



International Program Center
Bemidji State University
Handbook for International Students 2009-2010



Welcome!

On behalf of Bemidji State University (BSU), the International Program Center warmly welcomes you to our campus. Bemidji, the first city on the Mississippi River, offers great opportunities for shopping, education, medical care, technology, lodging, and government services, as well as exciting outdoor recreation. We hope you agree that Bemidji is a beautiful place to visit and a great place to live and study.

You will have many occasions to interact with American students and family members through participation in:

- √ The BSU International Student Organization
- √ Open Borders, a residential learning community focusing on opportunities to appreciate and experience new cultures
- √ Family Friends Organization
- √ The Diversity Awareness committee of our Student Senate
- √ Other academic and/or social clubs and organizations on campus

We hope you enjoy your time at Bemidji State University!

Let Us Know if You Need Assistance!

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Bemidji State University
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Information for International Students at Bemidji State University

Academic Calendar

BSU offers two semesters per year, as well as a summer session. The fall semester (August-December) and spring semester (January-May) last approximately 15 weeks, and the summer session (June-August) offers two 5-week sessions.

Health Insurance

All international students at BSU are required to purchase health insurance through the MnSCU contracted student insurance provider, regardless of any other health insurance the student may have. Payment for the annual insurance premium is due prior to the start of the semester.

Orientation

All new international students are required to attend orientation prior to the start of classes. Orientation topics include academic advising, class registration, immigration policies and regulations, banking, and other related activities.

BSU Student Handbook

The Student Handbook contains the policies and procedures that relate to many aspects of your life as a BSU student, in and out of the classroom. All students are expected to abide by these policies. Saying you are unfamiliar with American university regulations is not legitimate excuse. Please familiarize yourself with the student handbook, located <http://www.bemidjistate.edu/students/handbook/>.

Academic Advisors

You will have the opportunity to meet with a faculty member in your program of study during the orientation program to receive assistance with course selection. You will then be assigned a permanent academic advisor upon registration. Your assigned advisor will be a faculty member from your declared major or program of study. You are encouraged to schedule meetings with your academic advisor or course instructor.

Placement Testing—English as a Second Language (ESL), and Mathematics

During the international student orientation program, non-native speakers of English will undergo assessment to determine placement levels for English as a Second Language (ESL). Students whose ESL assessment results indicate placement in the Intermediate ESL or Advanced ESL course will be required to enroll in the applicable course their first semester. Post-test results at the end of the semester will determine the need for subsequent enrollment in ESL courses their 2nd term.

Students may also be assessed for proper placement in mathematics courses.

MyBSU/BSU E-mail

Located on the BSU website, the MyBSU portal is the location of your student e-mail login, e-services (registration, billing payment, etc.), D2L login, and bulletins and alerts. All students are required to use their student e-mail to contact BSU faculty and staff members, and are encouraged to check it often for alerts and reminders.

Banking

You are encouraged to establish bank accounts in a local bank upon arrival in Bemidji. The reasons for this are to keep your money safe, for ease of transferring money from home, and for bill payment. Most people in the U.S. have checking accounts, saving accounts, or both. Most students pay for school and other expenses using checks, credit cards, or bankcards. Students also frequently use ATM or debit cards when shopping or dining. It is **never** a good idea to carry large amounts of cash on your person.

Health

BSU has a Student Health Services office to attend to your healthcare needs. You are strongly encouraged to use this facility. It is convenient, inexpensive, and helpful. Medicines and treatments are available at low cost to students.

ID Cards

You will be issued a BSU student ID card during orientation. You will need this card to gain access to computer labs, the library, and the Gillett Recreation and Fitness center. If you lose or damage your card, to obtain another one, you must go to the Hobson Memorial Union Desk. You will be issued a small fee for a replacement ID card.



Information for International Students at Bemidji State University (Continued)

Identification

If you are not eligible for a U.S. driving license, you can acquire another possible form of ID called a Minnesota identification card. Please visit this website for more information <http://driversed.com/dmv/minnesota-id-cards.aspx>.

BSU Housing

The Department of Residential Life at BSU is committed to creating a caring environment that encourages academic success, individual respect, personal growth, and a sense of responsibility toward our community and a global society.

