



International Student Handbook

www.racc.edu

READING AREA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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January 2011

Welcome!!

Congratulations on your acceptance to Reading Area Community College! Coming to America, though exciting, can prove to be a very stressful process. This handbook, created just for you, will work to alleviate some of that stress while also answering some of your many questions.



► Preparing to Come to the U.S.

One of the most difficult things about coming to the U.S. is deciding what to pack. What should you pack? What shouldn't you pack? What is extremely necessary for you to bring? What can you live without? It is sometimes easy, when contemplating such matters as to whether you should pack an umbrella or just buy one when you get here, to forget to pack the things that you absolutely do need. To try and make it a little easier for you, we have compiled a list of several essential items that you must bring and most certainly do not want to forget to pack when you are preparing to come to the U.S.

- ◆ **Clothing:** The very first thing people usually tend to pack is their clothing. In order to pack the appropriate clothing, you need to know about the weather here. We have four seasons in the state of Pennsylvania: spring, summer, fall, and winter. Our winters tend to be very cold while our summers are usually hot and humid. It is important that you take this into account when deciding what clothing to pack.

- ◆ **Valid Passport:** It is important that, before you come to the U.S., you make sure that your passport will be **valid for at least six months after your arrival** in the States. If it will expire sooner, it is imperative that you renew your passport prior to traveling.
- ◆ **Birth Certificate:** It is important that, if your passport is less than one year old, you bring a copy of your birth certificate with you. If you do not bring a copy of your birth certificate, the social security office may not be able to issue you a social security number.
- ◆ **Money:** Before arriving in the U.S., you should make sure that you have either U.S. dollars or travelers' checks. We recommend that you carry most of your money in the form of checks and credit cards; it is not necessary to carry a lot of cash with you. If you do not have a credit card, you should apply and acquire one prior to arriving in the United States. We recommend that you bring a minimum of \$1,500 to \$2,000 U.S. dollars (in addition to tuition and living expenses) to cover additional expenses.
- ◆ **Medication:** It is extremely important that you remember to bring with you any and all medication that you take regularly.
- ◆ **Driver's License:** Another item that you can bring with you to the States is an international driver's license. It is not imperative that you have one, but it may prove useful during the duration of your stay in the U.S.
- ◆ **Contacts:** You do not want to forget the contacts of your loved ones. Remember to bring with you the phone numbers, home addresses, and e-mail addresses of your family and friends.

- ◆ **Significant Items From Your Country:** Something else you may want to bring are postcards, pictures, and other objects that represent or showcase something special about your country or something your country is known for. Once a year, every year, the United States has an International Education Week. During this week, RACC encourages all of its international students to share with friends and faculty information, stories, songs, pictures, food, clothing, etc., about each student's home country.

- ◆ **Prepare for Placement Test:** It is very important to prepare to take your college placement test. Results from this test will determine your initial placement in Math and English courses that you will likely take at the college. For more information about the test and sample questions, please go to: <http://www.act.org/compass/sample/index.html>. This will give you good ideas on what to study for the test. Good luck

- ◆ **Transcripts:** Something that is necessary for you to collect and bring to the U.S. is all of your transcripts. It is important that these transcripts are certified and translated into English.

► Paying for your SEVIS I-20 and Preparing for your Visa Interview

Who pays the SEVIS fee?

Prospective students who are planning on getting an F-1 or student visa for the first time or prospective students who have “initial attendance” on their SEVIS I-20 must pay the fee.

When do I have to pay the SEVIS fee?

The SEVIS fee must be paid at least *three* business days prior to applying for your visa.

How do I pay the fee?

The fee can be paid to the Department of Homeland Security either by mail or online and must be accompanied by a Form I-901. The fee can be paid by you or by a third party, inside the U.S or outside the U.S.

To Pay by Mail or Internet:

1. Go to www.FMJfee.com.
2. Obtain Form I-901 from the website given above.
3. If you or another person who is going to pay the fee on your behalf is inside the U.S., you can call 1-800-870-3676 to obtain Form I-901.
4. Make sure to fill out the form correctly. It is imperative that you write your name on the form exactly as it appears on your passport and your SEVIS I-20.
5. Prepare a check, inter-national money order, or foreign draft (drawn on U.S. banks only) in the amount of \$200 USD, made payable to “The Department of Homeland Security.”
6. Mail the completed Form I-901 and your check to the following address:

I-901 Student/Exchange Visitor Processing Fee
P. O. Box 970020
St. Luis, MO 63197-0020

7. If you are paying the fee over the Internet you can use a credit card.
8. Make sure to hold on to your receipt, Form I-797, in order to provide evidence that you paid your fee. You will be showing it to the Consulate officer later when you will be getting your visa.

Preparing for your Non-immigrant F-1 Student Visa Interview

Contact your local U.S. Consulate or Embassy to ask about how to get an F-1 International Student Visa. Another way you can acquire this information is by visiting <http://usembassy.state.gov/>. Another very helpful source is the website of the U.S. Department of State: [http://travel.state.gov/visa/tempvisitors types students2.html](http://travel.state.gov/visa/tempvisitors/types_students2.html).

