Coming to Columbia
Essential Information for New International Students

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**Coming to Columbia**

**Essential Information for New International Students**

We of the International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO) at the Morningside campus and the International Affairs Office (IAO) at the Medical Center join with the faculty and staff in welcoming you to the University. Studying in a foreign country is both an exciting and a challenging experience. We offer this guide to help you meet the challenge and enjoy the excitement of this very dynamic environment.

For many of you, this will be your first time in New York City. You will experience the unexpected, both because this is a different culture and because this is one of the largest and fastest-moving cities in the world. The staff of the ISSO and the IAO is available to help you with issues related to your nonimmigrant student status.

In fall 2012, Columbia’s international population surpassed 13,000 individuals from 153 countries—including enrolled international students, students engaged in post-graduate practical training employment, research scholars, and accompanying family members.

*Coming to Columbia* is designed to give you information that will be helpful from the time you receive a Certificate of Eligibility for either F-1 or J-I student status through your first few weeks in New York as you settle in.

Again, welcome to Columbia. We invite you to enjoy the richness of New York City and extend to you our best wishes for a successful scholarly experience.

**About the ISSO**

The ISSO serves the international students and scholars on the Morningside campus, all doctoral students in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences and students enrolled in the Mailman School of Public Health at the Columbia University Medical Center.

**Walk-In Advisory Service** - The ISSO offers full advisory services during its normal operating hours. No appointment is necessary. International students and scholars with questions or requests concerning visas, immigration, travel, employment, or other matters relating to their stay at Columbia are welcome to walk in to speak to an International Student Advisor.

**The ISSO Website** - Information about visa and immigration regulations, Columbia’s international community and other related matters can be found on the ISSO’s website, www.columbia.edu/cu/issso

**ISSOnews email broadcasts** - Throughout the academic year, the ISSO provides regular email broadcast messages to international students. These messages, referred to as ISSOnews, are automatically distributed to currently-enrolled international students (i.e. not U.S. citizens or permanent residents) at Columbia. You are responsible for reading the ISSOnews, as it is our primary vehicle for distributing timely and important information concerning visa, immigration, and related matters. The messages also remind you of informational sessions and deadlines.

**ISSO Office Hours**

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday - 10:30 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.
CLOSED on Wednesday
Location: 524 Riverside Drive in International House North between 122nd Street and Tiemann Place

**About the IAO**

The IAO serves the immigration-related needs of students and scholars at the Columbia University Medical Center (with the exception of students in the Mailman School of Public Health and GSAS, who are clients of the ISSO). Staff members of the IAO assist prospective and enrolled international students and scholars with initial and continuing visa documentation. The IAO sends bi-monthly announcements updating students on immigration issues.

**IAO Office Hours**

Monday – Friday 11 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Location: 650 West 168th St.
Black Building Room 1-126B

Mailing Address:
630 West 168th Street, Box 27
New York, NY 10032
Telephone: 212 305-5455
Fax: 212 305-5208
Visa and Immigration Basics

Immigration Definitions for Students
The following terms and acronyms will be used frequently in Coming to Columbia and throughout your stay in the United States.

SEVIS – The Student and Exchange Visitor Information System (SEVIS) is a data collection and monitoring system of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) that is used by U.S. academic institutions and U.S. consulates and embassies. Certificates of Eligibility are generated through SEVIS, and schools are required to make regular updates in SEVIS each term including students’ fulltime enrollment, changes of address, changes to funding sources or academic programs.

F-1 Student Status – The most common type of status used to study in the United States, it is available to all full-time degree and non-degree students who are admitted to the University and have demonstrated ability to finance their academic program.

J-1 Exchange Visitor Status – There are many categories of J-1, including a student category. To be eligible for the J-1 student category, over half of your funding must come from a source other than your personal or family funds. Common sources of funding for EVs include funding from a government, international organization or university. Students fully funded by Columbia would be eligible for J-1 status.

Certificate of Eligibility – This document certifies eligibility for F-1 or J-1 status. It is presented to the U.S. consulate to apply for a visa and to the DHS official when you enter the U.S. The Certificate of Eligibility for F-1 status is form I-20; for J-1 status it is form DS-2019. Students are eligible for the Certificate of Eligibility from the ISSO after they have been admitted to a fulltime program of study and have documented their ability to finance their education.

I-20 – The I-20 is a form generated by Columbia University’s ISSO or IAO for use in applying for the F-1 visa and entering the United States. The I-20 is issued to admitted students who have shown proof of their ability to finance their academic program. It includes your biographical details and information on your academic program and source of funding. You must keep all I-20s that are issued to you.

DS-2019 - The DS-2019 is a form issued by Columbia University’s ISSO or IAO, or other Exchange Visitor sponsoring organizations such as IIE or LASPAU, for use in applying for the J-1 visa and entering the United States. Fulbright scholars and other sponsored students will receive the DS-2019 from their sponsoring organization. The DS-2019 includes your biographical details and information on your academic program and source of funding. You must keep all DS-2019s that are issued to you.

Passport – Passports must be valid for at least 6 months into the future at all times. If you will need to extend your passport while in the U.S., you must contact your country’s consulate in NY or embassy in Washington, D.C.

Entry Visa – The entry visa is issued by a U.S. consulate or embassy. It can be issued up to 120 days before the start date on the Certificate of Eligibility, but your admission to the U.S. in F or J status is limited to 30 days in advance of the start date. The visa is an entry document—it demonstrates eligibility to apply for admission to the United States, but does not determine how long you can stay. The length of the visa is determined by reciprocity agreements between the U.S. and your home country and is not necessarily tied to the length of your program of study. The visa must be valid when you enter the U.S. and cannot be renewed in the U.S. Your entry visa may expire while you are in the U.S. while you are maintaining your student status, but when you travel abroad you will need to obtain a new visa to return. Citizens of Canada and Bermuda do not require a visa to enter the U.S., but must present an I-20 or DS-2019 at the port of entry.

Immigration Status – Individuals in the U.S. can have only one status at a time, determined at the port of entry. If you have multiple visas in your passport, you must show the officer the F-1 or J-1 entry visa page when you enter the country as a student. Be mindful that you are admitted in the appropriate status as indicated by the admission stamp on your passport, and follow up with a printed version of your electronic record.

I-94 Arrival / Departure record – The I-94 is the Arrival / Departure Record, in either paper or electronic format, is issued by a Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Officer to foreign individuals entering the United States. I-94 arrival records are now created electronically upon arrival by air or sea. Instead of a paper form, the visitor is given an annotated stamp in the foreign passport. Your arrival record is evidence of your legal entry in to the U.S— the date of admission, your immigration status, and how long you can stay in the U.S. The electronic arrival/departure record can be obtained at www.cbp.gov/i94, and all students are encouraged to access and print their admission record after each arrival for personal records. Once you depart the U.S. the arrival record is no longer available. The I-94 paper card continues to be issued at land borders.

Duration of Status (D/S) – Duration of status is the length of time you are permitted to remain in the U.S. Your duration of status includes the length of your academic program as indicated on the Certificate of Eligibility, plus any period of practical or academic training used after graduation, plus a grace period to prepare for departure of 60 days for F-1 status and 30 days for J-1 status.
Differences between F-1 and J-1 Status
The most common reasons students choose J-1 status are because their funding organization (e.g. the Royal Thai Government) requires them to have a J-1 visa or because they are married and want their spouse to be eligible to apply for permission to work in the U.S. Important differences between F-1 and J-1 status are listed below.

Source of Funding – Individuals are eligible for J-1 status only if they are receiving more than 50% of their funding from a source other than personal or family funds. Such funding includes funding from the U.S. government or the student’s home country government, an international organization, or the University.

Two-Year Home Residency Requirement – Students in J-1 status and their J-2 dependents might be subject to a “two-year home residency requirement”. The two-year home residency requirement requires J-1s and J-2 dependents to return to their home country for two years before they are eligible to enter the U.S. in H or L employment status or as a permanent resident.

Individuals are made subject to the two-year home residency requirement if (1) they receive government funding from either the U.S. or (2) their home country is on the J-1 Skill List and their field of study is on it. Each country selects fields for which personnel are considered in short supply and individuals studying in those fields are subject to the two-year home residency requirement. Not all countries have a Skills List. You can search the skills list by country on the U.S. Department of State website (http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_4514.html). There is no foreign residence requirement for F-1 students.

Medical Insurance – J-1 regulations require all J-1 and J-2 dependents to have medical insurance that meet certain requirements. The medical insurance offered by Columbia University covers all requirements for those in J-1 and J-2 status.

Work Permission – Both F-1 and J-1 students are permitted to work on-campus up to 20 hours per week during the semesters and full-time during university holidays. For off-campus employment, F-1 students are eligible for employment through practical training while J-1 students may be authorized for academic training.

F-1 Practical Training – F-1 students are eligible to apply for practical training authorization to work in their field of study after having completed two semesters as a full-time student. Curricular Practical Training (CPT) can be used for required or course-based internships during the academic program in certain schools and departments. F-1 degree and certificate program students are eligible for up to 12 months of Optional Practical Training (OPT) authorized by USCIS for off-campus work during and/or after the completion of their degree program. Some fields of study in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM fields) may be eligible for an additional 17-month extension.

J-1 Academic Training – Available to J-1 students after having completed one semester of full-time course work for off-campus employment that is integral to their course of study. All J-1 students are eligible for up to 18 months of Academic Training authorization or the length of their degree program, whichever is shorter, to be used during and/or after the completion of their degree program; J-1 students earning doctorates are eligible for up to 36 months of Academic Training authorization.

Dependent Employment – F-2 dependents are not eligible to work in the U.S. J-2 spouses are eligible to apply for employment authorization from USCIS.

Dependent Study – F-2 dependents may take only 1 or 2 courses for recreational purposes and must change to F-1 status if they register full-time or in a degree program. J-2 dependents are eligible to study as they wish.

