

BENNINGTON COLLEGE

**International Student
Handbook**

2012-2013



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Hello and Welcome to Bennington!

Eva Chatterjee-Sutton
Dean of Students
Interim International Student Advisor

August 2012

Dear International Students,

Congratulations - - you have arrived! I am so excited to welcome each of you to Bennington College. This is a special place, and you and I will discover it together over the next four years. The pre-orientation program for international students is just the beginning of your transition into life as a member of the Bennington community. Over the next few days, you'll meet faculty, staff, and fellow students, learn a lot of information, and have some fun, too.

As your International Student Advisor (ISA), I'm available to you on a regular basis during your stay at Bennington. My responsibilities include providing information and assistance to you in dealing with federal and state regulations (e.g., immigration, visa, tax), as well as supporting you academically, culturally, and personally. Please feel free to stop by my office and say hello anytime, or to ensure that I'm available, you can also contact me in advance to set up a meeting. Within the next few weeks, I'll be contacting you to set up a time for us to chat about any concerns you have and to get to know each other better.

This booklet is designed as a resource to aid in your transition to the College. You will find important information about your Visa, as well as tips on acclimating yourself to the area. Please review all the information and do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

I look forward to working with you throughout your time at Bennington! Again, welcome, and best of luck to you in the new term!

Warm regards,

Eva Chatterjee-Sutton
Dean of Students
Office of Student Life
Office hours:
Monday – Wednesday, 9:00am – 7:00pm
Thursday – Friday: 9:00 am – 5:00 pm
Barn 113

Your F-1 Visa

An F-1 student is a nonimmigrant who is pursuing a full course of study toward a specific educational or professional objective at an academic institution in the U.S. Once the educational objective has been obtained, the F-1 student is expected by the U.S. government to return to his or her residence abroad.

Essential Immigration Documents

Passport: Your international identification document issued by your country of citizenship.

Visa: You have been issued an F-1 visa. F-1 is a temporary visa for the purpose of full-time study to persons who have a permanent residence in a foreign country. Your visa is currently in your passport.

I-20 form: The I-20 is the document issued to you by Bennington College inviting and identifying you as an F-1 student at our institution. The I-20 is the document on which the International Student Advisor notates your authorization to travel and any types of special work authorization.

I-94 Card: The I-94 is a white card issued to you on the plane. The I.N.S. Inspecting Officer will have taken the Arrival Record at the port of entry and stapled the Departure Record into your passport. Your first I-94 number is considered to be your "Admissions Number" and should be re-copied onto all subsequent I-94 cards you receive.

Maintaining Your F-1 Status

Each student has a number of responsibilities to maintain his/her F-1 status, which are detailed below.

The main point to remember is that if you are doing anything other than making full-time progress toward your degree and doing any work other than on-campus work, you should have seen the International Student Advisor for information about how to stay in lawful status.

Think of your F-1 status as a precious thing. Bennington College will advise you on how to maintain it, but ultimately it is your responsibility to make the choices that do not violate it.

Responsibilities of the Student

1. Have a passport that is valid for at least 6 months into the future.
2. Pursue a full course of study at the school listed on the currently valid Form I-20 during every academic session or semester except during official school breaks, or unless approved under a specific exception, in advance, by the International Student Advisor.
3. Follow proper I.N.S. procedures if the student must remain in the U.S. longer than the length of time estimated for completion of his or her educational program, as stated on Form I-20.
4. Follow proper I.N.S. procedures to continue from one educational level to another (i.e. bachelor's to master's level).
5. Follow proper I.N.S. procedures to transfer to a school other than the one originally authorized to attend.
6. Limit employment, both on and off campus, to a total of 20 hours per week while school is in session. Full-time employment during school breaks should be limited to no more than 40 hours per week.
7. Refrain from off-campus employment without authorization.
8. Abide by rules requiring disclosure of information and prohibition on criminal activity. Students are required to disclose fully and truthfully all information requested by I.N.S. Students are also required to obey all federal and state laws that prohibit the commission of crime of violence or any type of drug-related offenses.

Exceptions to the Full-course of Study Requirement

There are a small number of exceptions to the full course of study requirement.

1. Annual vacation. At Bennington College, the annual school vacation is the summer break, June through the beginning of September.
2. Illness or Medical Conditions. A student who is compelled by illness or other medical conditions to interrupt or reduce a full course of study is considered to be in-status during the illness or other medical condition. The student must resume a full course of study upon recovery. (8 CFR 214.2(f)(5)(iv))
3. Valid Academic Reasons. "Academic Difficulties" exceptions to the full course of study consist of:
 - Initial difficulties with the English language.
 - Initial difficulties with reading requirements.
 - Unfamiliarity with American teaching methods.
 - Improper course level placement.
4. Completing program during the current term.
5. Engaging in Practical Training.
6. Withdrawal of School Approval.

