ADVANCED COLLEGE**

**INTERNATIONAL STUDENT HANDBOOK**

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Welcome!

On behalf of Advanced College, I wish to extend to you our warmest welcome to the United States and to California.

Advanced College offers a lot of educational opportunities for you. What makes Advanced College the right choice? Whether you are a recent high school graduate or looking for a fresh career path or even living in another country and want to have an opportunity to take some of the courses on-line at your native home and apply for F-1 or M-1 visa to be able to finish the last year of your education at U.S.A or have the option to take the whole program here in the U.S., Advanced College could help you fulfill this dream.

We are very pleased that you have chosen this college to be your “home” for the next few years.

We are here to help you in your personal, academic, and cultural transition to the college environment.

It is our hope that this handbook will provide you with some helpful tips while living in the United States of America. I feel confident that you as an international student will find it a useful resource. Again, please let us know how we can assist you during your stay at Advanced College, and I look forward to getting to know you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "L. Mansourian". The signature is written in dark ink and has a long, sweeping underline.

Dr. Lida Mansourian  
President of Advanced College

## **Entrance Examinations**

Information about test scores and requirements for admission to Advanced College may be found in the “Admission” sections of our school catalog. Advanced College requires international students to take an English proficiency exam before admission for an Associate Degree or other Certificate program but not for admission to the ESL program.

After the English proficiency exam requirement, a High School diploma is required for our Certificate programs. If it is for an Associate Degree there is an “APT” test that evaluates English Composition, Mathematics, Social Sciences, and Sciences. This exam will be given to a prospective student for advanced placement in the College.

## **Credits**

The quantity of academic work a student completes is measured in “Credits.” The number of credits of a course depends on the number of hours per week. A “3-credit course” will meet three hours weekly for one semester.

## **Before Leaving Your Home**

### **Passport**

Be sure your passport is current and will not expire in the next six months. If your passport is going to expire soon, the consulate may not give you a visa. Also, keep a copy of your passport in a different place from your passport in case the passport becomes lost or stolen. When you arrive in the U.S. for passport renewal, your embassy/consulate may need a letter verifying that you are a full-time student.

### **Applying for a Visa in your Country**

The visa is permission granted by the U.S. to request entry into the United States. You will need to make an appointment for a visa interview at the U.S. Embassy or Consulate. When you have an interview with the Consulate be sure that you have all the following documentation:

- Valid I-20 (Advanced College can issue that)
- Letter of admission from Advanced College
- Financial or Bank guarantee
- Parental consent (if applicable)

### **Visa Types**

F-1 or M-1 Student: This type of visa permits an individual to enter the U.S. for full-time study at an authorized institution in the U.S. I-20 is the form issued by the educational institution to the international student upon his/her admission. The student takes this form to the U.S. embassy or consulate to apply for the F-1 or M-1 visa. Upon issuance of the I-20, the international student is responsible for paying the SEVIS I-901 fee, which can be done via the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement website at:

[www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/index.htm](http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/index.htm)

F-2 Spouse/Dependent: This type of visa is held by spouses and dependents of F-1 students. To receive an F-2 visa, the spouse presents an I-20 form in the name of the F-1 student to an American Embassy or Consulate abroad, with evidence of financial support. An F2 dependent does not have permission to be employed.

### **Receiving a Visa**

After you receive your visa, you will either have a “multiple” or “single” entry visa. The multiple entry visas will let you enter and leave the U.S. without any restrictions with a valid I-20 from Advanced College.

If your American Embassy or Consulate denies your visa, usually they explain why the visa was not granted. After submission of any missing documentation, you may be granted the visa.

## **Your Health before Arriving**

Be sure to have a complete physical and dental examination before you leave your home country. Let your physician know that you are going to study in the United State for several years, and find out how you can get any medication that you might need. There is a possibility that your home doctor might be able to help by referring you to a source for prescription drugs in the USA. Also, be sure to get copies of your medical records translated into English if your doctor recommends it.

In the meantime, get all of your dental work completed before you arrive in Los Angeles. Dental work is very expensive and it is not covered by most health insurance plans in the USA.