Message for Canadian Students
All regulations pertaining to F-1 and J-1 status apply to Canadian citizens. The only difference between the requirements for Canadian citizens and all other international students is that Canadians do not require an entry visa from a U.S. consulate to enter the United States.

While Canadian citizens do not need an entry visa to enter the United States, you must always present your passport and I-20 or DS-2019 to the DHS official when you enter the United States. On your first entry to the U.S., you will need to present the following documents: passport, I-20 or DS-2019, admission letter, proof of finances, and receipt of the I-901 SEVIS fee payment. It is a violation of B-2 status to study in the United States, so it is important that you present these documents to the DHS official to be admitted in F-1 or J-1 status. If arriving at a land border, you will need to be issued an I-94 Arrival/Departure paper card; if traveling by air, your arrival record is automated and the CBP officer will stamp your passport with the date of entry, port of entry, and classification (F-1 or J-1).

How to Obtain F-1 or J-1 Student Status
To be eligible for F-1 or J-1 student status to attend Columbia University, all prospective students must first have been admitted to a full-time program and have received an I-20 or DS-2019 from the ISSO. Students attending Columbia must use an I-20 issued by Columbia or a DS-2019 issued by Columbia or a sponsoring Exchange Visitor organization such as the IIE. The requirements for obtaining F-1 or J-1 status differ for students who are outside the U.S. and those who are already in the U.S.
If you are outside the U.S

Once you have been issued your I-20 or DS-2019, all admitted students (except Canadian and Bermudan citizens) must apply for an F-1 or J-1 entry visa and use the visa with the Columbia I-20 or DS-2019 to enter the U.S. Students who have had their SEVIS records transferred from another U.S. school to Columbia may continue to use an unexpired entry visa with Columbia’s I-20 or DS-2019 to enter the U.S.

Applying for an F-1 or J-1 Entry Visa at a U.S. Consulate

The first step is to carefully check your I-20 or DS-2019 to see that all information is correct. If you have informed us that your dependents will come with you to the U.S., they will each receive a Certificate of Eligibility to apply for the F-2 or J-2 visa.

The Department of State is the federal agency responsible for the issuance of visas at U.S. consulates. There are clear instructions on its website for applying for an F-1 or J-1 visa (see list below), and you should check the website of the consulate or embassy at which you will apply for additional requirements and fees. You will need to refer to the SEVIS number on your I-20 or DS-2019 to make the visa appointment and pay the I-901 SEVIS fee (https://www.fmjfee.com/i901fee/index.jsp) in advance of the visa appointment. Take the printed receipt with you, and complete the electronic DS-160 nonimmigrant visa application online and upload photos. Note that F and J are nonimmigrant visas that require you to demonstrate your intention to return to your home country following the completion of your studies.

Please refer to the following websites for information on applying for a visa:

What is a U.S. visa?
http://travel.state.gov/visa/questions/what/what_4429.html

Student Process Steps: How to Navigate the U.S. Immigration System
http://www.ice.gov/sevis/students/index.htm

List of consulates worldwide  http://www.usembassy.gov/Wait times by consulate for F and J visa appointments
http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/wait/wait_4638.html

Applying for an F-1 visa
http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1268.html

Applying for a J-1 Visa
http://travel.state.gov/visa/temp/types/types_1267.html

Frequently Asked Questions regarding the I-901 SEVIS fee
http://www.ice.gov/sevis/i901/faq3.htm

Tips for preparing for a visa interview
http://www.nafsa.org/resourcelibrary/default.aspx?id=8643

Potential Delays in Visa Issuance and at Ports of Entry

Heightened security measures instituted since September 11, 2001 may result in delays in visa issuance abroad—regardless of whether you are applying for first or subsequent student visas in the F or J classification.

Security checks and clearances based on nationality, name checks, or sensitive areas of study that are of concern to U.S. national security may lead to Administrative Processing. Although the Department of State (DOS) strives to resolve these additional clearances within 60 days, it is on a case-by-case basis and can take longer. There is no way for the university to intervene or expedite this process.

Please refer to the DOS website on U.S. Visa Policy and Visa Processing Time at
http://travel.state.gov/visa/questions/policy/policy_4433.html

There may be delays at the airport after arrival as all F and J students SEVIS records are checked for admissibility.

Entering the United States

Admission to the United States is under the jurisdiction of the CBP, part of the DHS. You may enter the U.S. up to 30 days before the date listed on your I-20 or DS-2019 and are expected to arrive by the start date of your program, though allowances are made for slight delays.

Step 1: Present your documents to the CBP Officer. Keep your passport and Certificate of Eligibility (I-20 or DS-2019) in your carry-on bag. You will have access to your checked luggage only after you pass through inspection. You will need to show the officer the following documents:

• Passport
• F-1or J-1 visa (unless a citizen of Canada or Bermuda)
• I-20 or DS-2019

You should also carry your admission letter, I-901 fee payment receipt, and your proof of finances with you to have available if asked. The officer will stamp your passport for admission in F-1 or J-1 until “D/S”. D/S stands for Duration of Status. Your I-94 arrival record is evidence of your legal entry in to the U.S., your immigration status, and how long you may stay in the U.S. If entering the U.S. by air or sea, an automated Form I-94 record will be generated for you by the CBP officer. CBP will provide you with an admission stamp on your passport that is annotated with date and place of admission, class of admission and until when you may stay. F and J are admitted for D/S (duration of status) rather than a specific date. The electronic arrival/departure record can be obtained and printed from www.cbp.gov/I94 . Print a paper copy of your arrival record each time you enter the U.S. throughout your academic program for your personal records. See DHS information on Arriving in the United States
http://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/students/arriving
Step 2: Report your arrival to Columbia's ISSO or IAO. The final step in ensuring your valid F-1 or J-1 status is to report your arrival to the ISSO or IAO.

- If you are a student under the supervision of the ISSO, you will need to complete an online form within 7 days after your arrival in the U.S. at https://www1.columbia.edu/sec/cu/isso/new_arrival_check_in.html. You will need to refer to your passport and I-20 or DS-2019 and have a local-area address, including a postal zip code—even if it’s temporary. It is very important that you complete this step in a timely manner to activate your SEVIS record.
- If you’re a student at the Medical Campus under the supervision of the IAO, you will need to present your passport, I-20 or DS-2019 and a print-out of your arrival record from http://www.cbp.gov/I94 to the IAO so they can report your arrival in SEVIS and activate your student record.

If you are in the U.S.

If you are in the U.S. in a status other than F-1 or J-1 student - Admitted students already inside the U.S. in another status may either exit the U.S. and follow the procedures above to obtain F-1 or J-1 status through entry to the U.S. or apply for a change of status to the USCIS (Citizenship and Immigration Services) within the United States. Individuals in B-1/B-2 or F-2 status are not permitted to study and must be in either F-1 or J-1 status before the start of the academic term. The processing time of a change of status application is not predictable and cannot be expedited. Students receiving funding from the university through a teaching or research assistantship must be in student status by the beginning of the term to be paid. Not all individuals are eligible to apply for a change of status, so it is important to speak with an ISSO advisor about your plans. Generally, it is preferable to leave the U.S. and return in F or J status if possible.

If you are in the U.S. in F-1 or J-1 status at another institution - Admitted students in the U.S. who are already in F-1 or J-1 status for study at another institution must request a transfer of their SEVIS record from their current institution to Columbia and maintain their F-1 or J-1 status without leaving and re-entering the U.S. Note that individuals in J-1 status might not be eligible for a transfer and should consult with both the ISSO and their current immigration sponsor. Transfer students should complete the Online Application for Visa Certificate and follow the instructions for submitting the supporting documentation. In addition, you must have the Transfer-In Form completed by an international student advisor at your current school and set a “release date”, the date on which Columbia will gain control of your SEVIS record. The ISSO can process the I-20 or DS-2019 for you only after the release date has been reached. After receiving the I-20 or DS-2019, please report your arrival at Columbia using the online arrival form at https://www1.columbia.edu/sec/cu/isso/new_arrival_check_in.html to complete the SEVIS transfer procedure. If you are not leaving the U.S. before coming to Columbia, use your last date of entry to the U.S. on the arrival report form.

Transfer of F-1 SEVIS record to Columbia University

If you are currently in F-1 status from another U.S. institution and intend to begin your studies at Columbia University, you are considered a “transfer student” by the ISSO for the purposes of issuing an I-20. A transfer of the supervision of your F-1 status from your current school to Columbia University is required by the DHS. You will be considered a transfer student if one of the following applies to you:

- You are in the middle of a degree program and are leaving that program to begin at Columbia.
- You are in the 3-2 engineering program.
- You will have completed a degree program at your current institution and will begin a new degree program at Columbia.
- You are currently on authorized OPT from another school and will begin a new degree program at Columbia.

Students doing a joint degree program between Columbia and an institution overseas are not considered transfer students by DHS.

There are three steps required to complete the transfer of the SEVIS record process. You are required to register for full-time studies at Columbia in the first available term after leaving your previous school or the first term after the summer vacation period. No “semester off” between schools is allowed by the DHS except for the summer.

Step 1. Request transfer and submit documents to ISSO to apply for a Columbia I-20 - Once you have learned of your admission to Columbia and have accepted the offer, you will need to apply for a Columbia I-20 by submitting the online Application for Visa Certificate and emailing a pdf of the required documentation as directed in the instructions. You will also need to notify your current international student advisor of your intention to transfer to Columbia and to complete the “Transfer-in” form, a required part of the application. In addition, SEVIS transfer students also need to send a copy of the current I-20 and I-94 card.

Download the Transfer-in form and complete Section 1. You should bring this with you when you meet with your current international student advisor to determine the “release date” of your SEVIS record so they can transfer your electronic SEVIS record. The release date is the date that your SEVIS record will become available to the ISSO—and no longer available to your current school. The ISSO is not able to access your SEVIS record and issue your I-20 before the release date. The transfer-out procedure must be requested within 60 days of completing your program at your current school although the actual release date may be later.

