



**United Planet/
ICYE USA
National Profile
2010-2011**



Boston Skyline and Charles River

"Individually, we are one drop. Together, we are an ocean"
-Ryunosuke Satoro

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1. History of United Planet

Joint Cooperation

United Planet (UP) is the American and Canadian partner of the ICYE Federation, one of the longest running volunteer organizations in the world. As an international, Boston-based, non-profit organization dedicated to broadening mutual understanding, friendship, and peace among cultures, UP has partnered with ICYE to re-establish ICYE's program in the United States and Canada.

ICYE and UP have been teamed up since 2004 to bridge the gap between American and Canadian volunteers and the rest of the world. At the ICYE General Assembly in Taiwan in 2007, United Planet became an Associate Member of ICYE. As such, United Planet will both send and receive enthusiastic and committed exchangees within the ICYE Federation.

2. Who is United Planet?

What we do

As featured on CNN, United Planet provides a diverse and creative range of international, community-based, and online programs to achieve global understanding. Initiated in 2000, United Planet was officially founded as a 501(c)3 non-profit organization in the United States on September 19, 2001. United Planet has expanded its membership and volunteer base to encompass over 100 countries during the past 5 years. The response to the quality and diversity of UP's programs has been very favorable both in the US and abroad.

Where we are

United Planet is located in Boston, one of America's most historical and beautiful cities. With more universities and colleges than any other US city and a young international population, Boston is an ideal point of entry for exchangees into the United States. During orientation, exchangees will have an opportunity to explore and become immersed in this vibrant city.

Who we are

You will meet various members of the United Planet team while in the United States. United Planet's Board of Directors and Advisors play an active role in the organization, working closely with our staff and volunteer members to provide excellent services and generate new and exciting programs. The internationalism of the United Planet team reflects the mission of the organization. All UP team members are enthusiastic and passionate, and very excited to be working with you on this wonderful opportunity.

Cultural Exchange Options for Exchangees

In addition to your volunteer placement and the orientation camps, United Planet offers a range of programs designed to complement your ICYE exchangee experience. These programs, available to both volunteers and United Planet members, give exchangees an innovative opportunity to share their unique experiences with people at home and all over the world.

Here are some more details on how you can enjoy these programs during and after your ICYE experience:

UP Forum

Through the UP Forum, exchangees can meet and exchange experiences with people from over 150 countries through the online community. Exchangees can create a discussion log to update friends at home, as well as other United Planet members, about their exciting experiences in the US. The forum is located at:

www.unitedplanet.org/messageboard

Cultural Awareness Project (CAP)

The Cultural Awareness Project gives exchangees the opportunity to share their culture and information about their country with members of schools and local community centers during their stay in the United States. Exchangees are also encouraged to pass on their experiences when they return home. This is a highly interactive and fun way to share experiences, inspire global curiosity, and promote cultural awareness and friendship. One can simply register as a volunteer presenter in the CAP section on the homepage of United Planet at www.unitedplanet.org

For more information on these and other exciting UP programs please refer to our website at www.unitedplanet.org

3. Facts about the United States

Climate

Due to the size of the United States, it is not possible to define one climate for the entire country. In general we have four seasons: fall, winter, spring and summer. The length of these periods varies according to region. The US is mostly temperate, but tropical in Hawaii and Florida, arctic in Alaska, semiarid in the great plains west of the Mississippi River, and arid in the Great Basin of the southwest. Low winter temperatures in the northwest are ameliorated occasionally in January and February by warm winds from the eastern slopes of the Rocky Mountains. Situated in the northern hemisphere, the cooler months of the year are from November to March, while the warmer months last from April to October. We recommend you consult an online weather group such as www.weather.com or www.cnn.com for the most current and up to date weather alerts.