## Arriving in the U.S.A.

### **I-94 Form (Departure Record)**

This form shows that you have been lawfully admitted to the U.S. I-94 form is the small white card that is usually stapled into your passport on the page next to the American visa. This form is given to every foreign person who enters the U.S. This form has an 11-digit number, which is the Arrival/Departure number. This is a computerized number, which INS assigns to you to keep track of your arrival and departure from the U.S. This form is very important because it also shows your visa status and the expiration date of your stay in U.S. Be sure to make a copy of this form and keep the copy in a safe place.

### **About Los Angeles**

“The City of Angels” rests between mountains, ocean, and desert. Founded in 1781 by Spanish settlers, the city now represents over a hundred different cultures, with almost a hundred languages. The city is unique; with many freeways surrounded by beaches, home to generations of movie stars, making a difficult choice between surf, sun, Disneyland, of basking in reflected stardom in Beverly Hills, Hollywood Hills, and L.A. offers the visitor a glimpse of its legendary past.

### **Los Angeles Climate & Weather**

Sunny L.A. enjoys pleasant weather throughout the year. The temperatures tend to be moderate, seldom exceeding 85°F/30°C or falling below 45°F/7°C. Sunshine reigns most of the year.

### **Apartment**

South Gate/Downey/Paramount

Downey has great apartment rentals to choose from in a wide variety of different neighborhoods and surrounding cities. You can search for conveniences like a fitness center, swimming pool or off-street parking. The rental prices for a studio or one bedroom range from \$700 to \$1200 a month. If you share an apartment with roommates, the cost can be reduced significantly. Students can also rent rooms in near by houses.

Suggested Questions for Landlords:

- How much is the security and monthly rent?
- What is included in the rent? Especially utility and if not what is the average monthly cost of the utilities?
- Can I share the apartment with anybody? And if yes, how many people?
- How long is the monthly lease?
- Is there a laundry facility available?
- Is there parking space available?
- Is there an additional charge for parking?
- How far is the grocery?

## **Los Angeles Attractions**

Los Angeles is a city where you can surf at the beach in the morning and ski in the snowfields in the afternoon. The surrounding mountains of Los Angeles offer hiking and rock climbing in summer. Los Angeles has more than 320 km (200mi) of bike trails, shopping, star spotting and roller coaster screaming area.

Some of these areas include:

- Universal Studios: this park is packed with the latest special effects and rides to the themes of many famous films.
- Disneyland: one of the most famous theme parks in the world. It offers a huge selection of rides and activities for both adults and children.
- Rodeo Drive: The place to shop in “style” with its large selection of the most exclusive shops found anywhere.
- Griffith Park Observatory and Planetarium: This is the largest municipal park in the U.S. It also contains one of the largest space telescopes open to the public.
- The Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA): permanent collection, thematic exhibitions of international scope. Painting, sculpture and environmental works created since 1940.
- Magic Mountain: A park of roller coaster rides and fun entertainment for the entire family.
- The Museum of Tolerance: This museum looks deeply into the history of human rights’ atrocities throughout the world.

Some of the Beaches:

- Santa Monica Beach: one of the widest and most popular beaches in the Los Angeles area
- Venice Beach: one of the most urban beaches, where there are a lot of people, shops and activities
- Manhattan Beach: a hot spot for surfing, body surfing, or boogie boarding
- Hermosa Beach: a great spot to surf, play volleyball, or take a ride on the bike path
- Redondo Beach: the pier at your disposal, this is a great place to bring the kids
- Malibu Beach: most famous beach in Los Angeles
- Long Beach: a popular place to take the family. It is surprisingly pleasant for its urban environment.
- Marian del Rey Harbor: one of the largest harbors in the country for pleasure crafts
- Topanga Beach: one of the most popular surf spots in the area with a wide sandy beach perfect for sunbathing on hot summer days.

## **Traveling In and Out of the U.S.**

If you travel within the U.S. be sure to carry your passport and I-20. Be sure to keep a copy of your passport and I-20 in a place separate from your passport in case these documents become lost or stolen.