You should take the following factors into consideration when determining a release date:
- F-1 regulations allow a student to work in the summer between schools on the campus that maintains supervision of the SEVIS record.
- If you are on OPT from your current school, your release date has to be on or after your last day of employment, and must be by the start of the semester at Columbia.
- If you plan to travel outside the U.S. before coming to Columbia, you must allow enough time for a Columbia I-20 to reach you as you must use this form to re-enter the U.S. For example, if you have a release date of August 15 and are planning to re-enter the U.S. on August 20, this will not be enough time to get your I-20 to you before you return.

Your international student advisor will complete Section 2 of the transfer-in form and return it to Columbia.

**Step 2. Wait for your I-20 and prepare for arrival in New York**
The ISSO will process your I-20 and send it to you. If you are traveling or moving during the break before coming to Columbia, remember to update the ISSO with your current address for delivery.

If you plan to travel outside the U.S. after completing your studies at your previous institution but before starting your program at Columbia—and your current F-1 visa is valid and unexpired—you may use it in conjunction with Columbia’s I-20 to re-enter the U.S. even though the previous school’s name is on it. If your visa has expired, you will need to apply for a new F-1 visa but you are not required to pay the SEVIS fee again as you are considered to be a continuing student under the same SEVIS record. You may re-enter the U.S. any time, i.e. you are not restricted to entering the U.S. only within 30 days before the program start as are other students with an initial record.

If you are not planning to leave the U.S. before arriving at Columbia, you may request that the I-20 be sent by FedEx to you or that you pick it up at the ISSO when you arrive in NY.

**Step 3. Report your arrival in New York within 7 days to complete the SEVIS transfer procedure.**
You will report your arrival at Columbia by completing the online report form at https://www1.columbia.edu/sec/cu/isco/new_arrival_check_in.html. This step is very important as it will activate your Columbia SEVIS record and complete the transfer procedure.

**Dependents**
Dependent status is available to the spouses and children under the age of 21 of students in F-1 and J-1 status. Dependents would hold F-2 and J-2 status respectively. F-2 and J-2 dependent records can be created at any time during the academic program. The dependents’ purpose of stay in the U.S. is to accompany the “principal alien”, the F-1 or J-1 student, and their status is dependent upon yours.

In order to have a dependent certificate of eligibility processed, the student has to provide documentation showing additional funds available to cover the living expenses of their dependents. Dependent living expenses are estimated at $800 per month for a spouse ($9,600 per year) and $400 per child per month ($4,800 per child per year). A copy of each dependent’s passport must also be provided.

F-2 dependents are not permitted to work in the United States. F-2 spouses and children attending post-secondary education are not permitted to study in F-2 status and would be required to change to F-1 status for full-time study. F-2 children enrolled in primary and secondary school are permitted to study.

J-2 dependents can study part-time or full-time without changing status and are eligible to apply for employment authorization from the USCIS.

**Domestic Partners** – Domestic partners are not eligible for F-2 or J-2 dependent status but can apply for a B-2 visa to accompany the student. Although B-2 visits are usually for short periods of time, it is permissible for the partner to accompany the student for the duration of a study program in the US. To qualify, the accompanying partner must demonstrate the intent to depart the U.S. at the conclusion of the student’s authorized stay, intends to maintain a residence outside the United States, and meet other visitor visa eligibility requirements. The visa allows the individual to apply for entry at a U.S. port of entry. CBP officials at the port of entry determine the length of time you are authorized to remain in the United States in B-2 status.

**Acronyms and Abbreviations**

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<td>CBP</td>
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<td>CPT</td>
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<td>DHS</td>
<td>Department of Homeland Security</td>
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<td>DMV</td>
<td>Department of Motor Vehicles</td>
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<td>DOS</td>
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<td>EV</td>
<td>Exchange Visitor (J-1)</td>
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<td>EAD</td>
<td>Employment Authorization Document</td>
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<td>ICE</td>
<td>U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement</td>
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<td>IRS</td>
<td>Internal Revenue Service</td>
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<td>OPT</td>
<td>Optional Practical Training</td>
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<td>POE</td>
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<td>SEVIS</td>
<td>Student and Exchange Visitor information System</td>
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<td>USCIS</td>
<td>United States Citizenship and Immigration Service</td>
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Guidelines for Maintaining Student Status

Under United States immigration law, it is your personal responsibility to maintain lawful F-1 or J-1 student status. By following the guidelines listed below, you will be able to maintain lawful F-1 or J-1 student status with little difficulty. You must maintain lawful student status if you wish to enjoy the benefits associated with it, such as on-campus employment, practical or academic training employment, and the ability to re-enter the United States when you travel. If you have any questions about your status, discuss them with an advisor at ISSO or the IAO.

1. Keep an unexpired passport valid for at least 6 months into the future. Contact your country’s consulate in New York or embassy in Washington DC for instructions if you need to extend your passport while in the U.S.

2. Notify the ISSO of your address when you arrive and any time you change addresses. When you arrive in the U.S., you must notify the ISSO of your local address through the online arrival form—even if it’s temporary. Thereafter, you must notify ISSO of any change in address within 10 days of moving by completing the Change of Address Form online at [https://www1.columbia.edu/sec/cu/isso/address_change.html](https://www1.columbia.edu/sec/cu/isso/address_change.html). The ISSO and IAO are responsible for updating your address electronically in your SEVIS record. Note that you must keep your address up-to-date both with the ISSO and Student Services Online (SSOL) [https://ssol.columbia.edu/](https://ssol.columbia.edu/).

3. Maintain full-time enrollment and make normal progress toward your degree. The definition of full-time registration may differ from institution to institution—and among the various schools at Columbia as defined by the registrar. In general, full-time enrollment is defined as a minimum of 12 credits per semester. Full-time registration is required in every fall and spring semester. Students in programs that require summer registration (J-term MBA, the MPA in Environmental Science and Policy, and the Executive MBA and MPA) must also register full-time in the summer. All other students may use the summer term as a vacation period without enrollment, or may choose to register for as many as or as few courses as they would like. Exceptions to the 12-credit registration requirement are noted below. If your school or program is not listed, you must register for at least 12 credits to maintain F-1 or J-1 status. This includes non-degree students.

   - **Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (GSAS):** 1 Residence Unit (RU) each semester until RU requirements have been met (ordinarily 2 RUs for MA programs, 4-6 RUs for PhD programs). After meeting the RU requirements, you must register for either full-time Extended Residence or Matriculation and Facilities (M&F). Exception: Liberal Arts MA students register on a credit basis and are required to register for at least 12 credits.

   - **School of Law:** Minimum of 10 credits per semester. JSD students who have completed all program requirements and wish to remain in the U.S. to work on the dissertation register for JSD Research.
   - **School of Social Work (SSW):** Minimum of 10.5 credits per semester

4. Obtain authorization from the ISSO before dropping below a full-time course load. There are limited exceptions to the full-time registration requirement, including initial difficulty with English and the American academic system, improper course placement, medical reasons, and the final term of a degree program in which all degree requirements can be satisfied with less than a full-time course load. Authorization for a reduced course load must be granted before you drop below full-time.

5. Obtain employment authorization before beginning employment of any kind. Working without authorization is one of the most serious violations of your immigration status and by law could result in deportation. F-1 and J-1 students sponsored by Columbia are eligible to work on-campus up to 20 hours per week during academic terms and full-time during university holidays as soon as they are in student status. No written authorization from the ISSO is required. Written authorization is required for all off-campus employment; F-1 students are eligible to apply after two fulltime semesters in student status; J-1 students are eligible after completing one term.

6. Request and complete transfers of your SEVIS record between Columbia and another school you have attended before or will attend after. Transfer requests must be made before the end of the grace period.

7. Request extensions prior to the expiration date on the I-20 or DS-2019. If you require more time to complete your degree program and are eligible for an extension, you must request the extension before your document expires. If you will be continuing on to a new degree program at Columbia, a new Certificate of Eligibility must be requested before the end of the grace period for F-1 students and before the expiration date of the DS-2019 for J-1 students. The ISSO will send emails to you when the expiration date of your I-20 or DS-2019 is approaching to remind you of deadlines and procedures.

8. Before the end of your grace period following the completion of your academic program, you must:

   - depart the U.S., or
   - apply for OPT (F-1) or AT (J-1) if eligible, or
   - request a transfer of your SEVIS record to another school you will attend, or
   - apply for a change of status.

F-1 students have a 60-day grace period. J-1 students have a 30-day grace period. The grace period follows the completion of the
academic program or any period of authorized practical training or academic training. You cannot leave and return to the U.S. in student status after the grace period.

9. J-1 Students – Maintain valid health insurance. Full-time students are enrolled in Columbia health insurance that meets U.S. government requirements for J-1 students. All J-2 dependents must also be enrolled in health insurance that meets the government requirements. Your insurance policy must include (1) medical benefits of at least $50,000 per accident or illness; (2) repatriation of remains in the amount of $7,500; (3) expenses associated with medical evacuation of the exchange visitor to his or her home country in the amount of $10,000; and (4) a deducible not to exceed $500.

Returning to the United States after Travel Abroad

During your studies, you may exit the country for brief trips and return to resume your program as many times as you wish provided you carry the necessary documentation to re-enter the country. You must always enter the U.S. in F-1 or J-1 status while you are enrolled at Columbia. The ISSO and IAO cannot advise on entry requirements of other countries. If you are planning to travel to a country that is not your home country, you should contact the consulate of the country to which you will be traveling for entry information. A list of consulates in Manhattan can be found at [http://www.nyc.gov/html/ia/html/affairs/consular.shtml](http://www.nyc.gov/html/ia/html/affairs/consular.shtml).

To re-enter the U.S., you must carry the following documents:

1. **Passport** – valid for at least 6 months into the future on the date you return to the U.S. There are exceptions that allow nationals of countries with an agreement with the U.S. to be admitted to the U.S. up to the expiration date of the passport. For a list of these countries, see [http://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel/faq_f2.htm#:Toc81222003](http://www.ice.gov/sevis/travel/faq_f2.htm#:Toc81222003).

