



Kalamazoo**VALLEY**[™]
community college

International Student Welcome Packet

Email: international@kvcc.edu

Website: www.kvcc.edu

Tel: 269-488-4040



Last updated June 20, 2024

Welcome to KALAMAZOO VALLEY

Dear Student,

Congratulations on your admission to Kalamazoo Valley Community College!

Inside this booklet, you will find important **admission materials**. Please **print all documents related to your admission** and carry them with you to Kalamazoo. Make sure to read this booklet carefully to help you better prepare for arrival.

Kalamazoo Valley Community College **currently issues I-20s electronically**. We also included guidance issued by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) regarding electronic signature I-20 issuance.

We are excited to have you join us at Kalamazoo Valley! Our Student Development Services team is here to support you in your academic goals every step of the way. We hope your time here brings you valuable experiences, academically and socially.

Sincerely,

**Student Development Services
Recruitment and Outreach
International Support Team**

Meet Your Support Team

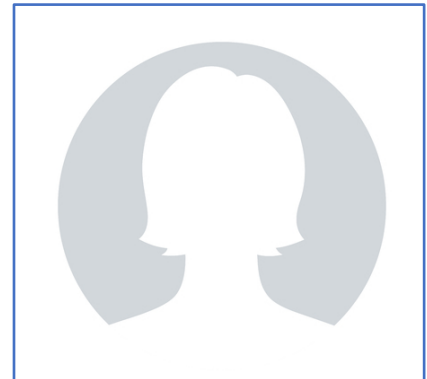
Mrs. Nkenge Bergan

Associate Vice President for Student Development Services
Principal Designated School Official



Mary Cox

International Student Recruitment & Outreach Coordinator
Designated School Official



Amie S. McPharlin

Immigrant Student Retention & Completion Coach
Designated School Official



Important Immigration Information – PLEASE READ

ARRIVAL

If you are unable to arrive on time, you must notify our Principal Designated School Official (PDSO), Nkenge Bergan, at international@kvcc.edu before the program start date indicated on your I-20. Failure to arrive at the designated time or communicate with the PDSO may result in the cancellation of your SEVIS record. Cancellation of a SEVIS record will require a new I-20, SEVIS fee, and visa for future enrollment.

ATTENDANCE

If you use the I-20 issued by Kalamazoo Valley Community College to obtain your visa and/or enter the United States, you are required to attend Kalamazoo Valley Community College.

PROGRAM OF STUDY

Students must remain in the major/program of study indicated on their I-20 form until a change of major has been approved and a new I-20 form issued.

I-901 SEVIS FEE

F-1 Visa Applicants: The current [SEVIS I-901 fees](#) is \$350 for F-1 applicants. The I-901 fee required by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security **must be paid and fully processed prior to your visa interview**. Citizens of Canada whose citizens do not require a visa stamp **must pay and process the SEVIS fee before appearing at the Port of Entry**. If you have paid the SEVIS fee before and are issued a new I-20 bearing a new SEVIS number, you must pay a new SEVIS fee and obtain a new visa. Please contact the U.S. embassy or consulate in your home country or refer to <https://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901> for payment information.

ENROLLMENT

F-1 and J-1 students must enroll **full-time (12 credit hours)** each mandatory semester to maintain lawful status. No more than one class or 3 credits may count towards status each semester if the class is in an online format.

TRAVEL

Remember to carry your I-20 with you together with your passport when you go through the port of entry. Do not pack it in your checked-in luggage.

PLACEMENT TEST & ORIENTATION

A welcome email from our international team will be sent to you that includes the dates of your on-campus placement tests (math, reading & writing) and orientation.

Typically, your placement test is scheduled prior to your orientation date. After taking your placement test, please see our International Student Support Team and bring the following documents with you:

- Passport with visa
- Proof of Health Insurance
- I-94 (printed <https://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901> after arrival)
- I-20
- Proof of Local Residence

About Kalamazoo

Located in Southwest Michigan, Kalamazoo is about two hours from both Chicago and Detroit. With nearly 75,000 residents, Kalamazoo has a big-city mindset and small-town features. A vibrant and progressive downtown that includes quality dining, nightclubs, microbreweries, shops, live entertainment, and the Kalamazoo Institute of Arts. Kalamazoo is minutes away from sprawling beaches and winding nature trails. Here are some more facts about Kalamazoo:

- Population of Michigan: 9.996 million
- Enrollment at KALAMAZOO VALLEY: 8,484
- International Students at KALAMAZOO VALLEY: 80

Weather

Michigan has four seasons, and the weather is always changing.

