

## *Introduction*

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The Buffalo State community welcomes all international students to Buffalo, NY! The faculty, staff and students are excited that you have come to join and study academically.

The role of the International Student and Scholar Services Office is to assist you during your time of academic study. Supporting you with cultural and personal adjustments to life and studies in the US. It is our desire in the ISSS Office that each of you be integrated into the school community. We want to help facilitate your academic and personal growth while you are here.

In this handbook you will find information in various areas to assist you. Some of these things you may already know; much varies from student to student and culture to culture, and we are attempting to make this handbook as broadly useful as possible. It is our hope that it will help you to identify some of the challenges that you may face and provide information that will be useful to you.

I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

Tricia L Herritt

Director of International Students and Scholar Services  
SUNY Buffalo State  
South Wing 410  
1300 Elmwood Ave  
Buffalo, NY 14222  
716-878-5331



## *US Culture*

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### **Social Interaction**

As you get to know other students and staff, feel free to ask them questions about words, body language, communications styles or practices that you are not familiar with. For instance, you may find that many US citizens prefer physical distance between individuals when talking than you are comfortable or familiar with. Similarly, regular but not prolonged eye contact is generally expected to communicate attentiveness and honesty. Try to be alert to some of these differences as you begin to form relationships with people from different cultural backgrounds. However, many people in Buffalo are familiar with multi-cultural contexts and intercultural dynamics and will know that, as an international student, you may not be familiar with the American social practices. Therefore, enjoy getting to know the strange and wonderful customs of others at Buffalo State!



Especially with US friends or roommates, directness is important as you seek to make your wishes and preferences understood. Americans generally assume that you mean what you say, and that you will express your opinions. For example, don't be afraid to ask someone politely if they would mind turning down the music in their residence hall room or to politely refuse if someone offers you something to eat that you don't like or want. Of course, there are many subtleties of communication which all cannot be described here. However, you should feel free to communicate your preferences/opinions to those concerned, especially regarding your space, possessions and body.

### **Children**

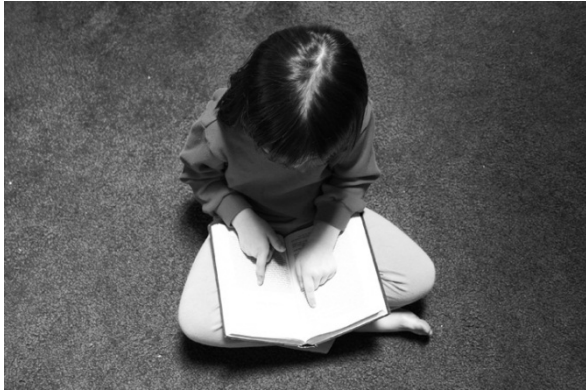
In New York, children under the age of 11 should be supervised by someone over the age of 12, depending on the maturity and responsibility of the child. NY State law views it as neglect to leave your children unattended, depending on the circumstances. For instance, a 10 or 11-year-old might be able to be left for short periods of time after school while waiting for the return of a parent from work, but child care should be arranged for younger children. Children must be 12 years old to babysit other children.

You may want to consult the **NY State** website to obtain more information about NY State laws pertaining to children.

**([https://troopers.ny.gov/Traffic\\_Safety/Child\\_Safety\\_Seats/](https://troopers.ny.gov/Traffic_Safety/Child_Safety_Seats/))** Take particular note of the guidelines about infant and child car seats and booster seats. Seatbelts for adults and approved car seats for children are mandatory and large fines will be given if they are not used.

New York State is concerned about the safety and protection of their children, particularly

with strangers. Therefore, as a general rule, you should not touch, hug, or kiss a child unless you know the parents and they are comfortable with this behaviour. Likewise, teachers and other people working with children in New York are generally not permitted to physically discipline or express affection towards children.



### **Receiving Gifts**

If you have received money, a gift or a service from someone, it is customary to write a thank-you note expressing your appreciation for that person's kindness.

### **Giving Gifts**

At Buffalo State, employees are not allowed to accept gifts. A small note is always appreciated.