2. **I-20 or DS-2019 signed for travel** – A travel signature (recertification) by an ISSO advisor is valid for a year from date of issue. The signature is on the bottom of page 3 of the I-20 and on page 1 of the DS-2019 form. (Note for J-1s: If your DS-2019 was issued by a sponsoring organization such as IIE, the sponsoring agency must sign the form.)

You will need to get a new signature once a year to permit further entries if you plan to travel abroad. To obtain a new travel signature, come to the ISSO with your passport and I-20 or DS-2019. If there has been any change to the information on the first page of your I-20 or DS-2019, such as change of program or change in the source of funding, bring relevant documentation and the ISSO will issue you an updated form instead of signing the current form.

3. **Valid F-1 or J-1 visa** – The visa must have an expiration date in the future and be valid for further entries when entering the country. Most visas allow for multiple unlimited entries; occasionally a visa will be issued for a limited number of entries. If your visa is expired or the entries allowed have already been used, you will need to apply for a new visa at a U.S. consulate while outside the U.S. The process is the same as applying for the visa the first time, but as a continuing student you will not need to pay the SEVIS fee again. In addition to the documentation required by the consulate, it is advisable to have an official record of your attendance at Columbia by requesting Academic Certification from the Registrar’s office. [http://registrar.columbia.edu/students/academic-certification](http://registrar.columbia.edu/students/academic-certification).

**Travel for F-2 and J-2 dependents**

Dependent(s) must carry the same type of documents as the student: unexpired passport, unexpired, valid F-2 or J-2 entry visa, and an I-20 or DS-2019 signed for travel. If traveling separately from the student, dependents should carry photocopies of the F-1 or J-1’s immigration documents (passport, visa, I-20 or DS-2019).

**Working in Student Status**

**On-Campus Employment**

Students in F-1 and J-1 status are eligible from your first term as an enrolled student to work on-campus for up to 20 hours per week during the academic year when classes are in session and full-time during university recess periods. On-campus employment is defined as work done for and paid by Columbia University, or work at a University location with an employer that is providing services to students, such as the Columbia Bookstore that is run by Barnes and Noble. You may have more than one position on-campus as long as the number of hours you work does not exceed 20. J-1 students sponsored by another organization, i.e. IIE or LASPAU, must receive a letter from their sponsoring organization to work at Columbia. International students are not eligible for jobs defined as Work-Study positions, as they are part of federally-subsidized financial aid for U.S. citizen or permanent resident students.

Some on-campus jobs are listed on LionShare through the Center for Career Education (CCE), accessible to students of the Columbia schools which are served by CCE (Columbia College, The Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Science, School of General Studies, School of Continuing Education (Master of Science Programs and Post-Baccalaureate Certificate Programs), Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, School of the Arts, Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation). Students of other schools should contact their own Career Services Offices.

You may also contact your academic departments for information on teaching or research assistant positions. Offices that hire non-Work-Study positions include but are not limited to the University Libraries, CUIT, computer labs, the Public Safety office, and the Columbia University Tutoring and Translation Agency.
Off-Campus Work Eligibility

F-1 Status
Off-campus work is possible only after you have been in the United States in valid fulltime student status for one academic year (two semesters) with the exception of an internship with an international agency. Off-campus work authorization always requires written permission, either from the ISSO or USCIS, the immigration agency. This type of employment may include Optional Practical Training (OPT), Curricular Practical Training (CPT), and in very unusual circumstances, permission to work based on unforeseen financial hardship.

http://www.columbia.edu/cu/issso/visa/F-1/F-1_work_overview.html

J-1 Status
There are two types of employment authorization for students in J-1 status: Academic Training (AT) and permission to work due to unforeseen financial hardship.


Tax Issues for International Students

Tax laws in the U.S. are extremely complex and the ISSO is not qualified or permitted to answer individual questions regarding tax liabilities or obligations. All international students should refer to our tax webpage for detailed tax information as well as attend one of several tax-filing workshops held each spring through the ISSO. It is the responsibility of each international student at Columbia to become informed of his or her own tax situation.

Scholarships/Fellowships — This funding is subject to federal, state and local taxes on the amount received in excess of tuition and fees. Your tuition amount will not be taxed but any stipend received will be subject to taxation. All teaching and research assistantships are taxable, according to an individual’s rate of pay.

W-4 Form — For those on the Columbia University payroll (including students receiving funding from Columbia as well as those students who have on-campus employment) a W-4 form must be completed before you are able to receive payment. You will receive it along with other employment forms from your hiring department or office. Nonresidents for tax purposes must complete the W-4 according to certain restrictions as described by the Internal Revenue Service link.


Tax Treaty — The U.S. has an agreement (treaty) with over 50 different countries that determine how the country’s residents will be taxed while temporarily in the U.S. http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/p901.pdf. A treaty may specify that residents of that country are exempt from all or part of U.S. income tax for certain types of income. These tax treaties are very specific and it should be noted that just because someone is a resident of a tax treaty country does not mean that the person will automatically qualify for tax benefits. If your country is one that carries a tax treaty with the U.S., you will want to complete the Form 8233 http://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-pdf/f8233.pdf with the Human Resources Office before being put on Columbia’s payroll. Contact cil1@columbia.edu or phone 212 851 2849 for more information.

Tax Return Filing Requirement — All international students in F-1 and J-1 status who are “nonresident aliens” for federal tax purposes are required to file at least one tax form by June 15th if present in the US at any time in the previous calendar year, January 1 to December 31—even if they had no US income; those with U.S. income will have an April 15th deadline to file a federal and perhaps a state tax return. Students in F-1 and J-1 status are generally considered non-residents for tax purposes for five years of having this status; beyond five years and students become residents for tax purposes (but not for immigration purposes). Students with U.S. scholarships are advised to keep all receipts for educational expenses such as books, as you might need to refer to them in the spring when filing a tax return. Each spring, the ISSO provides free access to a user-friendly web-based tax preparation system to file a federal nonresident tax return. In addition we sponsor a few workshops on filing NY State tax returns conducted by international tax experts. You will receive ISSOnews email reminders starting in February about workshops and deadlines.

Social Security Number (SSN) — The only purpose for an SSN is to be used by employers and employees for tax purposes, and the Social Security Administration (SSA) will not issue it for any other reason. For this reason, F-1 and J-1 students are eligible to apply for an SSN only with authorized employment. If you secure on-campus employment or are authorized for CPT or OPT, or Academic Training you will be eligible for a SSN. Columbia issues a 9-digit number to be used for internal purposes only to students who do not have a SSN. This number is not an SSN and cannot be used outside of Columbia. The one exception to needing to have employment to be eligible to apply for an SSN is for doctoral fellows who may not be a teaching or graduate research assistant the first year but whose admission letter refers to such activities as part of the fellowship.

Individual Taxpayer ID Number (ITIN) — The ITIN is a number issued by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) for individuals who are not eligible for an SSN because they are not employed but need an ID number for other types of income, such as a scholarship, fellowship or travel grant. The ITIN application is a W-7 form, and the IRS has special procedures for F and J students that require the involvement of the ISSO.

Pre-Departure Information

Packing for New York

Weather — During the summer, June through September, the
Moving overseas and starting school in a new country can be an exciting, and rewarding experience that will stay with you for a lifetime. However, it can also be intimidating, frustrating, and at times seemingly inconvenient. We offer the following packing suggestions that may make your time in the US more comfortable:

### What to Bring —
When you arrive to the United States, it is important to carry your immigration-related documents, US currency and credit card(s) on your person and to have the following in carry-on luggage:

- Medications you use regularly; extra prescription eyeglasses or contact lenses. Many drugs in the U.S. require a prescription from a doctor, so if you have a chronic health problem that requires medication, it is recommended to bring enough to last for a few weeks
- Valuables such as jewelry, or items that can’t be replaced if luggage is lost, such as personal photos or letters
- Experienced travelers recommend a change of clothing and toiletry items in case of unexpected delays, missed flight connections, or lost luggage

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#### Pack lightly —
You will be responsible for carrying your own luggage, and often arrivals at New York (or any US airports) can be overwhelming. The last thing you want to worry about is many pieces of luggage! Remember that anything you forget, and almost anything you would want to buy, is only a walk, bus or subway ride away. Dress at Columbia is typical of student style on most college campuses - casual. Students typically wear jeans, sneakers, and t-shirts. You may wish to pack a few semi-formal/formal items for special occasions. Also, depending on your major, a suit may be a good thing to have handy.

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2. **Household Items** — It is recommended to purchase most of your household items (cooking and eating supplies, small electrical appliances, bed sheets and towels) here in the US. These items can add unnecessary weight when you travel, and most can be found for moderate prices. In particular, electrical items from your home country may not be compatible with the US electrical supply and usage **may not be permitted** in the university residence halls.

### Money Matters

#### Estimated Expenses

- **Money Matters** —
  - You are required to register full-time every semester (except the final term of a degree program if you need less than a fulltime course load to graduate).
  - You may need to take English courses in conjunction with a reduced academic program or English courses exclusively. No degree credit is given for these courses so if you do need to take English courses, this might lengthen the time you will need to earn your degree and increase your costs.
  - If you have accepted an assistantship, your salary is subject to city, state, and federal taxes, unless there is a tax treaty between your home country and the United States. U.S. tax law requires the University to tax scholarship and fellowship grants that exceed the cost of tuition and fees to individuals on F-1 and J-1 visas. The tax will reduce your payments by 14%.

Medical costs in the U.S. are high, even when you have health insurance. All students are required to carry health insurance, and it is strongly recommended that your dependents are covered by health insurance while they are in the U.S. J-2 dependents are required by law to have health insurance. If you have health insurance through Columbia University, you can get coverage for dependents under the same plan at an additional cost.

### Cultural Adjustment

Moving to a new country, new city and a new academic
environment is a significant adjustment for everyone. The adjustment process is often called culture shock. Each individual experiences culture shock differently and there is no way to know in advance how you will respond to cultural adjustment. There are, however, some shared experiences of cultural adjustment that you should be aware of. It can be helpful to remember that the process of adjustment, the ups and the downs, is normal.

