Fall 2018 Pre-arrival Webinar – Making Travel Arrangements

Shuhui Lin: Thank you for participating our pre-arrival webinar series for making travel arrangements. Today we are going to talk about making travel arrangements. For those you who new to the webinar series, it is a webinar series provided to incoming international students. The pre-arrival webinar series will hopefully help you prepare and arrange your arrival plan for travelling and living in Iowa City, understand orientation expectations and responsibilities, and transition to student life and academics at the University of Iowa. All of the webinars will be recorded and posted on our website after we add the transcript to our webinars recordings. So if you have missed part of the webinar or if you want to listen to it again, afterwards, you can always find them on our website. The first two webinar recordings on graduate student support and professionalization also undergraduate student involvement are already posted on the website so you can pull up go to the website and find the recordings of the webinars.

Shuhui Lin: During the webinars, if you have encountered any technical difficulties, please let us know in the chat function. If you have questions that related to today’s topic, please use the Q+A function to post your questions. We will answer them live at the end.

Shuhui Lin: If you have not received your I-20 or DS-2019 yet, you can pay the e-ship global fee for us to mail you your documents. Once you have your documents, you can apply for the visa. The e-form for the e-ship global fee is in the pre-arrival checklist on iHawk.

Shuhui Lin: Some important days. So international student orientations are mandatory and, for graduate students, they are from August 7 to August 10, and for undergraduate students, they are from August 12 to August 19, so make sure that you arrive before those days to participate in orientation. So now we are going to do introduction.

Andrea: My name is Andrea Siebenmann, and I am the international student and scholar advisor at ISSS office

Shuhui Lin: My name is Shuhui Lin but I go by Lin, by my last name. I am the coordinator for International Student Support and Engagement, also with ISSS, and I will be managing the Q+A later.

Han Yu: My name is Han Yu, and I am a graduate student from the University of Iowa.

Lilia: My name is Lilia. I’m a graduate student at the University of Iowa.

Nick: My name is Nick Tan. I’m a business major at the University of Iowa.

Andrea: Thank you, and let’s go over the goals of today’s webinar. First we will basically do an overview of travel arrangements. Then we will offer some practical advice before departure and after arrival to the United States, and then we also will review airport transportation to Iowa City and at the end we will do live questions and answer time and hopefully we will provide some additional information for you on this topic.

Andrea: Let’s start with the iHawk website. Many of you who are participating in this webinar are most likely familiar with this website because, you as new students you are being asked to complete several
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excess luggage or any oversized pieces of

where you are coming from

specifications

Andrea: As part of the pre-arrival checklist, you probably encountered, if you have not you will, a tab that is called ‘arrival information.’ in this tab, one of the e-forms that you are being asked to complete is called ‘book your flight to the Eastern Iowa airport’. The e-form itself is probably a serving as a reminder that we would like you to reserve your flight or book your flight rather to the Eastern Iowa airport. The international code for this airport is CID and this is really the most convenient airport in terms of the distance from Iowa City and the University. Also in this form you will find, or you have found, a reminder at about arriving within 30 days or less of the orientation start date. This is actually dictated by the immigration law or regulations. So please abide by this request, requirement. Otherwise, you may find yourself not being able to enter United States if you arrive 30 days and more ahead of the orientation start date. Also we would like to remind you about the earliest and latest arrival dates. For graduate students the earliest arrival is July 9 and the latest arrival date would be August 6 and for undergraduate students the earliest arrival date would be July 14 and then latest arrival would be August 11.

Andrea: In the same e-form that we have mentioned earlier there is some information, brief information, about our airport welcome program. This is a program mostly targeted towards undergraduate students, new undergraduate students, arriving to the University of Iowa. This program is being conducted three days before orientation and it is strictly being conducted or staffed by undergraduate student volunteers that we recruit from the current students at the University. What the volunteers do they basically welcome you at the airport when you arrive and then they also offer any assistance you may need upon your arrival or will be able to answer any questions that you may have upon your arrival. We have reserved or we will reserve an airport lounge, which is room right across from the luggage retrieval area and then the airport graciously is offering to our university to use and this would be helpful for you, to where you can put your luggage if you need to wait for your transportation or just take a little break and rest. And then finally our volunteers would be happy to lead you to the airport transportation counters that are again easily found across from the luggage retrieval area.

