

External Education (MC 140)
School of Continuing Studies
1333 South Halsted Street, Suite 205
Chicago, Illinois 60607

April 28, 2009

Dear Participant:

As the Program Director for your Study of the United States Institute for Secondary Educators (SUSI), I am eagerly looking forward to your arrival at the University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC). Our goal is to provide you with an intellectually exciting curriculum devoted to the history, culture, arts and politics of the United States. You'll be reading original works of literature, law, politics and the arts, studying works of visual art and music; you'll also examine some of the theoretical and analytical texts that provide ways to "unpack," understand and teach these artifacts of American culture. In addition, you will obtain tools that you and your colleagues in your home country can use in curricular development and planning as well as in the daily teaching of language, literature, the arts, history and society.

This letter is a preliminary introduction to the more pragmatic aspects of the Institute - things you will need to know to pack and more generally prepare for your sojourn here. Before we address these, however, let me urge each of you bring not just ideas and ideals, but practical tools you have used in your teaching of the subject areas of this Institute, tools that might be shared with your fellow participants. These might include a reading and your strategies for drawing your students into that reading, or perhaps a project or problem you have used or encountered. We will be setting aside time for you to talk among yourselves about your own experiences generally and to present your ideas and strategies. We've found that you, together, hold a vast fund of knowledge to share.

In addition, I would like you to spend some time thinking about the ways American culture presents itself - or is represented - in your home country. What are the principal products, artifacts and works of culture (and of "culture" - that is, including movies, television shows, advertisements on buses, articles of clothing, etc.) that represent the image the United States has acquired in your country? If you are currently teaching, we suggest that you might ask your students these questions, for they are, ultimately, the ones to whom your work and ours will be directed. We have found in past Institutes that students all over the world have an image of America which you and we will have to: include, contend with and enrich if our work is to be successful. We will set aside a specific classroom period to discuss and analyze these ideas, and to consider their implications for teaching the United States as a subject.

Finally, I'd like you (and your students, if it's appropriate) to think over the distinction between the image of the United States as an international power and its place as a culture. How have these two intersected and diverged? We expect frank and often widely divergent opinions to be expressed in our seminars, and the highly charged global environment must necessarily be part of our subject matter in this of all years.

Based on our past summer sessions, I think you will find the Institute an exhilarating experience. You will be in contact with each other – truly, we constitute a miniature global society during the six weeks – and you'll meet an equally wide variety of Americans, both here in Chicago and across the nation. Coursework and readings can be heavy, but the classroom time is broken up to keep things lively, pedagogy is stressed, and the field work encourages you to apply what you've read and discussed.

In the coming weeks, we ask that you check your e-mail frequently as we will be sending you important information. Also, we strongly encourage all participants to visit our Web site at <http://www.uic.edu/depts/oeo/susi/>. There, you will find important information about the Institute including a description of the seminar, faculty and staff biographies, a preliminary calendar and itinerary, tour lodging information, and several required readings for the Institute – some of which you may be able to download and read prior to your arrival. The tour information has been included so you may leave itinerary details with your families and/or friends.

You should have already received a questionnaire sent to you by e-mail. If you have not yet done so, please complete it and e-mail Anna Pasillas at exedem@uic.edu or fax to (312) 413-9730 as soon as possible. If you don't have access to computers, networks and all the mixed blessings of hypermodernity, fear not! We will send materials to the American consulate with which you are most closely associated, and they'll send it on to you. Other materials may come by regular post or by express. We'll be doing our best to get in touch and to get the materials to you.