Cultural adjustment is typically described by a series of phases that begin before you leave your home country until you return home and go through the “re-entry phase”. You can go back and forth between phases and even skip some phases. The important thing is to remember that they are just phases and if you are experiencing difficulties, you will get through them and your feelings are normal.

The following are resources you can use to learn more about cultural adjustment and American culture and customs. Students have found it useful to learn about this subject before arriving, and then to return to the resources once here experiencing it yourself.

The short Youtube videos below were created by Dan Fishel, a former international student at the Graduate School of Business at Columbia University for their orientation.

- Part 1: Culture Shock Phases 1,2
- Part 2: Culture Shock Phase 3
- Part 3: Social Adjustment
- Part 4: American Handshakes
- Part 5: Academic Adjustment

- www.yale.edu/oiss/life/cultural/index.html

- Social Customs and Cultural Differences http://www.edupass.org/culture/

- Columbia’s CPS (Counseling and Psychological Services) is a great resource to students, and run several workshops specific to international students’ academic and social adjustment soon after the start of each term. Many of their counselors have an international background and are sensitive to issues of acculturation.

CPS article: New to New York: Coping with Culture Shock www.columbia.edu/cu/issonew/NY/NY.pdf

Academic Life

As you begin your classes at Columbia, you will probably notice some similarities and some differences between academic life here and in your home country. The following section will provide you with some information about the U.S. education system and tips on how to have a successful academic experience at Columbia.

Structure of the U.S. Higher Education System

The U.S. education system, as a whole, is intended to provide a broad education for as many people as possible. A high percentage of the population completes both secondary and post-secondary education. Students are not assigned to an academic track until mid-way through their undergraduate program, and national exams are not required to graduate from secondary school though performance on aptitude examinations, such as the SAT, may be used as admission criteria.

Undergraduate degrees (Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science) in the U.S. include a general education component and usually take four years to complete. The first year of study is called freshman year; the second is the sophomore year; the third is junior year and the final is senior year. Most undergraduate students (commonly referred to as undergrads) complete coursework in the humanities, social sciences, mathematics and sciences regardless of their chosen major, or area of specialization. The major is usually declared in the junior year. Students who have received the bachelor’s degree from U.S. schools will normally have a theoretical knowledge of their field of study rather than a practical one; however, the level of study in the field approaches that of the U.S. masters level.

Graduate study includes study toward a master’s degree or doctorate in all fields. At the graduate level, students study only their major subject along with languages or other subjects that will aid them in their field of study. Most original research is done at the doctoral level.

Overview of the American education system http://studyusa.com/en/a/58/understanding-the-american-education-system

Keys to Academic Success

To succeed in the U.S. academic system, you need to know how it is organized and how it works. Listed below are some suggestions you should keep in mind as you begin your studies. You will learn more of the informal rules for academic success as your courses progress and you have the opportunity to talk with advanced students in your field. The more you discuss such topics with experienced students, the sooner you will be able to develop an understanding of how your academic unit functions. Keep in mind that you may need a period of adjustment before you are able to demonstrate the best of your ability.

Expect to find different values in the U.S. educational system. From your successful experience in other academic systems, you have developed certain assumptions about the purposes and methods of education and about the way your field of interest should be studied. For example, you may assume that it is important to memorize large quantities of information, or that the way to study your field is to concentrate on a very limited aspect of it in great depth. Here, on the other hand, you may find that
memorizing material is considered less important than synthesizing ideas from a variety of sources, or that a field of study might be approached by contemplating briefly the works of a large number of scholars. It is important to recognize that differences of this kind exist between the systems of the United States and other countries, and to understand that you may have to adjust your thinking.

**Know what is expected by the instructor.** Professors do not have a prescribed way of teaching or grading students at Columbia University. You must determine what each professor expects of his or her students. Sometimes you must attend every class and actively participate in class discussion. Other times the expectation will be that papers be handed in at various intervals, with attendance or class participation seen as less important. It is your responsibility to be absolutely clear about your professor’s expectations.

**Talk with your instructors.** Professors here expect students to ask questions in class or immediately after it. They also expect students to consult them in their offices when there are problems. If you are not doing well and you do not go to see the professor about the situation, he or she may assume that you are not serious about the class. In other words, most professors will evaluate the attitude of a student as negative or, at best, indifferent if the student never raises questions either in class or out of it. If at any time you feel unsure of what is expected of you in class or are troubled by some aspect of the work, ask the professor and some of your fellow students about it.

**Select your courses wisely.** When arranging your course schedule, consult not only your academic adviser but also experienced students familiar with available courses and professors. Try to choose a combination of more demanding and less demanding courses, rather than only difficult ones requiring unusually heavy amounts of work. If it is possible, especially early in your program, do not take more courses than you must.

**Keep up with readings and assignments.** If you are accustomed to waiting until halfway through—or the end—of the term to begin studying, you will need to change your approach.

**The Central Value of Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is taken very seriously within higher education institutions in the U.S. Violations of the academic integrity standards can result in expulsion from the University. Plagiarism—representing another person’s work as your own—is the most serious offense in the academic world. Unfortunately, a few international students are found to have plagiarized each year and are expelled. The idea of what constitutes plagiarism may vary from country to country so it is important that you familiarize yourself with Columbia’s policies on academic integrity. This information will be reviewed during your School’s or department’s orientation program. The Columbia University Libraries provide guidelines on this subject at: <http://library.columbia.edu/subject-guides/social-sciences/plagiarism.html> and offers support for citation management software <http://library.columbia.edu/research/citation-management.html>

Indiana University has a useful self-test tool available to all students to check their knowledge on recognizing plagiarism. <https://www.indiana.edu/~istd/test.html>

Cheating on exams or homework is also a violation of the academic integrity standards. Talking during examinations, especially in a foreign language, copying from another’s paper and having someone else do your work are unacceptable. Even something as simple as asking to borrow a pencil or using another person’s calculator during an exam could be construed as cheating. Collaborating on homework assignments may also be prohibited by your professor. If you are unsure about whether you can work with fellow students on an assignment, ask the teaching assistant or the professor.

**Types of Courses and Methods of Assessment**

**Lectures**
The most common method of instruction is the classroom lecture. The lectures are often conducted with the assumption that you have read the assigned texts. The lecture often does not teach the information you read but use it as a starting point for further analysis and discussion. Attending the lecture is not a replacement for reading the assigned texts.

When the class is too large to permit questions and discussion or if you are not able to ask your questions during class, you may visit your professor or TA during his or her office hours to discuss your points. Many large lecture classes also have smaller sessions led by TAs to review course content.

**Seminars**
The seminar is a small class at the advanced undergraduate or graduate level. It is likely to be devoted entirely to discussion. Students are often required to prepare presentations based on their independent reading and research.

**Laboratories** – Some courses require work in a lab where the theory learned in the classroom is applied to practical problems.

Courses at all levels are usually graded using continuous assessment throughout the academic term. You are usually graded on every assignment given to you, including homework, pop quizzes and class participation. This means that you will need
to keep up with the reading and assignments listed in the syllabus throughout the semester.

Attendance in class is usually required, and the professor’s attendance policy is listed in the syllabus.

Examinations – In-class exams are more common at the undergraduate than the graduate level and depend on the assessment methods in your field of study. Many classes will have a “midterm” and “final” exam. Other tests or quizzes may be given periodically throughout the semester and sometimes without notice. Quizzes given without notice are called “pop quizzes”. Examinations are designed to assure that students are doing the work assigned and to assess their understanding of the subject. Professors or TAs will explain the type of exam you will be taking and the rules of the exam. Often, sample questions will be given to help you prepare. There are several types of exams.

Objective Exams – These exams test your knowledge of facts. International students sometimes have difficulty with objective examinations, not because of a lack of knowledge but rather because of unfamiliarity with the exam format. Objective exams can include the following types of questions:

Multiple choice: From a series of possible answers, you choose the correct answer or answers. These can be difficult, particularly due to the subtle differences in meaning of the words used in the possible answers.

Matching: Two columns of words, phrases, or statements are given and you choose the related pairs.

True or False: A list of statements is given and you indicated which are true or false.

Identification: You give the source and a brief explanation of the significance of certain names, terms, or phrases.

Fill in the blank: You will in the gaps in given phrases or statement so make a complete and accurate statement.

Subjective Exams – Sometimes called essay or short-answer exams, these exams require the student to compose a full response to a question or statement. This kind of exam tests your ability to organize and communicate your knowledge of a particular subject.

In-Class Exams – These exams are given during a class period. Questions may or may not be given to you in advance of the exam. The exam may be open book, meaning you can bring notes to the exam, or closed book, meaning you cannot reference any of your notes or materials during the exam period.

Take-Home Exams – Take-home exams are assigned to be completed outside of class time and submitted to the professor by a specific time and date. These exams are usually open book. It is especially important to know whether you can discuss the exam questions with classmates for these types of exams.

Research or Response Papers
In many courses, you will be required to write a comprehensive paper based on study or research you have done in the library or laboratory. Some courses also require you to write response papers based on the readings assigned for a period of time. Papers vary in length and scope of research. It is important to cite your sources appropriately for all papers you submit. Your TA or professor may be able to assist you with organizing your paper and properly citing sources. The Columbia University Libraries provide guidelines on this subject at:

Research Resources at Columbia Libraries
Columbia has one of the largest university collections in the United States. The extensive resources available in the 22 Columbia libraries include more than eleven million volumes. Each library on campus has professional librarians who are able to answer your questions about where to find a volume or how you can approach your research. It is highly recommended you attend an orientation to the library system to maximize your use of the libraries, and become familiar with their research support and service at http://library.columbia.edu/about.html and http://library.columbia.edu/content/dam/libraryweb/about/libraries_guide_2010-11.pdf

CUIT - Columbia University Information Technology (CUIT) provides Columbia University students, faculty and staff with central computing and communications services including email, telephone service, Web publishing, computer labs and electronic classrooms, course management and student information...
applications, office and administrative applications, and management of the high-speed campus Ethernet and wireless networks. CUIT also manages an array of computer labs, terminal clusters, ColumbiaNet stations, multimedia classrooms, and provides a variety of technical support services. For more information, visit their website at [www.columbia.edu/cuit/](http://www.columbia.edu/cuit/).

