

## **FINANCIAL MATTERS – International Students**

### **Finances – How Much to Bring**

It is important that students bring enough money with them in order to pay the expenses that must be paid during the week of orientation and the first semester of classes. Funds can be in a combination of traveler's checks, money orders, personal checks and/or cash.

The financial demands on new students and scholars are typically highest at the beginning of the academic year because tuition, health insurance fees and housing deposits are due at this time. St. Cloud State University (SCSU) tuition can be paid in full or set up on one of two payment plans. <http://www.stcloudstate.edu/billing/> SCSU Business Services is located in Room 123 of the Administrative Services Building.

- **Tuition and fees** : Visit <https://www.stcloudstate.edu/internationaladmissions/costs.aspx>
- **Health insurance**, in the amount of \$1,456.00 is due on check-in day in August. The **on-campus room and board** contract is for the entire academic year. Payments are made by the semester. If you are **living off campus**, you will need to make a deposit, sometimes up to three months' worth of rent, in addition to paying for the first month of rent.
- Additional expenses such as **temporary accommodations, books, supplies, initial household expenses, cell phones, and other miscellaneous expenses** will also need to be taken into account.
- We suggest that if you plan to pay with a check or money order that you **bring two**: one check payable to SCSU to pay for the health insurance (\$1,456.00) and the other check made payable to yourself to open a checking account.
- It is recommended that one obtain a small amount of U.S. currency in coins and bills (\$100.00-\$200.00) before arriving in the United States to cover miscellaneous initial expenses such as cab fare and meals. Most major airports have banks available for currency exchange and automated teller machines (ATM's) for those who decide to obtain U.S. currency after arrival.

### **Finances, General**

Students and scholars need to plan their finances carefully and not rely on earning a great deal of extra money after arrival in the United States. Employment in most non-immigrant visa categories is highly restricted by U.S. government regulations, so new students and scholars should come prepared to meet all of their expenses. Moreover, financial assistance and educational loans are usually not available to international students after arrival.

Another factor to consider in one's financial planning is that federal, state, city and/or social security taxes will be deducted from most U.S.-source salaries, scholarships and stipends. With tax deductions typically ranging from 14 to 30 percent of the total income, one's available income may be significantly less than expected. The amount of tax deducted depends on the individual's earnings, tax status and whether he or she is a beneficiary of a tax treaty. All individuals with US-source income are required to report their annual earnings to the Internal Revenue Service by April 15 of the following year. Anyone who has overpaid taxes during the year will receive a tax refund after filing the tax return.

Graduate students who have been awarded a graduate assistantship, which includes a tuition waiver, will not receive their first living allowances until one month after classes begin at the University. Tuition and fees, however, will be handled by the University immediately. Therefore, students must have their own funds available to pay for food, housing, books and supplies. The graduate assistantship does not cover student fees therefore the student will be responsible for paying the fees. If you have further questions please refer to the Graduate Assistant Handbook online at <https://www.stcloudstate.edu/graduatestudies/students/handbook.aspx>

### **Currency Restrictions and Transfer of Funds to the United States**

Some governments restrict the amount of money that can be taken out of the country. Others may restrict funds for students until an enrollment confirmation letter from the admitting US institution has been received. Before leaving home, it is advisable to determine whether any documents are required from the University in order to authorize the transfer of funds. In some cases ISSS – International Student and Scholar Services - can provide students the necessary documentation upon seeing proof of full-time student status.

### **Money Exchange**

One should be aware of the home country's requirements for exchanging money and the value of the home country currency in the United States. Travelers must declare currency amounts over \$10,000 at U.S. customs upon arrival. The following are bill denominations: \$1, \$5, \$10, \$20, \$50 and \$100.

## United States Banking Services

United States banking connections can be established before one leaves home. Individuals may request that their banks at home "wire" money to their U.S. accounts.

It is recommended that all new students and scholars open an account at a local bank soon after arriving in St. Cloud. All banks have different charges and fees for services, such as ATM access, checking and overdraft protection, so it is wise to investigate the terms and conditions of each bank and each account type before choosing. To open an account, one must present two forms of identification, such as a passport and an SCSU Campus Card. You will need your passport number to open a bank account here in the United States.