What You Need to Bring with You to the Interview:

- Passport that is valid for at least six months
- SEVIS I-20 Form
- Completed visa applications (DS-156, DS-158, and, if applicable, DS-157) and pay fee
- Two 2" x 2" photographs of yourself
- A receipt for the visa application fee
- A receipt for SEVIS fee
- Evidence that you have sufficient funds to cover your tuition and living expenses (original letter from the bank and sponsor)
- Any information that proves that you will return back to your home country after graduation. This may include property and/or family ties that you do not want to break.
- Review the International Student Handbook.

► Booking a Flight

You will also be required to attend a general orientation for RACC as well as an International Student Orientation prior to the start of classes, so it is important that you plan to arrive in Reading approximately three to four weeks before your classes begin. The sooner the better, but **you cannot arrive any earlier than 30 days before the start date listed on your I-20.**

► Arriving in Reading

If your plane will land in Philadelphia, New York, or New Jersey at the Philadelphia International Airport, the John F. Kennedy International Airport, or the Newark International Airport, you can easily travel from the airport to Reading via a Bieber Bus.



Philadelphia International Airport (PHL)

In order to get to Reading from the Philadelphia International Airport, one must first travel to the Bieber Bus Terminal located in the Greyhound Bus Terminal on 10th and Filbert Streets in Philadelphia. The phone number for the Bieber Bus Terminal in Philadelphia is 215.931.4004.

There are several ways in which one can travel to the Greyhound Bus Terminal from the Philadelphia International Airport.

- ◆ One can take the R1 train on Septa’s regional rail high-speed rail line from PHL terminals A-east through E to reach Center City Philadelphia. Take the R1 to Market-East station located in the Gallery mall which is adjacent to the Greyhound bus terminal.
- ◆ One can take a **taxicab** from PHL to the Greyhound Bus Terminal. If this option is chosen, one can pick up a taxicab from Zone 5 of the airport.
- ◆ One can also take a local **bus** to the Greyhound Bus Terminal. One can board a SEPTA bus in Zone 1 of the airport. It is important to ensure that the bus one boards has a stop on or near 10th and Filbert Streets where the Greyhound Bus Terminal is located. If assistance is needed, one should ask a uniformed airport employee for help, or call the Philadelphia International Airport Ground Transportation Hotline at 215.937.6958.

In the Greyhound Bus Terminal, one should board a bus for Reading, Pennsylvania at the Bieber Bus Terminal. The bus will bring one to the Reading Inter-City Bus Terminal, located on 3rd and Penn Streets in Reading. The phone number for the Bieber Bus Terminal in Reading is 610.374.3182.

John F. Kennedy International Airport (JFK)

In order to get to Reading from the John F. Kennedy International Airport, one must first travel to the Bieber Bus Terminal located in the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New York City. Port Authority is located between 8th and 9th Avenues and 40th and 42nd Streets in Manhattan. The phone number for the Port Authority Bus Terminal is 212.564.8484.

There are several ways in which one can travel to Port Authority from JFK.

- ◆ One can take a **taxicab** from JFK to Port Authority. If this option is chosen, one must make sure that he/she hails a cab in the designated areas or asks a uniformed airport employee to help him/her.
- ◆ One can also take a **bus**. This can be done by using the New York Airport Service Express Bus. This bus makes several stops in Manhattan, including a stop at the 8th Avenue and 42nd Street wing of the Port Authority Bus Terminal. If one chooses to take a bus to Port Authority, he/she can also use Express Shuttle USA. Operating between 7 a.m. and 11:30 p.m., this shuttle bus travels to several locations in Manhattan between 23rd and 125th Streets. In order to take advantage of this option, upon arriving at the airport one must go to the ground transportation desk and inform the airport employees of one's wish to use Express Shuttle USA. The ground transportation desk will call the shuttle which will then come to pick one up.

In Port Authority one should board a bus for Reading, Pennsylvania at the Bieber Bus Terminal. The phone number for the Bieber Bus Terminal in Port Authority is 215.683.7333. This bus will take one to the Reading Inter-City Bus Terminal located at 3rd and Penn Streets. The phone number for the Bieber Bus Terminal in Reading is 610.374.3182.

Newark International Airport (EWR)

In order to get to Reading from the Newark International Airport, one must first travel to the Bieber Bus Terminal located in the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New York City. Port Authority is located between 8th and 9th Avenues and 40th and 42nd Streets in Manhattan. The phone number for the Port Authority Bus Terminal is 212.564.8484.

There are several ways in which one can travel to Port Authority from the Newark International Airport.

- ◆ One can take a **taxicab** from EWR to Port Authority. If this option is chosen, one must make sure that he/she hails a cab in the designated areas or asks a uniformed airport employee to help him/her.

- ◆ One can also take a **bus** from EWR to Port Authority. The Newark Liberty Airport Express, which runs from approximately 4 a.m. to 1 a.m., is a bus service for the Newark International Airport that travels to several destinations in New York City, including Port Authority. However, please note that unlike many other bus services, tickets for the Newark Liberty Airport Express cannot be purchased from the bus drivers, but must be purchased online.