Andrea: We will now move on to some travel tips. Specifically, this is about preparing for your travel to Iowa, to United States, to Iowa, and Iowa City. So let’s start with some suggestions for before departing for the United States. First of all, the checked in luggage typically has some limitations as to the weight and the number of pieces of luggage that you can check in. please make sure to follow airline specifications on this because there are some steep fees or high fees for sometimes depending on where you are coming from. There could be a charge for the second piece of luggage or for any other excess luggage or any oversized pieces of luggage, so it always pays to follow airlines’ specifications on their luggage policies. In regard to carry-on luggage, there are also some restrictions and specifically United States instituted and restriction on what kind of fluids and how many fluids you can carry onto the plane. And this is called a 3 1 1 rule. You can see the image on the slide that is nicely illustrating what that rule is about. Basically one container of either liquid or gel cannot exceed three ounces, which is approximately hundred ML of liquid. Then all of the different containers have to fit into one plastic bag that is about a quart size bag, and then this bag needs to be placed into the carry-on luggage and only
one bag can be used for your carry-on luggage. So that's why 3 1 1 rule. There are also some web links provided here for you to read about this rule. So that you have a good guidance, and you can avoid any issues regarding carrying liquid onto the plane. There are also some restrictions regarding sharp flammable objects and also about medications and again, all of this information can be easily found on the website either for your airlines or just the airports where you are going to depart from. We would also like to bring to your attention to prepare for airport security scan because there are certain procedures that passengers are required to follow and they can vary from airport to airport in between countries, so please again, make sure you are aware of these procedures. We would like to also advise you to prepare for a longer layover or possible fly delay or missed connection because that's something that can easily happen sometimes when you travel by air. So it would be very good to get to be flexible and prepare for this contingency. And finally it is always useful to bring a small amount of the US currency or US dollar currency in cash. However, there is a limit as to how much you can bring into United States, and there is a $10,000 in cash.

Andrea: OK next I would like to ask some questions of our student panelists who are here. Again, it's Lilia, it's Han, and it's Nick. The first question is: what luggage advice can you share from your previous experience?

Han: So my advice for the new student is up bring slippers with you during your travel because this is a long distance travel for some of the students and they may need to stay overnight in the airport and in America, unfortunately, they don't provide free slippers. So it will be really inconvenient for you to shower, if you bring a slipper with you without be really convenient and you can take a break.

Lilia: I also have an advice. If you can, bring maybe products in a travel size that will be really great because there is a certain limit of size, so make sure everything is in a travel size.

Nick: When I take a long trip, I always bring my toothbrush to keep my mouth clean and also bring a sleeping-eye mask on the plane to protect your eyes and help you sleep better.

Lilia: If I can add something, please also make sure that you don't bring any fresh food. Maybe you can bring chocolate, you can bring cookies, but you cannot bring sandwiches or soups, they will put this in the trash for sure.

Andrea: Thank you. How about anything regarding security check-in, maybe what you just mentioned Lilia that was related to security check-in, that they would not allow you to –

Lilia: Yeah, for the security check in as I said don't bring food, don't bring any liquid like Coke or any soda and also if you want to have more time for your trouble, don't put socks or baskets because of tennis shoes, just put sandals, don't put belts and also don't wear something metal or something like this, it will take a lot of time for them to change everything.

Andrea: Thank you. And finally, if you were to prepare again for your trip, what would you do differently, if at all? Is there anything else that you would suggest for packing or for your luggage?