Geography and people

Location: North America, bordering both the North Atlantic Ocean and the North Pacific Ocean, between Canada and Mexico

Geographic coordinates: 38 00 N, 97 00 W

Map references: North America

Area: *total:* 9,629,091 sq km
land: 9,158,960 sq km
water: 470,131 sq km
note: includes only the 50 states and District of Columbia

Area - comparative: about one-half the size of Russia; about three-tenths the size of Africa; about one-half the size of South America (or slightly larger than Brazil); slightly larger than China; about two and one-half times the size of Western Europe

Land *total:* 12,248 km
Boundaries: *border countries:* Canada 8,893 km (including 2,477 km with Alaska), Cuba 29 km (US Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay), Mexico 3,326 km

note: Guantanamo Naval Base is leased by the US and thus remains part of Cuba

Coastline: 19,924 km

Terrain: vast central plain, mountains in west, hills and low mountains in east; rugged mountains and broad river valleys in Alaska; rugged, volcanic topography in Hawaii

Elevation extremes: *lowest point:* Death Valley -86 m
highest point: Mount McKinley 6,194 m

Natural resources: coal, copper, lead, molybdenum, phosphates, uranium, bauxite, gold, iron, mercury, nickel, potash, silver, tungsten, zinc, petroleum, natural gas, timber

Land use: *arable land:* 19%
permanent crops: 0%
permanent pastures: 25%
forests and woodland: 30%
other: 26% (1993 est.)

Natural hazards: tsunamis, volcanoes, and earthquake activity around Pacific Basin; hurricanes along the Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coasts; tornadoes in the Midwest and southeast; mud slides in California; forest fires in the west; flooding; permafrost in northern Alaska, a major impediment to development

Environment - current issues: air pollution resulting in acid rain in both the US and Canada; the US is the largest single emitter of carbon dioxide from the burning of fossil fuels; water pollution from runoff of pesticides and fertilizers; very limited natural fresh water resources in much of the western part of the country require careful management; desertification

Geography - note: world's third-largest country (after Russia and Canada)

Population: 307,212,123 (July 2009 est.)

Age structure: 0-14 years: 20.2% (male 31,639,127/female 30,305,704)
15-64 years: 67% (male 102,665,043/female 103,129,321)
65 years and over: 12.8% (male 16,901,232/female 22,571,696)
(2009 est.)

Nationality: *noun:* American(s)
adjective: American

Ethnic groups: white 79.96%, black 12.85%, Asian 4.43%, Amerindian and Alaska native 0.97%, native Hawaiian and other Pacific islander 0.18%, two or more races 1.61% (July 2007 estimate)
note: a separate listing for Hispanic is not included because the US Census Bureau considers Hispanic to mean persons of Spanish/Hispanic/Latino origin including those of Mexican, Cuban, Puerto Rican, Dominican Republic, Spanish, and Central or South American origin living in the US who may be of any race or ethnic

group (white, black, Asian, etc.); about 15.1% of the total US population is Hispanic

Religions: Protestant 51.3%, Roman Catholic 23.9%, Mormon 1.7%, other Christian 1.6%, Jewish 1.7%, Buddhist 0.7%, Muslim 0.6%, other or unspecified 2.5%, unaffiliated 12.1%, none 4% (2007 est.)

Languages: English, Spanish (spoken by a sizable minority)

Literacy: *definition:* age 15 and over can read and write
total population: 99%
male: 99%
female: 99% (2003 est.)

Social Features¹ **for more information on cultural differences we suggest visiting the following website: <http://www.edupass.org/culture/>

Culture

Personal Space

Acceptable personal space varies from culture to culture. You may find, while here in America, that social responses vary from your own home. In general, Americans require more “personal space” than many other cultures. Many times if you come too close to an American while in conversation, he or she will feel as if you are invading his or her space and will try to back away. Try to become aware of any reactions while talking to people and react accordingly. For instance, if while in conversation you find the other person leaning back or taking a step back, instead of closing that gap, let the other person set the personal space and talk from a further distance apart.

Also, Americans in general do not make a lot of physical contact when talking to strangers or casual acquaintances. Shake hands when you initially meet another person. Americans do not generally kiss or hug when greeting unless the two greeters are close friends.