### **Culture Shock**

Depending on your background, you may find the norms and values in US different from yours. Day-to-day living may be difficult and social situations can be frustrating. This experience is defined as "culture shock" by social psychologists. Some of the symptoms of this experience are loneliness, feelings of alienation, constant fatigue, wanting to withdraw from others, frustration and anger. The inability to cope with these feelings can really hinder your academic studies. This is not an uncommon experience. Research shows that, if you live in another culture for at

least three months, then at some point, you will experience culture shock. The period of time that you will experience it will vary from person to person. If you start to experience culture shock, then seek out other international students who have lived in Buffalo longer than you to find out how they have coped or speak to the Director of International Student and Scholar Services for some assistance. Talking with others about your frustrations and amusing observations will prove to be a great way of dealing with culture shock.



## *Life in the City*

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### **Campus Location**

The campus is located in the heart of the arts corridor of the city of Buffalo. Students will enjoy museums, art galleries, entertainment, unique shops, and restaurants.

**Buffalo State College** is situated on the Niagara frontier with easy access to Lakes Erie and Ontario, Niagara Falls, Toronto, Canada, and Western New York's exciting summer and winter recreation facilities. In addition, frequent flights and rail service in the region have made Boston, New York City, and Washington, D.C. convenient neighbors. Within walking distance are the world-renowned Albright-Knox Art Gallery, the Buffalo History Museum, and Delaware Park, which includes a golf course and the Buffalo Zoo. Within a few miles, are the Buffalo Museum of Science, Kleinhans Music Hall, the theater district, a multitude of distinct ethnic neighborhoods, and historic architectural masterpieces. The University of Buffalo (SUNY at Buffalo), with its vast array of resources and programs, lies within a 30 minute drive of Buffalo State. Professional football, ice hockey, lacrosse, and baseball along with professional and semi-professional theater and live musical groups provide entertainment.

### **Attractions in Buffalo**

#### 1. Niagara Falls State Park



Niagara Falls State Park is the oldest state park in the U.S. Home of the

*For more information:*

<https://www.niagarafallsstatepark.com/>

#### 2. Albright-Knox Art Gallery



A vibrant museum in the heart of Buffalo's cultural district, the Albright-Knox has been collecting and exhibiting the art of its time, often working directly with living artists.

*For more information:*

<https://www.albrightknox.org/>

### 3. Canalside



Canalside is located in downtown Buffalo at the heart of Buffalo's waterfront. Its home to hundreds of activities and events scheduled throughout the year, ranging from concerts, food/drinks, public art, festivals and much more.

For more information:

<https://www.canalsidebuffalo.com/>

### 4. Buffalo Zoo



The 23.5-acre Buffalo Zoo has the distinguished honor of being the third oldest zoo in the United States (est. 1875), and it houses some of the world's most exotic, endangered, and even local wildlife.

For more information: <https://buffalozoo.org/>

### Shopping

With a few exceptions, you should expect to pay the price marked/advertised for products you buy—negotiations are appropriate only at garage sales, flea markets, for items sold privately, and on large ticket items like cars and sometimes large appliances. The exception to this would be if a new item is somehow damaged, in which case you can ask if there would be any reduction in the price. Remember you will have to pay NYS tax on each item purchased in restaurants and stores 8.75% (some food items are not taxed). This tax is usually not included in the sticker price.

### Grocery Shopping

*Aldis*, *PriceRite* and *Save a Lot* are probably three of the least expensive supermarket chains for groceries, although their selection is often more limited than the larger grocery stores like *Wegmans* and *Tops*. Both supermarkets are close to campus and on the bus route.

Buffalo has many specialty international food stores and markets. Don't be afraid to ask someone if they can recommend where to shop for the items you are looking for. Many grocery stores carry more international foods as well.

### Shopping Malls

There are several shopping malls in the Buffalo area. Walden Galleria Mall is about 12 miles from campus.

The Niagara Falls Outlets is a popular location to get designer labels.

Eastern Hills Mall and Boulevard Mall are also within a 15-minute drive of the campus.

Typically, you'll find coffee shops, pharmacies, convenience stores, small restaurants, etc. at plazas.

### **Sports Equipment**

There are many stores in Buffalo, which sell used sports equipment, including ice skates and footwear. This is a good place to look for children's equipment since they will grow out of these things quickly. *Play It Again Sports* is one of the larger chains of used sports equipment. Skate rental is available at the Buffalo State Hockey Rink on campus during open skate times.