Lilia: I can say just not bring in laptops. Maybe put it in the checked in luggage because if you have a smaller electronic, this will be really great. I had my iPad and I left my laptop and it was easy. So just bring your phone or your iPad or tablet.
**Andrea:** Next we will be talking about some packing tips. And first I would like to note a reminder about the very critical documents that you definitely need for entering United States and just generally traveling. And I would suggest that not only once or twice check that you have all of this but triple check that you have a valid passport, that with you that you have your visa in the passport, J-1 or F-1, depending on which student category are you in, and then accordingly, you would also have your University of Iowa issued I-20 or DS-2019 forms. We also suggest that for new students sometimes it may be helpful to bring a copy of your admissions letter to the University as well as financial documentation. Then you will see that we have copied here a Web link to the Department of housing website where they are suggesting to students what do bring. This is a general suggestion for any students, but for international students, we thought we would just have very quick brief suggestions what to have as early essentials for when you arrive.

**Andrea:** First of all, we would recommend if you need any prescriptions for your glasses or medications, make sure to have those with you. They have to be doctor prescribed and then have also the documentation or receipt. And then also in addition to the admissions letter and financial documentation, if you have no submitted these documents, please bring them with you and those are the original transcript, and then also immunization records, you will certainly be asked for those at the orientation session or later on. From electronics there were already someone mentioned we would strongly suggest to look for correct plugs for United States as well as for converters if they are necessary and then any other electronics that are related to making phone calls and so forth. Also some students say that it's really nice to have some memorabilia memories from their home country or from their families such as photos, so many other small objects.

**Andrea:** In terms of clothing, we always say do you bring layers. And that is because the temperatures between summers and winters here in Iowa are really, really quite big, quite great, and so it would be very difficult for you to bring all of the clothing that would be required to cover all of the seasons here in Iowa, so that's why layers would probably be best and students could talk about it later they have any suggestions. And then in terms of household items. Again, those you don't have to bring a lot or any of those. You can buy a lot of different household items here in America, and in fact in Iowa City there are many discount stores where you can buy these for a very reasonable cost. If you don't have a big budget you can also borrow when you get to know more students. They will be willing to help you and get some of these items for you.

**Andrea:** So following the packing list or information, I would like to ask the students here if you followed someone else's advice when you were packing. Did anybody else help you on this or did you read on what to bring?

**Nick:** My mom is a doctor, so she always helped me prepare some medicines. Yeah. She also let me to pack her some medicine too, to bring to America.

**Andrea:** Okay, that's good. And then I would like to ask whether there were any items that you found useful to pack before you arrived.

**Han:** I would strongly suggest that those of you who eye contacts to bring some with you because, as mentioned, the eye contacts in the US is a prescription from the doctor, which is $100 for that. So if you bring enough eye contacts, you don't need to spend that money right away.
Andrea: Anything else? And then what about any items that were not really useful for you? Lilia, you mentioned that laptop was not very needed and perhaps we want to mention that point that students will have many, many computer labs available here at the University of Iowa that they will have access to as students, so that would be very helpful. Really just very small electronics work.

Lilia: If I could add something, when I first came to the United States, I brought a lot of specific products from my home country, because I thought that I wouldn’t find them here, but everything - we have an international market, so you can find everything here, so it’s OK if you don’t bring these products.

Han: And also I think for some electronical devices, it’s not very useful. For example, I bring all electronic parts with me when I’ve traveled and I also used an adaptor, but it is not work as efficiently and you can get one at a not very expensive price. So I think that is not very useful.

