Coming to Columbia
Guide for International Scholars in J-1 Exchange Visitor Visa Status

We at the International Students and Scholars Office (ISSO) on the Morningside campus and the International Affairs Office (IAO) on the Medical Center campus welcome you. As you begin this exciting experience, we offer this guide with information about New York and Columbia University to assist in your transition.

The staff of the ISSO and IAO is available to help you with immigration and related issues during your stay. We work with over 3,000 scholars from more than 150 countries and are aware that adjusting to a new environment is neither easy nor the same for each person. We hope you will feel free to visit our offices and get to know us.

We invite you to enjoy the breadth that New York City has to offer and extend to you our best wishes for a successful scholarly experience.

The objective of the J Exchange Visitor category is to increase mutual understanding between people of the United States and those of other countries by means of educational and cultural exchange. An overview of the most important aspects of J-1 status can be found in the U.S. Department of State Exchange Visitor Program Welcome Brochure at http://www.1tp-usa.com/images/PDF/EVP%20brochure.pdf.

About the ISSO and IAO

The ISSO advises international scholars on the Morningside campus, while the IAO advises scholars at the Columbia University Medical Center.

The ISSO and IAO offer full advisory services during the following walk-in hours. International scholars are welcome to seek guidance from an adviser.

ISSO Walk-in Hours:
Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday 10:30am – 4pm
The ISSO is closed on Wednesdays for walk-ins.

ISSO Location:
524 Riverside Drive, north of West 122nd Street

ISSO Website:
http://www.columbia.edu/cu/isso

ISSO Contacts:
Jane Acton (RO)
(212) 854-6356, ja378@columbia.edu

Gwyneth Smith (ARO)
(212) 854-3591, gs2258@columbia.edu

IAO Walk-in Hours:
Monday - Friday 11am-5pm

IAO Location:
650 West 168th St., Black Bldg. Room 1-126B

IAO Contacts:
Kathleen Mcveigh (ARO)
(212) 305-5455, kcm1@columbia.edu

Bonnie Garner (ARO)
(212) 305-5455, blg12@columbia.edu

Visa and Immigration Basics

Immigration Definitions for Scholars
The following terms 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 an internet-based system that allows various agencies of the U.S. government (U.S. Department of State - Consular Affairs, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Department of Homeland Security, and other agencies) to see up-to-date information about international students and scholars in F, J, and M visa status, their academic activities, and their J-2 family members.

Entry Visa Stamp – This is affixed in the passport by a U.S. Embassy or Consulate abroad and indicates eligibility for entry in a specific immigration visa category. The duration of the visa and the number of times it can be used vary based on reciprocity agreements between the U.S. and other countries. The entry visa can be issued up to 120 days before the start date on the DS-2019, but admission to the U.S. is limited to 30 days in advance of the DS-2019 start date. The visa must be valid upon entry to the...
U.S. and can only be renewed abroad. While inside the U.S. you are not required to have a valid visa to stay in the U.S., as it is needed only to enter the country.

Citizens of Canada are exempt from the entry visa requirement.

**DS-2019** – This is a visa certificate issued by the institution or organization which has sponsored the J-1 program. This certificate includes your biographical information and important details of the program. It is officially called the “Certificate of Eligibility” because with it you are "eligible" to apply for a J-1 visa at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate. It is also shown at the Port of Entry along with the valid visa during every trip into the U.S. during the program. Any accompanying dependent will each need a separate DS-2019 for J-2 status. It is recommended all DS-2019s are kept for your records after the program ends.

**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 inside the U.S., this would be done through your country’s Consulate or Embassy in the U.S.

**I-94** – This is a record of admission to the U.S., which documents legal entry into the U.S., the specific immigration status, and how long you can stay in the U.S. This is created in an electronic format (with limited exceptions) upon entry to the U.S. and a paper printout is available at [http://www.cbp.gov/I94](http://www.cbp.gov/I94). You should consult this website soon after each arrival into the U.S. to confirm the information of your entry is correct. As a J-1 or J-2 status holder the I-94 should show J-1 or J-2, D/S.