## **Health Care in the United States**

### **Staying Healthy**

When many international students arrive in the United States, they have changes in time zone, environment, and diet, which may initially cause sleep or digestive problems. The best way to stay healthy is to stay balanced. This permits you to perform your mental and physical best. Being kind to yourself and allowing adequate sleep will avoid many trips to the infirmary.

### **College Health Requirements**

Medical insurance is mandatory for all F-1 international students. A minimum six-month policy must be obtained. The international office will assist students in obtaining this insurance upon arrival. Coverage must include:

- Minimum coverage of at least \$250,000
- Outpatient Care Coverage (Doctor Visits, Outpatient Surgery, etc.)
- Hospitalization
- Medical evacuation and/or repatriation benefit
- Vaccination for measles, mumps, rubella (MMR) and PDD (tuberculosis). In case you have these vaccinations in your home country, then bring your immunization records (translated into English) to show proof of all immunizations.
- Completion of the standardized Advanced College health questionnaire

Failure to comply with these regulations will result in cancellation of registration; therefore, all international students have to take responsibility to satisfy these requirements.

When choosing your plan, be sure to carefully read the explanation of benefits and policy exclusions, so that you know what the insurance company will and will not cover.

### **How to use your Insurance**

After you sign your insurance contract, you will receive your insurance card from the company. Be sure to keep this card in your wallet at all times with other identification cards. Please call the insurance company if you do not receive a card. You must show this card when you visit the doctor or hospital.

## **How to contact Medical Care**

In a non-emergent medical situation, such as an ear infection, you will need to find a “family doctor” or “general practitioner.” Usually you can contact your insurance provider to request a list of doctors who belong to your insurance “network.” You can also find a family doctor by looking in the Yellow Pages under the heading “Physicians” and sub headings “Family Doctors” or “General Doctors”. Most physicians will require making an appointment in advance before they agree to see you, and the waiting time can be a few weeks. Also, when you have an appointment with a doctor, it is important to be on time since Americans are very time conscious.

In an emergency such as suffering from serious bleeding, pain, or in danger of death, go to the nearest medical facility.

## **How to Call an Ambulance:**

For an emergency, just dial “911” and tell the operator that this is a medical emergency and an ambulance is needed. Usually paramedics may issue instructions over the telephone while the ambulance is on its way in some urgent situations.

## **Transportation and Utility**

### **Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA)**

Three Metro Rail lines are operational: the Red, Blue and Green, which can take you to a number of popular places. Ticket vending machines are located in each station.

- The Red Line runs from Union Station (downtown) through Hollywood to North Hollywood.
- The Blue Line runs from 7<sup>th</sup> and Flower streets to downtown Long Beach.
- The Green Line runs east and west, crossing the Blue Line between Norwalk and Redondo Beach and ends south, near LAX (Los Angeles Airport).

The Gold Line (open mid-2003) connects downtown L.A. to Pasadena.

The bus system is notoriously slow if you are trying to get across town during rush hour (buses get caught in traffic jams, too). Exact change is required.

### **Purchasing a Car/Auto Insurance/Driver's License**

If you purchase a new car, there are legal and financial obligations involved. First, you must go to the Department of Motor Vehicles and apply for a driver's license. Also, you are required by law to have car insurance. In the Yellow Pages of the telephone directory under the heading insurance, there is a list of insurance companies.

### **Telephone, Electricity and Cable**

Usually the new tenant must start utility services, such as telephone, electricity, and gas. Also, ask your landlord about which services are provided and which services the tenant must arrange.

You will need to call Telephone Company to hook up your phone. The telephone company requires a deposit (refundable). Also, for electricity and cable, you will need to call those companies. (Usually the landlord provides all the phone numbers for these agencies)

## **Purchasing Items**

### **Grocery Stores**

There are a number of large grocery stores or “supermarkets” around our campus. Many of these chains have stores in different locations. The telephone directory lists these different locations. There are also many ethnic grocery stores listed in the yellow pages. Some ethnic restaurants sell packaged ethnic foods. You can ask from people of your native home about where they have found ethnic food.