In Port Authority one should board a bus for Reading, Pennsylvania at the Bieber Bus Terminal. The phone number for the Bieber Bus Terminal in Port Authority is 215.683.7333. This bus will take one to the Reading Inter-City Bus Terminal located at 3rd and Penn Streets. The phone number for the Bieber Bus Terminal in Reading is 610.374.3182.

Another way you can get from the airport to the city of Reading is to use a limousine service. The limousine will pick you up from the airport immediately after your plane has landed. The limousine will then take you directly to where you will be staying in Reading.

Limousine Phone Numbers:

- ◆ Lifestyle Limousine: 610.777.4577
- ◆ Accu-Limo: 215.675.9500
- ◆ Andrew's Transportation: 610.374.7955

► Contact International Student Advisor (ISA)

You **must** call the International Student Advisor (ISA) **as soon as you reach your destination** in the US to announce your arrival, make an appointment to take the college placement test, and register for classes. The ISA can be phoned at 610.372.4721 ext. 5259.

Here are some phone numbers of places and services you may need once you have arrived in Reading. If you have any questions about any of these businesses, please do not hesitate to ask the International Admissions Advisor.

Local Hotels:

- ◆ **Hampton Inn**
1800 Papermill Road
Wyomissing
610.374.8100
- ◆ **Econo Lodge Northeast**
2310 Fraver Drive
Reading
610.378.1145
- ◆ **Days Inn**
910 Woodland Rd
Rt. 422 Papermill Road Exit
Reading
610.374.1500
- ◆ **Holiday Inn Express**
2389 Bernville Road
Reading
610.372.0700
- ◆ **Comfort Inn**
2200 Stacy Drive
5th Street Highway
Reading
610.371.0500
- ◆ **The Inn at Reading**
1040 Park Road
Wyomissing
610.372.7811
- ◆ **Sheraton**
1741 Paper Mill Road
Wyomissing
610.376.3811

Taxi Phone Numbers:

- ◆ Grab a Cab: 610.478.1111
- ◆ Reading Metro Taxi: 610.374.5111

Restaurants:

- ◆ **Applebee's Neighborhood Grill & Bar**
1905 Ridgewood Rd.
Wyomissing
610.372.6444
- ◆ **Applebee's Neighborhood Grill & Bar**
5600 Perkiomen Ave.
Reading
610.404.2700
- ◆ **Alebrije Mexican Restaurant**
3805 Perkiomen Ave.
Reading
610.370.0900
- ◆ **Indian Cuisine Restaurant**
16 South 4th St., Reading
610.736.0843
- ◆ **The Crab Barn**
2613 Hampden Blvd.
Reading
610.921.8922
- ◆ **Uno Chicago Grill**
2713 N. Meridian Blvd.
Wyomissing
610.376.6720
- ◆ **Hong Thanh Restaurant**
22 N. 6th St., Reading
610.374.0434
- ◆ **Old Country Buffet**
1101 Woodland Rd.
Wyomissing
610.375.9954
- ◆ **Chili's Grill & Bar**
2703 N. Meridian Blvd.
Reading
610.374.9328
- ◆ **Outback Steakhouse**
1101 Woodland Rd.
Wyomissing
610.376.9910
- ◆ **Red Lobster**
945 Woodland Rd.
Wyomissing
610.376.2905
- ◆ **Ruby Tuesday's**
1665 State Hill Rd. #130
Wyomissing
610.373.6900
- ◆ **Friendly's**
3024 Penn Ave.
West Lawn
610.670.1180
- ◆ **Smokey Bones BBQ & Grill**
2723 N. Meridian Blvd.
Reading
610.375.9580
- ◆ **International House of Pancakes (IHOP)**
2701 N. Meridian Blvd.
Wyomissing
610.374.9300
- ◆ **The Peanut Bar**
332 Penn St., Reading
610.376.8500
- ◆ **Chef Alan's American Bistro**
525 Penn Ave.
West Reading
610.375.4012
- ◆ **East Wok Chinese**
1137 Berkshire Blvd.
Wyomissing
610.376.3842

► Immigration & Visa Information



Applying for a Student Visa

The most common reason for visa refusal is that the applicant failed to convince the U.S. Embassy office or Consulate that he/she will return home after his/her program of study has ended. It is essential that you *REHEARSE YOUR ANSWERS* to this and other questions. You only have a few seconds to convince the visa officer that you do not intend to

immigrate to the United States and hesitation, no matter how slight, is often taken to mean that you are unsure or are being untruthful. You must prove your intent to return to your home country. Some examples of intent are:

- ◆ close family ties in your home country
- ◆ organizational membership– including religious and/or social groups
- ◆ business or real estate owned by you or your family
- ◆ proof that you intend to return to your country and pursue your professional career there

The essential items that you must take with you to the embassy are:

- 1) Your I-20 (make sure you read all the information on page 2 and **sign the bottom of page 1**)
- 2) Your passport
- 3) The bank statement that you originally used in obtaining your I-20 from RACC
- 4) Any additional documentation that is required in your country for a visa

Arriving in the U.S.