Andrea: OK, thank you. And let’s move on to cover some information about what to expect after you arrive to the first port of entry, our airport in United States. The first item that you will be most likely handed or asked to complete will be a paper, a US customs form that would be handed out by airline employees on the plane and then sometimes, some airports in United States already have electronic kiosks to complete the same information electronically or digitally, so it really depends on where you will be arriving. And then next, when you arrive you would be coming to the immigration check-in there is staffed by the customs and border protection officers. Here typically you would be expected to present your immigration documents and then perhaps answer some questions. Possibility at this point will be that you may be asked to go through a secondary inspection, which could cause a little bit of a delay, and one of our students could share her experience with that later. But this is something that happens a fairly often. So nothing to worry about, it’s just a regular check additional checking of the documents. From the immigration check-in, typically you would like to move next to retrieve your luggage from one of carousels at the airport. And then after that if you had the paper form, the customs paper form, you would give it to the agricultural customs official. If you did not, then you would just go straight into the gates, through the gates at the airport if you are catching a connecting flight, and if that’s the case, we would like to remind you to make sure that you read the departure flight boards for updates. Gate numbers tend to change sometimes, especially at the bigger airports are, so make sure to remember to do that and read the flight boards frequently.

Andrea: Next I have questions related to this to our student panelists and specifically if you can share your experience at the airport immigration check.

Han: So, I’m the lucky one who had the secondary inspection check. That happened the third time I entered the US, and the person asked for my passport and I-20 and after he checked that, he just told me, “Sorry, we need to do a secondary check with you” and he brings my information and leads me to a room. So he gives the information to a person there and you just need to wait there for approximately an hour while they check your information. If your information is all right, they will just let you go after an hour. And don’t worry about that because some people said that if you have the secondary check on record, they will do it every time you enter the US, which is not true for me, so don’t worry about that. And also, people will look at your luggage when you do the secondary check, so even the luggage is stopped. The people from the airline will look after your stuff and they will give it back to you when you finish that.
Andrea: Thank you.

Lilia: I wanted to give another advice. Once you’re with the immigration check-in agent, he will ask you about information that is included in the I-20 so you have to know all of this. They just want to make sure that you are the right student and you know all the details like where you have been before, have you studied abroad before, what is your major, how long you going to stay in the United States, who’s going to give you money like financial aid and stuff like this.

Nick: Also one thing that I think people need to pay attention to at the airport immigration check is, if you use any public transportation from Chicago to Iowa City, you need to get four hours to five hours break from the airport to bus stations because I have two experiences. One is at the immigration check-in, I used one hour to pass the immigration check-in. The second one I used three to four hours to get through the immigration checks. So the time is really flexible, so people need to prepare for that for the next trip.

Andrea: OK. Thank you very much. That's very helpful. Also have you found anything or anyone that useful during this stage when you were at the immigration check?

Lilia: If I can add something. There are a lot of agents in the airport, so if you are close or you think you missed your connection or any other information about your flight, go to the agent and they will lead you to the right place, they will give you a lot of advice. So don't worry about this. The airports are really good with agents.

Nick: And if you are already finished with airport immigration check-in, get out to go for a train to go to the bus stations. It's not easy, it's not convenient to find the airport trains already because there is no one able to help you, but just don't panic and be relaxed too, until you find out the instructions in the airport.

Lilia: So an agents could also help you find a gate because if you think that it's not the right gate, you know in the boarding pass you have the gate, you have the seat, and you have the boarding time. So the gate may change. So you have to make sure every time that your gate is the right one, otherwise you’re going to miss your connection or your flight, which is not good.

Andrea: Thank you very, very good. Alright. Let’s move on to the next stage of the pre-arrival checklist. And that is the information collection tab. In this tab of you will or you have, depending on where you are in your pre-arrival checklist, come across the arrival information e-form. This e-form is actually more detailed and it's asking you for very specific information. And this is because here we are trying to collect some information to help you with the transportation arrangements to Iowa City. For example, there is an option if you are arriving to Eastern Iowa airport, we are asking you to provide your date, time, and flight number. And this is because, and I will explain later, is we have a special arrangement for your transportation. So that information would be very helpful for those purposes. Next question would be if you are, for example, arriving to other airports than Eastern Iowa in Chicago, like Nick mentioned, or in the Des Moines or any other airport, then we will have some other suggestions for you on what you need to do and then some students actually might be driving to Iowa City area, and that is because they are either visited someone else before the friend or relative and they're just going to be
driving in. So the best way to get to Iowa City area would be to use the interstate 80, which is the interstate that goes through many states from east to west.