Columbia Student and Administrative Services

This broad category includes Dining, Health, Housing, ID Center, Information Technology, Mail Services, Office of the Registrar, Print Services, Student Financial Services, Transportation. Your best source of information about these offices and services is the university’s [New Students](http://newstudents.columbia.edu/) website

Student Health Care

Health care in the United States is very good but can be very costly. There is no national medical care system or insurance program for students entering an academic setting. You must pay for medical or mental health services. For example, hospital costs in the New York area can be $2,000 a day, and that does not include physicians’ fees, which are also very high. One cannot afford to be without health insurance. For this reason, Columbia University offers a two-part health care program: the Health Service Program and the Columbia Student Medical Insurance Plan.

The Columbia Health Program — All full-time students are required to pay the Health Service Fee, which provides access to on-campus programs and services with Columbia Health. These resources are available to help students stay healthy and productive during their time at Columbia. Columbia Health is composed of five departments and more than 130 health professionals to meet a student’s health needs, including Alice! Health Promotion Program, Counseling and Psychological Services, Disability Services, Primary Care Medical Services, and the Sexual Violence Prevention and Response Program.

Morningside students may use Primary Care Medical Services located on the third and fourth floors of John Jay Hall (212-854-2284), while those registered at the Medical Center may use the Student Health Service located on the street level of 60 Haven Avenue (212-305-3400).

Columbia Student Medical Insurance Plan — Most people don’t think about health care until they feel unwell. However, negotiating health care systems can be over-whelming, especially when the system is unfamiliar or a student has other responsibilities or priorities they need to attend to. Now, before you arrive on campus, is a good time to read the information available to you.

The University also requires all full-time students, and strongly urges their dependents, either to enroll in the Columbia Student Medical Insurance Plan (also known as the Columbia Plan) or provide proof of comparable insurance coverage.

The Columbia Student Medical Insurance Plan works with the Columbia Health Program to provide care that complements the programs offered on campus. If you will be accompanied by any family members, it is imperative that your dependents also have adequate medical insurance. Dependents may also be covered under the Columbia Student Medical Insurance Plan, but review the dependent plan details to understand this coverage. For more information regarding specific coverage plans and providers, please explore the Columbia Health website at [www.health.columbia.edu](http://www.health.columbia.edu).

Immunization — The University informs new incoming students of the details describing the Health Service Program, the student health insurance plan and the immunization requirements. It is essential that you comply with the immunization requirement mandated by New York State or there will be a hold on your eligibility to register for classes, thereby jeopardizing your F-1 or J-1 status.

Student Financial Services (SFS)

Tuition Payment — Tuition billing and payments are managed by Student Financial Services. Payments are due at the beginning of each semester. Failure to pay the full balance on time will result in late fees. See the SFS website for information related to billing and payment. [http://sfs.columbia.edu/billing](http://sfs.columbia.edu/billing).

Housing

Finding housing can be one of the most challenging parts of getting settled in New York. University housing is available, but because availability is limited many students live off-campus. Because it can be difficult to secure housing, you should make plans for temporary housing for when you arrive in New York. The ISSO is unable to make housing arrangements for students. The resources below can assist you with finding suitable accommodations.

University Housing

Undergraduate Students

Undergraduate students attending Columbia College and the School of Engineering and Applied Science (SEAS) are guaranteed university housing. Undergraduate students receive information regarding housing from the Office of Undergraduate Admissions and must adhere to the application deadlines. [www.columbia.edu/cu/housing/](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/housing/).
Graduate Students
Graduate students are not guaranteed university housing. Students must apply for university housing through their Columbia school and you will receive information on how to apply from your school’s admissions office. The University Apartment Housing (UAH) office has detailed information regarding the types of available housing, the application process and information for tenants on their website at http://facilities.columbia.edu/housing/overview. Be sure to read about signing a rental agreement, key release, and moving in under “Essentials” on their website.

Off-Campus Housing
Finding a place to live off-campus housing can be challenging. If you plan to live off-campus, try to come to New York at least three weeks ahead of time and pre-arrange a temporary place to stay until you find an apartment.

Columbia’s Off-Campus Housing Assistance (OCHA) http://facilities.columbia.edu/housing/intro-ocha-3 can be very helpful in your search. They manage a database known as the Housing Registry which includes available rooms and apartments in non-Columbia-owned buildings and sublets of units in Columbia-managed housing. Prospective roommates can also post and search profiles on this site. In addition, OCHA offers housing search counseling and is supported in these efforts by our cooperative relationships with two New York City real estate/relocation agencies. OCHA has online listings of off-campus rooms and apartments, guides to NYC neighborhoods, resources on how to find housing, and general information about renting.

Another recommended resource is http://www.sabbaticalhomes.com/. Most international students will find that it is easier and more practical to share an apartment than to try to obtain a lease in your name. Without a U.S. credit history, employment, or a U.S. – based guarantor it is very difficult.

Temporary Housing Options
Hotels in New York can be very expensive. Columbia’s Office of Work-Life is intended for employees, but has a comprehensive compilation of temporary accommodation useful to all new arrivals or visitors for a variety of budgets. <http://worklife.columbia.edu/temporary-housing-options>

Getting to Campus
Columbia University is located in the borough of Manhattan. The main entrance to the Morningside campus is at Broadway and West 116th Street. The center of the Medical Center campus is located at West 168th Street and Fort Washington Avenue.

The New York City area is served by three airports. John F. Kennedy (JFK) Airport is located in Queens, approximately 25 miles from Columbia. LaGuardia Airport is also in Queens, but is about 15 miles from Columbia. Newark Liberty Airport is located in the state of New Jersey and is about 25 miles from Columbia. Most international students will arrive at JFK. LaGuardia only has international flights to and from Mexico and Canada. Transportation to Columbia from Newark is the most expensive because it is located in another state. All three airports have Ground Transportation Information counters near the baggage claims. Ground transportation options are also posted on their websites so you can make transportation plans in advance of your arrival.

JFK: www.panynj.gov/airports/jfk.html
Newark: www.panynj.gov/airports/newark-liberty.html
LaGuardia: www.panynj.gov/airports/laguardia.html

By Taxi – The easiest way to get to your destination from the airport is by taxi. Follow the “Taxis” sign to the uniformed taxi dispatcher. The dispatcher will give you a card with the number of the cab assigned to you and the approximate fare you can expect to pay at your final destination. From JFK to Manhattan, there is a “flat fare” to anywhere in Manhattan—plus a tip on that amount (10 – 20%) plus the cost of the toll for bridge into Manhattan—about $7. Destinations in other boroughs are based on the metered fare. You may pay with a credit card, but drivers prefer cash because they pay a fee for the credit card use. Ride ONLY in a licensed yellow taxi from the taxi stand. NEVER go with anyone who may approach you in the airport offering you a “good deal” or “express” ride to the city.

When telling the taxi driver your destination, you should tell them the street address and the cross streets. For example, you might say 400 West 119th Street between Amsterdam Avenue and Morningside Drive.

Public Transportation – Public transportation options exist from each of the airports; however, keep in mind it is difficult to manage large bags on the buses and subways. All transportation options are described in the airport links above under “Ground Transportation”.

Buses or Shared Vans – Shared vans, such as SuperShuttle, are less expensive than taxis and will take you to your destination. Because they drop off passengers around Manhattan, the ride from the airport to your destination can take longer than expected. Buses also run from the airports to Midtown Manhattan. If you take a bus, you will have to take a taxi or public transportation to your destination.

Welcome To NY! The First Few Weeks
Relocating to a new country in one of the fastest-paced cities in the world is an exciting, but challenging experience. There are many things to take care of, and they can’t all be done at once. Not knowing where to find what you need or how things are done, can
be unsettling and frustrating. Even a good command of English does not necessarily prepare you for the new accents and idioms you may encounter here. It is important that you be patient with yourself—and others. We know that obtaining a visa and making travel plans is a difficult process, but it is advisable to come early, before your academic commitments begin, to allow you time to settle in, get to know your way around, meet new people, and feel more “at home” before classes start. The earliest you can arrive, according to immigration regulations, is 30 days before the program start date on your visa certificate (I-20 or DS-2019).

New Student Checklist
Find housing!
Submit the Online SEVIS Arrival Form
Open a bank account.
Attend your School’s Orientation Program
Get your Columbia Student Card
Check with your school about any required placement tests you may need to take.
Register for a fulltime course load
Contact your consulate in New York City.

Settling In
Banking: Most students choose to open a bank account while they are in the U.S. The most common types of accounts are checking and savings accounts. Checking accounts are generally used for day-to-day expenses and do not earn interest while savings accounts are used for funds that are not immediately required and earn interest. Many banks will charge monthly fees and might have minimum balance requirements; however, many banks also waive those fees and requirements for students. When you go to open an account, tell the banker that you are a student at Columbia to find out if you will be exempted from those fees.

You do not need a Social Security number or a letter from the ISSO to open a bank account. You do need your passport, I-20 or DS-2019 and letter of admission to Columbia and your Columbia ID if you have it. The bank will normally want to see proof of your local or home address, such as through a housing contract or lease or a copy of bank statement from your home country with your name and address printed on it. For a list of banks in the Columbia neighborhoods, see http://www.columbia.edu/cu/issos/incoming/CU_Area_banks.pdf

Credit Cards and Building Credit - Most international students are not eligible to open a credit card when you first arrive in the U.S. In general, you need a credit history of paying your bills on time in the U.S. to be eligible for a credit card. You can check with the bank at which you have an account for the criteria in getting a credit card. Citibank and others have credit cards designed specifically for students. Other strategies are discussed at http://www.istudentcity.com/feature/1005_ccards2.asp

Establishing credit in the United States is important in terms of your eligibility for credit cards, loans, and having lower deposit amounts and interest rates. Good credit is established based on bank account activity history and on-time payments of bills that are in your name (i.e. utilities, phone, rent, credit card). One way to establish credit is to obtain a “secured credit card” from your bank. Secured credit cards require a deposit as collateral that becomes your line of credit. The timely payments add to your credit history. You can set up automatic payments through your bank or with individual retailers to ensure that your bills are paid on time. When you are eligible, only through employment, to get a Social Security Number (SSN) it is a good idea to update your accounts with the number so your credit history is consolidated and linked to your SSN.