Residence hall services are provided as a part of the residence hall living experience and are included in the living cost of each resident. Please visit the Residential Life webpage at <http://www.bemidjistate.edu/students/reslife> for detailed information regarding our on-campus housing and meal options.

Housing is available in the BSU residence halls during all breaks. Students who wish to stay at BSU during breaks should discuss this option with the Residential Life office staff.

Students living in the residence halls are assigned mailboxes. Postage stamps can be purchased at the Hobson Memorial Union's Information Desk and at the reception desk of most residence halls. The BSU Mailroom is available in the basement of Memorial Hall, room 001, where they sell stamps and accept personal UPS packages for shipment from all BSU Students.

Alerts

University alerts will be made through the BSU website homepage. Announcements may also be made through e-mail, posted bulletins, verbal methods, television and radio bulletins. Students should always be alert for such announcements, especially during times of bad weather.

U.S. Social Customs and Suggestions

- Use English** Speak English as much as possible while studying at BSU. Frequent usage of English will make the adjustment to living in the U.S. easier and will greatly increase the likelihood of academic success.
- Try the Food** American food might be quite different from the food in your home country. Take the time to try a variety of American foods to find out what you like. Part of the fun of being in a new country is discovering the food and culture of the country.
- Be on Time** In general, Americans value punctuality. When specific times are given for events, it is expected that everyone involved will be on time or maybe a little early. Always be on time for class and for appointments.
- Addressing Others** Use "Dr." when addressing your instructors if they have an earned doctorate degree; otherwise, you can safely address them with the title of "Professor". "Mr." or "Ms.", or "Mrs." if you know she is married, may be used when you speak to people, especially in more formal settings. If someone tells you to call them by their first name, then you can use that name in reference to them.
- Make Eye Contact** In the United States, eye contact is very important. Maintaining eye contact shows interest and honesty.
- Use Your Manners** It is preferred to use words and phrases such as "please", "excuse me", and "thank you" when appropriate.
- Ask Questions and Show Interest** Asking questions is encouraged and is seen as a good way to learn and show interest. Ask questions in class and participate in class discussions!
- Visiting Someone's Room or Office** Many people at BSU keep their office or residence hall room doors open when they are in the room. Before you enter the room, you should still knock or ask if it is okay to enter the room.
- Negotiating Prices** In the United States, the price listed on a product is generally not negotiable. Exceptions may include high priced items such as cars and houses.



Immigration Information and Policies for International Students

SEVIS

SEVIS is the automated system for the overall Student Exchange and Visitor Program. Its function is:

To trace and monitor **F, M, and J** non-immigrants.

To recognize, predict and report trends and anomalies.

To provide system alerts to help keep students in status.

It is critical that your information be correct in SEVIS. Please report any changes to your personal information (name, address, phone number, etc.) **directly** to the Designated School Official (DSO) promptly. Changes in your U.S. address **must be reported directly to the DSO within ten days of the change.** LaMae Ritchie serves as the Principal DSO for BSU.

E-mail: lritchie@bemidjistate.edu

Phone: 218-755-4096

Office: Deputy Hall 103

The Role of the DSO for SEVIS:

- √ Verify admission requirements, including review and evaluation of official transcripts, English skills, and evidence of financial support
- √ Issue/sign I-20s and DS 2019s for BSU sponsored students
- √ Verify/confirm the student's enrollment and status maintenance information reported to SEVIS
- √ Authorize Curricular Practical Training
- √ Authorize student transfer between U.S. institutions
- √ Authorize reduced course load
- √ Approve program extensions
- √ Recommend reinstatement
- √ Endorse optional practical training applications verifying that the student is eligible for this type of employment and submits information to SEVIS,
- √ Monitor address and employment activity throughout optional practical training.
- √ Endorse applications for employment based on severe economic hardship, verifying that student is in status and meets all requirements, and submits information to SEVIS

Maintaining F-1 Status

To maintain F-1 status, students **must**:

- √ Report to the school to get registered in SEVIS
- √ Have a valid passport
- √ Provide current U.S. address (no Post Office Box addresses please) to the DSO
- √ Report a change of address to the DSO within 10 days of the change.
- √ Pursue a full course of study every term, unless approved in advance for reduced course load
- √ Complete your course of study before the expiration of the program completion date on your I-20.