### **Gratuities**

In North American restaurants, the waiter or waitress is normally tipped (or "given a tip of") 15-18% for good service. You can tip less or more depending on the quality of the service. This can be left on the table if you are leaving cash or added to your credit card bill. It is expected to also tip the hairdresser in (nicer) hair salons, food delivery personnel, taxi drivers, bellhops in hotels and airports, etc.

## ***Finances***

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### **US Currency**

The basic unit is the dollar (\$). Bills in denominations of \$1, \$5, \$10, and \$20 are the most widely used, but also come in \$50, and \$100. The dollar is divided into 100 cents.

Coins are as follows:

1 cent = penny

5 cents = nickel

10 cents = dime

25 cents = quarter

### **Banking**

During orientation we will have a representative from an area bank. You are welcome to find your own banking institution. All will accept wire transfers internationally.

### **Income Tax**

You must file income tax forms or an 8843 Non-Resident Form each April. See the ISSS Office for more information.

You must report any money you have earned in the US, whether through employment, scholarships or assistantships.

The Income Tax Forms and Guide are available at post offices or online at <https://.irs.gov/>



## ***Transportation***

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### **Public Transportation**

NFTA bus transportation is provided to all enrolled Buffalo State Students. Bus routes are located at the front (Elmwood Ave) and south part (Grant St) of the campus

### **Travel to Canada**

During your time in Buffalo, you might want to travel to Canada. Please go to the Canadian Citizenship and Immigration website to obtain the correct visa. Remember you must have your I-20 and passport to re-enter the US. It is your responsibility to be aware of your rights and duties under US and Canadian law. Being well-informed and maintaining good relations with Immigration is in your best interest.

### **Driver's License**

Please do not assume that traffic laws are the same here as in your home country. Study a NYS Driver's Handbook before venturing out on our roads.

More information may be obtained from the DMV website at <https://.dmv.gov/>

1. Go to the Social Security Office with your passport, I-94 and Current properly endorsed I-20 Form
2. Tell the Social Security Office that you are not eligible for a Social Security Number because you are not working
3. Ask the Social Security Office to issue you a letter indicating that you are not eligible for a Social Security Number

4. With this letter from Social Security, go to the Department of Motor Vehicles and present the letter from the Social Security Office

5. The Department of Motor Vehicles should issue you a number that should allow you to follow the process to apply for a driver's license

### **Purchasing a Car**

If you are planning to buy a used car, you may want to consult the *Lemon-Law Used Car Guide* which is available at commercial bookstores (a "lemon" is what you don't want to buy = a deal gone sour or bad). This gives important information about specific automobile models and years, with prices, defects, archives of service bulletins and memos and more. If you are thinking of purchasing a used car, you should always have it inspected by a mechanic first, before buying it. **Please note that you must purchase car insurance if you are buying a car.** Insurance rates vary according to your age, gender, driving record, location, commuter/non-commuter status, and type/age of vehicle. You may receive a better insurance rate if you get a letter from your insurance company in your home country stating the length of time that you have had a "no claims" history.

If you're using another person's car on an occasional basis, you would normally be covered by that person's insurance. Make sure this is true if someone offers to let you use his or her car.

It is recommended that you also consider getting a roadside service program for emergencies. Check out <https://.aaa.com/> for more information

## ***Student Life***

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### **Student Rights and Responsibilities**

Please see the Dean of Students website for a complete list of all rights of students.

<http://deanofstudents.buffalostate.edu/compact-civil-and-caring-academic-community/>

### **Racism**

Racism is against the law in New York.

According to the law, you cannot be discriminated because of your: race, colour, place of origin, ancestry, ethnic origin, citizenship, religion, marital status, family status, age, sex, sexual orientation, or handicap.

### **Student Identification (Student ID)**

Your Buffalo State student card may make you eligible for student discounts at certain stores, on public buses, for reduced admission prices to events and attractions and performances. You will be able to obtain a Student ID card at the Butler Library main desk.

### **Housing**

You may find that living in residence at Buffalo State the simplest and most economical way of obtaining housing. There are single and double rooms as well as a limited number of apartments. You will need to complete a residence application online through the banner system. All students under the age of 21 are required to live on campus.

**A word of caution:** housing leases in the US are usually for the duration of one year and they are legally binding documents. Don't sign if you are not going to be living there for at least a year without consulting with the Housing Office.

If you are living on campus and you have any maintenance or repair needs, notify your RA. Do not hesitate to report to your RA any

problems you are having with your room, lounge, hallways, public areas or the bathrooms.