Below is a list of some banks in St. Cloud:

<b>On Campus:</b>	
<b>Affinity Plus Federal Credit Union</b> Atwood Memorial Center 164 <a href="http://www.affinityplus.org/pages/default.aspx">www.affinityplus.org/pages/default.aspx</a> 1-320-259-7187	
<b>Close to Campus:</b>	
<b>TCF Bank</b> 1001 4 <sup>th</sup> St SE, St.Cloud MN 56304 <a href="http://www.tcfbank.com">www.tcfbank.com</a> (800)823-2265	
<b>Bremer Bank</b> 1100 West St. Germain Street St. Cloud MN 56301 1-320-251-3300 <a href="http://www.bremer.com">www.bremer.com</a>	<b>ING Direct</b> 1-800-ING-DIRECT sales@ingdirect.com
<b>US Bank</b> 1015 West St. Germain Street St. Cloud MN 56301 1-320-251-7110 <a href="http://www.usbank.com">www.usbank.com</a>	<b>Wells Fargo Bank</b> 400 First Street South St. Cloud MN 56301 1-320-259-3100 <a href="http://www.wellsfargo.com">www.wellsfargo.com</a>

## Checking and Savings Accounts

Having a checking account will assure safe and quick deposit of foreign checks and free the account holder from carrying large amounts of cash. Banks provide monthly and/or online records of individual transactions from the checking account, thus allowing easy tracking of one's finances. Checks are typically used to pay monthly bills like rent, telephone, and electricity or certain retail purchases if accompanied by identification. Cashed checks are returned to the account holder after they are cleared by the bank, and may serve as proof of payment. Some banks will post scanned copies of the cashed checks in the online account statement. It is a serious matter to write a check without having sufficient funds in the account. In addition to various fees the bank will charge, the individual may suffer serious financial consequences and will be vulnerable to legal action.

Savings or investment accounts are used to hold money that won't be used immediately. Such accounts bear interest which may be taxable. Some savings or investment accounts have penalties for withdrawing funds before a fixed amount of time elapses but many will allow holders to withdraw or transfer funds to other accounts at any time without penalty.

## Automatic Teller Machines (ATM)

Basic banking, such as deposits, transfers and withdrawals, is available 24 hours a day at computerized banking machines (ATM's or Automatic Teller Machines) at most banks. These machines can be found throughout the city. **It is recommended that one only use ATM's located in safe and secure places indoors and avoid making withdrawals after dark.** Some banks charge a fee each for each ATM transaction.

## Credit Cards

Credit cards are used often in the United States but are sometimes difficult to obtain for international students and scholars who have not yet established good credit in this country or do not have a Social Security number. For this reason, some students and scholars choose to apply for credit cards in their home countries rather than in the United States.

Major credit cards in the United States are Visa, MasterCard, American Express and Discover, but businesses do not always accept all cards. Credit cards issued by department stores or oil companies are usually easier to obtain and can be used to establish credit.

One should use caution in using credit cards as a means of postponing payment for purchases. Almost all credit cards charge interest, which may range from 12% to 22% per year. If a credit card is lost or stolen, it is important to file a report with the police and notify the company that issued the card *immediately*.

## Debit Cards

A debit card (also known as a bank card or check card) is a plastic card that provides an alternative payment method to cash when making purchases. Functionally, it can be called an electronic check, as the funds are withdrawn directly from either the bank account or from the remaining balance on the card. In some cases, the cards are designed exclusively for use on the Internet, and so there is no physical card.

In many countries the use of debit cards has become so widespread that their volume of use has overtaken or entirely replaced the check and, in some instances, cash transactions. Like credit cards, debit cards are used widely for telephone and Internet purchases and, unlike credit cards, the funds are transferred immediately from the bearer's bank account instead of having the bearer pay back the money at a later date.

Debit cards may also allow for instant withdrawal of cash, acting as the ATM card for withdrawing cash and as a check guarantee card. Merchants may also offer cashback facilities to customers, where a customer can withdraw cash along with their purchase. Please contact your financial institution for further information about debit cards.

## Expenses Often Overlooked

- **Overnight lodging** Hotel rates in big cities tend to be quite high.
- **Tips on taxi fares and restaurant meals** It is customary to add 15% to the bill.
- **Winter clothing** Warm clothing, including a heavy coat and boots, can cost at least \$200 - \$250.
- **Deduction from assistantships and other awards for federal and state taxes** Up to 30% will be deducted from some stipends by the federal and state governments.
- **Personal and household items** Cell phone service set-up fees and deposits will be high compared to the usual monthly costs of an already-established service. In furnished and unfurnished apartments, tenants have to provide linens, towels, kitchen utensils, etc.
- **State and local sales taxes on goods or services** Consumer taxes vary from state to state and range from 1% to 8% (in St. Cloud 6.875%).
- **Security deposit** When renting an apartment off-campus, the tenant has to pay up to three months' rent before moving into the apartment. Payments must be made by check or money order, not credit card.