Visits Abroad and Re-Entry

If you go home, check to make sure that your I-20 is endorsed for travel. Check the back of your I-20 and be sure that it has been signed within 12 months of your re-entry into the U.S. In other words, if you are re-entering on September 2 2010, your I-20 needs to have been signed by the International Student Advisor, on or after September 3, 2009. If you are unsure, get a signature before you leave for the summer.

Students may return home or travel abroad on school breaks. However, students who interrupt their full course of study for 5 months or more effectively end the term of their F-1 visa. This means that the College must issue a new I-20 to students who have been abroad for more than 5 months and the student starts a new F-1 visa term. All “clocks” are reset; meaning that the student must regain an additional 9 months of status to be eligible for off-campus employment. This can significantly affect your upcoming FWT, summer, and even post-graduation plans.

If you are **considering taking a term off or studying abroad**, please consult the International Student Advisor to discuss the implications on your visa status.

The I.N.S. regulations are very unforgiving about taking breaks from Bennington, even if they are for legitimate study abroad programs.

What to do if you are Out-of-Status

There are several ways to fall out of status. The most common ways are:

- I-20 is not endorsed and up to date.
- Working more than 20 hours per week when classes are in session.
- Taking a leave of absence without authorization.
- Academic Probation for more than one academic term.
- Being involved in a crime or illegal activity in the U.S.
- Working off-campus without authorization.

If You Are Out Of Status...

1. See your International Student Advisor immediately.
2. Apply for “Reinstatement.” Your International Student Advisor can assist you with the application process. Submit the following items to the District INS Office:
 - Complete form I-539
 - Application fee
 - Submit new updated form I-20
 - Submit financial support documents and letter of explanation.

What if your Visa expires?

Your F-1 visa is essentially your permission to present yourself at a U.S. port of entry. If your visa expires while you are at Bennington College and you are in lawful status, you are legally present in the U.S.

However, the next time you re-enter the U.S., you will have to have a new visa in your passport. This means that when you go home, you will need to apply for a new visa at the U.S. Consulate. If you travel abroad with an expired visa, you may need to apply for a new visa at the U.S. Consulate in that country. Please consult with the International Student Advisor about third country travel if your visa is expired.

On-Campus Work

A student with an F-1 visa may work on-campus while classes are in session, during the Field Work Term, or during the annual summer vacation.

On-campus work is a basic privilege with the F-1 visa; no special paperwork is required. However, the College can not pay you unless you have received a Social Security number. You can obtain your Social Security number in early September; Student Life organizes an annual visit to the Social Security Office in North Adams, MA.

Students may work on-campus while classes are in session up to 20 hours per week. Students may work full-time (defined as up to 40 hours per week) during the Field Work Term or the annual summer vacation. Working more than 20 hours a week during term or 40 hours per week during vacation is a violation of your F-1 status.

Seeking On-Campus Employment

During the next two weeks, first-year students who wish to work on-campus should do the following:

1. Consult the WorkLink on the Bennington website – the exact address is in your orientation packet. You are eligible to apply for any job that is “regular” pay. You can not apply for jobs which are labeled “FWS” or federal work-study. Federal work-study is a type of financial aid from the U.S. government; only U.S. students are eligible.
2. Visit the FWT office and check the bulletin boards outside of the FWT office to see if more jobs become available.
3. Talk with returning students about on-campus jobs.
4. Decide how many hours per week you can work without it affecting your studies.
5. Drop by or make an appointment with the person who hires students in administrative offices on campus.

6. Apply to several different jobs on campus because you may not get your first choice. It is appropriate to contact the employer two to three days after you fill out an application to follow up.

Once you are hired for on-campus work, you must go to the Field Work Term/Career Development Office. You will need to fill out some forms in order to receive a paycheck. You will need to bring the following documents with you to the Business Office:

- Passport
- I-20
- Social Security number

Off-Campus Work

There are only three types of off-campus work authorization available to F-1 students. All of them require 9 months of lawful status before a student may apply. Even once the 9 month requirement is met, there are very specific criteria for each of these work authorizations.

Off-campus work without authorization is a serious violation of your F-1 status. Unauthorized work is a transgression that INS is very serious about; it is nearly impossible to achieve a re-instatement to F-1 status or to transfer to a new type of visa with a history of unauthorized work.

