

Forte International Exchange Association



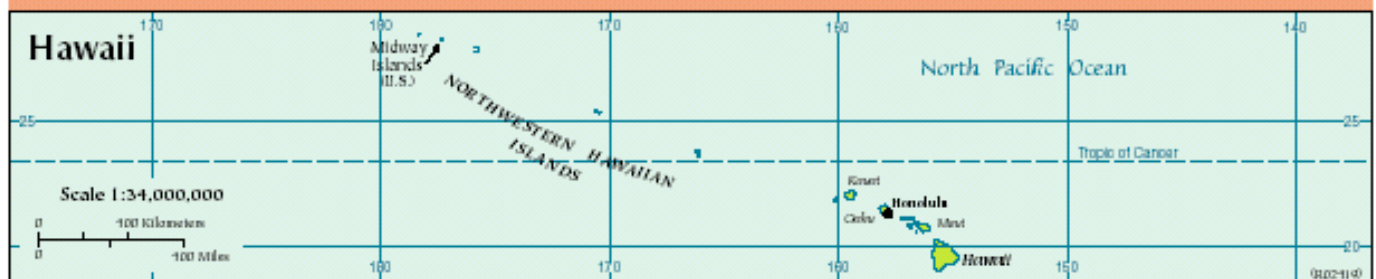
Student Handbook

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Table of Contents

I. Introduction	
Map of the United States	3
Your Host Country: The United States	4
II. Preparing for your trip	4
Spending money	4
Medical arrangements	4
Packing	5
Items to bring	5
Arriving in the United States	5
III. Your Host Family	6
About	6
Getting to know your host family	6
Adjusting to American Life	6
Culture Shock	7
IV. Your Local Representative	8
V. Going to school	8
About American High Schools	8
Forte coursework requirements	9
Making friends	9
School conduct	10
VI. Rules	10
VII. Guidelines	12
Setting rules at home	12
Chores	12
Telephone and computer use	12
Travel while in the United States	13
Health Insurance	13
Managing you money	13
VIII. Emergency Situations	14
Emergency Contact Information	15
IX. Making your American experience a success	16
Tips for improving your English	16
Resources to help you with your experience	17

UNITED STATES



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I. Introduction

Every year Forte International Exchange Association (FIEA) brings high school students from various countries to the US for one academic year (approx. 10 months) or semester (approximately 5 months). Through this program, you will gain new perspectives and insight into everyday life in the United States. Following the exchange year, you will be able to share your impressions and experiences with your family, friends, and classmates in your home country. Friendships formed during international exchange experiences may play a tremendous role in the future relations of our countries.

This handbook will give you an overview of the Forte International Exchange Association program, FIEA guidelines/rules, and an idea about what is expected of you during your stay here in the US. If you need advice or tips, this guide will serve as a useful reference. Your local representative and our staff in the FIEA office are also available to answer any questions or offer advice.

Your host country: The United States

The United States of America, comprised of 50 states and one district, covers 3 time zones and several geographic regions. With a population over 200 million, its people come from many different cultural and racial backgrounds. Although English is the official language, several other languages are spoken widely in some regions. A number of religions and religious holidays are also observed.

Some students will be placed in suburban or rural areas while others will be placed in cities. The US has several different regions as well. Your cultural experience will therefore be influenced by all these factors.

The United States is a multi-cultural country. Racial, ethnic, religious, economic and gender diversity can be found in schools, homes, and throughout the community. Please be reminded to treat people of all backgrounds with respect.

II. Preparing for your trip

Spending money

FIEA recommends that each student bring about \$1000 in traveler's checks. This money should finance any personal expenses during the year. Your host family is not responsible for covering your personal expenses. It is advisable to open a bank account once you are in the United States. Keep an accurate record of all your expenses; this will help keep you in charge of your finances.