- Summer: 60-80° degrees Fahrenheit, 15-26° degrees Celsius
- Fall: 40-60° degrees Fahrenheit, 4-15° degrees Celsius
- Winter: 15-30° degrees Fahrenheit, -10-1° degrees Celsius
- Spring: 35-55° degrees Fahrenheit, 2-12° degrees Celsius

Nearby Attractions

- Lake Michigan
- Wings Event Center
- Air Zoo Aerospace & Science Museum
- Many local parks and lakes
- Restaurants and breweries



Before You Arrive

Complete Visa Interview

Congratulations on receiving your I-20! To receive your F-1 student visa, you must complete an interview at a U.S. Embassy. All students wishing to study in the United States must apply for a student visa at a US embassy. Follow the steps below to prepare and hopefully receive your F-1 student visa.

1. Schedule your interview

- a. Find the embassy located closest to you using the USEmbassy.gov webpage and schedule an interview appointment.

2. Pay SEVIS Fee (I-901 fee)

- a. Visit this US government website (www.fmjfee.com) and pay \$350 USD. This is required by all international students before appearing for a visa interview.

3. Gather your documents

- a. It is recommended to bring all the documents you submitted to receive admission to Kalamazoo Valley and all documents received from Kalamazoo Valley. This means your passport, financial certification, bank statements, admission acceptance letter, I-20, and proof of payment for the I-901 Fee.

4. Attend your interview: 10 Points to Remember When Applying for a Student Visa

1. **TIES TO YOUR HOME COUNTRY**. Under U.S. law, all applicants for nonimmigrant visas, such as student visas, are viewed as intending immigrants until they can convince the consular officer that they are not. You must, therefore, be able to show that you have reasons for returning to your home country that are stronger than those for remaining in the United States. "Ties" to your home country are the things that bind you to your hometown, homeland, or current place of residence: job, family, financial prospects that you own or will inherit, investments, etc. If you are a prospective undergraduate, the interviewing officer may ask about your specific intentions or promise of future employment, family or other relationships, educational objectives, grades, long-range plans, and career prospects in your home

- country. Every applicant's situation is different. There is no explanation, document, certificate, or letter, that will guarantee visa issuance. You must be consistent verbally and with your documentation.
2. **ENGLISH.** Anticipate that the interview will be conducted in English. Practicing conversational English with a native English speaker is recommended. If you are coming to the United States solely to study intensive English, be prepared to explain how English will be useful for you in your home country.
 3. **SPEAK FOR YOURSELF.** Do not bring parents or family members with you to the interview. The consular officer wants to interview you, not your family. A negative impression is created if you are not prepared to speak on your own behalf. If you are a minor applying for a high school program and need your parents there in case there are questions, for example, about funding, they should wait in the waiting room.
 4. **KNOW THE PROGRAM AND HOW IT FITS YOUR CAREER PLANS.** You should have a good understanding of how the specific program you are studying aligns with your goals and your plans to return to your home country, not to immigrate to the United States.
 5. **BE CONCISE.** The goal of a Consular Officer is to conduct a quick and efficient interview to evaluate your intentions of studying in the United States. The first impression you make will have a significant impact on their decision. What you say is just as important as how you say it.
 6. **SUPPLEMENTAL DOCUMENTATION.** It should be clear to the consular officer what written documents you are presenting and what they signify. Lengthy written explanations cannot be quickly read or evaluated. Remember that you will have 2-3 minutes of interview time.

7. **NOT ALL COUNTRIES ARE EQUAL.** Statistically, applicants from countries suffering economic distress or have a history of international students failing to maintain compliance with the terms of their visa will be under more scrutiny. They will be evaluating your intentions to immigrate versus return to your home country.
 8. **EMPLOYMENT.** Your main purpose in coming to the United States should be to study, not for the chance to work before or after graduation. While many students do work off-campus during their studies, such employment is incidental to their main purpose of completing their U.S. education. You must be able to clearly articulate your plan to return home at the end of your program. If your spouse is also applying for an accompanying F-2 visa, be aware that F-2 dependents cannot, under any circumstances, be employed in the U.S. If asked, be prepared to address what your spouse intends to do with his or her time while in the U.S. Volunteer work and attending school part-time are permitted activities.
 9. **DEPENDENTS REMAINING AT HOME.** If your spouse and children are remaining behind in your country, be prepared to address how they will support themselves in your absence. This can be an especially tricky area if you are the primary source of income for your family. If the consular officer gains the impression that your family will need you to remit money from the United States to support themselves, your student visa application will almost certainly be denied. If your family decides to join you later, it is helpful to have them apply at the same post where you applied for your visa.
 10. **MAINTAIN A POSITIVE ATTITUDE.** Do not engage the consular officer in an argument. If you are denied a student visa, ask the officer for a list of documents he or she would suggest you bring to overcome the refusal and try to get the reason you were denied in writing.
5. **Notify the Kalamazoo Valley International Team or Student Development Services Office about visa interview results.**

Arrange Housing Accommodations

Students are responsible for arranging their own housing accommodations, there are great options near campus and around Kalamazoo. In the list provided below, you will find options for apartments located near Kalamazoo Valley Community College and Western Michigan University (WMU).