Immigration Information and Policies for International Students (Continued)

√ Keep your I-20 valid by following proper procedures for:

- ⇒ Extension of stay.
- ⇒ Change in educational levels.
- ⇒ Transfer of schools.
- ⇒ Abiding by the grace period rules – 60 days after completing a course of study unless applying for practical training, moving educational levels, or transferring.
- ⇒ Abiding by rules requiring disclosure of information and prohibition on criminal activity.
- ⇒ Abiding by any special requirements of the U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security
- ⇒ Employment—Do not work without authorization.

Questions regarding status should be directed to the BSU International Program Center. You can e-mail the director at lritchie@bemidjistate.edu, call 218-755-4096, or stop by the Center in Deputy Hall 103 on the BSU campus.

Fulltime Enrollment

You are required by U.S. immigration laws to be enrolled as fulltime student. This means you must take a minimum of 12 hours of credit each semester (9 credits for graduate students). Failure to maintain full time enrollment will result in a loss of immigration status and you would be required to return home or file for reinstatement. There are some exceptions to full time enrollment that may be considered:

- √ The request for a 'Reduced Course Load' must be submitted to the DSO for approval prior to reducing your course load.
- √ Complete a 'Reduced Course Load' form and have your advisor sign it. The forms are available in the Intl Program Center Office – Deputy 103 or online at http://www.bemidjistate.edu/students/international/ES_ReduCourLoad.html
- √ Students with approved reduced course load must resume a full course load in the next available term.
- √ Exceptions to Full Course of Study Requiring Prior Authorization:
 - ⇒ Illness or Medical Condition (Requires no minimum credit load) (must have medical documentation)
 - ⇒ Academic Difficulty (Requires a minimum of 6 credits of load):
 - ⇒ Initial Difficulty with the English Language
 - ⇒ Will complete degree requirements in current term (Requires a minimum of 1 credit of load).

Extension of Stay

If you are unable to complete your course of study by the program end date on your Form I-20, you can apply for an Extension.

To be eligible to apply:

- √ Must apply prior to the program end date. (Need to see PDSO for application completion)
- √ Must have continually maintained status.
- √ The delay in completion is caused by compelling academic or medical reasons, i.e.:
 - ⇒ Change of major
 - ⇒ Unexpected research problems
 - ⇒ Documented illnesses



Immigration Information and Policies for International Students (Continued)

Student Employment

You cannot legally work off-campus unless you have filed the necessary application with USCIS and have been granted authorization. You can work part time on campus without USCIS authorization. http://www.bemidjistate.edu/students/international/ES_Emp.html

On campus employment:

You are eligible to apply for 'Regular Payroll' positions on campus. These positions are competitive among all students. You are encouraged to prepare a resume and apply early.

On campus jobs are limited to 20 hours when school is in session, can be full time during official school breaks.

On campus employment does not require DSO or DHS approval for F-1. J-1 need approval

Off Campus – Severe Economic Hardship:

Must have been in F-1 status for at least one full academic year before applying.

Must apply to the United States Citizenship & Immigration Services -- USCIS. (Fee is required.)

Must provide verification; DSO recommendation; application to USCIS. (Fee required for filing)

Approvals are granted in 1-year increments.

Authorization ends if you transfer schools, complete your program, or fail to maintain non-immigrant status.

Limited to 20 hours a week, can be full-time during official school breaks.

Does not have to be related to course of study.

Does not count towards the on-campus hours, nor does it affect eligibility for practical training.

Curricular Practical Training

Employment off campus that is an integral part of an established curriculum, defined as an internship, cooperative education, or practicum.

Must be approved by your academic department, and you must enroll in appropriate course for the term of the employment.

Final approval is granted by the PDSO; does not require application to USCIS.

Must have been lawfully enrolled on a full time basis for one full academic year.

CPT authorization is employer and date specific.

Can be part or full time.

Use of full-time CPT for one year or more eliminates eligibility for OPT.

Must maintain full time status during employment period.

Optional Practical Training

Temporary employment for practical training directly related to your major area of study; most commonly utilized after degree completion.

Eligibility Requirements for OPT: http://www.bemidjistate.edu/students/international/ES_Emp_OPT.html

Must have been enrolled for at least one academic year.

Must apply to the United States Citizenship & Immigration Services -- USCIS (fee is required.).

Must apply prior to program completion – application approval can take 90-120 days, so apply early.