Social Visits

Americans are typically very friendly and will often plan social visits for new acquaintances on short notice. Do not feel required to accept the invitation. If you are busy, politely decline and suggest another date and time to meet again.

¹ <http://www.edupass.org/culture/>

If a friend has invited you to “drop by anytime” to his or her home, office or school, always call ahead of time just to confirm. While there, try not to stay too long unless otherwise invited.

Invitations are normally done over the phone or in person unless they are to a “special” event. If you are invited to someone’s home for dinner it is polite to bring a small gift as a gesture of your appreciation (though not required). Gifts such as a bottle of wine, candy, flowers, or small house gift are all acceptable, but again not necessary. Many Americans will invite you into their home and ask you to “make yourself at home”. Many will give you a full tour of the house and will invite you to “help yourself” to whatever you want. In general Americans will extend open invitations to you as a guest, if you are unsure if something is appropriate just ask, Americans generally are very responsive and friendly when responding to questions.

We encourage all of our exchangeees to take advantage of the unique opportunity to talk, meet and interact with Americans in various social settings.

Dress

In comparison with many other countries of the world, the US culture regarding dress is very casual. Common attire for young adults will almost always include jeans, a cotton shirt, and sandals or sneakers. In the metropolitan areas, such as Chicago, New York, or Boston, fashion can be much more eclectic, international, and trendy. In turn, fashion tends toward the traditional in the more rural or suburban areas of the United States. However, the most important thing to remember is that the US is extremely multi-cultural, and it will be very easy to blend in and feel accepted into the culture and society.

Religion

The US is a secular state, which means that there is no official state religion. In addition, because the US is so multi-cultural, with large populations of immigrants from all over the world, it is also very pluralistic. However, it can be very surprising for visitors to learn how devotional the population of the US is in terms of religion. In many states, especially those of the south and mid-west, Christianity, and specifically Protestantism, can be a very important social influence in the small communities. In the metropolitan areas, religion will often become less of a social factor. In conclusion, if you have a religious affiliation, you will most likely be able to find a strong and vibrant community that shares your convictions, and if not, you will never feel isolated or uncomfortable. Remembering to be polite and non-judgmental is the most important thing you can do.

Economy

Prices in the United States are normally a lot higher in cities than in smaller towns, thus the great difference in price for the same product. Prices may also vary greatly from shop to shop, so it is worth looking around! Below is a list of typical items and their general costs to give a better idea of what exchangeees may spend while abroad:

<i>Item</i>	<i>Price</i>
U.S. Stamp within the 50 states	\$.47
Local bus/subway ticket	\$1.25-\$2.00
Newspaper	\$1.50
Shampoo	\$2.25
Soft Drinks	\$1.25
Hamburger	\$2.50-\$5.00
A cup of coffee	\$1.00-\$3.50
A beer in a pub	\$3.00-\$6.00
Cinema ticket	\$7.00-\$10.00
Film developing	\$7.00-\$12.00
Train journeys: Boston - New York (one way)	\$65.00
Bus journeys: Boston - New York	\$15.00
(one way) New York - Washington DC	\$37.00
Washington DC- Chicago	\$87.00
Hostel accommodation (with bed and breakfast)	\$25.00-\$65.00

Government

Government Type: Federal Republic

Administrative divisions: 50 states (Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming) and 1 district (District of Columbia, the capital of the United States of America)

Independence: July 4th, 1776 (July 4th is a national holiday)

Executive Branch: *Head of state and head of government-* President Barack Obama (since 20th of January 2009)

Cabinet- appointed by the president with Senate approval

Elections- President and Vice-President elected on same ticket by a college of representatives who are elected directly from each state.

Terms- President and Vice President serve four-year terms

Political Parties: Democratic Party and Republican Party are the main parties.

Language

English is the language spoken by the majority of Americans. Being fluent, or very close to fluent, in the English language is the most important thing you can do in order to feel integrated and accepted by the society. It will enable you to communicate and form personal relationships with those individuals at your placement, your fellow volunteers, and those people you meet going about your day-to-day activities. That being said, Americans will take great pleasure in helping you to perfect your English, especially when it comes to slang. If you hear someone speaking and use a word you don't know or understand, always ask to have it explained. The use of US slang will be covered during the orientation.

