

U.S. Culture

The United States is a very diverse country with no single culture, ethnicity, or religion. Our country was founded on the immigration of people all over the world in hopes of starting a new life. The U.S. is the 4th largest country in the world, which results in many diverse cultures, customs, and traditions. Therefore, you will have a unique experience depending on which region of the U.S. you study abroad. Yet, there are certain aspects of U.S. culture that are generally accepted and can be used as a general guideline in order to gain a better understanding of what cultural differences you might encounter when you come to study here.

Time Perspective

Americans are very time oriented. They view time as limited; therefore it must be spent wisely. It is very important to be on time or early in the U.S., because if you are late, you are considered rude and it is viewed that you are wasting another person's time. This is especially true when you are going to meetings, interviews, work, class, or meeting a deadline. If class starts at 9am, you should be at class at least a couple of minutes before 9am.



Communication

The U.S. is a low context culture. This means that Americans prefer to speak clearly and directly. They do not focus so much on subtle points in insinuated meanings. Americans try very hard to say what they mean, so when they give an answer of “no”, it actually means “no”. Also, Americans refrain from talking about sensitive topics such as religion, money, or politics until they become close friends. In addition, the way in which people speak can vary between regions. Depending on the region of the U.S. people may speak with a different accent and act either friendlier or more distant.



The style of communication in classrooms is also very informal and direct. Students are encouraged to participate in class by asking questions whenever they don't understand anything. By participating in class and asking questions, it shows that the student is paying attention and is interested in the course. Usually, a student must raise their hand in order to be called on to answer a question. It is considered rude to talk at the same time as someone else, especially a teacher or boss.

Although Americans focus mainly on verbal communication, there are typical non-verbal communication elements that are typically practiced. When one is communicating with another, it is important to maintain eye contact. Be careful to not stare too intently for a long period of time. Holding a soft gaze for short durations is recommended. It is also important to refrain from tapping ones hands and feet while talking, as that symbolized impatience.

Status and Hierarchy

Americans determine status through individual accomplishment, although there are sometimes exceptions. How you address a person all depends with whom you are speaking. If you are friends with a person, typically you address them by their first name or with a “nickname”. Formal titles like Miss, Ms., Mrs., or Mr., Dr., Professor, etc. all depend on that person’s education and profession, age, and marital status. Yet regardless of status, Americans generally believe that everybody was created equal and should be treated as such regardless of race, gender, religion, ethnicity, or disability.

Religion

There are many different religions practiced in the United States as it is considered an individual’s choice as to which religion, if any, they would like to practice. It is protected by the U.S. Constitution under the Bill of Rights. Therefore, discrimination based on religion is frowned upon. There are often many different places to practice one’s religion (such as mosques, synagogues, or churches) depending on which religions is more prevalent in that area. Yet many colleges make an effort to have places of worship that can be available to students of all religions. There are also many religious holidays for which many business and schools with close, like Christmas or Easter.