Medical arrangements

While you are in the US, you will be covered by Forte International Exchange Association's health plan. This plan will cover you for any injuries or sicknesses you may experience during your stay in the US. Pre-existing conditions, routine check-ups, and immunizations will not be covered. We recommend you make the following preparations before you leave your home country:

- Schedule all routine doctors' appointments before leaving your home country including annual medical check-ups including vision and dental check-ups.
- Bring a copy of any important medical information including notes from your doctor, medication prescriptions, vision prescriptions, etc.
- Make sure that your immunization record is current and that you have all the necessary immunizations. You will need a complete and current immunization record before you will be allowed to attend school in the United States.

Packing

Planning for a year or semester abroad can be a difficult task. Many students like to bring items that remind them of their home. Please try not to bring too many personal items. Airlines have a limit to how much you can bring on the flight. Usually you will be allowed two suitcases (to check-in) and one carry-on bag.

It is a good idea to call the airline to find out about the luggage requirements. Airport security in the US is very tight right now and you may be asked to open your bag and show the contents.

Items to bring

We recommend you bring the following items:

- Warm clothes for winter seasons
 - If you are in the Northern (i.e. Minnesota or Massachusetts) you will need a very warm winter coat
 - The cold months are usually October-March
- Lighter clothes for warm months: August-early October; mid April-June or warmer places such as Florida
- Pictures from home
- A small gift for your host family- something to say thanks!
- A camera
- Copies of necessary medical information (prescriptions)
- Spare glasses or contacts lenses (if applicable)
- A pocket dictionary in your language and English

Arriving in the United States

Your first destination in the United States will be either Los Angeles or Washington DC where you will participate in an orientation session. It may be a little confusing when you first arrive. A FIEA representative will have a sign with your name on it when you arrive. (NOTE- Students will receive more explicit instructions about this whole process including going through customs, making connecting flights, etc.)

After a 1-2 day orientation session in Washington or LA, you will be placed on a flight to the city where your host family lives. When you arrive in your final destination an FIEA representative at the airport or your host family will meet you. Once you have gathered your luggage and met your party, you will leave the airport and go to your new home. When you arrive at your new home, other members of the family may be there to greet you. Your family

will likely be eager to show you around the house and your room. Your host family will realize that you will probably be tired when you arrive and that you will want to unpack and rest.

III. Your Host Family

An important part of your experience in the US will be your relationship with your host family. Through your home-stay, you will not only improve your English but also learn about American daily life in your community.

Host families come in different shapes and sizes. Some host families may have two parents with children, two parents without children or one parent with or without children. All host families have been carefully chosen and screened and we have taken great care to match you with the right family.

Host families participate in different activities together such as family or neighborhood gatherings; school and church activities; outdoor and recreational activities; sports events; etc. Your host family is participating in this program because they are eager to meet someone from another country and learn more about your experiences. They will welcome you into their home as a member of the family and will most likely be eager to introduce you to their friends and relatives.

As a member of the family, you will have certain responsibilities. These include helping out with household chores and respecting the family rules. Your host family will make these rules clear to you when you arrive. Please make every effort to abide by the host family's rules and remember that you are now a MEMBER of that family, NOT a guest! As an exchange student in the United States you need to adjust to your new family, school, and community. Please keep an open mind and try to be flexible, this will help you quickly adapt to your new life in the United States.

Getting to know your host family

During the first few days, your host family will probably ask you a lot of questions about your trip, the weather in your home country, your family and why you came to the US to study. Remember that they are eager to have you as a part of their family and that these questions are their way of getting to know you better. The first few days may be a little awkward. After time, this will pass and you will start to feel more comfortable in your new home setting.

Participating in activities with your host family and getting involved in activities in the local community is a good way to experience your new home. You may see new experiences and lifestyles that may seem strange or different. Remember that during your stay in the US it is a good opportunity to experience something new, so try to participate! You will learn and have a good time!

Adjusting to American life

It is important to remember that your country may have very different cultural and political background from the US. As a result, you may have a completely different set of values from the values of Americans. Your host family may have a different way of expressing their feelings or communicating. Additionally, their perception of good manners may differ from yours. It is important to remember these cultural differences when interacting with your host family. The following tips will help you adjust to the ways of your host family more easily:

- Be open to trying new things such as food, activities, and holidays (such as Thanksgiving).
- Learn to ask questions about anything you are unsure.
- Show interest in your host family and their activities.
- Hygiene- Shower at least once a day and again after sport activities.
- Use expressions like “please” and thank you to show your appreciation and respect.