When you arrive at your port of entry you will need three things at the immigration counter:

- 1) Your I-20
- 2) Your passport
- 3) The bank statement that you originally used in obtaining your I-20 from RACC

Immigration and Customs will enter all of your information, as well as your port of entry, in the SEVIS. They will then issue you an I-94 arrival/departure record that is stamped F-1 D/S. D/S (“duration of stay”) means that your I-94 is only valid as long as you are in school. Be sure to check that the officer has marked your I-94 properly. It is extremely important to hold onto your I-94 because it has your admission number.

It is also extremely important to send a change of address form, or a Form AR-11, to the address on that form every time you change your address. This is a requirement of the Department of Homeland Security. You are also required to inform the International Admissions Advisor of your change of address within **10 days** after your move so that the Office of International Student Admissions (ISA) can change the address in your SEVIS record.

In order to maintain a **legal status** in this country, you must:

- 1) Keep your passport valid at all times.
- 2) Attend the school you were issued your visa for (Reading Area Community College) for the first semester.
- 3) Carry a full course load, which is 12 credits or more during the fall and spring semesters (this, however, is not a requirement for the summer session). You must also remain registered for a minimum of 12 credits for the entire semester.

- 4) Leave the U.S. by the date that is on your I-20 (plus 60 days). If you find that you need more time to graduate, you must speak to the International Admissions Advisor at least 60 days prior to the end date on your I-20.
- 5) You are not allowed to work outside of the school unless you are authorized by USCIS to do so and have an authorization card with a current date.
- 6) Report changes of address, phone number, or name within *10 days* of your move to the International Admission Advisor.
- 7) Have no disciplinary action taken against you (e.g., driving under the influence of alcohol, possession of any illegal drug, etc.).
- 8) Make continuous progress towards receiving your degree and complete your course of studies by the end date on your I-20.

If you decide to go home for a visit, you need to have the International Admissions Advisor sign your I-20 before you leave. This signature is important because it means that you are in status according to all USCIS rules and regulations.

Immigration forms that have the most common use among International Students are:

- ◆ **AR-11** Change of Address
- ◆ **I-20** SEVIS/Certificate of Eligibility for Non-immigrant F-1 Student Status for Academic Studies
- ◆ **I-94** Arrival/Departure Record Form
- ◆ **I-539** Application to Extend Status/Change Non-immigrant Status
- ◆ **I-765** Application for Employment Authorization

These forms and other needed immigration forms can be accessed at www.uscis.gov or from the ISA.

► Getting Your Social Security Number, Pennsylvania Driver's License, & Bank Account

Social Security

In the U.S. there is a “social security card” that enables you to choose a cell phone company, get a driver's license, acquire a credit card, etc.

In order to get a social security card, you will need to do and/or have:

- 1) A letter from your advisor and a letter from your supervisor specifying that you are eligible to work on campus for up to 15 hours a week.
- 2) Fill out the social security application that is also given to you during orientation.
- 3) Drop off your completed application at the Social Security Office across from the school.
- 4) When you drop off your application, you need to present your passport, I-20, letter from the International Admissions Advisor, and your I-94.

If approved, you should receive your card in the mail within 4 to 6 weeks.

Pennsylvania's Driver's License

If you have an international driver's license, you are permitted to use it for up to one year. If your foreign license or international driving permit expires before one year, you must apply for a Pennsylvania learner's permit if you wish to obtain a Pennsylvania driver's license.

In order to acquire a learner's permit, you must present the following items:

- 1) Your social security card or denial of social security card letter
- 2) Your valid passport *with* your I-94
- 3) Your I-20 and your visa that is stamped on your passport
- 4) A letter from your ISA stating that you are “in status”

You will also need to pass a traffic knowledge test. The test can be given at any Pennsylvania driver’s license center. If you fail the test you can retake it until you pass. After getting a learner’s permit you need to:

- 1) Complete a full 50 hours of practice behind the wheel
- 2) Have a valid registration card for the vehicle you plan to drive for the test
- 3) Proof that the vehicle is currently insured
- 4) The valid driver’s license of the person who is 21-years-old or older

For more information you can call the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) at 1.800.932.4600 between the hours of 7:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, except on holidays.

Opening a Bank Account

It is necessary to have an established local mailing address in order to open a bank account. Until you are able to open an account with a local bank, RACC can open an account for you for the first few months of your stay. Though there is no interest on this account, you are only capable of withdrawing money once a semester from it. It is important then, when withdrawing money from this account, that you withdraw all of the money you will need for the entire semester.

Here are the phone numbers of three local banks:

- ◆ Sovereign Bank: 1.877.768.2265
- ◆ Wachovia Bank: 1.800.275.3862
- ◆ National Penn Bank: 1.800.822.3321

► Safety on Campus

The college security force is comprised of a supervisor and uniformed security guards who are in constant contact with the switchboard at the college and the Reading City Police. The RACC security force is present in the main parking lots at all times and makes frequent patrols to all areas of the campus throughout the day.