### **Convenience Stores**

There are small centrally located stores which frequently also sell gasoline. These stores are not a good place to buy large amounts of supplies because their prices are generally much higher than other stores.

### **Restaurants**

Restaurants are listed in the Yellow Pages under “Restaurants”. There are a variety of good restaurants in our area. Mexican, Greek, French, Italian, Japanese and other ethnic restaurants are available, as well as traditional American restaurants.

### **Shopping**

Where and how you shop will make a great deal of difference in how much you spend and the quality of products that you buy while you are in California.

### **Garage Sales**

Garage Sales often offer excellent bargains on used merchandise. Usually, community people at the seller’s home hold them. Garage Sales are advertised under Garage Sales in the classified section of the newspaper. They are held on weekends when the weather is nice.

# **Cultural Differences**

## **Culture Shock**

Culture shock happens when you find American culture, people, climate, customs, food and fashion to be very different from your native home culture. It is normal to go through this culture shock. You have to be aware that culture shock cannot be completely eliminated in a short period of time. The best way to reduce culture shock is to do your homework and study before coming to the U.S. Socializing with Americans is a great way to learn and know about their culture. Also, it is important to realize that Americans are acting according to their own set of values, not to values from your own country.

## **Directness**

Most Americans generally do not like to discuss religion, political beliefs, age, weight, or salary. They are usually sensitive about their physical appearance. It is not polite to tell them that he/she is overweight or fat.

## **American Name**

American names generally have three parts: the first name, the middle name or initial and the last or family name. Usually, the first name appears first, then the middle name and finally the last name.

## **“NO” Means “NO”**

If you say “no” you may not be asked again. For example, if you are a dinner or lunch guest and have been offered more food, be sure to say “no” only if you really do not want any more.

## **Punctuality**

It is very important and essential to be on time for classes, social events and appointments. Americans put great emphasis on being “on-time.” If you must miss an appointment or if you will be late, be sure to telephone the person you are supposed to meet to cancel or delay your meeting.

## **About Advanced College**

Advanced College holds accreditation through the Council on Occupational Education (COE).  
[www.council.org](http://www.council.org)

The Accrediting Commission of the COE is listed by the United States Department of Education as a nationally recognized accrediting agency. The Secretary of Education is required by law to publish a list of nationally recognized accrediting agencies that the Secretary determines to be reliable authorities as to the quality of education provided by the institutions of higher education.

### **Commission of International and Trans-Regional Accreditation (CITA)**

CITA is the most rapidly growing accrediting agency in the world. It was created in 1996 by five USA regional associations, which accredit schools and universities. In 2005, COE was invited to join CITA. As a result, all COE institutions are also CITA members.

[www.citaschools.org](http://www.citaschools.org)

Advanced College is also:

- Approved by the Bureau of Private Postsecondary and Vocational Education for the State of California. (BPPVE)
- Approved by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)
- Accredited by the Board of Vocational Nursing and Psychiatric Technicians (BVNPT)
- Approved by Workforce Investment Act (WIA)
- Approved by Veteran's Educational Assistance (VA)
- Approved by State Department of Rehabilitation and Private Vocational Rehabilitation
- Financial Aid Available for Those Who Qualify
- Has a fast-track programs geared to the Job Market
- Has Career Placement Assistance
- Has Flexible Class Schedules
- The Classes on Campus or some online, in real time or any time
- Flexible Degree and program options (From certificate to associate of science degree, from technology to health care)

## Other Tips

### **Personal Safety Tips:**

- Be sure to let your friends or neighbors know where you are going, when you plan to return and how you can be reached at your destination.
- Pay attention to those walking around you.
- Do not jog at night or in the early morning when streets are deserted
- Do not carry large amounts of cash or other valuable objects
- Take your personal belongings with you, even if you leave for a moment
- If you are being followed by someone go to a public place and ask for help
- Do not pick up hitchhikers
- You should lock your doors and close your windows at night before going to bed
- Never open the door to a stranger

### **Driving Safety Tips:**

- Do not talk on a cell phone while you drive
- Do not try to read a book or a newspaper or magazine article when you drive
- Do not listen to music so loud that you will not be able to respond to an emergency situation
- Make room for cars that are entering the highway. Check your mirrors and merge left well before coming to a highway on-ramp that has cars entering the highway.
- If your car breaks down, raise the hood, and wait in your locked car for a law enforcement officer to arrive.