### How to Obtain J-1 Status

**If you are outside the U.S.**

Once the DS-2019 has been received, all incoming J-1 scholars, except citizens of Canada, must apply for a J-1 visa stamp at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate and enter the U.S. using the visa and DS-2019.

Consular standards for visa eligibility may be rigorous. The Consular Officer will require you to provide documentation of the funding sources listed on your DS-2019 form to show you have funds to adequately cover the duration of your program. The cost of living in New York City is much higher than many other areas of the country. Estimated monthly living expenses are $2800/month for the J-1, plus $1000/month for a J-2 spouse and $500/month per J-2 child. You may be required to show the same documentation used to show adequate funding for the DS-2019 issuance again upon arrival at the Port of Entry.

The SEVIS fee is to be paid in advance of the visa interview and entry to the U.S. It is payable by the J-1 and is independent of any Columbia fees. Information can be found at [http://www.fmjfee.com](http://www.fmjfee.com). The fee applies only to the J-1 and is not required for dependents.

The J-1 and J-2 visas are non-immigrant visas. This means that you will have to demonstrate your intention to return to your home country following the completion of your program. This can be shown by demonstrating strong family ties and explaining how this scholarly exchange will help you in your professional field in your home country upon your return.

All regulations pertaining to J-1 and J-2 status also apply to Canadian citizens. The only difference between Canadian citizens and all other individuals in J-1/J-2 status is that Canadians do not require visas from a U.S. Consulate to enter the United States. Still, Canadians must always present the passport and DS-2019 to the immigration official upon entry to the United States. On the first entry to the U.S., present the following documents: passport, DS-2019, proof of finances, and receipt of the SEVIS fee payment. Canadian citizens who request J-2 status must also be prepared to show a marriage license J-2 spouse or birth certificate to confirm eligibility for the visa status at the port of entry.

### Entering the United States

You may enter the U.S. up to 30 days before the start date of your DS-2019 as long as your entry visa has been issued.

**Documentation to Present at the Port of Entry to the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Officer**

Keep your passport and DS-2019 in your carry-on bag.

When you meet the immigration officer, show:

- passport with valid J-1 or J-2 visa stamp (Canadians exempt from visa requirement)
- DS-2019
- I-901 SEVIS fee payment receipt
- Funding documentation

The officer will stamp your passport and/or DS-2019 as J-1 or J-2 “D/S,” indicating that you now have that status in the United States. The officer will give you information on how to access your electronic I-94 record at [http://www.cbp.gov/I94](http://www.cbp.gov/I94). You should consult this website soon after each arrival into the U.S. to confirm the information of your entry is correct.

**If you are Inside the U.S.**

If you are already inside the U.S. in another status may exit the U.S. and follow the procedures above to obtain J-1 status or may apply for a change of status through the guidance of an ISSO or IAO adviser by submitting an I-539 application to the USCIS.
If you are inside the U.S. in J-1 status at another institution:
Scholars inside the U.S. who are already in J-1 status at another institution can consult with the ISSO or IAO to determine if a transfer of J-1 visa sponsorship to Columbia University is possible. If so, the transfer of visa sponsorship must occur before the expiration of your authorized period of stay from your current program.

Accompanying Family Members

J-2 visa sponsorship is available to the spouses and children under the age of 21 of scholars in J-1 status. If your accompanying family member would like J-2 sponsorship but has not received a DS-2019 form for J-2 status, please contact the ISSO or IAO for guidance.

Those in J-2 status can study part-time or full-time without changing status, though it is best to consult the immigration adviser at that institution for guidance on the most appropriate visa option. Those in J-2 status are eligible to apply for an employment authorization card from the USCIS once they have arrived in the U.S. in J-1 status. Through this opportunity for employment the J-2 can have an enriching professional and cultural experience while accompanying the J-1 during the program. The ISSO website has guidance on the employment application procedure and an ISSO or IAO adviser can look over the application prior to its submission, if desired.