Entering and Leaving the United States

Because of increased security concerns, entering and leaving the United States has become more unpredictable and more complicated. Please keep certain factors in mind:

- Bring this letter and the correspondence with the consulate that announced your appointment to the Institute on the plane where you can easily find it. These documents should speed your arrival and keep Customs delays to a minimum.
- Carry with you any medications you will need for the first few days, in case luggage is misplaced or misdirected. (As all international travelers know, this unfortunately happens from time to time. Be prepared!)
- If you are pulled aside for one of the random (and time-consuming) entrance interviews, do not worry. We will have someone waiting for you, even if you are sitting (and probably dozing exhaustedly after your trip) in an uncomfortable chair. We'll have a human being with a car and some reassuring words waiting for you to come out the double-doors.
- Should you be delayed, if possible, see if you can call us on one of our cell phones:
 - Janette Salamanca's cell phone number, your first choice, is (708) 703-0374
 - Neil McCarthy's is (312) 636-3462;
 - Professor Arnesen's cell phone number is (773) 504-9162.

The Institute also has a phone number where you can leave a message: (312) 355-0423.

If you get paperwork from your Customs entry, please let us know so we can deal with whatever requirements might be included and minimize your inconvenience later in the Institute or as you are returning home.

Visa Information

You will be entering the United States on an exchange visitor visa, known as a J-1. U.S. immigration regulations permit a J-1 visa holder a 30-day grace period following the successful completion of the Institute and begins the day following its end date. You must depart the U.S. no later than thirty days following the conclusion of the Institute. If you plan to stay beyond the Institute's dates, you will be on your own; it is advised that you plan to depart from the U.S. about 2 days before your 30-day grace period expires in the event that your flight is delayed due to weather or other airport problems. The dates of your official program are shown in section three of your Form DS-2019. You must present your DS-2019 along with your passport to U.S. immigration officials in order to enter the United States, so be sure to bring it on the plane with you, along with the letters we've sent and the material you received from the U.S. consulate in your home country.

Weather

Chicago summer weather is continental, meaning that the days tend to be warm (an average high of 30 degrees Celsius) and humid. On any given day, the temperature could rise or fall dramatically, especially with one of our trademark thunderstorms, complete with lightning, thunder, rain, and on rare occasions sometimes even hail! To make matters even more complicated, the air conditioning in the U.S. is routinely near polar - around 19.5 degrees Celsius! The climate on the tour will be unpredictable. Be prepared for chilly evenings (5-10 degrees Celsius) in the southwest, weather similar to Chicago in the northeast and extremely hot temperatures during the days in the Washington, D.C. and Virginia portions of the tour (the temperature and humidity will be consistently high).

Dress

Dress on campus is usually quite casual, so you are free to be comfortable (shorts are acceptable). You will want a sweater or some warmer clothes for air-conditioned rooms (your accommodations and classrooms are air-conditioned, though we can't promise that they will always be temperate!). A rain jacket or small umbrella will be useful, as we average about 10 centimeters of rain each July. You will probably want to bring some "business" or "party" attire for a few special occasions. Because you will walk a great deal, be certain to bring at least one good pair of comfortable walking shoes.

Packing - Please Pack Lightly!

This cannot be emphasized enough. We will be traveling some 6,400 km, by airplane and coach bus, and staying in various hotels during the tour. The fewer items you bring, the easier you will find the trip. Keep in mind that during the tour we will be traveling within the United States by airplane. Every airline enforces strict luggage regulations, which may have changed since the last time you traveled. It will be very important for you to check with your airline(s) prior to departure to get information on restrictions. In general, for your international flight, you may only be allowed two checked bags, each with a total dimension (length + width + height) of no more than 157 cm and a weight not to exceed 32 kgs. If flying on American Airlines the weight limit is dependent on where you are traveling from. In addition, you may carry one bag ("carry on") with you aboard the airplane with a total dimension of no more than 114 cm and a weight not to exceed 18 kgs. Should you exceed these limits, your luggage will remain behind. Double-check the airline's luggage restrictions before your departure. Laundry facilities will be available at a small cost during your stay in Chicago.

You will be allowed to ship, at the Institute's expense, educational books and materials to your home before departing on tour. You will be limited to one box measuring approximately 30.5 cubic cm. and can only contain educational materials.

Tracking of the shipment as well as the shipment of additional boxes will be available at your expense.