All crimes involving violence, major property loss, or any felony are immediately reported by the Office of Safety and Security to the Reading City Police. Students, faculty, staff, and guests are encouraged to report any crime or unusual or suspicious incidents to the Office of Safety and Security or to one of the security guards.

Any student who would like a security escort to his/her car may do so by contacting the guard in the lobby of the building in which the student is located. Campus safety and security issues are discussed in and at all orientation programs, student publications, the Student Handbook, and all College Success Strategies courses (which all freshman students are required to take).



► Library Services

The RACC library is located in the Yocum Building on the second and third floors. Students must become a member of the library in order to utilize most of the library services. In order to join the library, you will need to take your passport and proof of current US address (i.e.: your current student schedule) to the circulation desk in the library and fill out the necessary paperwork. You will then receive a library card. This card gives you access to videotapes, CDs, DVDs, books, and the Internet. Attendants are available to give you a tour of the library, guide you with research, and help you to find your way around the library.



► Student Services

Reading Area Community College offers valuable services to its students. The student services available here at RACC are tutoring, transfer, and counseling services. These services are free and available to every student attending the college. Please keep in mind that it is very important to **identify yourself as an International Student/F-1 visa holder** any time you are receiving counseling from staff or faculty. Also, always double check the requirements of the F-1 status before making any changes to your class schedule. If there are any concerns, please see the ISA immediately.

Tutoring:

The tutorial center is located on the second floor of Berks Hall in room B209. Tutoring services are available for basic skills and freshmen level courses in math, English, reading, science, etc.

Counseling:

There are certified counselors in Berks Hall that are available for academic, personal, career, and transfer counseling. All meetings are confidential and free of charge.

- ◆ Academic counseling, located in room B111, aids students in choosing appropriate courses according to their academic abilities.
- ◆ Transfer services, located in room B209, provide students with information about courses that can be transferred to other schools, as well as literature on and applications to other colleges and universities locally and across the state.
- ◆ Career Services, located in B209, are available for: interest/personality assessment, major/career selection, occupational research, resume writing/critique, cover letter writing/critique, interview skills training, job fair preparation, business etiquette review, strategic job search planning, etc.

► When Should I See the International Advisor?

The International Student Advisor (ISA) is the campus immigration specialist and should be contacted for any questions relating to immigration status, change in status, or issues of a concern to status. The ISA is located in room B121 and is available for appointments on Monday, Wednesday, or Friday. You can reach the ISA by phone at 610.372.4721 ext. 5259 or email at jmelones@racc.edu.

- ◆ All newly arriving international students must see the ISA as soon as they arrive in the US.
- ◆ All current international students are required to see the ISA a minimum of once per semester to confirm academic requirements for F-1 visa requirements as well as a general overview of student progress.

The following are common reasons that may require you to see the ISA before proceeding with a change in your academic studies or immigration status:

- ◆ Change in financial sponsor
- ◆ Before you make travel plans
- ◆ Work authorization (OPT, EAD card, SS card)
- ◆ Transfer to another college
- ◆ I-20 extensions
- ◆ Reduced course load (less than 12 credits)
- ◆ Change in major, name, address, phone or an other contact information
- ◆ Graduation
- ◆ On-campus jobs
- ◆ Academic difficulties
- ◆ Reinstatement of SEVIS record

Do not wait to contact the ISA if you have a concern! Certain issues take time to be adjusted and can render you out of status. **Contact your ISA as soon as possible. Do not delay!**

► Computer Laboratories

There are computer labs located on the first floor of Penn Hall, Yocum Library, and in Berks Hall room 209. Whether it is to type a paper or to access the Internet, these laboratories are available to every student attending RACC.

► Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activities vary from semester to semester depending on the interest of the students. The clubs are formed by the students and run by the students. Some of the clubs here at RACC are the International Club “Students of the World,” Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society, Student Government, *Legacy* (scholarly journal), and the *Front Street Journal* (student newspaper). RACC also currently has soccer and basketball teams.

The Fitness Center

This is a free service available to all students of the college. The only requirements are that you bring your student ID card, a towel and that you dress in appropriate workout clothing. If you are not familiar with the use of the equipment, trainers are available to help you. The Fitness Center is open Monday through Saturday. Please check at the fitness center in the SUB building for hours of operation.



► Housing

We would advise that you find a landlord prior to your arrival in the States. Once you have found a landlord, have him/her send you all of the information that he/she will need from you before your arrival. Tell your landlord the exact date you would like to have your apartment ready by. When selecting the date you would like the apartment ready by, please keep in mind that it takes time to set up the electricity, water, and telephone systems.

Please read your lease carefully before you sign it and make sure that you understand everything that is written. Do not sign your lease if there are phrases that you do not understand. Also, have everything put in writing- do not accept verbal agreements. Make sure to keep a copy of everything you sign for your records.