If any accompanying J-2 family member leaves the U.S. permanently, you are required to report this information to the ISSO or IAO immediately.

Domestic Partners and Other Family Members

J-2 status is only available for spouses and children under 21 years of age. Domestic partners and other family members are not eligible for J-2 status but can apply for a B-1/B-2 visitor visa to accompany you. Though B-2 visits are usually for short periods of time, it is permissible as a way to accompany you for the duration of the program in the US. The accompanying partner must demonstrate intent to depart the U.S. at the conclusion of your authorized stay.

Arrival on Campus: SEVIS Registration

SEVIS Registration Requirement
Upon your initial arrival you must complete a SEVIS immigration registration, after which the SEVIS immigration record is “activated” within three business days. To complete this registration, scholars on the CU Medical campus visit the IAO for in-person registration. Scholars on the Morningside Campus must register through the ISSO by following the complete instructions at: https://www1.columbia.edu/sec/cu/isso/J1SEVISReg.html. The registration process can only be done after arrival in the U.S., as you will need to access your I-94 Arrival Record at http://www.cbp.gov/i94 and make note of the 11-digit number, confirming that “J1” is the class of admission and “D/S” is the “Admit Until” date.

Maintaining Valid J-1 Visa Status

By following the guidelines listed below, you should not encounter problems maintaining your immigration status.

1. Keep your passport valid by extending it as needed

2. Never stay in the U.S. beyond the permissible time.
There is a 30-day “grace period” beyond the DS-2019 completion date in which to prepare for departure. However, if you complete your program earlier than the indicated date, your DS-2019 must be adjusted accordingly and you must leave the U.S. earlier.

3. Accept no employment of any kind without written permission from the ISSO or IAO. The initial invitation from your academic department would include the terms of employment you have been offered including the duration, duties, compensation and benefit eligibility. Note that if you hold the “Visiting Scholar” title at Columbia University you are prohibited from employment both on and off-campus. Working without proper authorization is considered to be the most serious violation of non-immigrant status. It is most important, therefore, that you consult with the ISSO or the IAO before you accept an offer of employment or perform services outside of the terms of your original offer. Refer to the ISSO website for further guidance. It is illegal to begin to work in anticipation of being granted permission to do so; you must have permission first.

4. Have medical insurance at all times. Those in J-1 and J-2 status are required by regulation to have health insurance with a specific minimum coverage requirements for the duration of the program, as listed on the DS-2019. Your insurance policy must include (1) medical benefits of at least $100,000 per accident or illness; (2) repatriation of remains in the amount of $25,000; (3) expenses associated with medical evacuation of the exchange visitor to his or her home country in the amount of $50,000; and (4) a deductible not to exceed $500.

If you are a full-time employee on Columbia University’s payroll and receiving full-time benefits of the University, it is likely that you and your dependents will be eligible for health insurance through Columbia University. Therefore, you should confirm with your hiring department or Benefits Officer in Human Resources as to
whether you are eligible for this benefit. If you decide to enroll in Columbia University’s health insurance plan, you must voluntarily authorize this action in writing. Information on the costs of insurance for full-time employees and guidance on benefit eligibility, payroll deductions and costs can be found at http://hr.columbia.edu/wac/welcome

If you are not a full-time employee of Columbia University, or if you are a Visiting Scholar, you must obtain health insurance from an outside carrier to cover your entire duration of J-1 and J-2 status. An overview of these insurance coverage requirements is at http://www.columbia.edu/cu/ isso/visa/scholar/J_health.html and at the bottom of that page is a link to an external list of reputable insurance providers with their websites which will list the cost and coverage levels to assist you in arranging your coverage.