Culture Shock

During your stay here in the United States, you will go through several stages of emotions and culture shock. At times you may feel uncertain and anxious but as time goes by you will begin to take in your new experiences as part of your everyday life. Over the months you will adjust to your life here and begin to feel more at home. Here are some emotions you may experience in the coming months:

- 1) **Excitement and curiosity** - When you first arrive, you will probably be excited about your new surroundings and experiences. You may notice yourself making comparisons between things here in the US and in your home country. This stage typically lasts for about a month but varies for all students.
- 2) **Anxiety and shock**- After the euphoria wears off, some students experience shock when noticing the differences between the US and your home country. You may become disoriented and homesick. This is completely normal and you may want to spend more time by yourself. It’s okay to call home when you are homesick. It also helps to share your feelings with your host family and local rep so they can talk to you about how you feel.
- 3) **Comfort**- After getting through stage 2, you will probably begin to feel more comfortable with your surroundings. This happens around the third or fourth month of your stay. Your surroundings do not seem so new or foreign to you anymore and you will begin to feel more at home.
- 4) **Confidence**- Towards the end of your stay, you will feel like a part of your host family and you will enjoy your new life here.

These emotions may be typical for exchange students, but every student's experience varies. Some students may experience all these feelings but at different stages while others may not experience some of these feelings at all.

IV. Your Local Representative

When you arrive in the US, you will be introduced to your local representative. Your local rep lives in your area and is available for advice, questions and to help you in problem solving. He or she is actively involved in your local community and knows about its different aspects.

You will be provided with your local rep's contact information where you can reach him or her when needed. Most communication with your local rep will be by telephone.

Your local rep serves as a liaison between you, your host family, school and FIEA headquarters in Washington DC. We encourage you to contact your local rep on a frequent basis to let him or her know how you are coming along. Even if you are having a positive experience, it's good to check in occasionally. **Contact your local rep if you are experiencing any problems at home with your host family or at school.**

When you arrive in the US, your local rep may meet you at the airport with your host family. During the first month of your stay, he or she will be in touch with on a weekly basis. Following that, it will be 1-2times a month.

In addition to your local rep, you can always contact staff at FIEA headquarters here in Washington DC. We love to hear from you so please don't hesitate to call us:

Contact information:

Forte International Exchange Association

Toll free: 1-888-866-6869

Email: ForteExchange@aol.com

V. Going to School

About American High Schools

American High Schools typically are grades 9-12 with students between the ages of 14 and 18. Each school has its own guidelines for coursework and graduation requirements. These guidelines are set by the local school board if it is a public school and by an individual school if it is a private or independent school. Schools may also vary in size and racial and cultural diversity.

Your local school may also provide you with a student handbook and rules. You will also meet a guidance counselor who will help you select the right classes according to your interests. The school guidance counselor will also answer any general questions about life at school.

As an FIEA student, you will not receive a high school diploma. However, you must follow all rules set by your host school and complete all academic coursework for the classes in which you will be enrolled.

Forte International Exchange Association Academic Coursework requirements

The following is a list of coursework that Forte requires of its students. Although all high schools have different courses available, the courses in the following list are available at a majority of high schools and still allow for flexibility in selection.

- 1) **US History** or **US Government**
 - a. Not both
- 2) One **Math** class
 - a. Any level (such as Algebra II, Geometry, Trigonometry or Calculus)
- 3) At least one **Art** Class: fine arts, performance art or applied art and/or computer class
 - a. Example- Music, Drawing, Ceramics, Drama, Woodshop, Drafting, Band, Choir, Orchestra, Film, Photography
- 4) One **English** class (American and English Literature; Composition Writing)
- 5) Either **Physics** or **Chemistry**- The student should check with Forte if he or she would like to take another science class (such as Biology, Earth Sciences, etc.).
 - a. Only one science class is allowed per semester

- A student cannot take more than 5 full-time academic classes per semester.
- After school activities that count for credit do not count as full-time classes (i.e. Math Club, Yearbook, etc.)
- No more than 7 courses (during regular school hours) per semester can be taken
- If a student is in a school with a block schedule of four classes per day, no more than three of the courses can be academic unless approved otherwise by Forte.
- Please contact FIEA for additional questions pertaining to coursework requirements or if certain courses are not available.