With the increased number of immigrants from Latin American countries, Spanish is spoken in many areas of the U.S. as well. The U.S. is a country of immigrants and in larger cities you will hear languages spoken from all over the world.

4. Profile of an exchangee

Who is eligible?

Age

Exchangees must be between the ages of 18 and 30. However, United Planet is willing to review applications from exchangees over 30.

What are the requirements?

Language

It is **very important** that before arriving to the United States you have a proficient level in English. Exchangees must be conversationally fluent in order to perform volunteer tasks. Exchangees must be comfortable in a working environment with other native English speakers.

Before acceptance, all exchangees are required to have a phone interview with a staff member at United Planet to confirm English proficiency.

Certificate of good conduct

All ICYE exchangees must be trustworthy, honest, and law-abiding in character. It is *essential* that you obtain a certificate from the police force in your country confirming that you have *no criminal record and that you have no previous criminal convictions*. All ICYE's projects insist on this certificate in order to ensure a safe environment for those with whom they work, many of them may be vulnerable or at risk. This certificate must be sent to UP *with your application form*.

Written references

We require two written references to submit to our volunteer projects. We ask that one reference be from your employer or teacher and another from someone who has known you for a long time. They should say a bit about your character, reliability, maturity, etc. These forms **MUST** be in English. We have included a reference form below for your convenience.

5. Program

Orientation

When you arrive in the US, you will begin with the Orientation together with the other exchangees from around the world. Depending on your language skills this program will vary from an intensive 3 to 5 days. You will attend language and cultural sessions and also enjoy a variety of excursions and social activities. All of these activities are designed to make you feel welcome, introduce American life and culture, and prepare you for life for the next six months or one year.

It is not only important that you learn about the USA, but it is also important to us that we learn about you and your country. We will have international presentations – this is your chance to tell the group about your country. Please bring photos, music and things from your country, so that we can learn as much as possible about where you come from.

Sample Orientation Itinerary

Sunday

- Arrive at Logan International Airport, Boston, MA
- Welcome by United Planet Program Coordinator
- Arrive at lodging

Monday

- Breakfast at lodging
- Welcome at United Planet (UP) office (located a few minutes walk or a short train ride from the selected housing in downtown Boston)
- Program Logistics, Materials, UP and ICYE info
- Duck Tour (around 11 am, lasts 80 minutes)
- Lunch at Prudential Center
- Session: Cross-cultural adjustment and communication
- English Lessons at Boston Public Library
- Dinner with exchangees and UP Team

Tuesday

- Breakfast at lodging
- Session: International Volunteering – Expectations & Experiences
- Aquarium Visit
- Lunch at Faneuil Hall
- English Lessons at Boston Public Library
- Free Time
- Dinner with exchangees and UP team

Friday

- Breakfast at YMCA
- Pick up transfer to airport
- Depart for project

Mid-year camp

This camp is offered for one-year exchangees only and will be held in the middle of your exchange year. With other exchangees, staff and UP volunteer members, you will be able to discuss any problems you might have encountered, and will spend some time reflecting on your experiences. We hope this will help prepare you for the second half of your year in the USA!

Final Evaluation

The final evaluation is another weekend camp. This will be the final time you will meet with your exchangee group. The evaluation is a chance to discuss your year in the USA, celebrate your accomplishments, and prepare to go home to your own country. You will also be equipped with concrete suggestions on how to share your intercultural experiences with people in your home communities and to stay involved in ICYE and UP activities.

6. Placements

Accommodations

Your project will provide you with accommodation. Different types of accommodation include:

- Your own bedroom in the project, with access to a shared bathroom and kitchen.
- A bedroom that you share with other exchangees or volunteers at the project.
- An apartment outside the project where 2-6 exchangees live together.
- Dormitory style housing with shared bath

Accommodation is typically basic but comfortable.