Curricular Practical Training

The I.N.S. defines Curricular Practical Training as employment which is an integral or important part of your Curriculum, or is a requirement for your major or degree.

Using Curricular Practical Training during FWT

The Field Work Term is an excellent example of a program that is an integral part of Bennington's curriculum. If your FWT job or internship is in your field of study, CPT is easily authorized. You will need to see the International Student Advisor to fill out an I-538 form and have your I-20 endorsed for CPT.

Using Curricular Practical Training during the summer

The Field Work Term is an integral part of a Bennington education. Hence, CPT is easily authorized for FWT. However, summer use of CPT must meet a fairly strict set of requirements, as listed in the guidelines for Curricular Practical Training. The burden of meeting these guidelines and obtaining the proper authorization is on each individual student for each summer.

You must apply for Curricular Practical Training to the International Student Advisor with a letter from your faculty advisor or faculty sponsor, and an employment offer letter from your summer employer. The letter from your faculty sponsor must explain how your CPT job or internship is integral to the Plan you have filed in the Dean's Office. The letter from your

employer must state the name of the employer, location of the work, a job description, and the dates of employment. These letters are due in the Office of Student Life at least 4 weeks prior to the beginning of employment.

Optional Practical Training

OPT is a 12 month period of work in a student's field of study that is allotted along with an F-1 visa. The aim is to allow students to work in their field of study during or after they get their degree. OPT is optional, you don't have to use it.

There are 4 times that INS considers it appropriate to use OPT:

1. Full time after graduation.
2. Full time during breaks.
3. Part time during studies.
4. During thesis writing for graduate students.

Most students choose to save their OPT allowance so they may work in the U.S. for 12 months after graduation. The International Student Advisor will help you apply for OPT in the months before graduation. A guide to common questions about OPT is attached.

Employment Based on Severe Economic Hardship

Students facing financial difficulties due to unforeseen circumstances beyond their control may be eligible for off-campus work authorization based on severe economic hardship. INS requires that the students have been in lawful status for at least 9 months and that they may have made a "good faith" effort to locate on-campus employment before applying to INS for employment based on economic hardship. Oddly enough, it costs \$120 dollars to apply for this type of employment authorization.

Students should discuss their economic hardship with the International Student Advisor before applying. Unless a student has very specific high paying skills, student often earn the same amount of money working off-campus as on-campus. It is very difficult to prove a case of "severe economic hardship" to the INS.

Students who do receive authorization to work off-campus due to severe economic hardship may work full-time and it will not be deducted from their 12 months of optional practical training.

The Field Work Term

All Bennington students are required to do a Field Work Term (FWT) each year. The FWT is a 7-week period (early January through late February) in which students gain practical experience related to their field of study. The FWT Handbook is on the Bennington College website and can answer most general questions. You may schedule an appointment or take advantage of walk-in hours (no appointment required) for assistance and additional information.

International students may do their FWT in the United States, at home, or abroad in a third country (depending on visa requirements). Since first-year, international students are not eligible for any type of off-campus work authorization, the only paid work available in the U.S. during the first FWT is on-campus employment. Please note that employment opportunities are very limited and generally do not meet the requirements for a FWT position.

It is a good idea to begin thinking about your plans for the FWT early, especially if you wish to return home or travel to another country. Do not wait until the last minute to decide to return home because International flights may be hard to book and visa requirements for other countries may be challenging to meet.

Income Tax

Most international students on F-1 visas who work on-campus are required to pay taxes to the State of Vermont and to the U.S. government. Taxes will be withheld from your Bennington College paychecks. In January, the payroll office will send you your W-2 (Wage and Tax Statement) and 1042-S (Report of Scholarship; this only goes to students with taxable grant aid). Students will be required to file income tax forms by April 15th and some students, as a result, will receive a tax refund from the U.S. government for the taxes they have overpaid. Other student may have to pay taxes if their total income is higher than the withholding limit.

Even if you will not be working in the U.S., you will still have to file a tax return at the end of the fiscal year, in April. When you receive your tax forms (W-2, 1042-S, etc.), **DO NOT THROW THEM AWAY** as they are necessary for filing your return!

In late February or early March, Student Life will coordinate tax workshops for International Students. There is a minimal fee (typically \$10-15) for students.

Banking

Once you arrive on campus, you will want to open a bank account at a local bank. You will need to bring your student identification, passport, and the funds you wish to deposit.