It is your responsibility to select, obtain and maintain health insurance coverage for yourself and any of your dependents. It is extremely important to have health insurance due to the high cost of health care in the U.S. Bear in mind that health insurance often does not cover pre-existing conditions, including pregnancy. It is also important to note that you and any accompanying family member(s) may be subject to the requirements of the Affordable Care Act [22 CFR 62.14(a)]. If you are in a nonimmigrant status, you are not allowed to accept any federal funds, such as Medicaid (the health coverage available to U.S. citizens with low incomes). Current U.S. federal regulations bar you from reentry into the United States if you have accepted federal funds from health programs requiring low incomes.

5. Notify the ISSO or IAO of any local address, telephone or email address change.
The ISSO and IAO will collect your new local address in the U.S. as part of the immigration registration process after arrival. If you have a subsequent change of U.S. residential address, phone number or email address, your SEVIS immigration record will be updated within 10 business days of your notification submission to the ISSO or IAO. For scholars on the Morningside Campus this is done through an electronic submission through the ISSO website at https://www1.columbia.edu/sec/cu/ isso/address_change.html. For scholars at the CU Medical Center contact the IAO adviser directly to update this information. If you are under the J-1 sponsorship of another organization, such as Fulbright, you must instead notify that sponsoring organization of any address, telephone, or email address change.

6. Extend your DS-2019, if needed, prior to its expiration date and within the category limits of your program. Those in J-1 status are admitted for “duration of status.” The dates in section 3 on the DS-2019 represent the period of time for which you are appointed or for which you have been designated a Visiting Scholar. If you require additional time, your academic department must send a request to extend the DS-2019 form to the ISSO or IAO prior to its expiration date. Each J-1 category (section 4 of the DS-2019) has a limit on the length of time you can be sponsored for a program: Short-Term Scholar (6 months), Research Scholar (5 years), Student-Intern (1 year). Further, Columbia University has limits on the duration of titles of appointment or designation. If eligible for an extension, the SEVIS record would be updated to reflect the terms of the extension and a new DS-2019 form issued. Again, this must be done before the current DS-2019 expires.

7. Inform the ISSO or the IAO of the intention to transfer your J-1 sponsorship to another institution prior to the end of your DS-2019. As a J-1 Exchange Visitor, you may transfer program sponsorship within the same category for a length not to exceed the category limit as long as the purpose is consistent with your original objective for coming to the U.S. It is essential that the transfer of visa sponsorship be concluded BEFORE the authorized period of stay from your first program sponsor.

8. If there are any changes to your program, e.g. site of activity, salary, title, completion date, funding, academic department, or immigration status, you must notify the ISSO or the IAO immediately.

The ISSO or IAO will update your SEVIS immigration record within 10 days of receiving written notification of any changes listed above and your DS-2019 form will be updated accordingly.

J-1/J-2 Exchange Visitor Travel

When leaving the U.S. temporarily during your program at Columbia, you will need to have the necessary documents to both permit entry to another country as well as to permit re-entry to the U.S. in J-1 or J-2 status. For travel to a country other than your home country, check with the consulate of the country you wish to visit for specific entry requirements. A list of consulates and their nearest locations can be found at http://www.citidex.com/252.htm.

Complete guidance on international travel matters is found at: http://www.columbia.edu/cu/ isso/visa/scholar/J_scholar_travel.html

International travel during the dates of your DS-2019 form requires that you:

Carry a passport that will be valid for at least 6 months into the future from the day you return from your trip abroad.

Have your DS-2019 recertified in the lower right corner prior to travel. Each travel validation signature is valid for one year, or the length of your DS-2019 form, whichever is less. In order for your form DS-2019 to be recertified, you must maintain an affiliation with Columbia University and have funding to cover all expenses for both you and any J-2 dependent. To obtain a travel
validation signature please visit the ISSO or IAO during our walk-in hours at least 5 days prior to your trip abroad. Bring your passport, DS-2019 for you and your accompanying family member(s), I-94 printout(s), and funding documentation.