Q: What is an academic class?

A: An academic class includes any class other than the Arts, Physical Education (PE or Gym), Study Hall, or Extra-curricular activities. For example, if you took Calculus, Chemistry, US History, American Literature and Spanish, you would have to fill your final courses with Art, PE or an extra-curricular activity, etc.

Making friends

Most schools have a wide range of extra-curricular activities. These activities usually take place after school and are a great way to make friends. Activities include music, sport teams (American football; basketball; track and field), arts and other clubs (such as the Wilderness Club; Computer Club; Yearbook; Model United Nations). Clubs are a fun way to get involved in activities that are in your area of interest/hobbies.

School conduct

It's important to remember that as an exchange student at the high school, you must respect and follow all the rules of the school. You will probably find that the environment in the American high school is very different from what you are accustomed to at your school in your home country. The following is a list of issues that you should be aware of when attending an American high school:

- Have a good/positive attitude towards your teacher and peers. Respect your teacher and his or her classroom rules.
- Do not talk in class or tease other students.
- Do not make jokes about people's differences, race, social class, intelligence, etc.
- Avoid bringing valuable and expensive items to school.
- **Violence-** American high schools have no tolerance towards anything related to violence. **Do not** make comments, referrals or jokes about bombs, guns, killing, knives etc. Such comments may lead to school suspension or expulsion and police involvement.
- **Sexual Harassment-** Certain types of verbal and physical sexual advances are inappropriate. Don't allow yourself at school or outside of school to get involved in any intimate situation with which you are not comfortable. Any unwelcome and inappropriate sexual advances should be reported immediately to your local rep or an adult you feel comfortable confiding in. Also, respect the feelings of others towards you- if someone says "No", he or she means it.

VI. Rules

The following is a list of student rules. If any of these rules are broken, we have different ways of dealing with the problem. You will be contacted by your local rep and FIEA staff here in Washington DC to discuss the problem. Depending on the severity of the problem you will likely be warned at first. Multiple offenses are cause for sending a student back home.

Rules and Regulations (For Students)

1. All activities of the student must be approved by his/her Host Parents. The student shall keep the host parents informed about where and with whom the student is at all times and the expected time of his or her return home.
2. A student may not purchase, possess or consume alcoholic beverages unless he or she is twenty-one years old. FIEA students shall not drink any alcoholic beverages including beer and wine while in the United States.
3. Purchase, possession, or use of any illicit drug or association with anyone involved with drugs in any way, shall be cause for any FIEA Student to be returned to his/her country.