Phone Service
Local & Long Distance Calls — for local or long distance service you must dial 1 plus the 10 digit number (example: 1-212-854-3587 for the ISSO). The area code is the first 3 numbers. In the above example 212 is the area code

Toll-Free Call — these numbers are often referred to as “800 numbers” after the original area code. For service, dial 1 plus the toll free 10-digit number. The following area codes indicate toll-free calls: 800, 822, 833, 844, 855, 866, 877 and 888.

International Call — Dial 011+country code + area code +number
See www.countrycallingcodes.com for a list of country codes.

Mobile (Cell Phone) Service Providers — You have a few choices for cell phone service: a pre-paid plan, or monthly plans, some with a year or two-year contract, and some without. Since you most likely do not have a credit history in the U.S., cell phone companies may require a refundable deposit before a contract can be approved. If you opt for a pre-paid plan, please make sure and read the fine print. Some companies charge a fee to customers who use a calling card with the pre-paid plans.

If you choose to sign a contract, you will be charged a fee if you cancel the service before time. See http://blog.peertransfer.com/2013/06/11/choosing-a-cell-phone-provider-in-the-u-s-for-international-students/ for some good tips on understanding and choosing a mobile phone plan.

For a list of providers closest to the Columbia neighborhood, see http://www.columbia.edu/cu/issos/incoming/Mobile_phone_options_July_2013.pdf
Local Post Offices — Find locations and hours of operation by inserting the neighborhood zip code at www.usps.com

The Post Office closest to the Morningside campus is located at 534 West 112th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue
Monday – Friday 9:00 am – 5:00 pm
Saturday 9:00 am – 4:00 pm

The Post Office closest to the Medical Center is located at 511 W. 165th St. between Audubon Ave. and Amsterdam Ave.
Monday – Friday 9:00 am – 5:00 pm
Saturday 9:00 am – 4:00 pm

ZIP (postal) codes are required for all U.S. mailing addresses. To find ZIP codes use the ZIP Locator at www.usps.com/

Getting Around Manhattan

New York City is composed of five boroughs—Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, the Bronx and Staten Island. It is worthwhile exploring them all, but this section will just cover Manhattan.

See Navigating New York City!

A Brief Orientation — Manhattan is quite easy to navigate. Named and numbered avenues run north-south from 1st Avenue in the east to 12th Avenue in the west. Cross streets run east-west from 14th Street to the northern tip at 215th Street. Broadway runs diagonally across the length of Manhattan from a northwest to southeast direction.

If you are presented with an avenue address (such as 524 Amsterdam Avenue or 411 Third Avenue), Google the address to see the cross streets, or use the www.ny.com/locator/

Fifth Avenue is the dividing line between East and West. Building numbers go up in both directions from Fifth Avenue, so an address such as 12 East 23rd Street is in the first block east of Fifth, and the address 12 West 23rd Street is on the first block west of Fifth.

Central Park divides the east and west side of the city between 59th and 110th Streets.

Invest in a good street map and NYC guidebook soon after your arrival, and you’re sure to make good use of it throughout your stay. Alternatively, look for relevant apps for your smartphone.

Public Transportation — The New York City subway system covers 231 miles of track in the five boroughs of New York City—Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island. It runs every day of the year, 24 hours a day, although with reduced frequency late nights and weekends. The subway system is a great, fast way to get around, avoiding above-ground traffic.

Riding buses when you have the time is enjoyable, for the obvious reason of being able to look out the window and see the changing neighborhoods. You board the bus at the front, and pay by using a MetroCard or having $2.50 in change. (No bills or pennies are allowed)

Bus drivers stop at bus stops only if there is someone waiting there, or if someone on the bus presses the “stop requested” strip located between windows in advance of the stop. It’s a good idea to take a bus late at night when traveling alone rather than a subway.

Using a MetroCard — MetroCards are electronic fare cards that are used for public transportation (subways and buses) in all five boroughs of New York City. The basic fare for single pay-per-ride is $2.50, regardless of distance. www.mta.info/metrocard/

There are two kinds of MetroCards:

1) The Unlimited Ride MetroCard lets you ride all you want for a specific time period (from when you activate it, not when you buy it). Buying a weekly and monthly unlimited card is much more economical if you use transportation regularly.

2) The Pay-Per-Ride MetroCard can be bought in denominations from $5 and up. You get an automatic free transfer between subway and bus, or between buses, within a two-hour period from the time you pay your first fare.

To get the best travel route between two points, use www.hopstop.com/

For maps and schedules of NYC transportation and commuter rail lines, go to www.mta.info/. You can download an MTA subway map onto a smartphone, and there are also a lot of useful apps for navigating the city.

Taxis — Taxicabs are yellow and have a medallion number on the top of the roof. If it is lit up and says “on-duty”, it is available. The passenger is charged by the time and distance on a meter. It is usual to tip the driver 10-20% of the fare. It is also possible to use private car services by calling in advance to pick you up. One reliable car service in the Columbia neighborhood is Superior Car Service at 212 666-3939, usually arriving within minutes of your call.

Staying Safe at Columbia and in NYC

New York presents some of the same security concerns as any other urban area, but by using common sense and caution, you can do a great deal to increase your personal safety. Columbia’s Department of Public Safety is a great resource. Take time to explore their website at www.columbia.edu/cu/publicsafety/ which includes information on their operations, shuttle bus schedule, escort service, crime prevention, personal safety tips, and more.
Here are some tips to follow.

- Be aware of your surroundings at all times.
- Express yourself with confidence and control (i.e., when you're asking for directions or walking alone), rather than with fear or anxiety.
- Trust your instincts. If you feel uncomfortable about where you are, or are suspicious of someone near you, leave or stay away.
- Let roommates, friends, or partners know where you will be, when to expect you, or if you're going to be late or out of town.
- Avoid walking and exercising alone—have a friend, roommate, or partner join you.
- At the Morningside Heights campus, if you cannot find someone to walk with you from 8 PM to 3 AM, call Columbia's escort service at x4-SAFE / x4-7233. Outside of these hours, call Columbia Security at ext. 2798 for an escort. For the Medical Center campus, call x7-8100 twenty-four-hours anytime for an escort.
- Don't be afraid or embarrassed to call for an escort—your safety, well-being, and peace of mind are at stake.
- At night, take the well-lit and well-traveled paths. Avoid shortcuts through dark or isolated areas.
- Be prepared and ready with your keys before you approach your residence hall, apartment, home, or automobile.
- If you think someone is following you, don't lead him or her to your destination—instead, abruptly change directions and go into a store or restaurant that is open.
- Be aware of your valuables and belongings, such as your backpack, handbag, or wallet. Even if you're in a "safe" place for a short time, take them with you rather than leave them behind.
- When taking the bus or subway, use well-lit, and preferably well-peopled, bus stops and subway platforms. When riding the bus, sit near the driver. When riding the subway, avoid the isolated sections of the platform, such as the ends, and avoid the empty or fewer-peopled subway cars. Don't sleep on the bus or subway. Also be aware of who gets off the bus or subway with you. Head directly to a public place, such as a store, restaurant, or residence hall, if you feel that someone is following you.
- Be an active, safety-conscious student: Notify Columbia's Facilities Management Department at (212) 854-2797 (Morningside) or (212) 305-8100 (Medical Center) about broken lights, emergency call boxes, windows, doors, locks, etc. Report all crime(s) to Columbia's Department of Public Safety or the police precinct. For Morningside Heights, the 26th Precinct number is (212) 678-1311; for Medical Center, the 33rd Precinct number is (212) 927-3200.
- Free shuttle service (with Columbia ID) is available between the Morningside Heights and Medical Center campuses, and also within the Morningside Heights area at night.
- Protect your privacy online and be aware of scams on the phone, street and online. Be alert to phishing. Watch an entertaining and informative short video on this subject. http://www.columbia.edu/cu/publicsafety/columbiaVideo.html

In case of an emergency situation, you can contact Columbia's Department of Public Safety at (212) 854-5555 (Morningside) or (212) 305-7979 (Medical Center)—put the numbers on your phone.