Have an unexpired J-1/J-2 entry visa stamp valid for further entries in your passport.
If you visit countries other than Canada, Mexico, or the Caribbean (with the current exception of Cuba), you must have a valid J-1 [and J-2 for accompanying family member(s)] entry visa stamp in your passport in order to return, in addition to having a form DS-2019. If your visa is no longer valid, you must take your passport and DS-2019 to the nearest U. S. Consulate or Embassy in the country you are visiting to apply for a new visa stamp. Evidence of financial support for your stay in the U. S. must also be presented when applying for a visa.

There are a number of factors that may contribute to delays in having a visa issued. The Department of State's website includes comprehensive information on non-immigrant visas and has a link to individual consular posts.

Carry a recent letter stating that you are currently affiliated with Columbia University. If you are on an academic appointment, obtain this letter from your academic department confirming the duration and terms of your appointment. It should include your title, your duties, and your salary. If you hold a Visiting Scholar designation, the letter would be the initial Visiting Scholar designation letter that accompanied the DS-2019 when it was issued.

Note: Under certain circumstances one can return to the U.S. from a trip of less than 30-days to Canada, Mexico or the Caribbean even if the J-1 visa stamp has expired. Information can be found at http://travel.state.gov/content/visas/english/general/automatic-revalidation.html (and) http://www.columbia.edu/cu/isso/visa/scholar/J_scholar_travel.html

Tax Issues for International Scholars

Tax laws in the U.S. are extremely complex and the ISSO is not qualified to answer individual questions regarding tax liabilities. Our website has detailed tax information and we sponsor several tax-filing workshops on campus each spring. It is the responsibility of each international student at Columbia to understand his or her own tax situation. There are, however, a few areas that may be of immediate concern to incoming international scholars.

Tax-Filing Requirement – All international scholars in J-1 status are required to file at least one tax form, called Form 8843, by June 15th if present in the US at any time in the previous calendar year—even if you had no US income; if you received income you will have an April 15th deadline. Each spring, the ISSO provides free access to an on-line user-friendly web-based application for federal tax returns for “non-resident aliens.” In addition we sponsor workshops on filing NY State tax returns conducted by international tax experts.

W-4 Form – If you are holding an academic appointment and on the Columbia University payroll, a W-4 form must be completed before you can receive payment. This form impacts the amount of tax withholding and is very important. You will receive it along with other employment forms from your employing department.

Tax Treaty – The U.S. has treaties with over 50 different countries that determine how each country’s residents will be taxed while temporarily in the U.S. A treaty may specify that its residents are exempt from all or part of U.S. income tax. These tax treaties are very specific and even though you may be a resident of a tax treaty country it does not mean that you will automatically qualify for tax benefits. If your country has a tax treaty with the U.S., complete the Form 8233 through www.irs.gov before being put on Columbia’s payroll (this also applies if you will be receiving funding from Columbia). For New York State tax information, publications, and forms refer to http://www.tax.ny.gov.

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 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 located in Queens, approximately 25 miles from Columbia; LaGuardia Airport in Queens, about 15 miles from Columbia; Newark Liberty Airport in the state of New Jersey about 20 miles from Columbia. Most international scholars 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 and additional toll costs are incurred when crossing state lines. 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

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 fare you can expect to pay at your final destination. From JFK to Manhattan, there is a flat fare plus tolls and tip. Because taxis have to cross bridges or use tunnels to enter Manhattan from the airports, the cost of the toll is added to the metered fare. It is customary to tip the taxi driver 10-15% of the fare. While most taxis now take credit cards, not all do so. **Ride only in a licensed yellow or green taxi.**

**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.

**Buses or Shared Vans** – Shared vans, such as SuperShuttle ([www.supershuttle.com](http://www.supershuttle.com)), 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.