Depending on preferences, some students prefer to live near Western Michigan University, and others prefer to live near Kalamazoo Valley. Before you decide where to live, we also recommend that you check the [Metro Bus Routes](#) near that location. If you need bus transportation, the most convenient housing locations will be located near bus line 11 which can be taken near the WMU recreation center. Additional housing options can also be found [here](#).

Steps

1. Research options and agreements that best fit your needs (ex. Location, furnishings, cost, etc.)
2. Contact the apartment complex to learn about the process for signing a lease
3. Complete paperwork, payment, and arrange move-in dates

*** Avoid scams. When searching for a place to rent, it is important to rely on reputable websites that not only provide a detailed listing and photos but also contact information for the landlord. Visit the State of Michigan [Consumer Protection](#) for more details.

Health Insurance & Services

All international students are **required to have health insurance** during their studies in the United States. Due to the high costs of healthcare, it is important that students have health insurance during their entire stay in the United States, even small injuries can cost thousands when a student does not have health insurance. Kalamazoo Valley requires that you



submit your proof of health insurance before you enter the US. Listed below are a few companies that offer acceptable health insurance plans:

- [ISO Insurance](#)
- [iNext](#)
- [International Student Insurance](#)

After you have purchased health insurance please send the confirmation page, which should include the expiration date, to international@kvcc.edu

Arrange travel to the U.S.A.

Booking your travel and arriving to the USA is very exciting, but there are few details to keep in mind:

- Book your travel as soon as possible **after** you receive your visa
- Arrive **after** the “earliest arrival date” mentioned on I-20 (usually around July 20 for Fall and December 5 for Winter), **you will not be permitted to enter earlier**
- The closest airports are Kalamazoo (AZO) and Grand Rapids (GRR)
- Try not to schedule flights with layovers shorter than 2 hours in case of delays
- Book a hotel for the days before you move into an apartment or homestay
- Taxi or Uber/Lyft can be arranged upon arrival

Prepare for Traveling

What to pack?

- Clothes – clothes for warm and cold weather. Bring a warm jacket especially if arriving in winter. Remember that Michigan experiences all four seasons.
- Shoes – warm and cold weather shoes; bring warm boots if arriving in winter
- Toiletries – toothbrush, shampoo, toothpaste, deodorant, etc.
- Outlet adapter – (The USA operates on a 120V supply voltage and 60Hz.)
- Phone and Laptop – it is recommended you purchase a laptop that is intended for use in the USA.

- **Documents – Passport, Visa, I-20, Admission letter, financial documents, I-901 receipt**
 - Take photos with phone of all important documents
- Some cash & credit card/debit card – recommended to bring a couple hundred dollars in case of emergency.

What NOT to Pack?

- Pets of any kind
- Devices using open flame
- Any type of gun/weapon
- Alcohol or illegal drugs

What to expect upon arrival

- You will pass through primary inspection with the US. Customs and Border Patrol
- They will examine your documents and ask questions to verify information. Example questions include:
 - What is the purpose of your visit to the US?
 - How long do you plan to visit? How long will you be staying?
 - Do you have the means to support yourself financially while in the US?
- If you are missing documents or the documents cannot be verified, you may be directed to a secondary inspection.
 - What is the Form I-515A? This form allows a student to enter the country for temporary admission while you obtain the necessary documentation. You have 30 days (about 4 and a half weeks) to send the necessary documents to the Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVIS). **Contact your DSO via international@kvcc.edu and/or 269.488.4040 as soon as you are directed to secondary inspection.**
- If you are approved to enter the US, you will receive a stamp and be permitted to continue. For more information see the Study in the States webpage.

After You Arrive

Check-in with the International Support Team

Once you have arrived in the US, please notify the KALAMAZOO VALLEY international office as soon as possible. **You must arrange a day to check in and complete placement tests – this should be done prior to orientation.**

Check-In

All students must check in with the international office before orientation. Please bring all your documents so they can be verified, and copies made for your file (passport, visa, I-20, I-94, proof of health insurance).