A checking account will permit you to write checks to make purchases and

pay bills. Most retailers and service providers will accept a personal check drawn on any U.S. bank (it need not be a local bank) as long as you can show appropriate identification (passport, student identification card, or driver's license). At most banks you need not keep a substantial sum (or "balance") in the account—just enough to cover your checks and any fees the bank charges to maintain the account. Finally, checking accounts have the advantage of providing you with immediate access to your funds. You may cash personal checks up to \$200 at the Business Office.

A debit card, also know as a checking card, allows you to withdraw or deposit money to your bank account using an automatic teller machine (ATM) and to make purchases at stores that accept the card. Some debit cards carry a credit-card logo (such as MasterCard or Visa), and can be used in place of a check or credit card. Debit cards are not credit cards, however, and they can be used only to the extent that you have funds in the account to which they are linked. Some ATMs charge a fee to withdraw funds; typically these fees range from \$2-4.

Chittenden Bank
401 Main Street, 442-6396
101 Kocher Drive, 447-7522

Merchants Bank
5 Bank Street, North Bennington, 447-7545
406 Main Street, 442-8321

TD Bank
500 Main Street, 447-7533

Credit Cards

Credit cards will allow you to make purchases even when you have no money immediately available. Banks and other financial institutions, department stores, and gasoline companies all issue credit cards that can be used to buy goods. You are billed every month and are required to pay at least a portion of your balance each month. If you do not pay the entire amount due, interest (or a "finance charge") accrues on the unpaid balance. The interest rate can be quite high, particularly if you have not yet established your "credit worthiness." The cost of credit cards varies greatly. The annual fees and interest rates charged by some financial institutions are much higher than others. Once you establish a "credit history," or if you have significant assets, you should be able to obtain a card with a lower interest rate and little or no annual fee.

Credit cards are convenient, but unless you are careful you may be shocked when you get your monthly bill. Keep all your receipts to keep track of what you spend.

Driver's License/Identification Card

As an international student, you have at least two forms of picture identification – your passport and your Bennington student I.D. card. Some students also choose to get a Vermont I.D. card or a VT driver's license. These two, which look identical except for the title, are the standard forms of identification here and are often required when making financial

transactions, especially when writing checks, and at some other times, such as when an age check is necessary (i.e. purchase of cigarettes and alcohol, restricted movies at the cinema). Every Vermont resident who operates any motor vehicle (car, truck, motorcycle) must have a driver's license. The operation of an automobile without a valid operator's license is illegal, punishable by fine and sometimes by jail sentence. Operator's licenses may be obtained by passing an examination on Vermont driving laws and a driving test on the road.

Telephones/Mobile Phones

Each student residing on campus is provided the option for a direct telephone line and telephone, free local and campus dialing, a voicemail account, and long-distance access. The cost for this service is \$50 per term and is included on the tuition statement. The College provides international, interstate, and intrastate dialing at competitive rates. There are no additional fees or per-call surcharges. There is a phone request form available on The College website. For help with phone questions please contact the IT department at helpdesk@bennington.edu or call extension 4476.

Even though your room will have a campus phone, you may want to purchase a personal mobile phone. There are several cell phone providers in the Bennington area, including Sprint, Verizon, and AT&T. There is a T-Mobile store in Albany. All of these stores offer 1 year contracts, or "Pay as you go," phones.

Sprint

341 Main St
Bennington, VT 05201-2112
(802) 440-8174

Verizon Wireless

359 Main Street
Bennington, VT 05201
(802) 440-9990

AT&T

135 Hannaford Sq
Bennington, VT 05201
(802) 442-6091

Getting around Bennington

Bennington College has contracted with Green Mountain Express to provide free shuttle service for students to nearby destinations. The shuttle schedule can be found on their web site: <http://www.greenmtncn.org/>, in student houses, or in the Office of Student Life.

****Refer to your New Student Orientation packet for Bennington "Hot Spots!" including shopping areas and restaurants.**

Healthcare

Making an Appointment:

For any kind of health-related advice, you can simply walk in. Usually, you will see one of the nurses who will either address the issue if it is within their skill set, or arrange for you to see Dr.

Randy Anselmo based on the urgency. If you are certain that you need to see Dr. Anselmo before an initial assessment then call ahead or stop by the office and make an appointment.