If you would like more information regarding housing in and around the city of Reading, contact the Metropolitan Management Group. The Metropolitan Management Group leases out apartments ranging from studio apartments to two bedroom apartments. The price range for these apartments

ranges from \$500 to \$800 per month. If you are interested in the Metropolitan Management Group, or have any questions regarding the apartments and services that it offers, you can contact Susanne Petsch, the Leasing Administrator for the Metropolitan Management Group, at 610.288.7700, ext. 17. You can also find more information regarding the Metropolitan Management Group at www.mmgapts.com.



*Please be advised that RACC is not responsible for your rental or the rental company you choose.

► Health Insurance

Healthcare in the United States is not covered by the government, as is the case in many other countries. Therefore, it is very expensive to pay a medical bill if you have a medical emergency. Although RACC does not require you to have health insurance, **we strongly recommend** that you do. Though we will provide you with many healthcare brochures, it is your responsibility to choose the one that best suits your personal health, budget, and lifestyle.

Some terms in health insurance that you might not be aware of include “deductible” and “pre-existing condition.” “Deductible” means that you must pay a certain amount of money before the insurance company pays for the remainder of the bill. “Pre-existing condition” refers to the existence of a health condition you had before you enrolled with your health insurance.

► Overcoming Culture Shock

Many students, when living in another country, experience and feel emotions that are collectively referred to as culture shock. Culture shock simply means that you feel out of the loop. Adjusting to a new culture does not happen overnight; it takes time to adjust to a new country, a new language, new customs, new behavior, and a new environment.

Some symptoms of culture shock are:

- ◆ Excitement and stimulation
- ◆ Confusion, irritability, or withdrawal
- ◆ Sudden intense feelings of loyalty to home culture
- ◆ Marital or relationship stress
- ◆ Depression, boredom, or lack of motivation
- ◆ Physical reactions such as appetite change or headaches

We cannot stress enough that you should get involved with as many activities as possible. Always try to seek out school community groups, clubs, and teams. Try to make as many American friends as you can. This will significantly help you to grow accustomed to your new surroundings as well as the new culture in which you are immersed, and will also go a long way in alleviating some of the symptoms of culture shock.

If you do not understand something, ASK! There is no such thing as a stupid question. Do not be afraid to ask; most people will be happy to answer your questions.

It is important to take into account some aspects of American culture when dealing with Americans. Americans sometimes have views on certain subjects or situations that may be very different from your own.

- ◆ Friendship: Many international students mistake American friendliness for friendship. These students are then often disappointed to discover that their friendship with the American is not as deep as the student believed it to be. Because of this, many international students feel that Americans are insincere. This, however, is a false generalization. In some cultures, friendship is reserved for a very select group of people, people that are extremely significant to a person; however, though Americans do have close friendships with certain people, Americans usually tend to have many friends, of which the international student may only be one.

- ◆ Individualism: Many cultures stress the importance of the group over the individual. Because of this, many things (e.g., decision-making) are done by a group, not solely by an individual. When someone has a problem, he/she works it out with a group of friends. Often times, decisions that an individual needs to make are decided upon by that person's entire family. This, however, is not the case in America. Americans value individualism. Americans take pride in solving problems (if manageable) by themselves. Americans make their own decisions, usually without little outside help or influence, and usually these decisions reflect upon the desires of the individual and not upon the wishes of the group. Expressing one's individuality by speaking one's mind and thinking for one's self are two concepts that are valued highly in America, especially in the classroom.

- ◆ Time: Time is something that Americans tend to be very sensitive about. There is a saying in America that "to be early is to be on time; to be on time is to be late; to be late is unacceptable." In America, it is considered a sign of respect to be on time, whether it is for a class, a meeting, an appointment, etc. Conversely, arriving somewhere late

is seen by Americans as a sign of disrespect; tardiness is considered to be rude and impolite. It is very important to be early or on time for all of your classes; many professors believe that arriving to class late is simply “unacceptable.”

- ◆ **Equality:** Equality is something that is granted to all people in the United States. Everyone, regardless of gender, skin color, religion, race, sexual orientation, language spoken, or physical or mental capabilities, is considered equal under the law and in the eyes of American society. Therefore, you should not treat anyone you meet as being inferior to you; everyone is equal.
- ◆ **Different Ethnicities:** In the U.S., people speak very carefully about race and ethnicity. Americans perpetually strive to be politically correct when speaking about race and ethnicity as to not offend anyone.
- ◆ **Privacy:** Americans, in general, value privacy. There are some things that are acceptable to talk about and some things that are simply unacceptable to talk about with an American you do not know well. Here are some things that Americans would find socially acceptable or socially unacceptable to converse about:

Acceptable Topics of Conversation

- ◆ the weather
- ◆ your commuting experience; cars
- ◆ your classes or your job
- ◆ music, sports, or movies
- ◆ fashion, shopping, clothing
- ◆ computers, technology

Unacceptable Topics of Conversation

- ◆ money;
 how much one earns
- ◆ family
- ◆ religion
- ◆ politics
- ◆ personal health

► Religious Services

The following is a list of churches, mosques, synagogues, and religious centers in the area:

- ◆ **Church:**
Catholic-Latin Rite
Sacred Heart Church
Lakeview Dr. & Cherry
W. Reading
610.372.4010
- ◆ **Church:**
Jehovah's Witnesses
1101 W. Wyomissing Blvd.
610.796.1810
- ◆ **Church: Eastern Orthodox**
St. Herman's Orthodox
Church
133 W. Broad
Shillington
610.775.4461
- ◆ **Islamic Center of Reading**
18 Noble St.
Reading
610.478.1338
- ◆ **Jewish Community Center
of Reading**
1700 City Line Ave.
Reading
610.921.0624

► Tax Information

Who Must File?