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**Housing**

Finding housing can be one of the most challenging parts of getting settled in New York. It can be difficult to secure housing; therefore you should make plans for temporary housing in advance of your arrival in New York. For those holding an academic appointment, your academic department can confirm whether your position is eligible for on-campus housing. Those holding a Visiting Scholar designation are generally not eligible for on-campus housing.

Although the ISSO is unable to make housing arrangements for scholars, the following resources can assist you with finding suitable accommodations.

**Off-Campus Housing**

Columbia’s Off-Campus Housing Assistance (OCHA) can be very helpful in your search. 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. You can access OCHA’s online listings after you have activated your UNI and Columbia University email account. You can access OCHA's information online at [www.columbia.edu/cu/ire/ocha](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/ire/ocha).

It is customary to pay at least one month’s rent and a deposit – usually an additional month’s rent – to the landlord at the time you agree to rent the apartment. It will be important that you have those funds immediately available in cash or payable by check to secure your housing. When renting a room or an apartment, you should always request a lease with all relevant charges noted, such as rent, security deposit, etc. from the landlord. Without a lease, you have no binding agreement and your landlord may charge you more than you had verbally agreed upon.

**Temporary Housing Options**

Hotels in New York are very expensive. A list of temporary and less-expensive accommodations can be found at [http://worklife.columbia.edu/temporary-housing-options](http://worklife.columbia.edu/temporary-housing-options). This listing of accommodations does not constitute a recommendation of such facilities, nor is the accuracy of the description verified. Check current availability and the cost of the accommodations when making a reservation and mention that you are a Columbia scholar to receive any possible discounts. OCHA also maintains a list of short-term housing options.

**International House** - A unique resource in the Columbia neighborhood is the 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, almost 100 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 and scholars live there and it offers a rich array of facilities, programs, and activities. Visit the I-House website at [www.ihouse-nyc.org](http://www.ihouse-nyc.org) to learn more about their programs and applying for residence.

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**Money Matters**

The cost of living in NYC is higher than the average city in the U.S. and therefore it is recommended to bring additional personal funds for your stay here.

**Banking** - Most scholars 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.

When you open your account, you will receive a set of “starter checks” that you can use to make payments from your account. Shortly after, you will receive a set of checks with your name and address and an ATM or debit card. Checks are not used as commonly as in the past; however, it is good to have checks to pay rent or other expenses. Most bills can be paid online.

**ATM Cards** - The ATM (Automatic Teller Machine) debit card can be used to get cash and to make purchases at retailers, as it is linked to your checking account so the amount of the withdrawal or purchase is immediately deducted from your account. The card can only be used as a debit card to make purchases if it has a
Visa or Mastercard logo on it. If there is no logo, it can only be used to withdraw cash from an ATM.

Social Security Numbers - The Social Security Number (SSN) is used by employers and employees for tax purposes. Information on the process of applying for a number can be found at http://www.columbia.edu/cu/ isso/visa/F-1/SSN.pdf. Note that those in J-2 status can apply for an SSN only if they have received an employment authorization card from the USCIS.

Cell Phone Service Providers

There are two choices for cell phone service: a pre-paid plan, or a yearly contract. 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 to 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 the end of your contract. Below are some cell phone providers you can choose from. Please note: these are just a few options. Prices and plans may vary at each retail store. The ISSO does not endorse any one company.

- AT&T
  www.att.com
- Sprint
  www.sprint.com
- T-Mobile
  www.t-mobile.com
- Verizon
  www.verizonwireless.com

No contract cell phone:

- Virgin Wireless
  www.virginmobileusa.com
- Metro PCS
  www.metropcs.com

Getting Around Manhattan

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

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 24 hours a day daily with reduced frequency on late nights and weekends.

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 fare is a set rate, regardless of the distance being travelled. MetroCards can be purchased for individual rides, or for 1-day, 7-day, or 30-day durations. Fare information can be found at www.mta.info/metrocard/.

