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Adapted from the University of Illinois International Protocol Guide
http://international.illinois.edu/services/protocolguide.pdf
The Virginia Commonwealth University
International Visiting Dignitary Protocol Guide

The number of distinguished international visitors to the university has increased over the past few years due to the increased international activity on campus.

International visiting dignitaries should be accorded appropriate courtesy and recognition during their visits. To ensure this happens, information regarding such visits should be communicated and certain campus units should be involved in the planning process.

The purpose of this guide is to:

- Define the type of visitor for which this policy is relevant
- Provide clear instruction for the appropriate protocol requirements
- Ensure effective and appropriate communication among relevant VCU offices
International Visiting Dignitaries Definition

For purposes of this guide, international visiting dignitaries include:

- Heads of State or multinational organizations
- Senior governmental officials such as ministers
- Deputy ministers or those of equivalent rank
- Ambassadors
- Deputy chiefs of mission
- Consuls general
- University presidents, chancellors and cabinet members

Units or individuals planning visits of distinguished domestic visitors should contact VCU University Relations.
**Letters of invitation**
If you are planning to invite an international dignitary to the Virginia Commonwealth University campus, please notify the Global Education Office as early as possible. GEO will facilitate the issuance of an official letter of invitation from VCU signed by the university’s president.

**Itineraries**
Designing an itinerary is a critical component of international visitor management. It can be very complex, but worth the effort. The complexity will reflect the purpose of the visit and level of dignitary.

The host unit should prepare a detailed itinerary that includes names, titles and arrival and departure date of visitor(s); names and titles of VCU officials to be seen; date, time and location of meeting or event; and the responsible VCU party and their contact information.

This itinerary should be shared with the GEO as early as possible after confirmation of meetings.

[Itinerary template](#)

**Gifts**
It is appropriate to exchange gifts with visiting international dignitaries and VCU should expect that official international delegations will arrive on campus bearing gifts. International visitors typically present high quality gifts and this should be kept in mind in selecting gifts for guests.
GEO may be able to recommend appropriate gifts, but is not in a position to provide them. The hosting unit is responsible for acquiring appropriate gifts and coordinating presentation arrangements.

**International gift protocol**

**Meals and Receptions**
Depending on the duration of the delegation’s visit, it is likely that a visit to VCU will include some form of meal or reception.

**Hosting and invitations**
Any meals or receptions should be arranged by the hosting unit. If the delegation is led by the head of the international institution, the VCU president or provost, if they are available, should be invited to the event. It is also advisable to invite members of the university community who are members of the delegation's home nation.

**Menu selection**
If you must make menu selections, be aware of religious considerations and dietary restrictions. Consult your visitor’s office to find out about any dietary restrictions. It is not advisable to prepare foods from the visitor’s culture unless you are absolutely certain it can be prepared properly.

**Seating**
Traditionally, the host or hostess of the event would be seated at the head of the table, with the guest of honor to his or her
immediate right. All other guests should be seated in descending order of precedence. Assigned seating is common practice for head tables at an event. Place cards are recommended for meals of more than six people.

National Anthems

U.S. National Anthem
When appropriate, the National Anthem can be played at the beginning of an event. The audience should rise and stand facing the U.S. flag. If the flag is not displayed, they should face the source of the music.

Anthems of other nations
National anthems of foreign nations formally recognized by the government of the United States may be played at events where appropriate. The anthem of the host nation (U.S.) is always played last. The audience should stand for all anthems.

Flag Etiquette
It is traditional to display the flag at major or significant public events, ceremonies and functions—whether indoor or outdoor. It is customary to display the colors of the host or hosting organization (Virginia State flag), but the national colors and/or the positional or personal flag of the guest of honor can also, and in certain circumstances, should be displayed. (Note: Flags should not be displayed for guests in the audience).
Flag placement
The flag with the highest precedence (U.S.) always takes the position of honor to the flag’s own right of all other flags or at the center in an alternating display. The flag with highest precedence (U.S.) will be furthest left, if viewed from the audience.

Other nations
When flags of other nations are displayed, they are to be placed on separate staffs/poles of the same height. The flags should be of equal size. Flags of other nations should be displayed to the U.S. flag’s own left (the right of the observer). When two or more national colors are displayed (in addition to the U.S.), they are normally displayed alphabetically by their English names.

Flag placement
The U.S. flag should be placed in the position of honor at the speaker’s right as that person faces the audience. Any other flag should be placed on the left of the speaker (or to the audience’s right). When the U.S. flag is displayed flat, it should be placed above and behind the speaker, with the union facing to the observer’s left.

Table /miniature flags
These are not official, but can be used as a form of positive recognition at a dinner, luncheon or reception event. They can be combined with other table decorations. Typically, the flag of another nation(s) plus the U.S. flag is the most common display. For a small luncheon or dinner, table flags
demonstrate a gesture of respect for your international guest’s home country. GEO has miniature flag stands and wide array of miniature table flags available.

Resources

Online:
CIA World FactBook

Displaying flags of other nations
http://correctoncampus.com/?mainID=5&subID=27&type=default&type=default&sub2ID=29

International gift protocol
http://www.1worldglobalgifts.com/giftgivingetiquetteandcustoms.htm

National Anthems
http://www.nationalanthems.info

University of Illinois International Protocol Guide
http://international.illinois.edu/services/protocolguide.pdf

VCU Libraries Research Guides: Global Business
http://guides.library.vcu.edu/global-business/countries

U.S. Department of State, Information on Countries
www.state.gov/countries/
Books:

*Kiss, Bow, or Shake Hands*. Morrison and Conaway. Avon MA: Adams Media, 2006. (Cultural overviews and protocol information for over 60 countries.)