Shopping

Food (supermarkets)

Fairway - 131st Street and 12th Avenue by the Hudson River; also at Broadway and West 74th Street
http://www.fairwaymarket.mcjr.net/store-harlem/

Apple Tree - 1225 Amsterdam Avenue at 120th Street
http://www.theappletreemarket.com/Products-Page.wd=1

D'Agostino – 2828 Broadway and 110th Street

Metro Foodmarket - 1316 Amsterdam Avenue between 123-124th Street
http://www.metros.com/

Milano – 2892 Broadway between 112th and 113th Streets

Morton Williams - 2941 Broadway and West 115 Street

West Side Market – 2840 Broadway and 110th Street
http://www.wmarketnyc.com/

Zabar's - 2245 Broadway between 80th and 81st Streets
http://www.zabars.com/

Specialty / Ethnic Food

You can find foods from all over the world in NYC. In the Columbia neighborhood alone, there is a wide variety at Fairway, Milano, West Side Market and Milano. You can find more specialty items in particular ethnic neighborhoods, and it's an enjoyable way to explore neighborhoods in the other boroughs outside of Manhattan.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_York_City_ethnic_enclaves

Furniture and Other Household Items

Bed Bath & Beyond – 1932 Broadway between 64th-65th St.
www.bedbathandbeyond.com

Century 21 - 22 Cortlandt Street between Church and Broadway
www.c21stores.com/

University Housewares - 2901 Broadway at 113th Street
http://www.universityhousewares.com/

Crate & Barrel - 650 Madison Avenue at 59th Street
www.crateandbarrel.com

Gothic Cabinet Craft - 2652 Broadway between West 100th and
101st Streets  http://gothiccabinetcraft.com/
IKEA – In Elizabeth, NJ with a free shuttle bus on weekends from the Port Authority Bus Station
IKEA – In Brooklyn. Free Water Taxi on weekends from the Wall St. Pier
http://info.ikea-usa.com/Brooklyn/StoreDirections.aspx

Kmart - 250 West 34th Street between 7th and 8th Ave. If you take the #1, 2 or 3 subway to 34th St. Penn Station, you can enter the store from the concourse without exiting to the street. www.kmart.com/
Macy’s Herald Square - 7th Avenue at 34th Street www.macy’s.com/
Marshalls –125 West 125th Street and Lenox Avenue; 50 W. 225th Street (next to the #1 subway 225th subway stop); http://www.marshallsonline.com/
Target – 40 West 225th Street http://www.target.com/ (next to the #1 subway 225th subway stop)
Dollar Tree (Deals) – household and food items are all $1
http://www.dollartree.com/home.jsp
280 Saint Nicholas Ave. near 123rd St. and other locations
99¢ Store – 933 Amsterdam Avenue & between 105th and 106th St.
Pottery Barn - 1965 Broadway at the corner of Broadway and 67th Street
http://www.potterybarn.com/
Sleepys – 2804 Broadway at W. 108th St. www.sleepys.com/

Used Furniture and Other Household Items

Columbus Avenue Flea Market - 77th Street and Columbus Avenue on Sunday
CraigsList - newyork.craigslist.org/
Housing Works – 2569 Broadway between 96-97th St. Other thrift shop locations www.housingworks.org/
Salvation Army - 536 West 46 Street between 10th and 11th Avenue
Goodwill – 2231 Third Ave. at 121 Street; other NYC locations: http://www.goodwillny.org/shop/goodwill-store-locations

Computers, Telephones, and Other Electronic Items

Computer Sales@columbia - Columbia students may purchase Apple and Dell products at discounted rates.
www.columbia.edu/acis/sales/
J& R Computer World and J&R Music World 15 Park Row between Ann and Beekman Streets (downtown in the financial district) www.jr.com/
Radio Shack - 2812 Broadway at 108th Street www.radioshack.com/

Bicycles, Rollerblades, and Other Sports Equipment

Blades- 156 West 72nd Street  http://www.blades.com/about/
Innovations Bike Shop- 105 West 106 Street between Columbus and Amsterdam Ave. Also offers bike rentals by the hour or day http://www.innovationbikeshop.com/
Eastern Mountain Sports (EMS) – 2152 Broadway at 76 Street www.ems.com/
REI Soho 303 Lafayette Street just south of Houston Street http://www.rei.com/stores/soho.html
Modell’s Sporting Goods - 300 West 125 Street at St. Nicholas Avenue

Museums and Cultural Institutions in NY

You have probably heard about New York’s world-famous museums, but there are many other lesser-known museums and cultural institutions to explore. The Arts Initiative at Columbia provides great information about events in the city and on campus and free admission to over 30 museums with a Columbia ID, as well as discount vouchers for the cinema and discount tickets to the theater. For a list of NYC museums and cultural institutions, see

International House - A rich resource in the Columbia neighborhood is International House, located next door to the ISSO at 500 Riverside Drive. I. House is a residential community of more than 700 students, scholars and interns of different nationalities and backgrounds. Today, 85 years after its founding by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., I. House is world-renowned as a center for cultural exchange and international events. Many Columbia students live there, but they also offer Non-Resident memberships, allowing access a rich array of facilities, programs, and activities. Visit the website at www.ihouse-nyc.org/ to learn more about their programs.

One to World– The organization One to World, located downtown at 285 West Broadway at Canal Street, helps international students, scholars, and their families in the New York area make use of the cultural, ethnic, and professional resources of the city. They sponsor various activities, including tours throughout New York and visits with American families. One to World’s web site is www.one-to-world.org/

Family Matters

Information for Spouses and Partners

Although it is exciting to have the opportunity of living in another country for a while, it can be challenging for the spouse of a student or scholar to settle in and find their own independent reasons for being here and circle of friends. Students and scholars are very busy and spend a great deal of time studying or doing
research. But in addition to being busy, the student or scholar has built-in opportunities to interact with others and form friendships. Spouses and partners, on the other hand, must actively seek out those opportunities. This task may be a bit more difficult for international spouses whose immigration status does not allow them to be employed in the United States, or who may not be proficient in English. U.S. immigration regulations prohibit employment for spouses in F-2 and H-4 immigration status. Fortunately, there are many ways for spouses and partners of international students and scholars to become involved with the University and its community.

Using Columbia facilities, such as the library and gym - Spouses who are not studying at Columbia are not eligible for a Columbia ID; therefore they cannot access most Columbia facilities. One exception is the gym, which they may pay to use. Spouses may apply for a library card granting reading privileges but not borrowing privileges at 201 Butler Library, telephone number (212) 854-2271. Bring some documentation with both your name and your spouse’s name and address on it, such as a lease or bank statement, or documents reflecting your F-2 or J-2 immigration status.


Eligibility to apply for a Social Security Number - Social Security Numbers are issued only to those who have eligibility to be employed in the United States. Therefore, an F-2 spouse—or a J-2 spouse without work authorization—cannot get an SSN. Individuals in F-2 or J-2 status can apply for an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN). The ITIN may be needed for filing a tax return. The ITIN is obtained by application to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS); the ISSO has information about this process.

English classes - There aren’t classes specifically for spouses, but there are local resources. Many spouses take advantage of the inexpensive ESL classes at the Community English Program (CEP) at Teachers College, taught by TC students who are ESL teachers in training. Teachers College is located on 120th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue. Registration for the fall semester is usually in mid-September. [www.tc.columbia.edu/centers/communityenglish/](http://www.tc.columbia.edu/centers/communityenglish/)

American Language Program (ALP) at Columbia offers courses in English as a Second Language (ESL). See [http://ce.columbia.edu/alp](http://ce.columbia.edu/alp)

Public Libraries – Some branches may offer free English classes for the community. [http://www.nypl.org/events/classes/adult-learning-centers](http://www.nypl.org/events/classes/adult-learning-centers)

Community Involvement

One to World - The organization One to World, located downtown at 285 West Broadway at Canal Street, helps international students, scholars, and their families in the New York area make use of the cultural, ethnic, and professional resources of the city. They sponsor various activities, including tours throughout New York and visits with American families. One to World’s web site is [www.one-to-world.org/](http://www.one-to-world.org/)

Community Impact - Community Impact is an independent non-profit organization dedicated to serving disadvantaged people in the Harlem, Washington Heights, and Morningside Heights communities. Community Impact strives to advance the public good, and foster meaningful volunteer opportunities through partnerships with more than 100 community organizations and agencies who do service work in these neighborhoods. Many spouses and partners have enriched their own lives by helping to make a difference in the lives of others.

New York Cares – Get involved and meet people by volunteering your time. This organization can offer you opportunities for one or throughout the year. [http://www.newyorkcares.org/volunteer/](http://www.newyorkcares.org/volunteer/)

Public Libraries - The New York Public Library and its branches provide a wide variety of resource information and special programs for residents, including lecture and film series of general interest for adults. To apply for a library card you will need proof of residence by showing a rent receipt or utility bill. Books, electronic books, DVDs, and CD are available for borrowing. Many libraries will also have special sections and activities for children. [www.nypl.org/](http://www.nypl.org/)

Information for Families with Children

Columbia University’s Office of Work/Life promotes the University’s commitment to a working and learning environment supportive of its faculty, researchers, administrators, staff and students in their pursuit of productive and fulfilling professional and personal lives.

The Work/Life website provides a central location for current related policies, programs and services available at Columbia University. The School and Child Care Search Service support parents at Columbia University through school placement counseling, child care referrals, a searchable database of New York City area schools, and informational resources for finding child care and schooling.
Other resources for childcare:

The Center for Children’s Initiatives (CCI) has information about choosing different types of childcare
www.centerforchildrensinitiatives.org/

The Day Care Council of New York, Inc. The Day Care Council of New York is a diverse membership organization of child care and family service providers, consumers and advocates. The Council’s mission is to seek support for and to assist in the development of quality child and family care services. http://www.dccnyinc.org/

Barnard College, affiliated with Columbia University, has a babysitting agency for hiring Barnard students.
http://barnardbabysitting.com/

Other resources for NYC public schools:

Inside Schools.org is an extremely helpful independent guide to NYC public schools that provides practical tools to navigate the city’s school system. Be sure to read the information at “The Basics” that includes a section called “New to NYC Schools” and helps demystify the process of enrollment.
http://insideschools.org/

NYC Department of Education website - schools.nyc.gov/ParentsFamilies/

Religious Life at Columbia

The Earl Hall Center - The mission of the Earl Hall Center is to foster learning through spiritual, ethical, religious and cultural exchange, and to promote service to the University and its surrounding New York City communities. The Earl Hall Center includes the Office of the University Chaplain, Community Impact and the United Campus Ministries.

The Office of the University Chaplain - The Office of the University Chaplain (OUC) ministers to the individual faiths of Columbia University's diverse community of scholars, students and staff from many different faith traditions while promoting interfaith and intercultural understanding. Toward this goal, the Office of the University Chaplain creates and sponsors programs concerning justice, faith and spirituality.

United Campus Ministries - An umbrella organization comprised of clergy of different faith traditions and lay people, the UCM serves the needs of the diverse religious communities at Columbia University. In addition to traditional religious ceremonies, services and pastoral counseling, the ministries offer a wide assortment of lectures, outreach projects and discussion group.
http://www.columbia.edu/cu/earl/ucm.html