If you are thinking of living off campus, there are several things you need to consider. Be aware that most landlords require you to pay upfront first **and** last month's rent (sometimes referred to as a security deposit) The security deposit is usually refunded when you move out- unless you cause excessive damage to the apartment or break the lease terms. Many apartments require you to pay for your utilities (water, gas, electricity) in addition to the monthly rent; ask the landlord or superintendent before you sign a lease agreement. Most apartments and houses are rented unfurnished.

Rental Agreements/ leases: You should be sure you have the following in writing, before signing a rental agreement/lease:

- The monthly rent payment.
- Move-in payments due upfront: first and last months' rent/security deposit
- The length of the lease,
- Number of day's notice needed upon moving out (after lease term is complete).
- Financial penalty for breaking the lease (leaving before the lease term is complete)
- Conditions for subletting.
- Know whether utilities are included or paid separately—what the rate will be.

Other things you should know:

1. By law, a landlord cannot enter your apartment when you are not present without your permission; they must give you 24 hours notice, unless it is a emergency.
2. If the landlord chooses to evict you, they must provide you with written notice to

vacate your apartment at least 60 days in advance of the date they want you to leave.

3. If your name is on the lease, you are responsible for any damages that occur, even if you are in a shared apartment or you have sublet to someone else.
4. A landlord may request **but cannot require** a non-refundable cleaning deposit, a refundable key deposit, or a deposit against damages. You do not have to pay these.

Students living off campus have certain legal rights regarding maintenance and repair of apartments and houses, health and safety issues, privacy, rent increases, leases, subletting/assigning a lease, and eviction. If you are experiencing any difficulties in these or other areas, you should feel free to speak to the International Student and Scholars Services Office, or to someone else you know who can assist you in finding out what your rights are.

### **Finding a Church/ Place of Worship**

There are many ethnic and multiethnic churches in the area. A simple internet search will be helpful.

### **Garbage, Recycling & Compost**

All homes and most apartments and condos are part of a recycling program. Blue recycle bins are used for plastics, cans, cardboard, newspapers and glass. In many public places, such as shopping malls and street corners, you will find that waste disposal is divided into categories.

### **Libraries**

Buffalo State has a library in Butler Hall. It is accessible to the public, and books/journals can be read in the library or photocopied. Materials normally may be borrowed only by current students or alumni, or with an active student ID card. Some public libraries may have restricted access to borrowing their materials.

The Butler Library has a 3<sup>rd</sup> floor Global Study Lounge on the North side of the building. This colorful area of the library showcases flags and has seating for studying and group projects. One Friday a month, there is a Global Café event where faculty and students gather to support our international population. This is a great opportunity to form friendships and get involved with the campus.



## ***Employment***

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### **Study Visas**

**All International Students must obtain an F or J Study Visa from the US Consulate/Embassy in your home country before you arrive in US.** Do not enter on a Visitor's visa expecting to apply for a Study Visa from within the US, as this is not possible. You will not be allowed to register for courses at Buffalo State without a valid visa.

You may need to apply for a renewal of your visa, depending on your period of study and the length of the authorization given. To renew your visa, you should obtain your I-20 from the ISSS Office prior to traveling home.

### **Employment**

International Students can not work off campus unless they have CPT/ OPT approval.

On-campus jobs are posted on the career services website. You must be registered as a full-time student. Most jobs are filled in September, with some new opportunities in January. You will need to submit a resume and cover letter and have an interview. These student jobs are limited in number, and we regret that not all international students who apply may be employed on campus.

During the Fall and Spring term you are permitted to work up to 20 hours per week. During winter and summer break you are able to work longer hours.

Stop by the ISSS Office for paperwork and advisement on this subject.

### **OPT Employment (after graduation)**

International students may work in their field of study for one year after they graduate in order to gain work experience in the US

### **CPT Internship or Field Experience/Volunteer Work**

Since certain conditions apply, speak to the ISSS Office to determine if you are eligible to participate in this program.

### **Financial Aid**

Unfortunately, there is presently very little scholarship money available specifically for international students studying at Buffalo State. However, international students may apply for any of the entrance scholarships (1<sup>st</sup> year University College). For more year University College). For more information, speak to a Financial Aid Advisor.