Parameters of On-Campus Health Services:

A Health Services staff member may prescribe medications, which can either be dispensed to you at Health Services, or sent electronically to local pharmacies for medications not already on hand. For services that Health Services staff is unable to completely on campus (laboratory tests, certain therapies, surgical procedures, etc.) they can typically provide a referral. Generally, insurance coverage through Bollinger (which all students have as a result of paying the "health services fee" portion of tuition) covers the cost of seeing us and doing minor laboratory tests in the office without needing to do any paperwork on your part.

The Bollinger insurance policy is a year-round plan that covers you anywhere in the world. If you need to seek care while away from the College during summer, FWT, or whenever, be sure to take a claim form with you or download a copy from the web and fill it out. Bollinger just needs to receive claim forms within 90 days of the service, and you can either send it directly to them, or to Health Services.

Coverage of Off-Campus Services:

For most services off campus to be covered, the only paperwork is a blue claim form which is available in the Health Services office. The Administrative Assistant can help students with all issues of insurance coverage. She can help to expedite insurance processes. All students also receive a copy of the insurance policy, which gives details on the limits of coverage. There are extra copies in the Health Services Office

Medications/Prescriptions:

If medications are dispensed, the cost can be paid for with your Bennington Card declining balance. For prescription medications you fill out a blue claim form and receive reimbursement for up to \$75 per illness, per year. If it's an over-the-counter medicine, there is no reimbursement. All medicines stocked in Health Services are priced near wholesale cost, so if you are paying cash, it is almost always cheaper to purchase them with Health Services. We always try to let students know if they can get their medications cheaper elsewhere.

Visit the Health Services section of the Bennington web site for more information.

Adjusting to U.S. Culture

Culture Shock

Culture shock is a psychological disorientation due to being in a new culture.

Broadly speaking, culture shock comes from:

- living and/or studying (or working) for an extended period of time in a different environment

- having values you held absolute brought into question because of cultural differences
- being constantly put into situations where you are expected to function with maximum proficiency but where the rules have not been adequately explained

As the above suggests, culture shock does not result from a specific event. Rather, it builds up slowly from a series of small events often difficult to identify. Remember that the reactions are emotional and not easily subject to rational management.

The four stages of culture shock are:

- Initial euphoria
- Irritability and hostility
- Gradual adjustment
- Adaptation of biculturalism

A person with culture shock may experience some of these symptoms:

- homesickness
- boredom
- withdrawal (i.e., spending excessive amounts of time reading; avoiding contact with host nationals)
- need for excessive amount of sleep
- compulsive eating and/or drinking
- stereotyping of and hostility toward host nationals
- loss of ability to work effectively
- physical ailments (psychosomatic illnesses)

Although uncomfortable, it is a normal part of the adjustment process, and you need not be ashamed of it.

If homesickness or cultural adjustment is troubling you it may be helpful to speak to older international students, the International Student Advisor, or someone at Psychological Services. In the United States, many people consult psychological counselors when they have troubles. Counselors not only help people with serious problems; they help people make changes and adjustments in their lives. The most common reasons that people see counselors in this culture are anxiety (nervousness) or depression (intense sadness).

Holidays Celebrated in the United States

The following are American federal holidays and other common national observances. The information below was found at www.usa.gov.

New Year's Day is January 1. The celebration of this federal holiday begins the night before (New Year's Eve), when Americans gather to wish each other a happy and prosperous coming year. Many Americans make New Year's resolutions.

Martin Luther King Day is a federal holiday celebrated on the third Monday in January. The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. was an African-American clergyman who is recognized for his efforts to win civil rights for all people through nonviolent means.

Groundhog Day is February 2, and has been celebrated since 1887. On Groundhog Day, crowds gather in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania, to see if groundhog Punxsutawney Phil sees his shadow after emerging from his burrow, thus predicting six more weeks of winter weather.

Valentine's Day is celebrated on February 14. The day was named after an early Christian martyr, and on Valentine's Day, Americans give presents like candy or flowers to the ones they love. The first mass-produced valentine cards were sold in the 1840s.

Washington's Birthday is a federal holiday observed the third Monday of February to honor George Washington, the first President of the United States. This date is commonly called Presidents' Day and many groups honor the legacy of past presidents on this date.

Easter falls on a spring Sunday that varies from year to year. Easter is a Christian holiday celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For Christians, Easter is a day of religious services and the gathering of family. Many Americans follow old traditions of coloring hard-boiled eggs and giving children baskets of candy.

Earth Day is observed on April 22. First celebrated in 1970 in the United States, it inspired national legislation such as the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts. Earth Day is designed to promote ecology, encourage respect for life on earth, and highlight concern over pollution of the soil, air, and water.