Meals

Meals are often eaten at the project but in some cases you will receive money to buy and prepare your own food.

Language Classes

Each United Planet exchangee will have the opportunity to participate in English Lessons during their orientation in Boston. In addition, all activities and programming is conducted in English and exchangees are encouraged to ask questions of the UP Team and take language notes while exploring Boston.

7. Transportation

Exchangees are required to pay for their own air transportation within the US since placements are located throughout such a vast geographical area.

United Planet recommends the following websites for information on domestic flights:

- Expedia Travel www.expedia.com
- Kayak www.kayak.com
- Student Universe www.studentuniverse.com
- Travelocity www.travelocity.com
- Southwest Airlines www.southwest.com
- AirTran www.airtran.com
- Sidestep www.sidestep.com
- Jetblue www.jetblue.com

For your convenience, please find some sample prices for August 2009 to United Planet host placements:

Boston to Reno, Nevada (Round Trip) \$300
Boston to Chicago, Illinois (Round Trip) \$280

United Planet will provide assistance with domestic transportation if requested.

8. Health Insurance

As an ICYE exchangee you will be fully covered by a comprehensive health insurance should you experience any health problems or accidents during your stay. Your sending NC will provide you with all documentation and information. We will be happy to answer any questions during Orientation.

9. Visa and other information

U.S. Immigration requires that all incoming ICYE exchangeees apply for a B-1 (Temporary visitor for Business) status visa. The B-1 visa is applicable to exchangeees working solely as volunteers WITHOUT attending school, college, university or any other tertiary education facility (Note: this does not include private supplemental English classes provided by United Planet). Exchangeees are NOT permitted to be employed for wages during their stay. The B-1 visa is valid for up to one year.

Upon acceptance into the program, United Planet will issue two copies of the letter of invitation to the exchangeee. One copy of the letter of invitation must be presented to the US Embassy in the exchangeee's home country. It usually takes at least 2 to 3 months to receive a visa; however, this processing period varies per country. Please take this into consideration and apply early!

All our exchangeees are encouraged to visit the US Immigration website at <http://www.usimmigrationsupport.org> for information on acquiring visas. Exchangeees must visit the American Embassy in their country of residence.

United Planet must have a copy of your visa before you arrive in the United States.

United Planet is currently pending approval by the U.S. Department of State to issue J-1 Visas. We will update your NC if this option becomes available.

Upon Arrival

Upon arrival, you will receive an I-94 form (a white card) that is stapled into your passport. **Please make sure that this form is valid for the duration of your stay: for six months or one year.** If the immigration officer questions how long you will stay, please explain your situation – that you will be volunteering unpaid in the country for six months/one year with United Planet and that your food and accommodation will be provided for during the time you are volunteering. **Please show the officer a copy of your invitation letter.**

10. Rules and regulations

- UP offers full-time voluntary work programs only. NO SCHOOL PROGRAM IS AVAILABLE.
- Your residence visa does not allow you to hold a paid job. If an exchangee is discovered working illegally, s/he will be deported. This means that you will have to leave the country.
- Exchangees are expected to take an active part in all ICYE orientations and camps.
- Travel abroad before the end of your program is only possible in special occasions (i.e. with your work placement) and never without permission from UP.
- Hitchhiking in the US can be dangerous and we therefore actively discourage this practice.
- Exchangees known to be using illegal drugs or drinking alcohol if under the age of 21 will be expelled from the program.
- The exchange year lasts 6 months or 12 months and after that all exchangees have to return to their home country. ICYE and United Planet have no responsibility for exchangees failing to adhere to this rule.