### **Social Security Number (SSN)**

If you have been authorized to work either on or off campus, and you meet Social Security's eligibility requirements, you can get a Social Security number. Please stop by the ISSS Office with your employment letter.

To apply for a Social Security number: complete an application for a Social Security Card (Form SS-5)

Show the Social Security office original documents proving your work-authorized immigration status, and age

Take your completed application and original documents to your local Social Security Office

Social Security Office  
186 Exchange Street, Suite 100  
Buffalo, NY 14202

## ***Immigration and Your Family***

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### **Spouses Studying In US**

Your spouse may want to study while in the US. Spouses are able on F-2 visa to study part time.

### **Spouses Working in US**

Spouses are not able to work while in the US.

### **Children Studying In US**

Note that all children entering Grade 1 (6 years old) are eligible to be enrolled in public school in Buffalo or the town you are living in. Please contact the Buffalo Public School Central Registration Office to begin that process.

## ***Health Care***

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### **Required Health Insurance**

International students are required to have the SUNY health insurance plan. This is added to your bill in August and covers August to August. If you arrive in January it will cover January to August. You must enroll any dependents on an F-2 visa for insurance.

### **Health Services**

Weigel Wellness Center located next to our office building has a walk-in clinic (no appointment necessary). They will make referrals to off campus physicians if that is needed. Eye glasses/contacts and dental are not covered by the SUNY insurance.

### **Clothing and Furniture**

If you are not from a country with cold winters (October to April), you will want to be sure to purchase a warm (well-lined) winter coat, hat, mittens, scarf and water tight boots. There are also many places where you can purchase used and discounted new clothing such as *Salvation Army*, *Goodwill*, and *AmVets Thrift Store*.

Some of the above may also have used furniture for your apartment on or off campus. You will probably want to shop around to compare prices. The classified section of the newspaper also has private sales of furniture and appliances.

### **Winter Tips**

1. **Don't take chances with cold weather.** Be sure to find out the weather forecast by either listening to a local radio station or check online and then dress accordingly.
2. **Warm, winter clothing is a necessity.** It can be quite cold some days and you will need warm clothing to stay healthy. Try wearing several layers of clothing. It is much easier to remove a layer or two if you become too warm than to get warmer by adding another layer. Don't worry about how you may look as long as you accomplish your goal of keeping warm. Winter clothing might include a down coat, waterproof boots, mittens, a hat or earmuffs, and long underwear known as "long johns".

3. **Ask others that are familiar with the climate for advice.** Speak with other international students, classmates or the ISSS Office for assistance.
4. **Be sure to eat breakfast.** Your body will stay warmer if you have some fuel to burn.
5. **Use moisturizing creams and conditioners.** Your skin and scalp may become dry and flaky due to the cold and the dry heat indoors. In addition, drinking lots of water daily will help to prevent dehydration.
6. **Protect your eyes and skin from the sunlight reflected from the snow.** Your eyes can be damaged by the sunlight reflected from the snow, although this rarely happens. You can protect your eyes by wearing sunglasses and your skin by putting on sunscreen.
7. **The wind chill factor is something to consider.** The temperature can feel colder because of high blowing winds.
8. **Be aware of frostbite.** Exposing your ears, fingers, toes or cheeks to freezing temperatures, even for a short period of time, may cause them to be severely damaged. Seek medical help immediately if any part of your body should lack feeling or become pale or slightly blue.



9. **Seek help if you become stranded in the cold.** If for some reason you are stranded in the cold with no transportation, then go to the nearest shelter to warm up. If you happen to be in a rural area, then you may need to knock on the closest door and ask if you can come in for a short period of time. Don't risk being out in freezing temperatures for prolonged periods of time since it can be life threatening.
10. **When driving always keep a warm blanket, a candle and matches in the car.** If your car ever has mechanical problems these items will be invaluable for keeping warm.

There are several things that you might find helpful to know as you begin your studies at Buffalo State: Verbal and written communication styles vary widely across cultures and language groups. You will find that North Americans assume a fairly linear form of reasoning. Therefore, it is understood that the main thesis or argument should be made clear by the presenter or author. The reader or listener is not expected to figure out what your central point and your conclusions are; it is assumed that this is your job as the communicator. This will affect how you write papers, prepare and organize oral presentations, etc. When you include illustrations, examples, quotations, etc., be certain to make it clear how these contribute to your argument(s).