### **Alcohol Awareness:**

California has strict laws regarding the use of alcohol, especially driving under the influence of alcohol or underage drinking is not allowed.

### **Drunk Driving:**

If you are driving a bicycle, car and are under the influence of alcohol or any illegal drug, you may be arrested for “driving under the influence.”

### **Underage Drinking:**

California’s laws prohibit the sale of alcohol to anyone under age 21. Being arrested for the sale or possession of alcoholic beverages by underage persons can result in a jail sentence and/or a fine and possible suspension of driving privileges.

### **Protect yourself form telemarketing:**

Your best protection is to tell them that you are not interested, do not waste any of your time or theirs, and then hang up.

**Shoplifting:**

Shoplifting is removing merchandise from stores without paying. Shoplifting is a serious crime in California, and merchants are alert to any possible offenses. Be sure to keep your chosen items clearly visible as you shop and show them to the cashier.

**Bribing is a Crime:**

Do not attempt to bribe anybody in the U.S. Bribery is a serious offense, and the punishment are fines and/or imprisonment.

**Money and Banking:**

Do not carry large amounts of money or keep it in your room. Establish an account at one of the banks in South Gate so that your money can be kept in safe place.

There are 2 different types of accounts:

- Checking Account - usually based on how much money is in the account and how many checks you write. Discuss your situation with the people at the bank to find the types of account that is best suited to your need.
- Saving Account - designed to hold money in a bank or savings and loan association for longer periods so that it can earn interest.

**Tipping:**

It is customary to tip food services. Usually, people tip 15-20 % of the total bill unless you are dissatisfied with the service.

**Telephone Directory:**

The telephone directory is a very helpful source of information. It has a list of almost everyone in the area that owns a phone, their address, and their telephone number. The directory lists area codes, call rates, and business phone numbers.

**Potluck Gatherings:**

Potluck is a gathering; each person is expected to bring a food or drink item to share with the group.

**Going Dutch:**

It is very common in the U.S. to split the bill, meaning that each person pays for his or her own meal.

**Academic Assistance:**

If you are having difficulties with your studies, seek the advice of your faculty or your academic advisor.

**Finding a Job:**

After completion of a degree program, international students are eligible to apply for OPT (Optional Practical Training). This work authorization permit allows you to work full-time for up to one year.

**Day Light Saving Time:**

48 states in the U.S. (except Arizona and Hawaii) have daylight saving time. That means twice a year, in mid-March and mid-October, clocks are adjusted forward by one hour in the spring and backward by one hour in the fall.

**Measuring System:**

The measuring system in the U.S. is different with many other countries. The U.S. uses the English measuring system, not the metric. Liquid is measure in gallons or ounces and distance by miles or yards and feet. The temperature is measured in Fahrenheit degrees.

**Credit Card:**

Credit cards are universal and let you to charge items based on your credit limit. You have the option to pay a minimum on a monthly basis or pay the full balance each month. If you do not pay fully each month, you will be charged interest based on any unpaid balance. You can pay your tuition and fees at Advanced College with a major credit card such as American Express, Visa, or MasterCard. It can be difficult for international students to open these credit card accounts in the U.S. If you want to use a credit card, bring one from your home country. It is better to make arrangements with your family to pay the bills for you.

**Holiday Observed:**

These are the major holidays listed below and most schools, colleges, universities and government offices are closed on these dates:

New Year's Day  
Martin Luther King, Jr. Day  
Presidents' Day  
Good Friday  
Memorial Day  
Independence Day  
Labor Day  
Veteran's Day  
Thanksgiving (Thursday and Friday)  
Christmas Day

If specific holidays fall on a weekend, offices will be closed the preceding Friday or following Monday.