

WELCOME TO TRUMAN STATE UNIVERSITY

**International Student Pre-Arrival
Orientation – American Culture 101**

CULTURAL ADJUSTMENT AND AMERICAN CULTURE 101

Those Crazy Americans!

Overview of ways US culture tends to differ from others.

While this session is particularly helpful for those with little US experience, we encourage those who are more experienced to pay close attention as well.



AMERICAN CULTURE 101

Assumptions, Respect, and Choice

- Think before you assume - a behavior that means one thing in your culture might not mean the same thing here. If you don't know what someone's intentions are, ask!
- Respect – each culture has different ways of showing respect. Many of the things we will discuss are based on the value of respecting individuality.
- Choice – Americans tend to value having many choices. This includes many choices that might not be found elsewhere. It is not considered polite to openly disagree with people's choices in their physical appearance and lifestyle.

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Time & Deadline Obsessive Don't be Late – It's an American thing.

When is it OK to be late?

parties, social events, sporting events if you are not playing

When is it NOT ok to be late?

class, work, rides, assignments, meetings, appointments, payments

How late is too late?



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Personal Habits & Daily Routine



- **Food & meals** – especially in college, it is common to skip meals or just eat snacks all day. Eating a meal is not an excuse to be late for something.
- **Weather** – it's what Americans talk about when they can't think of anything else to say.
- **Showers & smelly stuff** – Americans don't find the lingering smell of food or sweat acceptable. They are obsessed with deodorant and personal hygiene.
- **Individualistic** – doesn't mean selfish, just that people generally expect everyone to take care of their own things. It doesn't mean Americans don't help each other, just that they value the ability to take care of themselves.
- **Busy** – Americans value being busy for some reason. They will always complain about how busy they are, even if they are not.

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Communication Style

- Personal space – It's important to give each person about half a meter of space. Anything else might be too close.
- Smiles – Americans, especially women, consider smiling to be polite. Some people might feel like they are being rude if they do not smile. It does not necessarily mean anything, it's just a greeting like "hi!"
- "Hi, how are you?" – a general greeting, not an invitation to share all of your problems. This doesn't mean that an American doesn't care about you, just that this is a very common greeting.
- Focused, direct & to the point – when people are busy, they often just want to talk about the necessary things, and might not want to engage in "small talk."
- Labels & acronyms – So many acronyms. If you don't know, just ask.

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Touchy Subjects – Avoid these subjects when meeting new people!

- religion
- finances
- politics
- family problems
- disabilities
- sexual orientation
- personal habits



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Gender Issues

- **Hugging & kissing** – don't make assumptions! For some people, it is normal to hug friends of the opposite sex. However, usually friends don't kiss, even on the cheek.
- **Touching friends of same gender** – this is not as acceptable in the U.S as it is in many other cultures. Friends of the same gender generally do not link arms or hold hands or touch each other while they talk. This is especially true for **men** in the United States.
- **“hanging out” vs. “hooking up”** If you don't know what you're doing with someone, ask them! Don't assume!
- **women & their age / weight** - Just don't talk about it 😊

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Business & Professional Formality

Relationships with professors & other professional people – Do not use slang! (especially in email)

Remember, “you” and “are” are words, not letters

Do not write an email the way you text. Do not use emoticons e.g. 😊



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Business & Professional Formality

Negotiating & bargaining – talking to professors is like going to the market. In some countries, you can bargain when you go to the market. You negotiate with seller until you get a price you both agree. In America, talking to your professors is more like going to Walmart. You have to pay the price they tell you. It is important that professors do not feel like you are questioning their expertise on a subject. It is better to ask them questions rather than make demands or try to bargain.



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Things to remember:

- You are a Truman student first, an international student second!
- All of the resources on campus are available to help you succeed, the CIS is just one of many! Your professors, university staff, Student Advisors, CILs, and many others are here to support you.
- If you are having any problems, please talk to someone about it.
- Don't be afraid to make mistakes. Other people will understand.
- Everyone needs help. Everyone makes mistakes. The more you can learn to ask for help and deal with making mistakes, the more successful you will be.
- Dealing with problems early means a positive outcome is more likely.
- We all make mistakes. If you get into a bad situation, come to us. Don't be embarrassed. We aren't your mom and we won't tell her.