Both subways and buses use the MetroCard. Buses will also take exact change, with no bills or pennies allowed.

To obtain the best travel route between two points, use www.hopstop.com. For maps and schedules of NYC transportation and commuter rail lines, visit www.mta.info.

Taxis - Taxicabs (called “cabs” or “taxis”) are yellow or green and have a medallion number on the top of the roof. If it is lit up and says “on-duty,” it is available. You will be charged by the time and distance on a meter. It is usual to tip the driver 10-15% 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 AA Special 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 with common sense and caution, you can do a great deal to increase your personal safety. Columbia University's Department of Public Safety is a great resource. Their website at www.columbia.edu/cu/publicsafety includes information on their operations, shuttle bus schedule, crime prevention, personal safety tips, and more.

Here are some tips to follow.

- Be aware of your surroundings at all times.
- Trust your instincts. If you feel uncomfortable about where you are, or are suspicious of someone near you, leave immediately or stay away.
- Let roommates, friends, or partners know where you will be, when to expect you, or if you are going to be late or out of town.
- If you think someone is following you, do not lead him or her to your destination—instead, abruptly change
directions. If this person continues to follow you, get help at a public place.

- Be aware of your valuables and belongings, such as your backpack, handbag, or wallet. Even if you are in a "safe" place for a short time, keep them with you rather than leave them behind.

- At night, take the well-lit and well-traveled paths. 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.

- Be an active, safety-conscious scholar: 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.

Morningside Heights Evening Shuttle Bus Service runs from 6pm to 4am each evening. The schedule can be found at http://transportation.columbia.edu/evening-schedule.

Free shuttle service is available between the Morningside Heights and the Medical Center campuses, and also within the Morningside Heights area at night (with a Columbia ID) http://transportation.columbia.edu.

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).

American Cultural Opportunities

An essential part of your experience in the U.S. will be taking part in the American way of life and community around you. You will have the opportunity to meet new people, engage in activities, and explore this new culture. Your involvement both on and off-campus will allow you to gain a deeper understanding of the American culture and hopefully build friendships that will last a lifetime! We also understand that you may be experiencing some adjustment issues to your new way of life and we want to give you the appropriate resources to make this transition a little easier.

Below are some resources for you as you begin this new adventure in the U.S. and in NYC.

One to World – This organization 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. www.one-to-world.org

Arts Initiative - The Arts Initiative of Columbia University provides diverse programs to encourage members of the Columbia community to experience the creative life of the campus, engage in the cultural riches of New York City and the wider world, and create arts and performance. http://artsinitiative.columbia.edu

Community Impact – This is an independent organization that is dedicated to serving disadvantaged people in the Washington Heights, Harlem, and Morningside Heights communities. It strives to provide high quality programs, advance the public good, and foster meaningful volunteer opportunities for students, faculty, and staff of Columbia University through partnerships with more than 100 community organizations and agencies who do service work in these neighborhoods. http://www.columbia.edu/cu/ci

Campus Resources

ID Center – Once you arrive on campus and have visited your academic department to complete any arrival procedures they may have, you can obtain an ID Card at the ID Center located in Kent Hall. Details on the operating hours and items to bring can be found at http://idcenter.columbia.edu/obtaining-card.

University Libraries - Columbia University Libraries support the intellectual life and scholarly activities of Columbia faculty, staff and students. Access restrictions are in effect in most of Columbia's libraries. Members of the University and of affiliated institutions must show a valid Columbia ID or Columbia reader's card before entering the libraries. Information on accessing the libraries, hours and borrowing fees can be found at http://library.columbia.edu/services/access.html.

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, it creates and sponsors programs concerning justice, faith and spirituality.

**Dodge Fitness Center** – The Marcellus Hartley Dodge Physical Fitness Center is a comprehensive wellness facility that supports a span of athletic and health interests including fitness improvement, lifetime sports or wellness and recreation. Membership fees vary depending on your Columbia affiliation. Information on Dodge Fitness Center and membership rates can be found at [http://www.dodgefitnesscenter.com](http://www.dodgefitnesscenter.com).