Placement Testing

You will need to take the necessary placement tests **BEFORE** your orientation. These are mandatory and should be taken seriously, as you will be placed in classes depending on how you score. Subjects covered in the placement tests include Math, Reading, and Writing. Students may be required, depending on the documentation submitted, to take one or all tests. More information on placement testing can be found [here](#), including links to practice tests. To make an appointment to take your tests, contact the Kalamazoo Valley Testing Center at 269-488-4235.

Attend Orientation

All international students must attend orientation to register for classes. You will receive email reminders regarding orientation, so be sure to review the information and come prepared.

Registration

During orientation, you will have the chance to meet an advisor and plan your courses for the semester. Work with them to build a schedule that suits your lifestyle and needs. As an international student, you will be required to take at least 12 credits per semester to maintain your status.



Tuition

Be prepared to pay tuition and fees **within 5 days** of registering for classes. Payment plans are available and can be arranged. For Assistance, please contact the Student Financial Services Office.

Maintain F-1 Status

The requirements below are mandated by the US government and must be followed to maintain status as an F-1 student. If a student fails to maintain status, they risk termination of their I-20 and visa.

Full-Time Enrollment

F-1 international students must enroll in at least 12 credit hours each Winter and Fall semester and make progress toward completion of their program. Summer semester is considered a vacation period, and you are not required to enroll in classes.

Dropping below a Full Course of Study

A student who drops below a full course of study without the prior approval of the Designated School Official (DSO) will be considered out of status and will risk termination of their I-20 and Visa.

Financial Support

Students must demonstrate they are financially able to support themselves without working for the entire period of stay in the United States.

Notice of Change of Address

A student must inform the DSO of any legal changes to his or her name or any change of address within 10 days (about 1 and a half weeks) via the personal information update form.

Employment

F-1 visa holders are eligible to work on-campus up to 20 hours per week, however, jobs are very limited and should not be assumed as a source of income. To work off-campus F-1 visa holders must attend classes for one year and obtain work authorization through the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS). Off-campus work options are:

- Curricular Practical Training (CPT)
- Optional Practical Training (OPT)
- Severe Economic Hardship

Travel Signature

It is required to have your I-20 signed by a DSO before traveling internationally. A signature from a DSO is valid for one year.

Important Documents

Passport – Your passport is very important. Do not lose it or let it expire. If your passport is lost or going to expire within the next 6 months contact the international office immediately.

Visa – The visa allows you the opportunity to enter the US, however, you can still be turned away at the border if a Customs and Border Protection (CBP) official believes it necessary. A visa can expire without issue while in the US, but a student cannot enter the country with an expired visa.

I-94 – This document confirms that you entered the country legally and with an F-1 visa. A new I-94 can be printed out at <https://i94.cbp.dhs.gov/i94/#/home>

I-20 – This document verifies you as an F-1 student and cannot be allowed to expire.
Keep it in a safe place and bring it with you when traveling internationally.

Resources

KALAMAZOO VALLEY and the surrounding area offer lots of resources to help make your experience in the United States rewarding and successful. Please see the information below or contact the Student Development Services if you need help with non-academic matters.

Community Resources

Additional resources have been compiled into a [Community Resources](#) page. Resources vary to include Health Care, Child Care, Clothing, Food, Housing, and more.

Bus Routes

For detailed information regarding bus routes in Kalamazoo please see the [KMetro](#) web page.

Tutoring

Have questions about homework or need help with a paper? The Learning Center offers a variety of services to assist in every student's success. Appointments can be on a drop-in basis or by appointment. For more info visit the [Learning Center](#).

Academic Advising and Counseling

KALAMAZOO VALLEY provides students with academic advising designed to support the entire student experience and offer guidance throughout their academic career. To learn more about our academic advisors and counselors, or to make an appointment, visit the academic counseling webpage.

Banking

Opening a checking account is recommended in the US, avoiding foreign transaction fees and enabling you to withdraw cash. Below are a few banks preferred by students, however there are many others in the area: PNC Bank & Chase Bank

Phone

The most convenient and inexpensive cell phone plan options are prepaid. Here are some popular choices:

- AT&T
- T-Mobile
- Total Wireless (Verizon network)
- Mint Mobile

Campus Contacts

We are here to support you! Please review the [Student Services Contact](#) list and reach out if you need assistance.

Thank you for choosing Kalamazoo Valley Community College!

Kalamazoo VALLEY is as unique as you are. That is why we are glad you found us. Our programs are designed to help ensure your success and build your future. Our instructors challenge, inspire, and equip—a truly unique educational experience. It's your education, it's all about you. We are committed to enriching the lives of our students and communities through quality educational programs and services.