U.S. immigration laws speak of immigrants, non-immigrants (also called non-resident aliens), and illegal aliens; however, U.S. tax laws speak only of resident aliens and non-resident aliens. It is very important to determine your residency status. If you are a resident alien, you will be taxed like a U.S. citizen. The tax laws define residency differently than the immigration laws do. Under the Internal Revenue Code, even illegal aliens are treated as resident aliens if they meet the substantial presence test in the tax code.

How Do You Determine Residency Status?

Non-residents become residents for federal tax purposes in one of two major ways. One way is by receiving permanent

residency from USCIS. The second way is by having substantial presence in the U.S. (more than 183 days). If you are a non-resident, you must file your tax return on IRS Form 1040NR or IRS Form 1040NR-EZ. The website for the IRS is www.irs.gov.

► In Closing . . .

Coming to America is a very big decision, a decision that may seem frustrating, but will ultimately prove rewarding. Even though the process of arriving to and studying in the U.S. may sometimes feel stressful, just remember that, in the long run, your time here will enrich and better your life. By coming to the U.S., you have opened yourself up to wonderful new experiences and numerous opportunities that you did not have before. So, we encourage you to study, learn, and have fun!

► Helpful Websites

Reading Area Community College
www.racc.edu

Reading and Berks County
www.berksweb.com
www.readingberkspa.com
www.readingeagle.com

Government Resources

U.S. State Department: www.travel.state.gov
U.S. Embassies Abroad: usembassy.state.gov
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services: www.uscis.gov
International Education: www.nafsa.org

Travel Resources

Student Travel: www.statravel.com
Currency Converter: www.xe.net/ucc or www.oanda.com
Worldwide Internet Café Guide:
www.netcafeguide.com/frames.html

Scholarships and Funding

www.iie.org/gilman
www.iie.org/nsep
www.aed.org
www.collegeboard.com
educationusa.state.gov
www.finaid.org
www.iefaf.org
www.petersons.com

The Foundation Center
79 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10003-3076
www.fdncenter.org/

For \$9.95 per month or \$99.95 per year you can subscribe to get more information regarding scholarships.

► Glossary

Culture Shock - a sense of confusion and uncertainty sometimes associated with feelings of anxiety that may affect people exposed to a foreign culture or environment

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) - a Cabinet department of the federal U.S. government with the responsibility of protecting the territory of the United States

Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) - a state government agency that administers the registration of automobiles, issues driver's licenses, and issues learner's permits

Healthcare - the prevention, treatment, and management of illness and the preservation of mental and physical wellbeing through the services offered by the medical, nursing, and allied health professions

Illegal Alien - a foreign national who resides in another country unlawfully; this person intends to remain in the country indefinitely

Internal Revenue Code (IRC) - the main body of domestic statutory tax law of the United States

Internal Revenue Service (IRS) - a U.S. federal government agency that collects taxes and enforces the internal revenue laws

Landlord - the owner of property (e.g., houses or apartments) that is leased or rented to another person

Learner's Permit - a restricted license that is given to a person preparing for the driver's test but has not yet satisfied the requirements necessary to obtain a driver's license

NAFSA - the Association of International Educators

Non-resident Alien - a visitor with the legal right to visit a country (which is foreign to him/her)

Politically Correct - using language, behavior, and practices that do not offend political sensibilities (as in matters of sex, race, and/or ethnicity)

Resident Alien - a person who has temporary or permanent residence in a country (which is foreign to him/her)

Social Security Card - a card with a person's name and social security number on it; there are two restricted cards: one card reads "NOT VALID FOR EMPLOYMENT"- this card cannot be used as proof for work authorization; the other restricted card reads "VALID FOR WORK ONLY WITH DHS AUTHORIZATION"- this card is only issued to people with

► Glossary

temporary work authorization in the U.S.