**Counseling and Psychological Services** – Columbia University’s Counseling and Psychological Services supports the psychological and emotional well-being of the campus community by providing counseling, consultation and crisis intervention, all of which adhere to strict standards of confidentiality. [http://www.health.columbia.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services](http://www.health.columbia.edu/counseling-and-psychological-services).

**United Campus Ministries** – This is an umbrella organization comprised of clergy of different faith traditions and lay people. It serves the needs of the diverse religious communities at Columbia University. In addition to traditional religious ceremonies, services and pastoral counseling, it offers a wide assortment of lectures, outreach projects and discussion groups. [http://www.columbia.edu/cu/earl/ucm.html](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/earl/ucm.html).

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**Family Matters**

Although it is exciting to have the opportunity of living in another country for a while, it can be challenging for your spouse, partner or child to settle in and find his or her own independent reasons for being here, and circle of friends. Fortunately, there are many ways for spouses and partners of to become involved with the University and its community.

**J-2 Employment** - Immigration regulations allow J-2 spouses to apply for work authorization to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), as long as the purpose of the employment is not to financially support the J-1 program. This authorization will allow the J-2 to engage in the U.S. professional and cultural life. Information on this can be found online at [http://www.columbia.edu/cu/issos/visa/scholar/index.html](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/issos/visa/scholar/index.html).

**English Classes for Spouses and Partners** - Many take advantage of the inexpensive ESL classes at the Community English Program (CEP) at Teachers College (TC) taught by TC students who are ESL teachers in training. Teachers College is located on 120th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue. Information on registration is available by calling them at (212) 678-3279 (a recorded message) or (212) 678-3097 (office phone). The Community English Program’s website is a great source of information on registration dates, fees, programs and class schedules. Registration details and tuition costs can be found at [http://www.tc.columbia.edu/centers/communityenglish](http://www.tc.columbia.edu/centers/communityenglish).

Columbia University’s American Language Program offers courses in English as a Second Language (ESL). Information is found at [ce.columbia.edu/node/295](http://ce.columbia.edu/node/295) or call (212) 854-3584.

**Columbia University’s Office of Work/Life** – This office provides a central location for current related policies, programs and services available at Columbia University. It provides personalized support for those who are exploring in-home care, early childhood education options, special needs, independent, parochial, and public elementary, middle, and high schools in the greater New York Metropolitan area. 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 other informational resources. [http://worklife.columbia.edu](http://worklife.columbia.edu).

**Other resources for childcare:**

The Center for Children’s Initiatives (CCI) has information about choosing different types of childcare, which can be found at: [http://www.centerforchildrensinitiatives.org](http://www.centerforchildrensinitiatives.org).

**Other resources for NYC public schools:**

[Inside Schools.org](http://www.insideschools.org) is an extremely helpful independent guide to NYC public schools that provides practical tools to navigate the City’s school system. It clarifies the process of enrollment. Further information can be found at the NYC Department of Education’s website: [http://schools.nyc.gov/ParentsFamilies](http://schools.nyc.gov/ParentsFamilies).

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**A Final Welcome**

We hope your experience at Columbia will be successful and enjoyable. We at ISSO and IAO will do our best to answer your questions or point you in the right direction. In addition, the Department of State Exchange Visitor Program Welcome Brochure offers guidance and an overview of this program at [https://j1visa.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/The-Exchange-Visitor-Program.pdf](https://j1visa.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/The-Exchange-Visitor-Program.pdf). You can also visit their website at [http://j1visa.state.gov](http://j1visa.state.gov) for further details on the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program.

Again, welcome to Columbia and we hope your stay is both productive and enjoyable; we look forward to meeting you!

Last Updated 12/8/2014