Employment must be in your area of study.

Cannot exceed 12 months per educational level.

Must be completed within 14 months following completion of study.



Immigration Information and Policies for International Students (Continued)

Apply for a Social Security Number

Once you have secured a job offer on-campus or through CPT, have your employing department produce an employment letter for you. Bring that letter along with an unofficial transcript from Records, to the International Program Center. Give the letter to one of the staff members (you do not need to meet with LaMae). A staff member will create a letter verifying that you are a current international student at BSU. LaMae will then sign that letter. Once it is complete, you will be notified via e-mail that your letters are ready. Please give 2-3 days unless notified. Plan ahead, as the DSO is not always readily available.

Please follow the instructions at the following website <http://www.ssa.gov/pubs/10181.html#apply>.

Tax Reporting Obligations

You are required to submit a Form 8843 to the Internal Revenue Service every year by April 15th. The form is located on the social security website <http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f8843.pdf>. Please see the "International Student Tax Reporting Responsibilities", given to you during orientation, or talk to the accounting department on campus. There are also free tax help sessions on campus hosted by our accounting department during spring semester. Take advantage of this free assistance.

Transferring to another U.S. school

Must be admitted to the new institution and be eligible for an I-20.

Must be maintaining status at current school.

Inform the DSO at BSU, via e-mail, of your intent to transfer, the name of the school to which you wish to transfer, and the date you wish your I-20 to be released to your new school. (The release date is typically the last day of your last semester.) You will also need to provide a copy of the acceptance letter from the school to which you are transferring. You do not need to meet with your DSO.

Change of Educational Programs or Levels

Follow institutional & academic requirements for moving to a new major or applying to pursue a higher degree (i.e. Bachelors to Masters). Before the end date of your current program, inform the DSO and request an updated I-20. Contact the DSO via e-mail to alert them of this situation.





Immigration Information and Policies for International Students (Continued)

Travel Information after arrival in the U.S.

Make sure you have the following items when you travel:

- √ Passport (passport must be valid for at least 6 months beyond expected final travel date)
- √ Check your U.S. visa in your passport to learn if it has expired. If so, you will have to apply at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate to have it renewed before returning to the United States. If you have changed your visa status to F-1 in the United States, you must apply for an F-1 visa at a U.S. embassy or consulate before returning to the United States.
- √ Have your Designated School Official sign your I-20. Please do not wait until the last minute in the event the DSO is not readily available! Many ports of entry require the DSO signature to be within the last 6 months.
- √ You are advised to carry your BSU transcript with you and evidence of your student status. To request one from the Records Office, you will need to present a valid picture ID and have no outstanding financial obligations to BSU. There is no charge for this.
- √ If you wish to have a "Verification of Enrollment", as further evidence of your student status, please request that from the Records Office.
- √ Get current "Financial Support Documents" from your financial sponsor. You may be asked to show them to immigration officials at the port of entry when you return to the United States. You will also need updated or recent financial support documents if you plan to apply for or renew your visa.
- √ If you are traveling outside the United States to a country other than your home country, contact the embassy of that country to learn if you need a visa to enter that country. If so, inquire about the requirements, cost and time frame needed to apply for a visa. Keep in mind that it often takes 2-3 weeks (or longer) to process a visa application.
- √ If you are outside the U.S. for more than 5 months, you will need a new initial I-20 to re-enter (unless you are traveling as part of a BSU study travel program).
- √ If you are traveling within the United States, you are advised to carry your original passport and I-20 with you at all times.

Renewing/Applying for a Visa

If you need to renew your student visa, contact the US Embassy/Consulate in your home country or in the country where you are traveling BEFORE you travel. Be sure to find out what documents are required and how long the process may take. NOTE: Please be aware of the long delays affecting the visa application process. Be sure to plan ahead to avoid serious delays! If you do receive a new visa, be sure to report to your DSO when you return to campus. A copy of your new visa will need to be placed in your student file. Visit their website at http://travel.state.gov/visa/visa_1750.html.

Returning to the United States

When returning to the U.S., be prepared for delays at the initial port of entry. Different routing procedures may be used for students. You will need to plan your travel, transportation, and connecting flights accordingly.

Returning to Campus

Report to the International Program Center upon your return to BSU. Be sure to bring all of your immigration documents with you. A school representative may need to make copies of all documents.