Social Security Number - a 9-digit number issued to citizens, permanent residents, and temporary residents of the United States

Student Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) - a U.S. networked computer system that tracks information on non-immigrant international students and scholars attending school in the United States

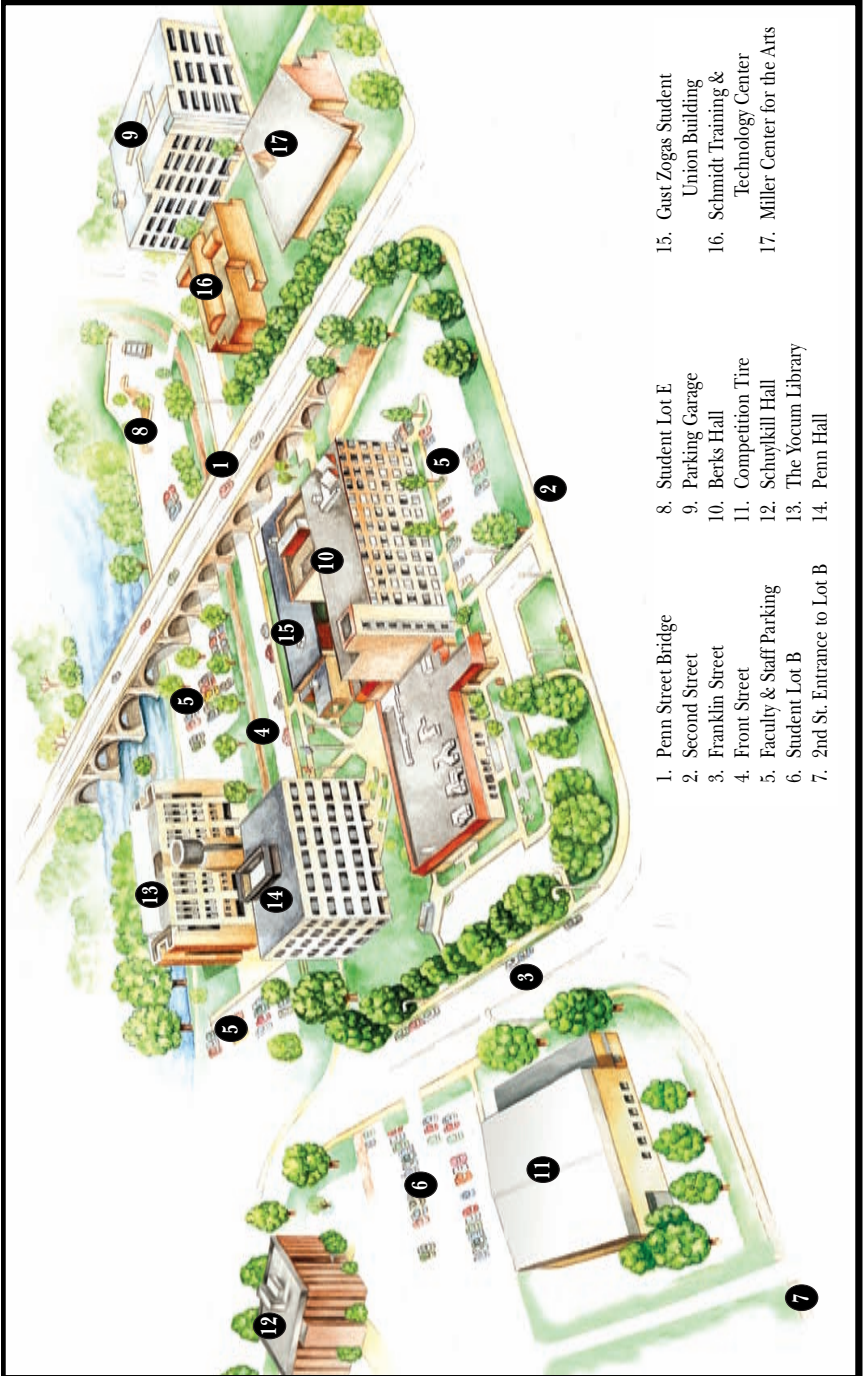
Substantial Presence - a tax status; if one meets the substantial presence test (has resided in the U.S. for 183 days or more), then that person will be taxed as if he/she were a U.S. citizen

Traffic Knowledge Test - a computer-based multiple choice exam that tests a person's knowledge of road rules and traffic laws; this test must be passed in order to obtain a learner's permit

United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) - a bureau of the Department of Homeland Security that is charged with processing immigrant visa petitions, naturalization petitions, asylum and refugee applications, and managing all of the immigration benefits functions that were performed by the former INS

United States Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) - a former bureau of the Department of Justice that handled legal and illegal immigration and naturalization; it ceased to exist on March 1, 2003, when most of its functions were transferred to three new agencies within the newly created Department of Homeland Security

~ Campus Map ~



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|------------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| 1. Penn Street Bridge | 8. Student Lot E | 15. Gust Zogas Student Union Building |
| 2. Second Street | 9. Parking Garage | 16. Schmidt Training & Technology Center |
| 3. Franklin Street | 10. Berks Hall | 17. Miller Center for the Arts |
| 4. Front Street | 11. Competition Tire | |
| 5. Faculty & Staff Parking | 12. Schuykill Hall | |
| 6. Student Lot B | 13. The Yocum Library | |
| 7. 2nd St. Entrance to Lot B | 14. Penn Hall | |



Reading Area Community College
International Student Admissions
10 South Second Street, P.O. Box 1706
Reading, PA 19603-1706
www.racc.edu