11. Exchangee documents

Please see following pages

Contract for ICYE Exchangees

1. I have read and understood UP's National Profile and accept its contents. I have paid special attention to the parts on the project requirements and the pocket money.
2. I understand that I will not live in a host-family during my year in the US.
3. I will be flexible regarding the type of placement and will not ask to change projects during my exchange year. I will not refuse to go to, or remain at a project due to its geographical location.
4. I will live in any place in the US, whether it is in the countryside or in a city.
5. I understand why the projects in the US need responsible volunteers who have a certain level of English and confirm that I am able to communicate in English.
6. I understand that I will receive my pocket money directly from the project and will not ask United Planet to pay additional money.
7. I shall not seek or accept paid employment during my exchange year.
8. I will attend the compulsory orientation, mid-year camp, and final evaluation camp as planned and organized by United Planet (unless special exception is granted).
9. I understand that I can only take 2 days per week and one week for every 4 months of work as personal days.
10. I accept that United Planet is not responsible for providing me with food and accommodation when traveling away from the volunteer host during personal/vacation days.
11. I will return to my country after my 6 month or one year exchange program. If I fail to do so, I understand that United Planet can inform the authorities. I have read and understood the above contract and agree to adhere to its content.

Printed Name: _____

Country: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Confidential Reference

Please send this contract to the United Planet office together with your application form.

Name of exchangee: _____

How long have you known the exchangee?

In what capacity do you/have you known the exchangee?

On another sheet of paper, please comment on the exchangee's:

- Ability to communicate with different kinds of people
- Reliability, adaptability and flexibility
- Maturity and ability to work independently
- His / her positive qualities
- His / her weaknesses or challenges
- Other comments/points that you feel may help United Planet to place the exchangee in a full-time project.

Name (please print): _____

Signature: _____

Address: _____

E-mail address: _____

Telephone: _____

12. Checklist

Please ensure that you have:

- A valid passport
- Appropriate Entry Clearance / Visa (contact your local American consulate or US Embassy if you have any questions)
- 2 copies of the invitation letter – one for the Embassy in your country and one to take on the plane with you to give to the immigration official when you land in the U.S.
- A police certificate (certificate of good conduct, see 4.3). This is a certificate issued by the police confirming that you do not have a criminal record
- Two written references to UP
- Correctly issued flight ticket and that your flights are confirmed
- Warm clothes and good shoes
- All your ICYE papers - including this National Profile
- Emergency contact information
- Small gifts from your country to give to people in your project / friends
- Some information about your own country: pictures, brochures, maps, books, coins, recipes, etc.

The following forms must be copied and sent to UP

- A valid passport
- Appropriate Entry Clearance / Visa (contact your local American consulate or US Embassy if you have any questions).
- A police certificate (certificate of good conduct, see 4.3). This is a certificate issued by the police confirming that you do not have a criminal record.
- Two written references to UP.

Do not bring too much – YOU will have to be able to carry your own luggage everywhere!

When you arrive at the airport you will have to carry your own luggage to the Orientation: this means up and down stairs and for long distances between the station and the orientation itself. Afterwards you travel on your own or with other exchangees by train, bus, or airplane to your project and again **you** will need to carry your own luggage.

Exchangees often arrive with a year's supply of toiletries – these are heavy and can be bought very cheaply in the US. Just bring what you need for the orientation and buy more when you get to your project.

Backpacks are easier to carry and more convenient to store than suitcases. If you bring a suitcase make sure that **you** can carry it comfortably. One piece of advice is to pack your bag and then take out half of the stuff – you'll still have more than you need!

Conclusion

Now that you have this information, we hope that you are as excited to visit the United States as an ICYE Exchangee with United Planet! We look forward to hearing from you and welcome any comments or questions you may have.

This is the beginning of a very fulfilling process both for you and for the people you are helping. You will have the chance to make a valuable difference while simultaneously changing your own life as well! Our mission at United Planet is to promote global awareness and foster cross-cultural understanding and friendship. We are very excited that you will become a part of this mission and are grateful for your continual support and involvement with ICYE and United Planet.

We look forward to seeing you soon here in the United States. If you have any questions, comments or concerns, please feel free to call us at +1-617-267-7763 or email us at longterm@unitedplanet.org.

All the best and good luck!

Theresa Higgs and the United Planet Team



Boston Public Garden with statue of George Washington