Be sure to check your BSU e-mail for special announcements concerning information about your immigration status and related issues. Make sure all necessary offices on campus have your correct address so you can receive mail.

Contact the International Program Center if your address or other contact information changes. In order to comply with immigration regulations, notify your DSO directly of any changes in contact information within 10 days of such change.

Stays in the United States After Completion of Program

Students who complete their study at BSU may remain in the United States up to 60 days after their program completion date. Students who leave their program prior to completion must exit the U.S. within 15 days.



If Out Of Status

If you do fall out of non-immigrant status:

- √ You may leave the country and request a new initial I-20 for re-entry.
- √ You may remain in the U.S. and apply for reinstatement to the U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services. You will need to submit the I-539 form, which can be found at <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis> (Link to 'Immigration Forms'). Approval is not guaranteed however. Conditions:
 - Out of status < 5 months with no record of repeated violations
 - Is or will be pursuing a full course of study
 - Has not worked without authorization
 - Is not deportable on any other grounds
 - Status violation resulted from circumstances beyond the student's control

Adjusting to a new environment

This is an exciting time for you. You will be meeting new people, making new friends, and you will be very busy. During this time of transition you may also feel a certain degree of loneliness, homesickness, and anxiety. Being aware that this is normal, understanding what you are feeling, and knowing your resources will help you get through this difficult, but short time.

- ◆ Stressors may include:
 - New country, culture, climate, food
 - Different people, different schedules, faster pace
 - Worries about fitting in, family back home, finances
 - Language challenges
 - Increased pressures from academic expectations
- ◆ Getting through culture shock
 - Keep in touch with family and friends
 - Make new friends and enjoy your new home
 - Eat well, get your sleep, and exercise normally
 - Get involved!
 - Be patient and ask questions if you don't understand
- ◆ Helpful resources
 - Talk with friends from back home or new friends in Bemidji
 - Visit the BSU Counseling Center if your condition does not improve
 - Talk with your Resident Hall Assistant
 - Visit with your academic advisor or a professor
 - Talk with your DSO



“By three methods we may learn wisdom:

First, by reflection, which is noblest;

Second, by imitation, which is easiest;

Third, by experience, which is the bitterest.” — *Confucius*

Where To Go For Help

For questions about classes, registration, textbooks, major requirements, degree completion, academic progress—

- √ Refer to the 'Student Guide to Academics and Registration' provided to you during orientation or available on-line at <http://www.bemidjistate.edu/students/records/advising/studentguide/SGIndex.html>
- √ Talk to your instructors, your academic advisor, and/or your department chair
- √ Refer to the current BSU catalog – available on-line at <http://www.bemidjistate.edu/academics/catalog/>

For questions about I-20s, DS2019s, staying in status, and immigration issues—

- √ Talk to the DSO in the IPC office, Deputy Hall 103, or e-mail studybemidji@bemidjistate.edu
- √ Visit the U.S. Department of Immigration website <http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis>
- √ Refer to the IPC webpage at <http://www.bemidjistate.edu/students/international/>

For health issues, health insurance questions, or counseling about personal/emotional issues—

- √ Contact Student Health and Counseling Center in Birch Hall 755-2053
- √ Refer to the Health Services website <http://www.bemidjistate.edu/students/health/>
- √ Read through the insurance booklet given to you at orientation (more available at IPC or Health Services)

For information on student life, clubs and organizations, student services, university policy and procedures—

- √ Consult the current BSU Student Handbook, available at <http://www.bemidjistate.edu/students/handbook>
- √ Visit the MyBSU portal for announcements of activities, policy reminders, important notices, etc. <https://portal.bemidjistate.edu/>
- √ Refer to the Hobson Union website http://www.bemidjistate.edu/students/hobson_union/

For information about Bemidji, community events, or places to visit—

- √ Visit the Bemidji Chamber of Commerce website <http://www.bemidji.org>
- √ Refer to the Visit Bemidji website at <http://www.visitbemidji.com>



Bemidji State University is an equal opportunity educator and employer. Bemidji State University is a member of the Minnesota State Colleges and University, an agency which serves the education needs of about 370,000 students each year on 53 technical college, community college, and state university campuses across Minnesota



For Special Accommodations, contact the Coordinator of Disability Services (SN202) at 755-3883.