4. FIEA students may not drive cars or motorcycles or other motorized vehicles at any time during his or her stay in the U.S. If a student drives any car or motorized vehicle under any circumstances, the student will be returned to his/her home country.
5. School attendance is mandatory. If the student fails to follow school rules, exhibits behavioral problems at school, or fails academically he or she may be sent home.
6. FIEA students are not allowed to travel outside the local area either alone or with other teenagers. The local representative of FIEA will define the local area. Over-night traveling is allowed only with an approved group, such as a school or church-sponsored group approved by FIEA, or with an adult approved by the host family and FIEA.
7. FIEA discourages students from visiting family members living in the United States known by the natural parents and/or the American host family. Written permission from natural parents, permission from the Host Parents and a letter of invitation from the family the student wishes to visit are required. A student found to be in violation of this condition will be returned to his or her home country.
8. FIEA students are not permitted to visit their home country during their stay in the United States, with the exception of a medical emergency within the immediate natural family. Students returning to their home country during an FIEA program MUST obtain permission from the FIEA Office in Washington, DC.
9. If a student travels outside of the United States with his/her host family, he/she must always check first with U.S. immigration officials to make sure he/she will be allowed to re-enter.
10. Students are forbidden from hitchhiking while in the United States. In many states, hitchhiking is **illegal** and hitchhiking is also considered to be very **dangerous!**
11. Students are not permitted to take a job during their stay in the United States, except intermittent jobs in the neighborhood such as lawn care or baby-sitting.
12. If in the student's application he/she said that he/she does not smoke, the student may not smoke during his/her stay in the host country. If the student is a smoker, he/she must discuss his/her smoking habits with his/her host family and follow their regulations. At all times, state laws regarding tobacco purchase, possession and use by minors must be obeyed.
13. Violation of any local, State or Federal Law in the U.S. will cause the student to be sent home.
14. Students are not allowed to remain in the United States after the FIEA exchange program is completed. All students shall return to their home country as a group. Students who do not leave upon program completion will be reported to Immigration and Naturalization Services as required by law.
15. Students must respect and obey all decisions made by FIEA officials. Failure to abide by these rules and decisions may result in return home without warning or a second chance, and

any additional expense that are incurred shall be the responsibility of the student and his or her natural parents and or legal/guardians.

16. FIEA students participate in the student exchange program to learn about the United States, both culturally and academically, therefore all FIEA students need to be willing to make adjustments accordingly to adapt to their host family, community, and school.

VII. Guidelines

Setting rules at home:

Every family will have their own set of rules and guidelines. It's important to establish rules with the your host family from the very beginning. Rules may be put in writing so that you can refer to them whenever necessary. Learn your host family's guidelines for phone use, curfews, going out, and household chores.

Every host family and student is expected to work out an agreement regarding scheduling and transportation to the student's extracurricular activities like athletic team practice, social gatherings, parties, movies etc.

Chores:

In most American families, kids are expected to perform chores. You will probably be asked to clean up after yourself, make your bed, wash your dishes, clean your room and also do your laundry. Other chores may include setting the dinner table, taking out the trash, vacuuming, or cleaning the bathroom. These are typical and normal chores. Your host family will discuss any chores that you will need to perform. If there are any tasks you do not know how to perform, be sure to tell your host family so that they can show you. Ask your host family if you can be of help to them (such as with dinner preparation or yard work outside).

Your host family may also ask you to cook some food from your home country to share with them on occasion.

Telephone and Computer Use:

Most families will allow you to use their telephone and computer. Each host family has its own guidelines for computer and telephone use, which should be discussed at the beginning of your home-stay.

Most families do not mind if you occasionally make long distance calls. However, be aware that you will be responsible for paying for your share of the calls when the bill arrives.

We encourage you to purchase pre-paid telephone calls. Prepaid cards can be purchased at local supermarkets and drug stores. Prepaid cards allow students to make calls on their own funds without owing the host family any money.

Travel while in the United States:

Many students will want to travel to other places in the United States during their year here in the US. While we encourage them to travel and see as much of the country as possible, certain guidelines need to be followed.

FIEA students are not allowed to travel outside the local area without their host parents' permission. Over-night travel is allowed only with an authorized group, such as a school or church-sponsored group, or with an adult authorized by the host family and FIEA.

Students traveling with their host family will not need permission from FIEA. Host families may also approve of travel with other families or student groups. Unless you offer to pay, students will be responsible for paying for themselves while traveling with you on family trips.

FIEA discourages students from visiting relatives or family members in the United States known by the natural parents or the American host family. If a student plans to visit relatives or friends, he/she has to show an invitation letter and get permission from FIEA and host family as well.

FIEA does not permit travel outside the US (i.e. to Canada or Mexico) unless you have approval from our office in Washington, DC. The terms of your visa may not allow you to travel outside the United States.

Health Insurance:

Students receive health coverage through FIEA. You will receive a card showing you have coverage. Please keep your card in your wallet in case of an emergency.

Please note that this plan **does not cover routine check-ups** or pre-existing conditions.