Andrea: Just as a reminder. This is a quick picture that shows where Iowa is located within United States, and then Iowa State and here in Cedar Rapids, where the eastern Iowa airport is located, and then this is Iowa City. As you can see the distance between the two cities is very small and very convenient. It's only 25 miles and or 40 kilometers, and so that's why we were very strongly suggesting for you to arrive to eastern Iowa airport because they could make the transportation much easier for you.

Andrea: Here are some images of where how the airport looks like and these are samples of the renovated inside of the airport. This is for example, the language retrieval area. And this is another picture of the same area with the some counters of the rental cars and the airport shuttle. Speaking of airport shuttle, I would like to mention and in fact in the arrival information e-form, it is noted that ISSS has made arrangements, special arrangement, with the airport shuttle service company for a discounted travel rate if you book your transportation through completing the ISS arrival information e-form. Also the condition for the discounted rate is that you need to arrive between August 9 through 11, which is the three days or the welcome program days before orientation and then there should be more than one student on one trip. So if you have a buddy or a friend that you are flying together, it would be really good and smart to book the shuttle together, especially if you go to the same destination in Iowa City area.

Andrea: Also what is required in order for us to help you with this arrangement is that you need to confirm that you indeed are interested in transportation assistance through the airport shuttle service. And as a reminder please provide the specific destination in Iowa City area. And that would be either your address at the residence Hall if you know it by now, or off campus housing or any temporary hotel or motel address. That would be very helpful for the airport shuttle to group you depending on the destination and make will make your ride more efficient, and then also it will make it more cost effective for everyone on the same ride. If and when you are using the airport shuttle service, either through us through our welcome program or outside of it, it is always good to let the staff of this company let him know if you were not able to use the shuttle, if you booked it through us or by yourself and the reason could be missed flight, flight delay, or other reasons, but it's always a nice courtesy to let them know either by email or calling them. Depending on where you would be in United States or even at home if you know, for example, just departing from your home country that you already missed flight because of mechanical or any other reasons, then just do send a quick email to the shuttle service folks and they will really appreciate that so that they can rearrange your ride for another time or day if necessary.

Andrea: Other reminder - if you are not able or for any reason you are not arriving during the welcome program dates to the Eastern Iowa airport or you’re arriving to other airport than the eastern Iowa airport, you will have to make your own travel arrangements or transportation arrangements rather. Like Nick was mentioning earlier, there are bus connections between the Chicago O'hare International Airport and Iowa City and he can mention some specifics about that, but then if you would like to use other transportation from Cedar Rapids airport from Eastern Iowa airport you are welcome to explore that. You see the web link here on this website on this slide. So basically there are taxis, there is Uber, and there is limo and, of course, there are priced differently, so take that into account. We would like to
also just provide a quick reminder that neither the university nor assistance office provide any transportation services. We cannot pick you up at the airport if you arrive here. So please keep that in mind and make all of the arrangements ahead of time. And finally, one important reminder is that there could be some folks that are offering you the transportation to Iowa City area. However, we would advise you to stay away from those offers and just go along with the reputable companies with either a taxi company or the shuttle or any other rides because the safety and security of rides with private individuals are not guaranteed and also these private individuals make take advantage of you and charging excessive amount for the ride to Iowa City area. And we would not like you to have that kind of experience right after arriving here.

**Andrea**: And final reminder, in the pre arrival checklist, in the last tab, that's on resources. And as you can see this is a sample of the website that we have developed for new student specifically where you can find all kinds of pre-arrival information, orientation related information, or academic and cultural resources as well as information on Iowa City area. So please make sure you take advantage of all of this information before coming here and make yourself familiar with as much information as you can.