### **Educational Culture**

Sometimes, students find that even when they do not have any difficulties with English grammar or vocabulary, they continue to experience difficulties in obtaining the academic results that they desire, especially on their essays. This may be due to subtle cultural differences in thought and communication patterns. If this is the case, you may find that reading other students' papers (from previous years, on different topics) that have received good marks will assist you in identifying what may be the problems with your writing and give you an idea of the expectations of the professor. Sometimes professors have kept "grade A" papers from former students as examples for you to read. Always ask a professor how you can better your grade in the future if you receive an unsatisfactory grade.

Look for the various ways you can take advantage of **The Writing Centre**.

This free service is designed to assist you in writing papers. Information about the drop-in

centre, workshops, and booking appointments for essay consultation will be posted in the Writing Centre. In order to make use of these services, you will have to plan to have your essays finished in advance of the assignment deadlines.

Methods of evaluation can come as a surprise to some students. You may find that your college courses require you to do a number of assignments ask for clarification of your professor's expectations and goals for reflective or integrative assignments.



In general, students may feel free to ask questions that are relevant to the subject being discussed during class for clarification or further explanation. Frequently, smaller classes or certain professors or courses will foster discussions in which students are welcome to participate. In this environment, you may find that US students ask controversial questions, challenge authority or offer their own opinions. Proposing an alternate view is not in and of itself seen to be a rejection of the person but only of an idea, nor is it necessarily an indication of someone's respect for the professor or lack of it. So, you may need to pay close attention to the attitudes and demeanour behind the words being conveyed, and also remember that volume and body language may have

different meanings in different cultures and settings.

Generally, you can judge whether and when discussion is encouraged from your professor's words and behaviour concerning this issue, and also by whether there is any part of your grade allotted to participation. Professors may periodically pause and invite questions/discussion, or they may indicate that you should feel free to interject. Always stop by the professor's office for a personal discussion or support outside of class.

Don't hesitate to ask for clarification from another student on class expectations, assignments, and grades, especially those that are given verbally. If you need to speak to a professor at length about a topic, assignment, etc., it may be a good idea to make an appointment with him/her in person or by phone to meet before or after class or during office hours.



The general rule with regard to titles is that you address your professor by their title, "Dr." or "Professor" unless they give you permission, personally or as a class, to do otherwise. However, in the US faculty are frequently less formal about this than many other cultures. You may find that some professors will prefer more informal teacher-student relationships than you may be used to.

### **Academic Integrity**

The Academic Calendar also outlines policies regarding expectations in the submission of papers, the taking of exams, and other related issues. Please be certain that you understand the requirements by each professor to cite your sources in footnotes or parenthetical references. If you have any questions concerning this, consult your professor.

### **Registering for Courses**

You will need to work with your academic advisor to register for classes. There is a PIN number given to access banner class registration. Undergraduate students must have a minimum of 12 credits and only one on-line class. Graduate students must have a minimum of 9 credits with only one on-line class during fall and spring terms.

## **Key Contacts at Buffalo State**

The Undergraduate Admissions Office: (716) 878-4017 [intladmissions@buffalostate.edu](mailto:intladmissions@buffalostate.edu)  
For questions on your acceptance, your program or your admissions application.

The Graduate Admissions Office: (716) 878-5601 or [gradoffc@buffalostate.edu](mailto:gradoffc@buffalostate.edu).  
For questions on your acceptance, your program or your admissions application.

The Registrar's Office: (716) 878-4811 [regofc@buffalostate.edu](mailto:regofc@buffalostate.edu)  
For questions on registering for courses and obtaining a transcript.

The Student Accounts Office: (716) 878-4121 [stuaccts@buffalostate.edu](mailto:stuaccts@buffalostate.edu)  
For questions on your tuition payment and other financial matters.

The International Student and Scholar Services Office hopes this resource has been helpful in introducing you to life at the Buffalo State campus. We look forward to getting to know you over the course of your studies here.

Any questions, comments or suggestions may be addressed to:

**Tricia L Herritt**  
**Director of International Students and Scholar Services**  
**SUNY Buffalo State**  
**South Wing 410**  
**1300 Elmwood Ave**  
**Buffalo, NY 14222**  
**716-878-5331**  
**[herrittl@buffalostate.edu](mailto:herrittl@buffalostate.edu)**