When you visit a doctor, you must present this card at doctor's office so that they can record your insurance information. You may be required to fill out a claim form after the appointment. The doctor's office will send the bill directly to the insurer who will pay for it.

Managing your money:

It is best to open your own checking or savings account at a local bank. Host families are not to keep your money in their bank account. Please bring personal identification (passport) when you open the bank account. Keep a record of all deposits (when you add money to your bank account), withdrawals (when you take money out of your account), and payments. Please contact your parents in your home country if you have a money problem (if you are running out of money).

VIII. Emergency situations

During your year in the US, there are different emergency situations that could occur. Many emergencies are unexpected, so taking necessary precautions may be useful in case you are in one.

Precautions:

- Have a copy of your identification (with photo) on you at all times.
- Have a list of all important contacts with you at all times (use the sample on the next page):
 - Your host parents' home and office contact information
 - Your Local rep's home and office contact information
 - FIEA's toll-free number: 1-888-866-6869
- Keep both the copy of your identification and your emergency contact list in your wallet or a pocket that is with you at all times.

Personal Emergencies:

Include problems at home or at school.

Examples:

- Suspension from school
- Sudden uncomfortable situation at home

In the case of a personal emergency, please contact FIEA, your local rep or your host family.

Safety emergencies:

Examples:

- Fire at home
- Medical emergency
 - You, a friend or host family member are bleeding non-stop; are having trouble or have stopped breathing; etc.
- Home has been broken into

What to do?

If you have access to a phone, **call 911**. Try to tell the emergency dispatcher as much information as possible:

- What happened
 - Who is injured and their condition
- Where you are (address of the house or important landmarks)
- The telephone number of where you are calling from

If you do not have access to a private or public phone but are in public, ask someone with a cell phone to make the call.

Emergency Contact Information

Name: _____
Birthdate: _____
Nationality: _____
Occupation: International high school exchange student

Address and Guardians in the US:

Name(s): _____
Address: _____

Home Phone Number: _____

Work Phone Number(s): _____

Cell Phone Number: _____

Other Emergency contacts:

Local Representative: _____

LR's Home Phone Number: _____

LR's Work Phone Number: _____

Forte International Exchange Association: 1-888-866-6869

Legal Guardians and Address in your home country:

Guardian's Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Telephone Numbers: 011- _____

IX. Making your American experience a success!

- Be open to trying new things such as food, holiday festivities (such as Thanksgiving) and activities.
- Be respectful and sensitive of people from all racial, ethnic, religious and economic backgrounds.
- Talk to your host family regularly. Be aware that they are eager to learn more about you and what to know how you are coping.
- Get involved with activities at school in the community. This is a great way to make friends! Remember to make the effort to spend time with them.
- Keep in touch with your local rep and FIEA staff here in Washington DC. Let them know how you are coping or if you have any problems. We like to hear good news as well!
- Give your host family attention, time and love. This will help make your experience memorable!

Tips for Improving Your English

- **ALWAYS** ask questions when you don't understand something or ask the person speaking to speak more slowly.
- Keep a small notebook with you to write down new words (this will help you remember new words or phrases without having to ask the same questions over and over again)
- Watch television shows and ask you family to explain words that you do not understand.
- Try to **participate in** conversations and **not** just listen.
- Listen to American music
- Watch cartoons
- Read books in English
- Limit your phone time speaking Chinese and writing Chinese emails to your friends at home
- Practice your English every opportunity that you get!

Resources on the Internet That Will Help You With Your Exchange Experience

English Resources on the Internet

www.eslcafe.com

www.englishclub.com

www.webguide.englishclub.com

www.grammarnow.com

www.worldreference.com

www.eslpartyland.com

Homework Tools

www.dictionary.com

www.sparknotes.com

www.homeworkplanet.com

www.learning.calibernic.com/index6.html

Translating Tools

www.babelfish.altavista.com

Newspapers Worldwide

www.onlinenewspapers.com

www.newspapers.com

Information about the United States

www.50states.com

www.1uptravel.com/flag/flags/us.html

www.usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/factover/homepage.htm