Remember that you alone will be responsible for carrying all of your luggage on the tour and to and from all airports. There are no porters or assistants. Please do not bring valuables. They will be especially difficult to deal with on the tour.

Other Suggestions

Please take note of the following as you pack for your trip:

- Pack a small bag or "carry on" to be kept with you through your travels containing any essential items such as a change of clothing, toothbrush and anything else you may need to carry you through a day or two in case your luggage is delayed en route – trust us, this has come in handy! Remember this bag should neither be more than 114 cm nor exceed 18 kgs.
- Bring any prescription medication that you will need for the duration of your stay in the United States. Do not be stingy with your medications; many prescriptions that are familiar to you are not available here in the U.S. or can only be obtained at great expense. Remember that any medication should be kept in its original container clearly stating what it is. It may also be helpful to obtain a note, if possible, from your doctor or pharmacist in your home country stating what the medication is for. Pack your medication in your "carry on" bag.
- Bring an extra pair of prescription glasses or contacts just in case the ones you have get lost or broken. Replacing them here could be expensive.
- When you check your luggage at the airport in your home country, please make sure that it is checked all the way through to O'Hare International Airport in Chicago (the listing is ORD), your final destination. Be sure to keep all baggage claim checks so we can trace your luggage more quickly should it get lost.

Finances

Your housing and most fixed travel costs are paid for directly through the U.S. government. Housing, your travel costs on the tour, some group meals and the like, are already arranged. Your daily meals, your incidental expenses (from shampoo to public transportation to admissions to blues clubs and museums) will come out of your stipend, a fund of money that will be given to you to spend at your own discretion. Remember that you will be responsible for managing your accounts. Some money for group activities will be withheld from your stipend (a few group meals and some group travel), and on the tour we will be collecting funds from each of you for group meals. In either case, the amount collected will not be substantial.

Since you will be arriving at the end of the week on Friday, June 12, university offices will not be able to begin disbursing your stipend until the following week. Consequently, please bring enough U.S. currency with you to cover your expenses while you are waiting for your stipend. Approximately 200 USD should be sufficient.

As a security measure, it's a good idea to purchase travelers checks in 100 and 200 USD denominations. Certain expenses such as housing, tour travel, working meals and required books will be paid for by the Institute. However, local travel, most meals and incidentals are to be paid from your stipend, and it has been our experience that the funds provided by the U.S. Department of State, while ample, are not unrealistic – expect to spend most or all of the stipend, and budget accordingly. We will provide you with a complete financial summary at the Orientation Breakfast meeting on Saturday, June 13.

Miscellaneous

We encourage you to bring cameras to help you record your experiences here. In the U.S., a 36-exposure roll of color film for prints costs approximately 5 USD and about 9 USD to develop. It takes one or two days for print processing and a bit longer for slides. Digital cameras are commonplace here in the States, and you can use the University's computers to download and even send back your digital files; or, if you prefer to develop your digital prints, the cost is about 19 cents USD per print, when you develop more than 30 prints. Video cameras are wonderful additions, but remember that your system may be different from that found in the U.S. CDs can also be "burned" on the university's computers. Once you have your official UIC university access codes, you'll be able to use the University's computers at nearly any hour of the day or night.

As you look over the program itinerary, please note that event dates and times are tentative and are subject to change. A final itinerary will be distributed upon your arrival in Chicago.

In conclusion, I want to tell you how pleased I am to have you as our guest this summer. If you need to reach us before your arrival, we may be reached at the Institute office at (312) 355-0423 during normal business hours (9 a.m. – 5 p.m. U.S. Central Time). After hours and on weekends, you may reach me at home, (773) 274-0349 or on my cell phone, (773) 504-9162. The office fax number is (312) 413-9730. Please keep this letter with you so that you will have our contact information handy.

See you in June!

Sincerely,
Eric Arnesen
Professor, Department of History
Director, Study of the U.S. Institute for Secondary Educators
University of Illinois at Chicago