National Arbor Day was proclaimed as the last Friday in April by President Richard Nixon in 1970. A number of state Arbor Days are observed at other times to coincide with the best tree planting weather, from January and February in the south to May in the far north. The observance began in 1872, when Nebraska settlers and homesteaders were urged to plant trees on the largely treeless plains.

Mother's Day celebrates mothers every second Sunday of May. President Woodrow Wilson, who issued a proclamation in 1914, asked Americans to give a public expression of reverence to mothers on this day. Carnations have come to represent Mother's Day, following President William McKinley's habit of always wearing a white carnation, his mother's favorite flower.

Memorial Day is a federal holiday observed the last Monday of May. It originally honored the people killed in the American Civil War, but has become a day on which the American dead of

all wars, and the dead generally, are remembered in special programs held in cemeteries, churches, and other public meeting places. The flying of the American flag is widespread.

Flag Day, celebrated June 14, has been a presidentially proclaimed observance since 1916. Although Flag Day is not a federal holiday, Americans are encouraged to display the flag outside their homes and businesses on this day to honor the history and heritage the American flag represents.

Father's Day celebrates fathers every third Sunday of June. Father's Day began in 1909 in Spokane, Washington, when a daughter requested a special day to honor her father, a Civil War veteran who raised his children after his wife died. The first presidential proclamation honoring fathers was issued in 1966 by President Lyndon Johnson.

Independence Day is July 4. This federal holiday honors the nation's birthday - the adoption of the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. It is a day of picnics and patriotic parades, a night of concerts and fireworks. The flying of the American flag is widespread.

Labor Day is the first Monday of September. This federal holiday honors the nation's working people, typically with parades. For most Americans it marks the end of the summer vacation season and the start of the school year.

Columbus Day is a federal holiday celebrated on the second Monday in October. The day commemorates October 12, 1492, when Italian navigator Christopher Columbus landed in the New World. The holiday was first proclaimed in 1937 by President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

Halloween is celebrated on October 31. On Halloween, American children dress up in funny or scary costumes and go "trick or treating" by knocking on doors in their neighborhood. The neighbors are expected to respond by giving them small gifts of candy or money.

Veterans Day is celebrated on November 11. Originally called Armistice Day, this federal holiday was established to honor Americans who had served in World War I, but it now honors veterans of all wars in which the U.S. has fought. Veterans' organizations hold parades, and the president places a wreath on the Tomb of the Unknowns at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

Thanksgiving Day is a federal holiday celebrated on the fourth Thursday in November. The holiday began in 1621, when Puritans, who had just enjoyed a bountiful harvest, showed their gratitude to the Native Americans for their help by hosting a feast to give thanks. The Thanksgiving feast became a national tradition and almost always includes some of the foods served at the first feast: roast turkey, cranberry sauce, potatoes, and pumpkin pie.

Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day is December 7. In 1994, Congress designated this national observance to honor the more than 2,400 military service personnel who died on this date in

1941, during the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, by Japanese forces. The attack on Pearl Harbor caused the United States to enter World War II.

Christmas Day is a federal holiday celebrated on December 25. Christmas is a Christian holiday marking the birth of the Christ Child. Decorating houses and yards with lights, putting up Christmas trees, giving gifts, and sending greeting cards have become traditions even for many non-Christian Americans.

On some federal holidays, government offices and services (like the post office and banks) are closed. Bennington College holds classes on some holidays; please consult the official college calendar on the Bennington College web site for more information.

Other Celebrations

In addition to the above national holidays, various ethnic and religious groups in America celebrate days with special meaning to them. Jewish high holidays, for example, are celebrated in September. Muslims celebrate Ramadan, African Americans celebrate Kwanzaa, Irish Americans celebrate the old country's patron saint, St. Patrick, and Mardi Gras is the day before the Christian season of Lent begins and is a big occasion in New Orleans, Louisiana. There are many other such religious and ethnic celebrations in the United States.

In Vermont

Town Meeting Day is the first Tuesday of March. Vermont citizens come together to discuss the business of their towns. Vermont law makes town meeting a holiday for government employee, and gives an employee the right to take unpaid leave from work to attend his or her annual meeting, subject to the essential operation of the business or government. Town meetings are open to those eligible to vote in the state of Vermont.

Bennington Battle Day commemorates the American victory at the Battle of Bennington in 1777 in New York. The holiday occurs on August 16 each year. In Bennington, there is a battle re-enactment put on by the local history foundation. Also, the town fires the oldest cannon in America, which is called the Molly Stark cannon, named after the commander John Stark's wife.